

You Can't Take it with You... Or Can You?

A guide to free and easy flying with your adventure equipment.

Active or adventure traveling can be a bit complex, especially in a post-911 world of constantly shifting security and luggage requirements. If you've been looking forward to those 18 holes in Hawaii or that two-week scuba adventure in Belize, the last thing you want are hassles, headaches or hefty fees to bring along your beloved equipment.

How does one bring their golf clubs, bicycles, scuba gear, ski boots or camping equipment on a trip by airplane? Being knowledgeable about recent changes to baggage allowances as well as each airline's specific policies before you buy a ticket may be the best way to keep your active adventure free and easy.

Double Checking Checked-Baggage Policies

Expect to find a few standard policies at any and every major airline. Each passenger is normally allowed two checked bags, and those checked bags must not exceed 62 linear inches. In other words, the dimensions (height, width, and depth) added together cannot be larger than 62. The major change to policy within the last year concerns weight. Whereas before passengers were allowed to check in bags that weighed up to 70 lbs each, that limit has been slashed to a mere 50 lbs per checked item.

When you're trying to backpack in Europe or backcountry ski in Canada, going over these allowances is not only easy, but also costly. Fees are charged for any excess weight and are calculated on a one-way basis. Therefore, fees for roundtrip overages will be double. Before you buy a ticket, check out the loopholes in airline policies. In some cases, a first class ticket could be less expensive than a multitude of fees.

Sporting Equipment on the Plane

If you want to take it with you on vacation, you are most likely not the only one. Airlines are prepared, and have guidelines, for anything an adventurous traveler may want to take along. There's one bit of advice for whatever toys and gear you are planning on bringing—always ask beforehand how oversized luggage is handled at your destination airport. Knowing where to go can avoid a big headache when you're eager to shift your adventure into gear.

Golf Clubs

Golf clubs are frequent flyers on most airlines and are usually simple to check as a part of your baggage allowance, provided they are enclosed completely. Airlines often prefer the hard-sided golf cases, though soft bags are also conditionally accepted. Some airlines do enforce a maximum club limit of between 14 and 20 clubs per bag. Considering that

your golf bag must meet the regular weight allowance of 50 lbs, however, perhaps they are only helping you lighten the load.

Bicycles

A bike is an awkward object—the pedals poke and catch, the wheels don't lock, and the frame must lean against something to be steady. It's not surprising that any bike wishing to fly the open skies must be boxed.

Obtain a bike boxes from a local bike shop. Most shops will not charge you as they are the same boxes that the factory uses to make deliveries to the shop. Some airlines, like Continental, sell boxes at the airport for around \$20. Preparing the bike for the box requires removing the pedals, turning the handlebars parallel to the frame, and deflating the tires to at least 20 psi. Then slide them into the box along with your tools (including a hex wrench or possibly a screwdriver) and pedals. Fill in extra space with additional cardboard or bubble wrap.

Write your name and destination on each side of the box, seal it well and you should feel comfortable handing over your bike to a gate agent. For step-by-step instructions, with pictures, please visit www.cyclingtheworld.org and click on "Resources."

Unless your boxed bike measures less than 62 linear inches, expect to pay an additional fee for its transport. Most major airlines charge between \$50 and \$80 but don't count a boxed bike towards your free checked baggage allowance. Remember, these fees are for transport one-way—plan on paying double for roundtrip.

Scuba Gear

As in any specialized sport, your scuba equipment can be very personal, something you don't want to be without. The key question you need to ask yourself when wanting to carry your scuba gear aboard an airplane is: tanks or no tanks?

If you are tank-free, the task is a rather simple one. Your dive bag will be counted as one of your checked bags, subject to standard weight and size regulations. Those bulky fins are best placed sole to sole, then wrapped in a towel to keep them from moving or poking during flight. Your mask should be protected with a hard-sided case. If you have your own BCD, shield it with several layers of wrapping and ensure it is protected from anything that may puncture it. Regulator and dive computers, however, should not be checked. Tuck them into your carry-on luggage whenever possible.

It may be a less common occurrence, but scuba tanks can also be checked as baggage if they are empty and open to allow for visual inspection of the interior. There's a somewhat hefty fee for tanks, however, ranging from \$50 to \$80 per leg of your trip.

Delta tops its competitors with a whopping \$100 fee for empty tanks. Exceptions to this rule could save you money. United flies to scuba-friendly areas like Central America, South America, Mexico or the Caribbean, where scuba fees are discounted to \$25 each way.

Snow-Sport Equipment

Skis, or snowboards, are best enjoyed when strapped to your feet. Lugging them around makes for a heavy and awkward load, for you and your airline. Snow tourism is a booming industry, so most airlines make it simple to bring your equipment and don't charge you for the privilege. You'll have to include your gear in your baggage allowance, but all major airlines offer the incentive of counting boots plus skis/board as only one item of luggage.

Securing your snow equipment, then, is most of the battle in checking them. Ski/board/boot bags are readily available at sporting good stores and some airlines, including Southwest and Continental, offer free plastic bags for your convenience.

Camping Equipment

Packing your backpack with your tent, sleeping bag and camp dishes shouldn't be any problem provided that it's within your normal luggage allowance. The items that will be difficult are your stove, lantern and their corresponding fuels. In fact, fuel canisters of any kind (liquid fuel, butane, propane, CO₂, Sterno, etc.) are banned outright because pressurized gases and flammable items are obviously a security hazard.

While it's true that you may be able to buy fuel at your destination, carrying the equipment without fuel is a problem as well. In fact, Continental will not accept any lantern, stove or heating equipment that uses such fuel, with or without the fuel itself. Similarly, Southwest will only accept such devices in their original packaging to prove that fuel has never been introduced into their systems.

Use electric lanterns, if you can, to get around these restrictions. Also, shipping some of your equipment to your destination might avoid a lot of hassle and, of course, get around weight restrictions as well.

Air travel has become a complex task in recent years both to keep security tight and costs down. That doesn't mean your favorite gear cannot accompany you on vacation but it does require a bit of extra research. Be sure to check out rental rates for gear at your destination. Sometimes it's more cost-effective to forego the luxury of having your own equipment. And if all else fails, shipping your adventure gear may be your best option. Sports Express Luggage is one great sports equipment and luggage delivery service, which will pick up your gear at your doorstep. Find them at www.sportsexpress.com. **F**



CHECKED BAGGAGE FEES

Airline	Per Additional Piece	Overweight (50-70 lbs.)	Overweight (70-100 lbs.)	Oversized (more than 62 linear inches)
American	\$80	\$25	\$50	\$80
America West/US Air	\$80	\$50	\$80	\$80
Continental	\$80	\$25	\$50	\$80
Delta	\$50	\$25	\$100	\$100
Frontier	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$50
Northwest	\$80	\$25	\$50	\$80
Southwest	\$50	\$25	\$50	\$50
United	\$80	\$25	\$25	\$80

Airline Loopholes

America West/US Air:

- Premiere Members can check three bags
- First Class weight limit is 70 lbs per piece

Continental:

- Elite Members weight limit is 70 lbs per piece
- First Class can check three bags of 70 lbs each

Northwest:

- First Class can check three bags

Southwest:

- Every passenger can check three bags

United:

- Premiere and Gold Members can check three bags