

Carry-on like a Pro:

A Guide to packing for any airline in 2026

SLOW LUXURY · HONEST REVIEWS · COUPLES TRAVEL

Packing a carry-on is half the battle of travelling well. After enough flights to lose count, here's how I do it without the gate-fee panic: what to pack, how to pack it, and the 2026 size rules for every airline.

Making Miles & Memories

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Why packing smart matters

A well-packed carry-on means everything you need is within reach, you skip the delays, and you breeze through security. Whether it's a weekend away or backup for your checked bag, it changes the whole trip.

Benefits of a well-packed carry-on

Convenience

Essentials close at hand the whole trip.

Time-saving

Fast access to passport, charger, meds.

Peace of mind

Ready for delays or lost luggage.

Understand airline regulations

Most common limit

Around 55x40x20cm (22x16x8in), but it varies a lot by airline and fare

Weight limits

Usually 7–10kg (15–22lb). Budget carriers enforce this hardest, so weigh

Wheels and handles count

They're included in the measurement. 1cm over can mean a gate fee.

Two ways to measure

- **Height x width x depth.** Most airlines use this method, requiring your bag to fit within specific dimensions, such as 22 x 14 x 9 inches, one of the most typical size limits for carry-ons.
- **Linear inches:** Some airlines prefer to set a single limit based on the total sum of height, width, and depth. As long as your bag's combined dimensions stay within this number, you're in the clear!

Security guidelines

3-1-1 liquids

100ml max per container, one clear bag, usually to be taken out for screening.

Electronics out

Laptops and tablets in a separate bin in most airports.

Pack smart

Easy-off shoes

Slip-ons beat lace-up boots when you're moving through the line.

Minimal metal

Skip the belt and chunky jewellery so you don't trigger the detector.

Meds in originals

Original packaging plus a doctor's note for prescription medication to avoid extra questions.

Snacks sealed

Original packaging or a clear bag avoids extra scrutiny.

Pack your essentials first

Start with the things you'll need most in the air, and keep them in the easy-to-reach parts of your bag. If your checked luggage goes missing, this is what gets you through.

Documents

Passport valid 6 months past arrival.
Print backups.

Electronics

Phone, charger, headphones. Power banks should always be in your carry on.

Valuables

Jewellery and key documents stay with you in a small bag or your carry-on.

Medication

Pack the trip's worth plus a few days. Bring spare lenses and glasses.

A change of clothes

Pack at least one change of clothes in your carry-on in case your checked bag is delayed.

Something warm

Planes can get chilly, so pack a hoodie in your carry-on to stay comfortable, especially on long flights.

The carry-on is your safety net.

Pack it like the checked bag might not arrive.

Organize your carry-on

Select the right bag

Choose a lightweight, durable carry-on that fits your airline's size requirements.

Multiple compartments are helpful for staying organised, especially for easy access to frequently needed items.

Use packing cubes

These help you organise clothing and other items by category (e.g., shirts, pants, socks). They keep everything neatly packed and make it easier to find what you need without rummaging through your entire bag.

Space-saving tricks

Roll, don't fold

Saves space, kills wrinkles. Best for tees and trousers.

Leave room for extras

Space for duty-free or something you grab on the way back.

Organise liquids

Clear bag at the top for quick security access.

Wear bulky items

Jacket and boots go on you, not in your bag to save extra space.

Pack a spare outfit & shoes

If your checked luggage gets delayed, you'll be glad it's there.

Compression bags

Ideal for bulkier items like jackets or sweaters to reduce the volume of your clothes by removing excess air.

Quick answers

Personal item vs carry-on?

You usually get one of each. A personal item (purse, small backpack) fits under the seat. A carry-on (suitcase, duffel) goes in the overhead bin. Sizes vary by airline.

Can a backpack be my personal item?

Yes, if it fits the personal-item limits. If it's bigger, it counts as your carry-on instead.

What's banned from carry-on?

Sharp objects, flammables, some sports gear, and liquids over 100ml. Always check the airline and security list before you pack.

How do I make sure my bag fits?

Measure it at home against the airline's published size, wheels and handles included. Use a luggage sizer if there's one at the airport.

Can I bring food and drinks?

Yes. Liquids follow the 3-1-1 rule. Anything bought after security is usually fine to carry on.

Carry-on overweight?

Repack into checked, pay for extra weight, or upgrade. Sort it before you reach the gate.

Valuables in checked instead?

No. Keep electronics, jewellery and documents on you. Checked bags get lost and delayed.

Medical equipment or meds?

Keep them in original packaging with documentation, and tell security during screening.

Bag too big for the bin?

It gets gate-checked, often free, but not guaranteed on a busy flight.

Duty-free in carry-on?





Yes. Keep it in the sealed tamper-evident bag with the receipt, and declare it if required.

2026 cabin baggage rules

63 airlines · verified June 2026

Three models in 2026: US and legacy carriers give a free full-size carry-on plus personal item on nearly all fares. Full-service international economy is limited by WEIGHT (often 7kg, 5kg on Chinese carriers), not size. Low-cost and basic-economy fares include only a free under-seat personal item; the overhead bag is paid.

What the colours mean

-  Cabin bag free
-  Paid / basic-fare limit
-  Weight-capped
-  Ceased

The EU's broader free-cabin-bag law is NOT yet in force (expected 2027). Gate enforcement is strict and varies by fare and route.

Verified June 2026.

DISCLAIMER: Before your flight, always check the airline's website for any changes to the airline's luggage specifications. Rules change often, so always confirm with your airline before you fly.

Airline size chart

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| AeroMexico | 55x40x25cm; combined 10kg (carry-on+personal) | Within combined allowance | Free incl. Basic 18kg Clase Premier |
| Air Canada | 55x40x23cm; no weight limit | 33x43x16cm | Basic = personal item only on Canada/US routes |
| Air China | 55x40x20cm; Economy 5kg | 1 under-seat item | Free; 5kg cap is the binding limit |
| Air Europa | ~55x35x25cm, ~10kg | 40x30x15cm | Free; Light fares may restrict |
| Air France | 55x35x25cm; combined 12kg | 40x30x15cm (EU std) | Economy Basic, small bag only |
| Air India | 55x40x20cm; Economy 7kg | 1 item, max 3kg | Free; 7kg cap |
| Aer Lingus | 55x40x24cm, 10kg | 25x33x20cm | Carry-on on most fares; Saver = handbag only |
| Allegiant Air | 55x40x25cm, no weight limit | 45x35x20cm | Carry-on PAID on all fares |
| American Airlines | 56x36x23cm; no weight limit | 45x35x20cm | Free incl. Basic Economy |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|---|
| ANA | 55x40x25cm; combined 10kg | Within 10kg combined | Free; 10kg combined cap |
| Asiana | 55x40x20cm, 10kg per piece | 40x30x20cm | Free; 10kg cap |
| Austrian | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x10cm | Basic/Light = personal item only short/med-haul |
| Avianca | 55x35x25cm, 10kg | 1 under-seat item | Basic (XS) = personal item only |
| British Airways | 56x45x25cm; up to 23kg across both | 40x30x15cm | Free on all fares incl. Basic; 23kg combined |
| Brussels Airlines | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm | Basic = personal item only short/med-haul |
| Caribbean Airlines | 56x36x23cm (<114cm), ~7-10kg | 1 personal item | Free; Lite = carry-on only, no checked |
| Cathay Pacific | 56x36x23cm; Economy 7kg | 40x30x15cm | Free; 7kg cap |
| China Eastern | Intl 56x45x25cm Dom 55x40x20cm; ~5kg | 1 under-seat item | Free; ~5kg cap (figures vary) |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|----------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| China Southern | 55x40x20cm, Economy 5kg | Small under-seat item | Free; 5kg cap |
| Delta | 56x35x23cm; no general weight limit | Under-seat (under 45cm) | Free incl. Basic Economy |
| easyJet | Large 56x45x25cm (paid); free small 45x36x20cm 15kg | 45x36x20cm | Small bag free; large overhead bag paid |
| El Al | <115cm total; Economy 8kg | Small personal item | Free; 8kg cap |
| Emirates | 55x38x20cm, Economy 7kg | Economy: 1 piece only | Free; 7kg cap, one piece only |
| Etihad | 56x36x23cm, Economy 7kg | 23x39x19cm | Free; 7kg cap |
| Eurowings | Large 55x40x23cm 8kg; free small 40x30x25cm | 40x30x25cm | BASIC = small bag only; large paid |
| EVA Air | 56x36x23cm (<115cm), 7kg | 1 add'l item | Free; 7kg cap |
| Ethiopian | 55x40x20cm, ~7kg Economy | Free under-seat | Free; 7kg cap |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Finnair | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm | Superlight = small bag only |
| Frontier | 61x41x25cm, up to 35lb — PAID | 45x35x20cm free | Carry-on paid; included only in bundles |
| Garuda Indonesia | 56x36x23cm, 7kg Economy | 1 small item | Free all fares; 7kg cap |
| Hainan | 55x40x20cm; ≤10kg intl (≤7kg dom) | <30x30x20cm | Free; weight-capped |
| Hawaiian | 56x36x23cm, max ~11.3kg | Under-seat item | Free |
| Iberia | 56x40x25cm, 10kg Economy | 40x30x15cm | Free all fares |
| Icelandair | Carry-on + small personal item | Small personal item | Free; Light keeps carry-on, no checked |
| ITA Airways | 55x35x25cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm | Light = personal item only |
| Japan Airlines | 55x40x25cm (<115cm); combined 10kg | Within 10kg combined | Free all classes; 10kg combined |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|---------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| JetBlue | 56x36x23cm; no weight limit | 43x33x20cm | Free incl. Blue Basic |
| Jet2 | 56x45x25cm, 10kg + personal item | 40x30x20cm | Free on all fares – both bags |
| KLM | 55x35x25cm; combined 12kg | 40x30x15cm | Basic = small bag only; standard+ incl. |
| Korean Air | 55x40x20cm (<115cm); Economy 12kg | 40x30x15cm | Free; 12kg cap |
| Kuwait Airways | 56x46x25cm; Economy 7kg | 1 add'l item | Free; 7kg cap |
| LATAM | 55x35x25cm; Economy 10–12kg | Under-seat item (all cabins) | Basic = personal item only |
| Lufthansa | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x10cm | Economy Basic 2026 = personal item only |
| Norwegian | LowFare: under-seat only; LowFare+: 55x40x23cm | Small handbag ~40x30x20cm | LowFare = under-seat only; overhead paid |
| Philippine Airlines | 56x36x23cm, 7kg | 1 personal item | Free; 7kg cap |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|--------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Qatar Airways | 50x37x25cm, Economy 7kg | Laptop bag (counts as the piece) | Free; 7kg cap, one piece |
| Qantas | Intl Economy 7kg, 56x36x23cm + personal | 1 personal item | Free; 7kg cap intl economy |
| Ryanair | Priority 55x40x20cm 10kg; free small 40x30x20cm | 40x30x20cm (24L) | Free small bag only; overhead needs Priority |
| SAS | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm | Go Light short-haul = under-seat only |
| Singapore Airlines | <115cm (~56x36x23cm), 7kg | 40x30x10cm | Free; 7kg cap |
| Southwest | 61x41x25cm, no weight limit | 41x34x20cm | Free on every fare incl. Basic |
| Spirit | CEASED OPERATIONS May 2 2026 | — | Airline no longer operating |
| SWISS | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm | Economy Basic 2026 = personal item only |
| TAP Air Portugal | 55x40x20cm, 10kg | 40x30x15cm, max 2kg | Free; lowest Discount may restrict |

| AIRLINE | CABIN / OVERHEAD BAG | UNDER-SEAT ITEM | STATUS |
|------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| Thai Airways | 56x45x25cm, 7kg | ~37.5x25x12.5cm, ~1.5kg | Free; 7kg cap |
| Turkish Airlines | 55x40x23cm, 8kg | 40x30x15cm, max 4kg | Free |
| United | 56x35x23cm; no weight limit | 43x25x22cm | Basic Economy = personal item only (domestic) |
| Virgin Atlantic | 56x36x23cm, 10kg | 40x30x15cm | Free all fares incl. Economy Light |
| VIVA Aerobus | Carry-on 55x40x25cm 10kg — Base PAID | 45x35x20cm | Base/Switch = personal item only |
| Volaris | Carry-on ~57x40x25cm 10kg — Basic PAID | 45x35x20cm | Basic = personal item only |
| Vueling | Large 55x40x20cm 10kg (paid); free 40x30x20cm | 40x30x20cm | Free personal item only; cabin bag paid |
| WestJet | ~53x38x23cm; no published weight | ~41x33x15cm | Basic/ UltraBasic = personal item only |
| Wizz Air | Trolley 55x40x23cm 10kg (Priority); free 40x30x20cm | 40x30x20cm, 10kg | Free under-seat only; trolley needs Priority |