

* 7 Tips for Air Travel with Gear *

© 2018; Explore in Focus™ with Jeff Parker

1) Disguise your gear.

You don't want your bag to scream "Expensive photography equipment inside!" so make sure it looks like any other bag—or worse (*you can even have some fun making it look "extra" undesirable*).

Cover up or remove any easily recognizable logos like "Canon" or "Nikon." A bit of black electrical tape works well for that purpose.

2) Carry on all but the tough stuff.

Lugging your gear around as carry-on gets tiring so after a while checking it in might tempt you. When temptation arises, sit by the airport window & watch workers load & unload luggage from a plane; that should re-convince you to check-in only your toughest stuff (*such as your tripod & head*).

3) Invest in the right bag.

I discovered through lots of experience that having the right carry-on bag for your gear constitutes money well-spent. A backpack with padded shoulder straps does the best job in my opinion (*Some folks like backpacks with wheels, but I prefer to carry mine. Besides, wheels take up precious weight*).

Carry-on restrictions keep growing tighter & are being enforced more than ever before. A backpack stands a better chance than roller bag of not getting scrutinized, especially if you wear it while boarding the plane.

And be aware: flights on commuter planes usually require you to check-in regularly-sized carry-ons at the gate. Before leaving home, check what kind of airplane you're on so you're emotionally prepared if checking in your carry-on has to happen. Unfortunately staff can't do anything about it; the overhead bins in commuter jets simply aren't big enough for regular bags. The good news is luggage checked in at the gate won't leave your sight for long, nor does it get handled as much.

4) Bring only what you need.

This sounds obvious, but many folks pack every single camera, lens, & gadget they own. Not only is that much gear cumbersome, but it adds unnecessary stress since they usually don't use most of it.

Find out the carry-on weight allowance & work backwards from there. If you're *really* organized you can keep a list of how much each piece of equipment weighs & tally it up as you pack (*beginning with the weight of your bag, of course*).

Think in terms of what you'll *primarily* photograph rather than what your secondary subject will be & pack accordingly. If you're not sure, ask your photo-tour operator what key equipment he/ she recommends. I always provide my clients with an equipment checklist—I even use it myself so that I don't forget anything!

5) Prepare for security.

As you prepare for security open camera cases & any other equipment bags to make everything visible. That minimizes handling of your sensitive gear by curious security-line personnel.

That's easier to do when you aren't in the stressful & hectic "regular" security line. So, if you fly at least twice a year, I highly recommend paying for the TSA PreCheck or Global Entry program. It is worth it! Once enrolled you're not guaranteed TSA PreCheck every time you fly, but you will get it most times & it removes tons of stress from your security experience.

6) Get on first.

After booking your ticket*, but before choosing your seat, call the airline to find out their boarding routine. (*NOTE: Some airlines now charge extra for booking over the phone so I suggest booking online & then calling about your seat assignment.) Some board from the back to the front, while others board window seats first, aisle seats last. Some allow frequent flyer members and/or holders of certain credit cards to board earlier than the rest.

Now that airlines charge for checked-in bags, passengers push the "carry-on" limit to the limit! That makes overhead-bin space not only tough to find, but tough to procure close by. With thousands of dollars' worth of equipment inside, you definitely want your bag safely secured near you.

7) Carry on a few clothing items.

Remember to carry-on some basic clean clothing just in case your checked-in luggage doesn't arrive when you do. In doing so, think in terms of what you can "pack" into what you're wearing.

Of course, you don't want to fly bulky & uncomfortable, but if, for example, you travel wearing a photo vest use it to store items such as a pair of underwear, a T-shirt, socks, a small tube of toothpaste & a toothbrush.

If a jacket's something you cannot go without where you're going, wear it (*or bring it*) on board. This assures that your coat comes along for sure! It also works well as a pillow on red-eye flights. (*And, you can pack its pockets with backup apparel.*)

Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker, leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious™ throughout North, Central & South America – & now India. Please join him!

- www.ExploreinFocus.com
- (512) 378-3355
- JParker@ExploreinFocus.com

