

8 things you shouldn't pack in your checked luggage

By Ned Levi

We've all heard horror stories from travelers about their delayed, lost, stolen, missing or damaged checked luggage.

Maybe you have your own horror stories.

Unfortunately, too many travelers exacerbate their checked luggage loss by packing laptops, family jewelry, cash, prescription medications, breakables and valuables in them. When they try to obtain compensation from their airline, they're told "Sorry, those items aren't covered."

When packing my checked and carry-on luggage for air travel, I keep in mind six main issues:

- air travel security agency regulations
- airline regulations
- checked baggage handling
- the value of my belongings for touring or work
- an item's actual and intrinsic values
- whether or not an item is essential for my health or safety.

If you're packing items of high actual or intrinsic value,

which you can't afford to lose or become damaged, leave them at home; but if you must take them, pack them in your carry-on.

1. TSA regulations, and those of other countries' air security agencies, govern what you are permitted to take in both your checked and carry-on luggage. These agencies have "Liquid Rules," and "Prohibited Items Rules" which must be obeyed by air travelers. For example, while you might prefer to pack spare lithium batteries for electronic gear in your checked luggage, TSA requires them to be packed in your carry-on.

2. The airlines influence your packing decisions by specifying in their "contracts of carriage" they have no liability whatsoever for specific damaged, missing, stolen or delayed belongings. If you pack cash, electronic gear, jewelry, prescription medication, computers, musical instruments, valuables and breakables, etc., in your



checked luggage, which become damaged, lost, stolen or delayed, count on the airlines saying, “Sorry, we have no liability for those items.”

Moreover, on US domestic flights, for example, the airlines have a total limit of liability, per passenger, per flight, of \$3,300, and on international flights of about \$1,800. So, for example, even if the airlines accepted liability for jewelry, and you packed valuable jewelry in your checked luggage, you could only collect \$3,300 at most, for the total loss — the jewelry, all your other belongings in the checked luggage, plus the luggage itself.

Don't pack valuables, cash, breakables, electronics, laptop computers, tablets, prescription medications, etc. in your checked luggage.

3. While all checked luggage is screened electronically, some checked bags are also examined by hand.

Unfortunately, there have been reports of TSA and airline employees stealing from checked luggage, so keep valuable belongings in your carry-on.



The way luggage is handled by airport machinery and luggage handlers, the odds are significant that fragile items will be damaged. In addition, bottles of soda can explode in checked luggage, and even bubble wrapped drink containers can break open. Don't pack breakable items in your checked luggage.

4. My camera equipment, essential for my work, must arrive at my destination with me, in good working order. For hikers traveling to national parks, hard to get topographical maps are essential. A special gift for an important birthday could be impossible to replace. If you've got to arrive with particular items which are



essential to your journey or difficult to replace, they shouldn't be packed in your checked luggage.

5. If you have to take valuables such as a work of art or a keepsake which has a high actual or intrinsic value, when you travel, don't pack them in your checked luggage.

6. Don't pack all your clothes in your checked luggage. Keep at least one complete change of clothes in your carry-on. With a full change of clothes, you can get along for a couple of days, awaiting the delivery of your delayed luggage. A change of clothes can also come in handy in case of an accident on the plane. On two occasions, when a flight attendant was accidentally pushed from behind, a cup of soda spilled in my lap. I was very happy to have a change of clothes in my carry-on.

7. Many travelers take prescription medications daily. Don't pack your medications in your checked luggage in case the luggage is lost, stolen or delayed. If traveling domestically, it takes time to have new prescriptions written and filled; when traveling internationally, it's harder to replace prescription medication.

Warning: Especially if a medication is “restricted,” pack it in its original container with the full prescription label on it, so that government officials won't question whether or not the drug is illegal.

8. Don't pack your travel documents in your checked luggage. Fortunately today, few travel documents need to be printed. If you do have paper documents, you can't afford to lose them, so keep them on your person or in your carry-on. For electronic documents, keep them in your smartphone, and/or tablet and a copy available via the Internet in “cloud storage” such as Google Drive, Dropbox or Sugarsync.

