



USNews.com

September 18, 2012

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5 Ways to Save Money on Checked Baggage Fees

The joy of watching loved ones light up while opening their holiday presents was once a priceless moment. Unfortunately, standardized baggage [fees imposed by airlines](#) have made traveling with too many packages and luggage a damper on holiday spirits and a blow to travel savings.



The Bureau of Transportation found that major U.S. airlines pulled in an incredible \$792 million in baggage fees in the fourth quarter of 2011 alone. Almost all domestic air carriers, with the exception of Southwest and JetBlue, charge passengers a per-bag fee for any checked item.

"Airlines are charging more because they can," says Mark Drusch, chief supplier relations officer for [CheapOair](#). "Travelers have proven with their purchasing behavior that they are willing to pay for checked bags at the current rates, however, this elasticity may be reaching its maximum based on a flattening of revenues generated by the airlines for checked baggage in the last few quarters."

Some Americans may have caught on to how to save money on baggage rates, but with the month of September being a critical time to capitalize on the best airfare rates in time for the holiday season, travelers need to arm themselves with ways to avoid unnecessary travel fees that add up. With a few easy planning strategies, travelers can not only arrive to the family holiday reunion with goodies in tow, but can also save hundreds of dollars along the way when [traveling on a budget](#).

1. Apply for Co-Branded Airline Credit Cards

If you're considering applying for a new credit card and anticipate a need to fly regularly in the near future, a co-branded [airline credit card](#) can bring free checked bag benefits in addition to added purchasing power.

Drusch recommends looking into the United Chase Card or the Delta Amex credit card for ways to save money on extra fees. Perks for travelers with co-branded credit cards include free checked luggage and a free meal from the respective airline's lounge.

2. Join Free Loyalty Programs

The dread of getting too carried away with a brand new line of credit is understandable. Fortunately, airlines are still competing for your business and offer no-charge loyalty programs.

Programs like Virgin America Elevate and Delta SkyMiles offer savings as [passengers accumulate points or air mileage](#) toward their next trip. In addition to earning points by booking a flight, customers can also earn points by shopping the airline's partner store online. Upon reaching a higher program level, members receive free upgrades, and yes—even free checked baggage. Renowned comedian Dan Nainan frequently flies when touring and claims that staying loyal to one airline has saved him from paying baggage fees: "I am smart enough to stick with one airline instead of flying 10 different airlines to find the cheapest fare. I am now Diamond Medallion on Delta, and never, ever, have to pay a bag fee!"

3. Invest in a Vest

Enlisting the use of a utility vest can work wonders when you're looking for ways to save money during holiday travel. Sure, you already stashed your cell phone, boarding pass, and ID card in your jacket, but what if you could add a full-size laptop to that list or even a jacket within a jacket?

That is exactly what Michael McColl, travel writer and author of *The Worldwide Guide to Cheap Airfares*, has accomplished with his vest prototype. The cargo vest lets him carry up to 25 lbs. cost-free.

"A full laptop and a jacket fit in the back pocket. The vest, plus a carry-on and a book bag, is the totality of what I take on most trips," shares McColl. Since the vest is worn on the body, it isn't considered luggage, but in reality it acts as just that.

4. Don't Bring Liquids

OK, for those who are unnaturally attached to a particular face wash or conditioner (I'm just as guilty), traveling sans liquid items may be impossible. But even cutting down on the amount of liquid goods you bring on your trip can be one of the best ways to save money on baggage fees.

Against my better judgment, I checked a bag for this very reason. My boyfriend and I each wanted to pack a standard backpack for our short weekend getaway to San Francisco. However, we stubbornly wanted to bring our own toiletries from home, so we buckled and ended up paying \$50 on round-trip [baggage fees](#)—just for these liquid products.

It wasn't until we arrived at our hotel that we realized we could have easily purchased \$1 travel toiletries at the Walgreen's down the street.

5. Ship Gifts Ahead of Time

Instead of trying to cram gifts into a checked luggage bag and risk either damage in transit or loss, ship gifts directly to your destination, if possible. During the holiday season, many retailers offer free shipping within the United States. Why waste that deal by shipping it to your own home, only to haul it with you on an airplane for another location?

Not only will the travel experience be considerably less cumbersome, but you'll save at least \$50, if not more, just by avoiding checking in gift packages.

All it takes to skirt excessive fees is a little ingenuity, whether that means sidestepping overweight baggage fees by wearing your heaviest items on your person or using credit cards as a ways to earn airline incentives. In any case, finding ways to save money is a must for the holiday season.

