

## Flying with Backpacking Equipment

Backpackers traveling by air have always had to deal with baggage challenges. After all, it takes a lot of equipment to go backpacking for a week or more. Fitting everything into backpacks that are securely packed for the abuse of airline travel within the allowable baggage restrictions are skills backpackers have always needed. But in today's ugly, charge you for everything travel environment, the process of packing has gotten a lot more challenging for everyone, and backpackers on extended adventure trips are certainly no exception.

Backpacks have lots of straps and gadgets on the outside that increase the chances of getting caught and damaged by the automated baggage handling equipment at airports. If you've got a little money to spend on a duffel, it's the way to fly (no pun intended). For most people this is the preferred method when packing for a big trip. It is easy to lay an empty pack at the bottom of a huge duffel and then layer all of your other stuff on top. Sandwich your trekking poles and more fragile items between layers of clothes. You can also pack a separate carry-on bag for post-hike street clothes and comfy shoes as well as providing a little extra space for any souvenirs picked up along the way.

You can find very cheap, serviceable duffel bags at most army surplus stores. Military parachute bags are large enough to hold most packs, and can be found at surplus stores usually for \$20 or less.



If you're willing to make a serious investment, however, the ultimate bag is the [North Face Basecamp Duffel](#) in XL for around \$160. That sounds like a big chunk of change to spend on a duffel bag, but consider this: It's made of a bombproof rubberized material that will outlast any canvas or nylon and the integrated shoulder straps make it easy to carry through airports.

If you're an organized person and can get everything into your pack while avoiding the size and weight restrictions imposed by airlines (you can use a carry-on for overflow) you can get away with skipping the duffel altogether. Just wrap the hipbelt backwards around the pack body and clip it tight. Then tighten all other straps (shoulder straps, load lifters, compression straps. Tuck and wrap any extra tails from the straps securely away--the idea is to make a lean, mean package that won't get hung up on conveyor belts.

## T.S.A. Baggage Rules and Backpacking Gear

In the United States, and on flights traveling to the United States, standard T.S.A. (Transportation Security Administration) rules apply to everyone. The T.S.A. restricts how outdoor gear such as trekking poles, ice axes, fuel canisters, bear repellents, stoves, and climbing tools can be carried on U.S. airplanes.

### **T.S.A. Policies for Hiking Sticks, Trekking Poles, Climbing Equipment**

Hiking sticks, trekking poles, and ski poles were problematic for travelers even before the new era of air travel. They don't easily fit in backpacks and duffel bags, and in the past, sometimes they were allowed as carry-on luggage, and sometimes not. Today, trekking poles must always be checked. Telescoping poles collapse into as many as three smaller sections, but even so, make sure they fit inside luggage.

Ice Axes, crampons, and climbing hardware are all potential weapons, obviously, and are never allowed in carry-on luggage. It isn't a problem to transport them in checked luggage, although fitting an ice axe into a backpack or duffel bag isn't always easy. Be sure to use a sheath for the ice ax blade, and, as with trekking poles, consider the size of the axe when deciding which luggage to take.

### **T.S.A. Regulations for Camping Stoves and Fuel**

Stoves and fuel are a big problem when flying, either domestically or internationally. Camping stoves are technically permitted onboard aircraft in both checked and carry-on luggage; but they must be cleaned of all fuel vapors and residue. (Whether they are appropriately clean is up to the person inspecting them.) If it is absolutely necessary to travel with a stove, pack a new one in an unopened box in checked baggage. If traveling domestically, consider avoiding the whole issue by boxing up your cleaned and empty fuel bottles and stove and sending it to a UPS store near your destination.

Stove fuel (either liquid fuel or compressed fuel) is not allowed on board, period. While fuel bottles are technically permitted, the T.S.A recommends shipping them because used fuel bottles may have traces of fuel residue. Stove fuel should be purchased at the destination.

### **Backpacking Accessories and T.S.A. Regulations**

Small items commonly used by backpackers can cause problems if packed in carry-on baggage.

- Miniature pocket knives and scuba diving knives must be checked. Even the one-inch varieties that can be clipped onto a key-chain will be confiscated by the T.S.A.
- Cigarette lighters are useful to backpackers for starting fires and stoves, but cannot be packed in checked baggage. One lighter may be carried in hand luggage.
- Lithium batteries (used for cameras and other electronics) are not allowed in checked luggage; they are allowed in carry-on luggage either in the device they operate, or in their original packaging.
- Strike-anywhere matches are not allowed either in checked or hand luggage; regular "safety" matches are allowed in carry-on luggage.
- Bear spray or mace is allowed in checked baggage, but only if it is four ounces or less. Most bear repellent sprays are larger than this limit and therefore must be purchased near your destination.
- Gel inserts for shoes and boots are not allowed in the airplane cabin, but may be packed in checked luggage.
- Aerosol insect repellents are not permitted on airplanes.

By understanding these rules before arriving at the airport, backpackers can best ensure that they arrive at their destination with everything they need.