

Airline Security: 10 Important Tips and Reminders

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Travel, and especially air travel, has become more challenging since 9/11. Airport security procedures seem to be in a constant state of flux. The big changes came on 12/31/2002, when U.S. law required that all baggage (checked and carry-on) be inspected prior to departure. Since then, changes have been fast and furious. These ever-present changes are hard enough for frequent flyers, but when a family's first flight takes them to their first visit to Walt Disney World or Disneyland, the situation must be far more daunting.

While this article is too brief to contain a full primer on airline check-in and security procedures, we hope these tips on hot topics for vacation travelers will help ease your mind and prepare for your journey. Note: These recommendations may become outdated very quickly, so always check with your airline a few days before you depart, to learn the latest conditions for your trip. A trip to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Travelers & Consumer Web site at <http://www.tsa.gov> is also a great idea. Also, note that this article focuses on domestic travel within the U.S. Requirements for travel outside the U.S. will be different, and are generally beyond the scope of this article.

1. Documentation

Have government-issued photo ID for every traveler 17 and older, and keep it handy, as you'll have to show it frequently. If children traveling with you have the same last name, the parent or guardian's photo ID will be enough. It can help to have a birth certificate for each child, but it's rarely necessary. We suggest passports for all adults and children who expect to travel on a regular basis, as there's no better form of ID out there.

At most airports you'll be required to present a boarding pass at the passenger security checkpoint. Tickets, confirmation slips, and itineraries may not be accepted. Some airlines now let you print your boarding pass at their web site, and you can now often get a boarding pass at curbside check-in and/or at e-ticket check-in kiosks in the terminal, as well as at the regular ticket counter.

2. Passenger Security Checkpoint

This is the checkpoint between the main terminal and the gate area. Did you know it's illegal to bring any prohibited item to the checkpoint?

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While you may have the option to dispose of the item(s), security personnel also have the option to arrest you! If circumstances allow, you can leave the security line to put the prohibited item in your car or make arrangements with the airline to transport it as checked baggage. However, if you choose to abandon the item at the checkpoint, you can't get it back.

3. It's Not a Joke

Of course, we've known for years that it's illegal to joke about bombs, hijacking and related matters at the airport. Be sure your children (especially pre-teens and teens) know this, too. One adolescent joke at the checkpoint can put a real crimp in your vacation.

4. Passing Through the Scanners

The metal detectors are more sensitive than they used to be. Here are some of the items that routinely trip the alarms: Small change, keys, eyeglasses, belt buckles, jewelry and body piercings, underwire bras, surgical implants (orthopedic screws and plates included), shoes with metal shanks (you often won't know this until the alarm goes off), and clothes with metal studs or buttons. If you're wearing a coat you'll have to remove it and send it through the X-ray scanner. We suggest transferring all items in your pockets into a purse, waist pack, briefcase, zippered coat pocket or similar item before you reach the checkpoint, to speed your progress through the line. If you know your shoes will trip the alarm, remove them and run them through X-ray. And who needs an uncomfortable underwire poking into her ribs anyway? Consider a sports bra, and travel in greater comfort.

5. Traveling with Children

It pays to mentally prepare your children for the inspection. They'll have to put their toys and other prized possessions through the X-ray machine, and pass through the metal detector. Infants and small children are subject to inspection, just like the grownups. An unexpected wand or pat-down can be traumatic for everyone in the family, so be sure children know what to expect, as it can happen to them, too. If they're big enough to walk through the scanners unaided, encourage them to do it, but also consider the chaos if your child dashes off on his/her own (send one adult through first, followed by children, with an adult bringing up the rear).

6. Inspections and Privacy

Inspections and screenings are mandatory. If you refuse to comply with an inspection, you're off the flight. You may not even be warned of this possibility before it happens. If you have concerns about passing through the scanners, talk to the inspector prior to entering. Passengers with small children, disabilities, medical implants, religious

concerns, and the like will have a much easier time if they tell the inspectors up-front, and discuss the best way to proceed through inspection. Passengers with medical pacemakers are advised to carry the appropriate ID with them (although it's not required). You can request a private inspection, should an inspection be necessary. The inspectors are trained to respect religious and medical sensitivities, and same-gender inspectors will be provided except in extraordinary circumstances. Individuals with body piercings may want to remove them prior to travel, as the jewelry will have to be removed (in privacy) if it trips the scanners. You can read much more about these issues at the TSA web page: <http://www.tsa.gov>.

7. Film

The TSA has a separate fact sheet on this topic. Professional and advanced amateur photographers may want to read the entire thing, at http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/editorial_1035.shtm. Here are a few key points for all travelers:

- Do not pack film in your checked luggage; the screening equipment can damage undeveloped film.
- The X-ray equipment at the passenger security checkpoints (carry-on items) should be safe for film speeds lower than 800 ASA/ISO, but each time a roll of film passes through the equipment, more damage can be done. Even the TSA warns that five trips through the scanners are more than any roll of film should receive. The scanners may not be strong enough to ruin "regular" film, but they can degrade image quality, especially after multiple scans, and can hurt many special-purpose films (medical, professional photo, etc.).
- You can ask that film be hand-inspected. The TSA asks that you re-package film in clear plastic containers to speed the inspection, and recommends against using lead-lined bags for carrying film, as these bags will still have to be opened and inspected. (Lead lined bags may still be advisable for trips out of the U.S., as procedures differ in other countries.)
- To avoid complications, we suggest you buy and process your film while on vacation. All Disney resorts and the Disney Cruise Line have next-day processing services, or you can mail exposed film to a processing lab. This may cost more, but those photo opportunities can be priceless. Once the film has been developed, it can't be damaged by the scanners.

8. Locking Checked Luggage

Now that the TSA is screening all checked luggage, there's always the

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possibility that your luggage will have to be opened for inspection (whether the TSA is hand-inspecting all luggage at your airport, or if your bag must be opened for further inspection following an electronic scan). In most cases, this will not be done in your presence. The TSA recommends that you not lock your checked luggage, as the lock may have to be broken and will not be replaced. If it's necessary to open a bag for inspection the TSA places a colored seal on the luggage afterwards, and a notice inside the bag to advise you that the bag has been inspected. The TSA is working on a program to provide color-coded security seals to all passengers. If the TSA then has to inspect the contents of a bag that color-coded seal will be replaced by a seal of a different color. Until that new system is in place, the TSA recommends you use plastic cable ties, available at most hardware stores. These inexpensive ties can be used like a lock to hold zippers closed, and can be removed easily by the TSA. You can open them later with a scissors or nail clipper (see the next section).

9. Not-So-Prohibited Items

Many personal items that had been prohibited in carry-on luggage can now be brought on board. These include round-nosed scissors, nail clippers, nail files, tweezers, knitting needles, and eyeglass repair kits including screwdrivers (larger screwdrivers are still prohibited). "Personal care or toiletries" in small quantities (3 oz. or less) are also allowed (see the section below). The full list of prohibited items changes regularly. The current list can be downloaded or viewed at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>. Of course, the major prohibited items are still all on the list. As has been the case for a while, knives, hand tools, and sports items like baseball bats, hockey sticks and golf clubs must go in your checked baggage.

10. 3-1-1 Rule for Carry-On Liquids

Remember the 3-1-1 rule when you want to carry on personal items that are liquid, such as shampoo or sunscreen. Here's how it works: You may carry on liquids in 3 (THREE) ounce or less (by volume) bottles, but these must be placed in 1 (ONE) quart-sized clear, plastic, zip-top bag, and you can only have 1 (ONE) bag per passenger, which must be placed in the screening bin when you walk through the security checkpoint. Note that the one-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring, and it's necessary that you consolidate all of your bottles into one bag to speed up the security screening. You may still put liquids in your checked luggage without worrying about sizes or bags, though.

Whew! That's a lot of stuff, but with a bit of advance knowledge you'll fly thorough the preliminaries and your fellow passengers won't be delayed

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behind you.

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