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Reduce the Risk of Lost Luggage

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Each
year,

millions of suitcases or one bag per 2,000 passengers were never found. Some of these lost bags sit at airports for months waiting to be claimed, before their contents are sold at luggage auction, donated or dumped. What happens to traveler's new bathing suits and unwashed underwear depends on which airline carried the suitcase and where in the world the plane landed.

The biggest ongoing weak spot in luggage handling involves passengers moving from one aircraft to another. In 2016, nearly half of all cases of delayed bags or 47% occurred in between connecting flights, particularly those with tight time frames.

Bags abandoned at Heathrow Airport are auctioned off at Greasby's in South London. In the U.S., thousands of unclaimed suitcases are unpacked each year and contents sold at an Unclaimed Baggage Center in Scottsboro, Alabama. At Canadian airports, each airline is responsible for its unclaimed baggage.

Air Canada and Westjet both have customer service agents at each airport who try to reunite suitcases with its owner. After several days, unclaimed bags are sent to the airline's central baggage tracing office. Agents at the central office then open and search through the luggage for tags, business cards, personal documents, anything that can help identify the owner.

Travelers who haven't located their missing bags after a few months should probably give up hope.

- Arrive early at the airport to allow sufficient time for your baggage to load
- Tie colored ribbon or attach unique markers to your bags to prevent confusion with other travelers and make your luggage stand out
- Place your name, itinerary and contact information inside your luggage to help airlines contact you if your bag is found. External tags can sometimes get lost or ripped
- Keep a list on you of unique or personal items inside each bag to help agents identify yours amongst the others if its found
- If your baggage is missing on arrival, file a claim before leaving the airport. Airlines often require losses to be reported within a limited time frame for compensation
- Check your luggage tag for accuracy; is it the correct name and destination?
- Use an electronic luggage tracker
- Never pack anything in your case that you have to have while traveling such as medication to minimize problems due to luggage issues
- Packing a complete change of clothes in your carry on is wise
- Obtain travel insurance coverage for your luggage and contents
- Take some photos of your bag and contents. While it won't prevent your checked luggage from being lost, photographing your bag can help ensure you are properly compensated
- Avoid short layovers
- Book direct, non-stop flights If possible
- Check your bags early. Air travelers who arrive at the airport with minutes to spare or get stuck in the check in line may find their luggage misses their flight. My rule of thumb is to be at the airport at least two hours ahead of my departure
- If you do have to have connecting flights, schedule a long enough layover to ensure both you and your luggage make it onto the next flight. Layovers of less than one hour aren't recommended

Using one or all of the above prevention methods will not guarantee you'll never have lost or delayed luggage, but using them will improve the odds yours will arrive safely with you at your destination.

I travel with carry-on luggage only as often as possible to reduce the risk completely.



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