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# Carrying On Your Dive Equipment

## *Luggage that gets it on the plane*

I don't like to check in my dive gear when I fly. Once it disappears into the baggage system, all I've got to get me through my next dive is a paper claim that won't hold up under water. It's always worth the trouble to carry on the vital items. What constitutes a vital item depends on how remote my destination may be and how important it is to use my own gear as opposed to rental gear or, worst case, no gear. I always try to carry on at least one full set of dive equipment.

Sometimes this doesn't go smoothly. The gate attendant gives my bulging bag the beady eye, asks me to step out of line, and swears that my stuff will be safe in the baggage compartment. That's when I politely decline and begin to repack everything right there in line. Sorry, 'scuse me, sorry, I'm putting on my BC as an outer garment, cramming Cadbury fruit and nut bars into my shirt, tucking my console into the pocket of my shorts, and generally invoking contempt and sympathy. It's always produced results, but nobody wants to sit next to me after I'm finally pushed onto the plane.

### **It Should Be Simple, But It's Not**

If you're as paranoid about checked baggage as I am but don't think you can pull off this melodramatic feat, here's your next best alternative: Make sure the dimensions of your one critical carry-on add up to less than the maximum size (length plus width plus height) permitted on *all* the segments of your air route.

There isn't any official FAA standard or government-approved size that spans airlines and international boundaries and aircraft types. Unlike the posted list of hazardous objects, such as combustibles, that are restricted by government regulations, carry-on size is controlled strictly by airline company policy. Some airlines allow pigs and chickens as long as they wear their seat belts; others won't let you wear a big hat.

The only sure way to find out what carry-on baggage policy applies to your trip is to insist on having each airline's reservations agent (as opposed to a travel

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agent) read the rules to you. If you've already got a route and a flight scheduled, you can find out whether the company policy applies to your itinerary. Small, commuter-type planes have tiny carry-on compartments, but large jets can be configured with minimal storage, too. After all, the less of your stuff they carry, the more room they have for revenue-producing freight.

Furthermore, there's no compelling reason other than common courtesy — and you know how common that is these days —

for one airline to honor the carry-on requirements of another. It's quite possible to meet the standards on the first leg of your trip, only to lose your carry-on into the belly of the beast on the second leg.

### **Thank You for Waiting — May I Give You Some Bogus Information?**

Airline reservations agents and independent travel agents I queried usually provided correct information. They typically quoted me a 45-inch limit but often said something like, "Just get on board without making a big fuss and nobody will care." Airline employees were uniformly ignorant of other carriers' carry-on baggage requirements, assuming nearly always that all connecting airlines played by the same rules.

On the other hand, travel-luggage salespeople, who have a vested interest in selling the largest bag they can, offered a wealth of misinformation. A number of luggage stores and mail-order luggage dealers told me that 45-inch bags were fine anywhere in the world, and others said that 47-inch bags were "airline approved."

### **Equation for Discontent: Q/39 = Crunch**

Calling virtually every domestic and international carrier listed in the phone book, I found 39 inches (l+w+h) to be the lowest common denominator, i.e., the stingiest carry-on size limit that anyone would dare enforce in coach class. You'd be cut more slack in business or first class, but how many of us pop for that?

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The 39-inch limit came from Qantas, which serves several of my usual dive destinations. I watched a fellow diver lose his 42-inch rolling carry-on to a grumpy Qantas gate attendant in Cairns, and no amount of whining about other airlines' limits made any difference.

I spoke with Air New Zealand, Alaska, ALM Antillean, American, Cayman, Continental, Delta, Northwest, Philippine, United, and USAir. None were as restrictive on cabin baggage as Qantas. All except Qantas permitted carry-ons up to 45 inches on international flights. A few even allowed larger carry-ons. Nobody seemed to care much about weight as long as a carry-on doesn't *look* heavy, or as long as heavy items weren't placed in an overhead compartment.

But what do they mean by "heavy"? Continental permits a carry-on weighing up to 70 pounds, while Philippine Airlines has a 25-pound limit, and Qantas can stop you if your bag exceeds a ridiculous

11-pound limit. I've never seen a scale at a boarding gate, but it's possible.

Most airlines also allow additional items, such as a camera, an overcoat, and a purse, any of which could be used to move you out of the gray area between OK and not OK, especially if you were wearing a garment with a lot of pockets.

### What to Buy

If you want never to be hassled by some crabby gate attendant nor to own different bags for different airlines, consider doing what I did: buy a 39-inch (l+w+h) rolling bag, and learn to pack fewer items tighter. I can almost certainly bring the bag on board any airplane, as long as I don't act as if it were full of heavy diving gear. I used to lug an over-the-shoulder carry-on, but when it was full, I needed a hand cart to make it through large airports. That cart was one more thing to keep track of, and it said something unpleasant and obvious

about the bag's weight. By comparison, a rolling cart might only have my undies in it. Without a scale, who's to know?

There are plenty of rolling 42- and 45-inch bags, and others that almost meet the more common 45-inch limit (such as the 47-inch bag from Sharper Image), but I just didn't want to start a rolling luggage collection. The only 39-inch model I could find in the San Francisco Bay area was Travelpro's #7182, which cost about \$160 and is guaranteed for three years. It's an uncommon model in stores, but if you can't find it where you live, you can get it mailed from ASU (800-873-3330). Mine's been beaten around on several trips but has held up fine so far. With very careful packing, it's just large enough to hold all my vital traveling dive gear except my fins, which always go aboard under my arm because they're so long that they'd never fit into a carry-on anyway.

Delmar Mesa

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## Who Said That?

### *Anonymous accusations on the Internet*

Anonymity and freedom of speech in cyberspace are being challenged by a Caribbean resort owner in a court case that could dramatically restrict the rights of computer network users.

The resort owner and a scuba instructor claim they were defamed on a computer bulletin board by an anonymous user, and they asked a judge this week to force America Online to reveal the name of the subscriber so they can sue the person for libel.

If Bowker and Joslin are successful in obtaining the name, it could have serious implications for millions of people who use the Internet to think, write, and debate in a world where they are identified by their ideas, not their names.

Technology experts fear a morass of court cases that would hold computer users accountable for what they say anonymously. "What this case brings up is the specter of millions of libel suits

every time there's a disagreement on the Internet," said Daniel Weitzner, deputy director of the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington. "I think it's a critical issue."

The motion, filed in Cook County Circuit Court, charges that Bowker's dive shop at the Carib Inn in Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles, and instructor John Joslin were defamed by a message posted on an America Online bulletin board for scuba divers by a user identified as "Jenny TRR." The bulletin board is accessible to the company's 3.5 million subscribers.

In June, Jenny TRR wrote that she had had a bad experience while learning to dive at the Carib