



A Phoenix man and woman were arrested recently for stealing at least a thousand checked suitcases from the baggage carousels in the city airport during the past year. How could that happen? Imagine the conversation between an airport cop and his boss last June:

Cop: Duh, chief, didja know that more than 500 checked bags have been stolen from our carousels since January. Shouldn't we do sumpin' about it?

Chief: Only 500? Nah, not to worry. We wait 'til them crooks take at least a thousand. Then we gotta think about doin' sumpin'.

Those airport security guys are great at checking shoes and waving electronic wands. But, how could they ignore this obvious in-their-faces crime spree? They never caught on, and it took city cops to catch the crooks in action, then follow them and find their house full of hundreds of empty suitcases.

Some checked bags may disappear while in transit from airport to airport, but many more lost bags are boldly swiped from the carousels. Here are some tips on keeping your bags from flying away ... not in the air, but from the whirling carousel ... without you.

1. Be sure your bags are brightly colored. Most stolen bags are black, and colored ones are easier to eyeball as they spin around the carousel.
2. In olden days, when airlines actually cared about people's bags, you needed to show an ID card matching a card on the luggage to a guard at the carousel. To save money, airlines no longer provide that protection. Almost anyone can grab a bag and take off. And unless you watch very closely, it can happen to you.
3. Never leave bags unattended anywhere at any time in the airport. Not only could you lose them, but security guys are quick to scoop up unattended bags. Then, you have to go to the security office and ID yourself, thereby inevitably missing your flight.
4. If not absolutely necessary to drag heavy luggage you'll need to check, consolidate your stuff and use wheeled carry-ons only. If you have some overflow, put it in a smaller bag you can stow under your airline seat.

5. Report any suspicious behavior around the carousels. That pair of crooks who snagged a thousand bags at the Phoenix airport had to be very obvious regular hangers-around. Even if inept airport cops aren't doing their job, smart travelers should ferret out the crooks and blow the whistle on them.