

First of all, it doesn't have to happen. Simply, just don't check any luggage! When we first retired 15 years ago, we traveled with enough bags to qualify as movie stars. Big suitcases, over-the-shoulder bags, cosmetic cases, dress bags, suit bags, whatever. Then, after several were lost and others came off the airport carousel smashed or with valuables pilfered, we got smart.



We dumped the big, hard-bodied suitcases and bought soft-sided, smaller wheeled bags. When we packed for a trip, we put everything we thought we'd need on a bed. Then, one by one, we eliminated all but absolute essentials. That meant we left behind at least half of the stuff we had packed in our earlier trips.

I know, I know. There are certain journeys that require all the heavy bags and checking them at the airport. Three-week cruises, long family holiday visits, dress-up social events and such. And bags always seem to get lost at the worst possible moment. Panic time when you can't find your bags when, after waiting an hour while all other passengers grab their bags, until that airport merry-go-round spins empty.

At that moment of panic, ask any employee where to file your claim for lost luggage. Do it immediately, but don't leave the airport until airline baggage handlers have had a chance to search for your bags. If you're lucky, the bags could have been mistakenly left off the carousel, and a quick search will find them. Then, if the bags are still unaccounted for, file a written claim and go home or on to your destination. If you used a travel agent for your flight, call that office as soon as possible, to get information about your rights, especially if the bags are never recovered.

After several such frustrating experiences, we were determined to travel light. We never again checked our bags, no matter what the destination or occasion required.

Our first test was a three-week European jaunt. We took along just a wheelie bag and knapsack each. We packed just one wash-and-wear suit/dress, along with the usual necessities. Each night when we showered, we washed whatever we had worn during that day and hung it up to dry in the hotel/motel/bed'n'breakfast room. It worked perfectly!

Admittedly, clothing customs have eased considerably in recent years, and as retirees, we rarely have to dress up anywhere. But just last month we had to fly across the country to attend a four-day family function that included two semi-formal occasions. Did we check our bags? Hell, no! It wasn't easy, but we managed it.

You'll hear all kinds of advice about what to do when the airline loses your luggage. Thank goodness, it doesn't apply to our travels anymore. Try it with all carry-ons. It may just work for you and yours.