



TSA's Process for Screening Checked and Carry-On Luggage

January 2, 2023 by [Liam Matthews](#) TSA Tips

The [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) is a federal agency responsible for ensuring air travel safety in the United States. One of the ways the TSA does this is by screening checked, and carry-on luggage for prohibited items before passengers are allowed to board their flights. In this blog, we'll take a closer look at the TSA's process for screening luggage and offer some tips for travelers to help them navigate the process smoothly.



Checked Luggage Screening

Before checked luggage is placed on a plane, it goes through a screening process to ensure that it does not contain any prohibited items. TSA uses X-ray machines to scan the contents of the luggage and look for any potentially hazardous items. The agency also uses explosive trace detection technology, which involves swabbing the exterior of the luggage and analyzing the swab for traces of explosives.

If a prohibited item is found in checked luggage, the TSA will handle it in one of two ways. If the item is legal to possess but not allowed on a plane (such as a large bottle of shampoo), the TSA will usually either dispose of the item or give it to the passenger to take with them after they have passed through security. If the item is illegal to possess (such as a firearm), the TSA will turn it over to law enforcement for further investigation.

Carry-On Luggage Screening

Carry-on luggage undergoes a similar screening process as checked luggage, with X-ray machines scanning the bag's contents. TSA officers may also physically inspect the luggage if necessary.

Certain items are not allowed in carry-on luggage due to security concerns. These items include [liquids](#), [gels](#), and [aerosols](#) that are over 3.4 ounces (100 milliliters) in volume, as well as certain types of electronics. Travelers are allowed to bring small quantities of liquids, gels, and aerosols in their carry-on luggage as long as they are placed in a quart-sized, clear plastic bag and placed in a visible location for inspection.

Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) and Pat-Downs

The TSA may also use advanced imaging technology (AIT) scanners to screen carry-on luggage and passengers. AIT scanners use low levels of X-ray technology to produce detailed images of the contents of a bag or the outline of a person's body. These scanners are designed to detect potential threats that may not be visible through traditional X-ray scanners.

If a passenger opts out of AIT screening or the AIT scanner indicates the presence of an anomaly, the passenger may be subject to a pat-down. TSA officers of the same gender conduct pat-downs as a passenger. They are designed to detect prohibited items that may not have been detected through other screening methods. Passengers have the

right to request a private screening or to have a companion present during the pat-down process.

Tips for Travelers

To help travelers navigate the [TSA screening process](#) smoothly, we have a few tips to keep in mind:

- **Pack efficiently:** Avoid packing prohibited items in your luggage, and pack your bag in a way that makes it easy for TSA officers to access the contents.
- **Arrive at the airport early:** Plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours before your scheduled departure time to allow for the screening process and any potential delays.
- **Understand the rules for prohibited items:** Familiarize yourself with the TSA's guidelines for what can and cannot be brought in carry-on luggage. This will help you avoid any surprises during the screening process.

TSA PreCheck

If you fly frequently, consider enrolling in the [TSA PreCheck program](#). This program allows travelers to use a dedicated security lane and keep shoes, belts, and light jackets on during the screening process.

To be eligible for TSA PreCheck, travelers must be U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents and pass a background check. The application process involves filling out an online application and scheduling an in-person appointment at a TSA PreCheck enrollment center. There is a fee for enrolling in TSA PreCheck, but the program is valid for five years.

TSA Cares

The [TSA Cares program](#) is designed to assist travelers with disabilities or medical conditions that may affect the screening process. Travelers can request assistance through the TSA Cares hotline at least 72 hours before their flight.

Travelers can request a private screening or have a companion present during the screening process through TSA Cares. The program also provides information on the screening process, what to expect at the airport, and assistance with mobility and communication needs.

Controversial Issues

There have been controversial issues related to the TSA's screening process, such as using advanced imaging technology scanners and the pat-down process. Some travelers have expressed concerns about the privacy implications of these procedures, while others have raised concerns about their effectiveness in detecting potential threats.

The TSA maintains that both AIT scanners and pat-downs are necessary tools in the effort to ensure the safety of air travel. The agency has implemented measures to address privacy concerns, such as using automated image analysis technology to process AIT scanner images and using modified pat-down procedures for children and sensitive areas.

Future Developments

The TSA is continually working to improve and update its screening processes to ensure air travel safety. Future developments that may impact the screening process include new technology, such as biometric scanners, and changes to the rules for prohibited items.

Conclusion

The TSA's process for screening checked and carry-on luggage is an important part of ensuring air travel safety in the United States. By understanding the process and following the rules for prohibited items, travelers can help make the screening process go smoothly. While there have been some controversial issues related to the screening process, the TSA is committed to addressing these concerns and continually improving its procedures to ensure the safety of all passengers.