

Title:

Arrival and Claiming Your Bags

Word Count:

1045

Summary:

Many bags look alike. After you pull what you think is your bag off the carousel, check the name tag or the bag tag number. If your bag arrives open, unlocked or visibly damaged, check right away to see if any of the contents are missing or damaged.

Keywords:

airline, form, claim, pay, suitcase, damage, airport, lost, airlines, money, value, carriers, carrier, damage caused

Article Body:

Report any problems to the airline before leaving the airport; insist on filling out a form. Open your suitcase immediately when you get to where you are staying. Any damage to the contents or any pilferage should be immediately reported to the airline by telephone. Make a note of the date and time of the call, and the name and telephone number of the person you spoke with. Follow up immediately with a certified letter to the airline.

Damage

If your suitcase arrives smashed or torn, the airline will usually pay for repairs. If it can't be fixed, they will negotiate a settlement to pay you its depreciated value. The same holds true for belongings packed inside. Airlines may decline to pay for damage caused by the fragile nature of the broken item or inadequate packing, rather than the airline's rough handling.

Carriers may also refuse to give you money for your damaged items inside the bag when there's no evidence of external damage to the suitcase. But airlines generally don't disclaim liability for fragile merchandise packed in its original factory sealed carton, a cardboard mailing tube, or other container designed for shipping and packed with protective padding material.

When you check in, airline personnel should let you know if they think your suitcase or package may not survive the trip intact. Before accepting a questionable item, they will ask you to sign a statement in which you agree to

check it at your own risk. But even if you do sign this form, the airline might be liable for damage if it is caused by its own negligence shown by external injury to the suitcase or package.

Delayed bags

If you and your suitcase don't connect at your destination, don't panic. The airlines have very sophisticated systems that track down about 98% of the bags they misplace and return them to their owners within hours. In many cases they will absorb reasonable expenses you incur while they look for your missing belongings. You and the airline may have different ideas of what's reasonable, however, and the amount they will pay is subject to negotiation.

If your bags don't come off the conveyor belt, report this to the airline before you leave the airport. Insist that they fill out a form and give you a copy, even if they say the bag will be in on the next flight. If the form doesn't contain the name of the person who filled it out, ask for it. Get an appropriate phone number for following up (not the Reservations number).

Don't assume that the airline will deliver the bag without charge when it is found; ask them about this. Most carriers set guidelines for their airport employees that allow them to disburse some money at the airport for emergency purchases.

The amount depends on whether or not you're away from home and how long it takes to track down your bags and return them to you. If the airline does not provide you a cash advance, it may still reimburse you later for the purchase of necessities. Discuss with the carrier the types of articles that would be reimbursable, and keep all receipts.

If the airline misplaces sporting equipment, it will sometimes pay for the rental of replacements. For replacement clothing or other articles, the carrier might offer to absorb only a portion of the purchase cost, on the basis that you will be able to use the new items in the future. (The airline may agree to a higher reimbursement if you turn the articles over to them.)

When you've checked in fresh foods or any other perishable goods and they are ruined because their delivery is delayed, the airline won't reimburse you. Carriers may be liable if they lose or damage perishable items, but they won't accept responsibility for spoilage caused by a delay in delivery.

Airlines are liable for provable consequential damages up to the amount of their liability limit (see below) in connection with the delay. If you can't resolve

the claim with the airline's airport staff, keep a record of the names of the employees with whom you dealt, and hold on to all travel documents and receipts for any money you spent in connection with the mishandling. (It's okay to surrender your baggage claim tags to the airline when you fill out a form at the airport, as long as you get a copy of the form and it notes that you gave up the tags.) Call or write the airline's consumer office when you get home.

Lost luggage

Once your bag is declared officially lost, you will have to submit a claim. This usually means you have to fill out a second, more detailed form. Check on this; failure to complete the second form when required could delay your claim. Missing the deadline for filing it could invalidate your claim altogether.

The airline will usually refer your claim form to a central office, and the negotiations between you and the airline will begin. If your flight was a connection involving two carriers, the final carrier is normally the one responsible for processing your claim even if it appears that the first airline lost the bag.

Airlines don't automatically pay the full amount of every claim they receive. First, they will use the information on your form to estimate the value of your lost belongings. Like insurance companies, airlines consider the depreciated value of your possessions, not their original price or the replacement costs. If you're tempted to exaggerate your claim, don't.

Airlines may completely deny claims they feel are inflated or fraudulent. They often ask for sales receipts and other documentation to back up claims, especially if a large amount of money is involved. If you don't keep extensive records, you can expect to dicker with the airline over the value of your goods.

Generally, it takes an airline anywhere from six weeks to three months to pay you for your lost luggage. When they tender a settlement, they may offer you the option of free tickets on future flights in a higher amount than the cash payment. Ask about all restrictions on these tickets, such as "blackout" periods and how far before departure you are permitted to make a reservation.