

Mishandled Baggage Is on the Rise: Here's What You Need to Know Before You Check a Bag

(Courtesy of Caroline Morse Teel, The SMARTERTRAVEL)

[A new study](#) from aviation technology company SITA revealed that the global mishandled baggage rate increased by 24 percent in 2021. On flights around the world, 4.35 bags per thousand passengers were mishandled. Staffing shortages and cost-cutting measures in the airline industry have contributed to the spike in mishandled baggage. "The industry now needs to do more with less," said David Lavorel, the CEO of SITA.

Your Bag Is More Likely to Be Delayed Than Lost

If your suitcase doesn't show up on the carousel, don't give up hope. According to the study, 71 percent of all mishandled bags in 2021 were delayed rather than lost. Only six percent of bags are actually lost (or stolen), and the remaining 23 percent of mishandled bags are damaged.

Connecting Flights Increase the Risk of a Lost/Delayed Bag

If you're not flying nonstop, your risk of having your bag mishandled increases—and flying internationally makes the odds even worse. According to SITA's study, "An increase in long-haul flights with connections in 2021 has pushed up the bags delayed at transfer to 41%, which is 4 points increase from 2020." ***The mishandling rate for bags on international flights was 8.7 compared to 1.85 for domestic routes.*** Consider traveling carry-on only if you have a connecting flight, especially if you only have a short amount of time to catch the connection.

Tips for Checking a Bag

If you have to check a bag, follow these important tips:

- Pack essentials (such as car/house keys, medications, contact lenses, a change of clothes, etc. in your carry-on or personal item) in case your bag is delayed or lost
- Clearly label your bag on both the interior and exterior with up-to-date contact information
- Remove any old airline tags from your suitcase; Lock your suitcase with a TSA-approved lock
- Arrive at the airport early

What Should You Do if Your Bag Is Mishandled?

- Alert the airline; Give the airline your travel itinerary so they can reunite you with your bag
- Complete and submit necessary airline claim forms
- Check the airline's lost/delayed luggage policy to see what compensation you are entitled to
- Save and submit receipts of expenses incurred from lost bags
- Check your travel insurance and credit card benefits to see if you are covered for a lost/delayed bag