

Bound for Argentina; how to pack up for a trip



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

As you read this article over your Sunday morning coffee, I am somewhere thousands of miles south of Montrose. I am on a long awaited hunting trip to Argentina. Upon my return, I plan on writing about this latest of my adventures.

In order to take a trip like this, one must submit themselves to the mercy of the airlines and air travel, not to mention Customs, TSA and every other authority along the way.

Before leaving on this trip, I visited Montrose Health and Human Services and left with a fantail full of vaccinations to keep me healthy while recreating in the jungles. After years of traveling, I thought I would share with you a few tricks and tips I have learned along the way, most of them the hard way.

As much as a pain in the posterior it is, flying is probably the only way to go for the travelling outdoors person. It never ceases to amaze me that you can get to just about anywhere in the world in around 24 to 36 hours.

Back in the day air travel was pleasant, compared to what it is today. A big guy like me had a comfortable seat with leg and elbow room, and they threw in meals and a cocktail or two. The airline employees were generally pleasant and helpful.

Today, the airlines cram more people into a smaller area, limit what you can bring and charge you for it — and hardly ever give you a smile. The general attitude is “We don’t care, we don’t have to.”

For us living on the Western Slope, we are fortunate to have very friendly airports in Grand Junction and Montrose. The people who work there are our friends and neighbors. These people are used to dealing with traveling outdoor people, skiers and hunters. Skip on over to some other large city, in another state, and you will see the other side of air travel.

First things first: Do your homework. Know the rules of what you can and cannot bring on an airplane. There are things allowed in carry-on bags and not on checked luggage. Lithium batteries are a good example. I always carry a bunch with me in my backpack I carry on the plane.

TSA and each airline have published rules and regulations, and I encourage you to read up before any trip as these change frequently. It might not be a bad idea to print up a set to carry with you. Sometimes you have to “educate” an airline employee



My luggage on the tarmac, waiting to be loaded for flight to Argentina. Luggage for outdoors people should be strong, lightweight and waterproof. (Mark Rackay/ Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

about his or her own company’s regulations.

Two items everyone who travels via air should have are a US passport book and a TSA Precheck authorization. The Passport Book works much better for identification than the card. The card is not accepted outside North America. When you apply for a passport, might as well pay a few extra bucks and get the book.

TSA (Transportation Security Administration) is a whole experience on it’s own. You will hear horror stories about people being groped, detained, belittled and so on. While some of this may be true, the fact is these people are there to keep us safe, and generally do a good job of it. Greet them with a smile and be polite, as it will make things easier all around.

For a more frequent traveler, look into getting a TSA Precheck number. You have to pay \$85 for five years and go to Grand Junction to be interviewed, fingerprinted and get a background check. The reward is you go through a special line with little or no waiting and no longer have to remove shoes, belts, laptops, cameras and liquids from bags.

When you are ready to start packing for the adventure, I start days before with a written list. Writing it down limits the amount of forgotten items and allows you to really think about what you need to bring.

An old packing method among travelling hunters is to lay everything out on the bed before you pack it. Then remove half the clothes and bring double the money.

As a rule of thumb, most airlines have a bag weight limit of 50 pounds. Going over

that weight can get pretty costly. I once paid a \$75 charge for a bag that was eight pounds overweight.

Your bags must also measure to a certain number in order to avoid additional charges. Their method uses a linear measurement. No bag can exceed 62 inches. Take the length of your bag plus the width and height. This number must be less than 62 inches. If your bag is 15 inches wide, 15 inches tall, and 36 inches long, your linear total is 66 inches, and you are over the limit. Check those measurements before leaving the house and not at the ticket counter.

Take careful consideration of the type of luggage you bring. Those cute little roll-around bags you see everywhere in the airports may be stylish and handy, but they are very inefficient for the travelling outdoor person. Look for a rolling duffel bag with tough inline-skate-type wheels. These bags can take a beating, and the baggage handlers will test them.

Be aware of the empty weight of your checked bags. I had one bag, very strong and secure, but its empty weight was 19 pounds. With a 50-pound limit, I gave up a lot of equipment and clothes when using this bag.

I have had my luggage sit on the tarmac in pouring rain while the handlers dawdle around loading the plane. Go for waterproof and strong bags, especially if you are travelling to remote areas and utilizing other means of travel such as boats and floatplanes.

Try to use TSA approved locks on everything. These locks are accessible to TSA agents for inspection. If you use a non-TSA approved lock, you could find your lock cut off the bag. I

also carry an extra couple locks in my carry-on, just in case one does get cut off.

Speaking of locks, I use combination TSA locks on all my bags. This means I don’t have to carry a key around with me, and that’s one less thing I have to worry about losing.

I have mentioned that my carry-on is my backpack. This is the same backpack that I will use every day in the wild on the trip. I carry things like expensive cameras, binoculars, range-finders and just about anything else I don’t want out of my site.

The pack is small enough that it fits under the seat and is always in my control — not that I don’t trust anyone; but I don’t. Cell phones, chargers, passport and personal medications should stay with you whenever you travel.

One trip I took to Canada had a 60-pound total weight requirement for bags checked. This included firearms and cases. After deducting the weight of my empty bag, case and rifle, it left about 15 pounds for clothes and everything else.

If you are on a trip with extreme weight restrictions, consider wearing heavier items like hiking boots on the plane. I carry my heavy jacket on board and keep as much as I can in my backpack. This helps reduce the checked bag’s weight a little bit.

Anytime your adventure takes you away from the good old USA, consider travel insurance. This insurance reimburses you for the cost of missed trips, connections, lost baggage and has a medical policy with it. If you get hurt or sick in a foreign country, having the insurance to cover the bills and evacuate you back home can bring piece of mind.

Ask a travel agent about these policies. The one for my upcoming Argentina trip costs less than 60 bucks.

If your destination is out of the United States, you could be looking at some serious travel time. I once spent over 48 hours in travel, before hitting the camp for a remote hunt in Northern Canada. I am looking at 40 hours for an upcoming hunt in the wilds of Argentina.

With that much time sitting in airports and on planes, think about some entertainment. A small laptop loaded with movies and games can help pass the time. It is also a good time to catch up on some reading.

It never fails, but when I fly, I get to sit next to some screaming kid. The screaming does not bother me so much anymore because much of my hearing is gone. For those of you with hearing you wish to preserve, consider getting a pair of noise cancelling earphones. They are worth their weight in gold on a long trip.

Admittedly, the travel is the worst part of any adventure, especially in this post-9/11 day and age. If you can reduce the stress by packing and planning carefully, it may help the difficulties of the trip pass easier. At least the airlines still serve cocktails, and sometimes that can help improve a bad mood. I hope I have some fun things to tell you about when I return.

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You know what...

...season this is. This season is called “ I want to choke that lying ground hog- I am so tired of rain and snow- even though I know we desperately need it so we can’t walk across Ridgway Reservoir this year- where did that earthquake come from- we were in the fields by this time last year and now the tires on the tractor will probably disappear in the mud- I am so tired of wiping off muddy dog paws- thank you, Lord, nothing fell off the mountain as I drove over Red Mountain, or Ophir Road, or I-70 almost anywhere!”

This season is known as “Colorado, where every day is the unexpected and never boring!”

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