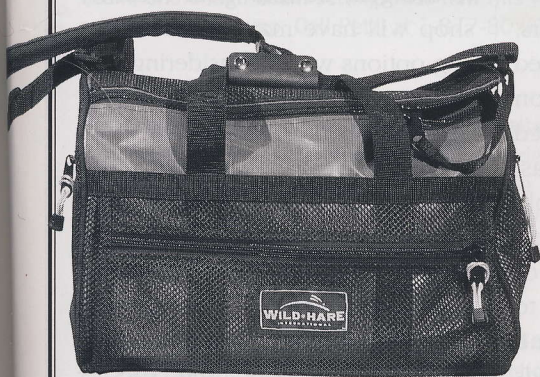


SIX TIPS FOR FLYING FLY FISHERS

BY TOM KEER



Don't risk your tackle and gear while you're en route to a fly-fishing dream destination.

When I got off the puddle jumper on Andros Island, the Bahamas, I bought a couple of bottles of Kalik beer for later that night. I got my change and noticed that there were two bonefish on the Bahamian dime; it is reasonable to assume that any country that features fish on its currency is probably a good place to spend some time.

Getting from Boston to Andros with my rods and gear intact wasn't an act of chance. It always takes some planning and organizing to avoid angling chaos when you're traveling.

A few examples of travel woes I've heard from friends should help illustrate what can happen if you don't plan your travel tactics. One angler I know checked his 2-piece-rod tubes, which subsequently arrived empty, thanks to predatory

baggage handlers. Another angler, traveling to Alaska, had a pallet of canned tomatoes fall on his rod tubes, thereby shattering each one, and immediately ending his fishing trip. Another fisherman I know had a bag of reels, a fully-equipped vest, and waders all routed to Georgia—when they ought to have gone to Montana.

The list of travel tragedies is seemingly endless, but the bottom line is that there are many ways to avoid the pitfalls of traveling with fishing gear. A friend of mine who travels regularly relies on the adage "Fail to plan, plan to fail." Here are six ways you can protect yourself, and your gear.

1 Check with your airline about their carry-on-size limitations as well as their overhead-bin lengths. Though no industry standard exists,

most airlines allow you to travel with a total of three pieces of luggage, one or two of which you can carry onto the plane. Generally speaking, the maximum weight of each carry-on piece can be between 40 and 50 pounds. The model of the plane will determine what the limitations are on the size of a carry-on bag.

When booking a flight, find out what kind of aircraft you will be boarding, and the dimensions of the overhead bins. Delta, for example, allows carry-on bags that total a maximum of 45 inches when the length, width, and height are combined, and a maximum weight of 45 pounds per piece. USAir allows 40 pounds and a length, width, and height dimension of 24-by-16-by-10 inches. It's a good idea to adhere to the particular airline's standard, and to avoid putting a flight attendant in an awkward position. One bull-headed pal of mine tried to beat the system and brought three oversize bags aboard. In spite of his less-than-persuasive attempts, the luggage containing his fishing tackle was off-loaded from his flight, and then transferred to the wrong plane. Accidents happen; he shouldn't have tried to beat the odds.

Two-piece rods oftentimes will fit in an overhead compartment. Every time I travel I call ahead to the airline to determine the size of the overhead bins, and I have had excellent luck carrying aboard 2-piece-rod tubes and storing them directly above my seat. In four instances I've had to change flights at the last moment, and my new flight had bins that wouldn't accommodate my rod tubes. I've communicated my pre-flight efforts to the flight attendants and they've graciously stored the tubes in the storage area reserved for garment bags in the front of the plane. In a situation like this, remember to work with the flight attendants.

Keep in mind that packing your

fly rods properly reduces the number of tubes you'll need to carry. Once I've identified that my 2-piece rods will fit in an overhead compartment, I try to consolidate the number of tubes that I carry on the plane. Most of the time, I'll bring several rods on a trip, not only to help me properly fish the water, but also in case one breaks. I fit two rods in each tube by packing them properly. This allows me to carry several rods with ease, which is always helpful, particularly since I've got a lot of other gear.

2 Multi-piece rods are carry-on luggage. These days, almost every rod manufacturer offers multi-piece rods. When evaluating new rods, consider how frequently you will travel with that rod; a multi-piece rod may well be a necessary choice. And because of the improvements in fly-rod design, casting differences in 2-piece versus 4-piece rods are slim to none.

3 There is a movement by the FAA toward disallowing 2-piece rods to be carried on an airplane. In the future, airline personnel may force anglers to check their rod tubes. To avoid any complications in the event that you have to check your rods, pick up a box from any of the common shipping centers. I use Mail Boxes Etc near my home in Boston, and have purchased a telescoping Ski Box case (9-by-6 inches, and from 40 to 80 inches long) for \$13, and also an Umbrella Box (4-by-4-by-60 inches) for \$7.80. Your rod tubes can be stored inside these boxes. Be sure to label the boxes carefully with your name and complete address. Another benefit is that there is no way for a shifty baggage handler to simply unscrew or unzip your rod tube and steal its contents.

4 Padded kit bags are ideal for reels and accessories and should

COVER YOUR BASES

Despite your best planning, disaster sometimes does strike when you travel. Cover your bases by calling your insurance agent to obtain an extension of your homeowner's insurance to include your fishing tackle. My rider costs \$40 a year, which could very well be some of the best money I spend on fishing every year.

—Tom Keer

be carried on. Several manufacturers, such as Orvis and Abel, offer padded fishing bags that fit the carry-on criteria. These bags feature padded pockets for your reels and cameras, pockets for fly boxes, and ample room for terminal gear and accessories, if not for an entire vest or chest pack. Such a bag is critical to the purpose of your travel, and should be carried on; if your rods arrive intact, but your reels and accessories do not, you're still out of the game. Kit bags are also useful for local fishing and can be kept fully loaded in the trunk of your car for an impromptu post-work excursion. They will protect your gear and are particularly useful if you fish out of a boat, a canoe, or a kayak.

5 Fly-fishing-specific travel bags can drastically enhance your

travel experience. Some manufacturers offer carry-on-size bags to accommodate your entire fishing ensemble. Orvis, for example, makes bags that are helpful for storing gear. The Kit Bag comes in two sizes and is padded to protect reels, extra spools, and cameras, and has enough extra room to store fly boxes, terminal tackle, polarized glasses, and more. The Able 10-Day Lodge Trip bag also has foam padding and a variety of pockets. For extensive travel, the 15-Day Lodge Trip bag may be better suited to the gear hound. Your local fly shop will have many other tackle-bag options worth considering.

6 Shipping tackle to a lodge or an outfitter can be prearranged in many instances. A bit of forethought can save aggravation. Several friends of mine who travel out West annually have developed relationships with their outfitters and will mail their gear ahead of time. UPS or Federal Express can provide efficient transportation of gear and, more importantly, offer tracking numbers to help you locate lost packages. Be prudent in how much gear you ship. Also, make sure that your outfitter is able to safely accommodate your tackle once it arrives, and that it isn't a burden for him to do so.



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More fly-fishing companies are making luggage designed for fishing travel. This year, Orvis introduced Nailhead Luggage.

