

To Check, or Not To Check - SmarterTravel.com Reveals Survey Results and Those Exempt From the
New Fees
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As Airlines Make Taking Bags a Luxury on Flights, SmarterTravel Users Sound-Off

SmarterTravel.com(TM), a comprehensive online travel resource, began polling users regarding baggage fees and flying when American Airlines announced their \$15 charge for the first checked bag, and the results were surprising. According to the on-site survey, only three percent of respondents said they would continue to fly the airline, and only because they were elite-level AAdvantage members or were close to receiving an award ticket. Due to the survey's high reader response and comments around the baggage issue, and United and US Airways' additional bag fees, SmarterTravel(R) has also provided a list of those who are exempt from the first checked bag charge.

In addition to responses from travelers who were reluctant to fly American Airlines in the future, SmarterTravel's on-site poll also found that:

- Most plan to carry on their luggage (39 percent) or will cut back on what they packed to only pay for one checked bag (30 percent).
- Twenty four percent noted that new fees are just one more reason they won't be flying at all anytime soon.
- Three percent noted they would suck it up and pay for two bags.
- Two percent said they always travel light.

"We understand that airlines are looking for ways to recoup costs incurred by the high cost of fuel, but the charge for baggage shocked and concerned us and our readers," said Anne Banas, executive editor of SmarterTravel.com. "The survey helps to underscore that travelers are not happy with the state of air travel, and that their efforts to get around the fee will only end up causing the airline headaches in the end. We also wanted to show that not all passengers are penalized with the charge -- there are a lucky few who can get around it based on their ticket or status."

Exemptions for the first and second checked bag fee include:

- Advance Ticket Purchases. Early birds who purchased tickets in advance of the ruling do not have to pay fees. American Airlines flyers who booked travel prior to June 14 don't have to pay for a first checked bag and those who booked before May 12 don't have to pay for a second checked bag. United passengers who made reservations before June 13 can check one bag free and those who booked February 3 or earlier can bring two bags free. On US Airways, you still have until July 9 to book to get one checked bag free.
- Business and First Class Travelers. Already paying exorbitantly high seat prices, business and first class travelers don't have to pay for their bags to come too. This also goes for the lucky ones who booked business or first class award travel.
- Active Military. Members of the military with proper ID and orders are exempt from the new baggage fees on all three airlines. American extends this exemption to all members of the military and anyone who purchased a military or government fare.
- Mobility Impaired or Traveling with Kids. All three airlines exempt wheelchairs and other personal assistance devices. Ditto for car seats and strollers checked by passengers traveling with a child on American only. United lets you check strollers free, and on US Airways, car seats and strollers are free only if you fly across the Atlantic and pay the lap-infant fee.
- Elite Frequent Fliers. Airline loyalty may not give you the types of rewards you reaped in the past, but at least nowadays it saves you from some of the punishment being wrought on economy flyers. If you're an elite level member of American's, United's, or US Airways' frequent flyer program, you're exempt from extra baggage fees on that airline. Each airline also exempts flyers with elite-level membership in its global alliance program.

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