pickwise

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Carry-on checklist

From tough softside cases to lightweight hardshells, we compared popular carry-on suitcases on build, features and value, so you can pick the right one before your next trip.

The 10 at a glance

#	Suitcase	Best for	Shell	Good for
1	Travelpro Platinum Elite Carry-On	Best overall	Soft	Frequent flyers
2	Away The Carry-On	Best hardside	Hard	Everyday trips
3	July Carry On Pro	Best for organisation	Hard	Business trips
4	Briggs & Riley Baseline	Best warranty	Soft	Long-term use
5	Monos Carry-On	Best lightweight	Hard	Weight limits
6	Samsonite Freeform Carry-On Spinner	Best value	Hard	Occasional travel
7	Rimowa Essential Cabin	Best luxury	Hard	Style and status
8	Calpak Ambeur Carry-On	Best for style	Hard	Weekend breaks
9	Delsey Paris Chatelet Air 2.0	Best vintage look	Hard	City breaks
10	Samsonite Omni 2 Hardside	Best budget	Hard	Tight budgets

Quick answers

What size is a carry-on suitcase?

Many US airlines allow 22 x 14 x 9 inches, including wheels and handles. Other airlines vary, so always check before you fly.

Is hard or soft luggage better for carry-on?

Hardshells protect fragile items better, while softside bags squeeze into tight overhead bins and often have outside pockets. Both work well.

Do wheels count in carry-on size?

Yes. Airlines measure the whole bag, including wheels and handles.

How to choose a carry-on suitcase

Common cabin bag limits

Sizes vary by airline and fare. Always check before you fly.

US airlines	IATA guide	Ryanair	Budget fares
American, Delta, United	Many international airlines	Priority cabin bag	Under-seat bag only
22 × 14 × 9 in	56 × 45 × 25 cm	55 × 40 × 20 cm	Check airline

1 Check your airline's size limits

Cabin bag limits vary by airline and fare, and wheels and handles count towards the size. Measure your bag against the strictest airline you fly with.

2 Choose hard or soft

Hardshells protect fragile items and shrug off rain, but they can scuff and don't flex. Softside bags squeeze into tight overhead bins and usually have handy outside pockets.

3 Think about how you pack

Look for compression straps, an expansion zip or a laptop pocket if you need them. Clamshell hardshells split into two halves, while softside bags usually open like a box.

4 Test the wheels and handle

Four spinner wheels make airports easier, and a sturdy handle with a comfortable height matters if you're tall. Wheels are usually the first part to fail, so quality counts.

5 Match it to your trips

For weekends, a light, simple case is enough. For longer trips or business travel, extra organisation and durability make a real difference.

6 Look at the warranty

A good warranty can save you money over time. Some brands cover airline damage for life, while others only cover manufacturing faults.

Your checklist

Tick things off as you go.

BEFORE YOU FLY

- [ ] Check your airline's cabin bag size
- [ ] Check any cabin weight limit
- [ ] Check what your fare includes
- [ ] Weigh your packed bag

PACKING

- [ ] Roll clothes or use packing cubes
- [ ] Wear your bulkiest shoes and jacket
- [ ] Liquids in a clear bag (100 ml each)
- [ ] Chargers and medication in reach

DOCUMENTS

- [ ] Passport and any visas
- [ ] Boarding pass saved offline
- [ ] Travel insurance details
- [ ] Bank card and some local cash

AT THE AIRPORT

- [ ] Keep liquids and laptop easy to reach
- [ ] Put a tag on your bag
- [ ] Know your gate and boarding group
- [ ] Take a photo of your bag in case it's gate-checked

See the full list online

All 10, with pros and cons and who each one suits.

pickwiseguides.com/travel/carry-on-luggage

Open the list