pickwise

TRAVEL · UPDATED NOVEMBER 2026

Packing planner

Can a weekend trip fit under the seat? We compared backpacks, totes and wheeled bags that fit common personal-item limits, so you can skip bag fees.

The 10 at a glance

#	Bag	Best for	Type	Size	Capacity
1	REI Co-op Trail 25	Best overall	Backpack	18 x 13 x 8 in	25L
2	Away The Everywhere Bag	Best tote	Duffel tote	16.3 x 10.2 x 7.3 in	20L
3	Bagsmart Blast Travel Backpack	Best value	Backpack	16.5 x 12.2 x 8.1 in	28L, 38L expanded
4	Aer City Pack Pro 2	Best for work trips	Backpack	18 x 12.5 x 7 in	24L
5	Calpak Terra 26L Laptop Duffel Backpack	Best 2-in-1	Duffel backpack	18 x 12 x 7.5 in	26L
6	Fjällräven Kånken Weekender	Best soft duffel	Duffel	17.3 x 11.8 x 7.9 in	30L
7	CabinZero Military 28L	Best for packing light	Backpack	Check listing	28L
8	Baggu Small Cloud Carry-on	Best lightweight	Tote	16.5 x 12.5 x 6.5 in	Small
9	Travelpro Crew VersaPack Rolling Tote	Best with wheels	Wheeled tote	16.5 x 15.75 x 8.5 in	22.5L
10	Amazon Basics Underseat Rolling Bag (14-inch)	Best budget wheels	Wheeled bag	Check listing	Check listing

Quick answers

What size is a personal item?

It depends on the airline. Frontier and American use 18 x 14 x 8 inches. JetBlue uses 17 x 13 x 8 inches, and United uses 17 x 10 x 9 inches.

Do handles and wheels count?

Yes. Airlines measure the whole bag, including handles, wheels and anything strapped to the outside.

Can a backpack be a personal item?

Yes, as long as it fits the airline's size limit and goes under the seat in front of you.

How to choose a personal-item bag

Common US personal-item limits

Includes wheels and handles. Limits change, so check before you fly.

Frontier	American	JetBlue	United
Must fit under the seat	Must fit under the seat	Must fit under the seat	Must fit under the seat
18 x 14 x 8 in	18 x 14 x 8 in	17 x 13 x 8 in	17 x 10 x 9 in

1 Know your airline's limit

On ultra-low-cost airlines like Frontier and Allegiant, the personal item is often the only free bag. Frontier allows 18 x 14 x 8 inches, including handles and wheels. Spirit stopped flying in May 2026, so older Spirit-sized advice may not apply.

2 Measure it packed, not empty

A bag that fits when empty can bulge past the limit once it's full. Pack it the way you will for your trip, then measure the depth, which is usually the limit people go over.

3 Choose soft over rigid

Soft backpacks and duffels squeeze into the sizer and under the seat more easily than rigid bags. Wheels are handy, but they take up space and add weight.

4 Look for a laptop pocket and easy access

A separate laptop sleeve makes security quicker. A top or front pocket keeps your passport, phone and charger within reach under the seat.

5 Pack for the trip length

Around 20 to 25 liters is enough for a night or two. For a long weekend, look at 25 to 30 liters and use packing cubes to keep it flat.

6 Know what a gate fee costs

If your bag is too big at the gate, budget airlines can charge far more than paying for a bag online. Paying ahead is often cheaper than risking it.

Your checklist

Tick things off as you go.

BEFORE YOU FLY

- [ ] Check your airline's personal-item size
- [ ] Check what your fare includes
- [ ] Measure the bag packed, not empty
- [ ] Check the depth first

PACKING

- [ ] Roll clothes or use flat packing cubes
- [ ] Wear your bulkiest shoes and jacket
- [ ] Liquids in a clear bag (3.4 oz each)
- [ ] Chargers and medication in reach

DOCUMENTS

- [ ] ID or passport
- [ ] Boarding pass saved offline
- [ ] Payment card
- [ ] Hotel and transfer details

AT THE AIRPORT

- [ ] Keep it unexpanded
- [ ] Laptop and liquids easy to reach
- [ ] Don't strap extras to the outside
- [ ] Board with the bag ready to measure

See the full list online

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

pickwiseguides.com/travel/personal-item-bags

Open the list

Bag-fit and packing planner

Measure your bag once it's packed, including wheels and handles, and compare it with your airline's limit.

Airline: _____ Fare type: _____ Flight date: _____

BAG FIT

Measurement	My bag, packed	Airline limit	Fits?
Height (in)			
Width (in)			
Depth (in)			
Weight (lb)			

OUTFIT GRID

Day	Top	Bottom	Shoes	Extras
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				

NOTES