



Know Before You Go

PACK SMART

One of the greatest challenges any traveling sportsman faces is how to fit all of the gear needed for an often lengthy hunt into as efficient a space as possible. Whether it is simply being able to carry everything you need with you or trying to avoid paying ridiculous excess baggage charges to airlines, it's important to save space and pack smart whenever possible.

This really can be challenging when you're trying to squeeze hunting equipment like boots, parkas, sleeping bags, waders or other large items into a bag that will meet current airline restrictions.

Consider these seven smart traveling tips next time you're preparing to depart for a hunt.

1. Minimize Clothing—You're going hunting, not on a cruise. You don't need a fresh set of clothes for every day. At most you'll want two changes of hunting clothes, should you get wet or need to wash a set while you're wearing the others. Do the same with long underwear—no more than two sets. As for regular clothing, wear one set when you fly out, you can wear these in the evenings after the hunt if you wish. Pack another set of regular clothes (jeans and a shirt) for the return trip home. You might want to be clean then when rotating back in among the world.

2. Take Quick-Dry Clothing—Buy quick drying long and regular underwear that you can wash while you are wearing the other pair. Again, for long underwear, no more than two sets, for regular underwear, two to three pairs max, will get you through if you can wash them and let them dry. The same goes for sox, three pairs max should get you through if you can at least give them a quick wash regardless of whether your hunt is four days or 14.

3. Wear Your Boots—Unless your trip requires snake boots, waders or pack boots, wear your boots on the plane and pack your favorite hikers, Crocs or other lighter (and smaller) footwear inside luggage. Sure, it's a hassle when you have to remove them to go past the screener at the airport, but it will save you a lot of weight and space in your bag.

4. Roll It—Roll clothing items into tight cylinders and hold together with heavy-duty rubber bands. Rolled clothing takes up less space than folded items. You can even roll up an entire days clothes into one roll so that when you are in camp and attempting to get ready for the day, you have everything you need right there together.

5. Utilize All Available Space—Items such as folding knives, GPS units, boxes of ammo, game calls or other smaller items can be placed in your bag inside shoes or boots (if you still pack them) to maximize the space that footwear takes up. If you still packed a large set of boots, you can sometimes fit compact optics such as binoculars or laser rangefinders in the shank of the boot for both economy of space and extra protection from beating and banging during travel.

6. Go Foamless—Gregg Severinson, director of Cabela's Outdoor Adventure Division, offers us this one: Remove the foam from your gun or bow case and line those cases with clothing. It will allow you to take more clothes on the trip and will also give you a change of hunting clothes in two bags in the event one of them doesn't arrive with you at the airport.

7. Hard Case Additions—Besides removing the foam from your protective cases and lining them with clothes, remember you can also pack items that need extra protection such as glasses, optics and sometimes even cameras along with your rifle, shotgun or bow. The one thing you can't pack with a rifle or shotgun: ammunition. By law (at least where airlines are concerned), ammunition must be in its original packaging and stored in a bag separate from the firearm.

8. Carry-On Considerations—Make sure you carry on as much as you are allowed. Fly enough these days and the airlines will lose your luggage—in fact, probably sooner than later. And even if it does finally make it, precious hunting days could be lost by the time it arrives. For that reason we recommend you always carry one set of camo or hunting clothes in a carry-on bag with you as well as enough toiletries (small tube of toothpaste, contact lens solution, soap, deodorant) and even a game call or two if you'll be using one to get you through a day or two. This is another good reason to wear your hunting boots as well. Borrowing a gun is often easier in a camp than finding somebody who's clothes and boots will fit you like you need them to. You may also want to consider carrying on all those high priced binoculars, spotting scopes and rangefinders to prevent breakage or theft.