

Packing Guidelines

Before you start packing, there are many things to consider. How much can you bring? What is safe to bring? Will you bring it with you to the United States or send it separately? This section will help you understand how to get your luggage safely from your home country to the United States.

Airline Baggage Allowance

There is a limit to the amount of baggage you can take with you on an airplane. The number of pieces of baggage and the size and weight of those pieces determine this limit. Confirm your airline's baggage allowance when you purchase your ticket. Be aware that allowances to North America are often more generous than allowances elsewhere in the world. Regulations are subject to change.

Since most people travel economy class, the following limitations are given as guidelines. To North America, passengers are usually allowed two pieces of baggage, plus one small piece of hand or "carry-on" baggage that can be carried onto the airplane and must be able to fit under the airplane seat. Each piece must not surpass a certain weight and size restriction, as established by the airline. If your luggage exceeds these limitations, you will be asked to pay excess baggage charges.

What to Bring With You

What you bring with you is largely a matter of personal choice. You will have to carry whatever you bring, so it is in your interest to keep it light and compact.

Start to pack early, so that excess weight and bulk can be eliminated and essential items not overlooked. Do not worry if you cannot bring everything, since most goods are available in a wide range of prices in the United States. Small items can be sent by airfreight or through the postal system. Shipping by sea can take several months.

Do bring:

- A good bilingual dictionary, since it might not be possible to obtain one for your language in the United States.
- All of your essential identification papers and documents, to be carried on your person or in your hand baggage. **DO NOT PUT IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS IN BAGS YOU HAVE CHECKED ONTO THE PLANE - KEEP THEM IN YOUR HAND LUGGAGE** (see "Documents to Bring").
- Books, manuals, or journals that you think may be useful for reference in your field of study and that definitely will not be available in the United States.
- Pictures of your family, home, and country, for yourself but also to show to your new friends.
- Items from your culture, such as musical instruments, recordings of traditional and contemporary music, picture books, arts and crafts, and small gifts, to share your talents and customs with people in the United States. For festive occasions you may consider bringing traditional dress and accessories from your country. This would be a great way to show and tell Americans more about your culture and traditions.

Things to Leave at Home

You can obtain a booklet on customs regulations at the consulate or embassy where you acquire your visa. Prohibited items include some foodstuffs, narcotics, weapons, and items for resale. The U.S. Customs Service also provides this information on their website at <http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/alerts/>.

Do not bring:

- Things you can easily buy in the United States, such as notebooks, pens, paper (paper in the United States is of a slightly different size than in countries following the metric system), toiletries, towels, or bed sheets. These items will take up valuable space in your luggage.
- Food, seeds, or plants. The United States has very strict restrictions on importing foods, perishables, and agricultural goods into the country.
- Books that can easily be obtained in U.S. libraries. Lamar University has their library catalog on the Internet, where you can check the availability of books. You can also contact the university library staff to verify the availability of any essential books. You can usually also obtain books through interlibrary loans.
- Animals.
- Medications, unless you have written prescriptions from a doctor (see "Prescriptions for Medication and Eyeglasses").
- Expensive jewelry, treasured possessions, family heirlooms, or delicate things, since there is always a chance that these items can get lost, stolen, or damaged during travel or during your stay.
- Firearms, knives, weapons, or articles that could be perceived as weapons; X Narcotics or drugs;
- Electrical appliances. Appliances in the United States work on a 115 volts and 60 cycles system. It is usually best to purchase electrical items in the United States, especially if you plan to live in university housing, as some items will not be allowed. Most items are reasonably priced. Also note that video systems, including televisions, VCRs, and DVD players (including those in laptop computers), use different systems in different parts of the world, and those you bring from home are unlikely to be compatible with the U.S. media.

Protecting Your Baggage

Be sure that you clearly label every piece of luggage with your name, U.S. address, and a telephone number. Identification tags are available from the airline, but sturdier luggage tags or labels are recommended. For additional security, you may also want to put a label or luggage tag inside your luggage.

You should have enough clothing and personal items packed in your carryon baggage to last for a couple days in the event your checked luggage is lost or sent to the wrong destination. Be sure to pack prescription medicine, eyeglasses, or other important items in your carryon baggage.

NOTE: Never leave your baggage unattended. You must always be alert to the possibility of theft.