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Porters one way to handle your baggage

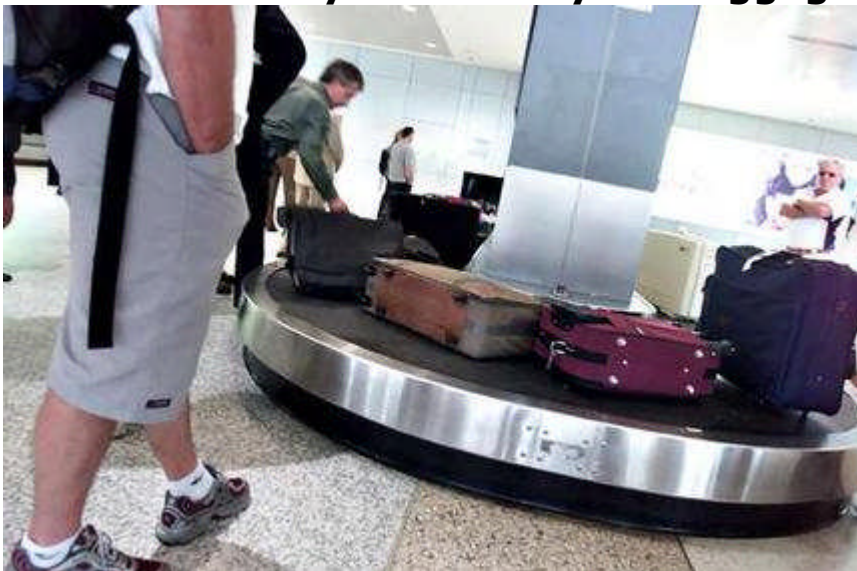


Photo: *Phil Carrick*

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There are some scary statistics around for people travelling by air.

Two billion passengers flew around the globe last year.

Sydney International airport moved around 29 million of them.

On an average day between 6am and 9am, 6000 to 7000 passengers arrive at the airport.

Based on the industry average figures published by SITA (previously known as Societe Internationale de Telecommunications Aeronautiques) two bags on average are stolen or lost, seven are tampered with and 45 are delayed each day at Sydney Airport.

Internationally, 30 million bags are mishandled every year.

Tampering and problems with baggage are an increasing issue for airlines, according to Lachlan Powell, gateway facility manager at the transport company DHL.

But he says his company, named the 2005 and 2006 International Express Operator of the Year, is working hard to not have the same sort of reputation as the airlines.

He was speaking during a tour of the Oceania hub quality control centre for DHL at Sydney Airport, where members of the media were given a rare insight into how our parcels are handled.

Mr Powell says around 35,000 parcels or luggage items go through DHL's operations everyday.

Around 180 security cameras are trained on the handling area and every bit of cargo is examined in X-ray machines, with any one item going through 17 to 20 scans during the whole

delivery cycle, he says.

With barcodes on every parcel it's easier to identify packages. And there's a section where staff work to identify the correct addresses for poorly addressed parcels.

While he says losses are minimal the bigger problems are the delays with Customs, flights and weather.

Costs for excess baggage are also a growing thorn in the side for travellers.

British Airways has become the latest airline to introduce stricter luggage controls, meaning less bags and more excess luggage fees.

It imposed its new restrictions February 13, with more airlines expected to follow in the near future. Australians travelling to the UK with British Airways can now only check-in 23kg in economy class. For any excess luggage, a new charge of STG120 (\$A300) per bag has been introduced. (Discounts apply if excess fees are paid online before travel.)

Australians travelling to Europe can now face heavy excess luggage fees.

According to Personal Porter, a new baggage delivery service, if you fly with a major Australian airline with a 32kg bag in economy, where luggage restriction is now a mandated 20kg, you could be up for an extra \$576 in excess fees.

The service offers an alternative for people willing to pay to have their luggage sent separately to their flights.

It picks up your luggage at your home or office and delivers it directly to the destination of your choice, be it a hotel, office or residence.

James Garrod, the marketing director of Personal Porter, explained that his company, which was launched in Sydney in January, delivers luggage globally, operates customer service centres in Australia and the UK and is looking to expand operations throughout the airline hub structure. They chose DHL as their "primary partner" because of its reputation for reliability and security and because it had a 40 per cent market share in moving freight around the world.

He says Personal Porters is the first operation of its kind in the Asia Pacific region.

Although if you use the service you may be away from your luggage for three to four days, passengers have the option to get through airports without dragging their luggage and without the need to worry about potentially having their bags misplaced.

To have a 32kg bag, for instance, delivered door-to-door to either Frankfurt or London - the two main European airport gateways - would cost \$465 using Personal Porter, a saving, it quotes, of \$111 compared to excess luggage fees.

It also means time saved during check-in and not having to wait around at the luggage carousel upon arrival.

The Personal Porter service can be booked online and customers pick their preferred pick-up time and delivery date.

Details: visit <http://www.personalporter.com>.

Details of Qantas excess baggage fees: visit
<http://www.qantas.com.au/info/flying/beforeYouTravel/baggageAddCollection>

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