



Keeping track of luggage

Lost bags need no longer be a nightmare.

Matthew Brace examines a new porter service.

HERE'S a sobering thought. Major airlines in Europe — including Lufthansa, British Airways and Air France — mishandled more than 5.6 million bags last year.

“Mishandled” is airline-speak for lost, delayed, damaged or pilfered.

British Airways, the “world’s favourite airline” according to its marketing spiel, was the worst culprit, mishandling 23 bags for every 1000 customers.

The figures come from a survey of 24 European airlines.

BA blamed security alerts last August, when police uncovered a plot to blow up airliners en route from Heathrow to the US.

The restrictions — which banned all liquids, gels, water and, for a time, laptops, books and magazines into the cabin, presumably in case a copy of Hello! magazine prompted an international mid-air incident — saw the amount of checked baggage increase by 25 per cent.

The overall lost bag total is certainly higher than that reported, as not all European airlines confessed their baggage handling sins, and Asia Pacific airlines, as a rule, do not release such information.

An air-travel watchdog, the Air Transport Users Council (AUC), said passengers often struggle to get reasonable redress from airlines if their bags are mishandled.

“When passengers hand over their suitcases at check-in they should be able to expect to see them the other end,” AUC chairman Tina Tietjen said. “So we look to airlines to do all they can to improve their baggage handling.”

Things are not much better in the United States where the number of bags lost and delayed is also climbing. In August last

year, more than eight bags were lost or delayed for every 1000 passengers.

Such baggage-handling records are hardly likely to make the flying public sympathetic to the ever-increasing security restrictions. To make matters even more stressful, airlines are increasingly clamping down on overweight baggage, charging an arm and a leg if you are a few kilos over the limit.

But all is not lost, so to speak. A luggage cavalry is riding to the rescue, with an alternative service.

You can now pack your bags a few days ahead of your flight and someone will spin round to your door and pick them up; next time you see them, you’ll be checking in to your hotel in Geneva or slipping your moorings on a deep-sea fishing expedition.

Two Australian companies are leading the way: Personal Porter and World Baggage.

For Personal Porter to send one large bag (32kg) plus your golf clubs (22kg) from Sydney to Dubai, to arrive on July 10 in time for you to play a rather hot 18 holes at the Al Badia Golf Club, will cost you \$1283.07.

Or, if you fancy a little skiing in Zermatt next February, then for the company to fly one large bag (32kg), two sets of skis or a snowboard (25kg), plus two pairs of ski boots (2 x 12kg) will set you back \$1270.54.

Families can send strollers and baby seats, and group travellers can send an entire peloton of bicycles or fat bundles of snow gaiters.

Personal Porter says there are as many as 20 progress checkpoints to ensure your skis, boots, car seats and golf clubs are keeping to the schedule.

If you’re really attached to your

snowboard, you can log on to the website www.personalporter.com and find out where it is with a luggage-tracking device.

If your luggage doesn’t arrive at your destination on the arranged day, you get your money back.

The new service requires its staff to think creatively. They recently had to ship a kayak to Canada for a sporting event.

But even they have their limits, and according to Personal Porter founder and group marketing director James Garrod, there’s one thing the company cannot carry.

“Although it seems a perfectly innocent item, it is in fact flammable and therefore restricted. What is it? Perfume!” he says.

Last year, World Baggage (www.worldbaggage.com.au) offered specials of \$5.50 a kilogram for any air freight to its Paris depot, and \$2.50 a kilo to Singapore.

Both are cheaper than the whopping excess-baggage fees charged by airlines.

Such services might have come in handy for Auckland armour-maker Warren Ormsby-Green when he was creating costumes for The Lord Of The Rings films and The Last Samurai. To reduce his excess-baggage fees, he used to fly dressed in his own armour.

It could also be useful if you need to transport any items of a distinctly personal nature.

Whoever left the vibrating sex toy in a rubbish bin at Mackay Airport in October, 2004 will know what I’m talking about.

There was a security scare and an evacuation of the airport before staff identified it as an “adult novelty device”.

It was not reclaimed.



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