

Looking Forward

Product Trends from The 2019 Travel Goods Show

By
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2019: The Year for Clear

Most years, there'll be a dominant color at The Show. But one of the most attention-getting visual trends at this year's Show was a complete absence of color: transparent polycarbonate luggage, which was both novel and visually arresting.

Polycarbonate has been an industry darling for quite some years, for its toughness and light weight. But employing clear polycarbonate is a new development that saw widespread use at this year's Show.

Transparent polycarbonate is actually commonplace outside the travel goods arena, due to its relative toughness and optical clarity – it's used to form aircraft canopies and windshields, aerodynamically sculpted automotive headlight lenses, eyeglasses and sunglasses, scuba masks and protective eyewear like safety goggles and motorcycle helmet visors. It's also the material of choice for bullet-resistant glass like bank teller windows and armored vehicles.

Though it was not colorless, Shenzhen Pino Investment Development Company drew attention in the New Products Pavilion with its blue-tinted 20" Transparent Blue Cabin Case of see-through polycarbonate. Newcom displayed transparent carry-ons in its booth as well.

Heys, which has long been at the forefront of visual trends such as the licensing of pop artists, Disney, Marvel and other iconic graphics, went all in on the transparency trend with multiple lines including a see-through collaboration with pop artist Britto – a longtime

If you want to know what travel products are going to be popular in a given travel season, just visit The Travel Goods Show. It's the one place you'll see what multiple manufacturers are promoting – what they think will have currency this season. It's their forecast for what's hot as well as their wish list of hot sellers. As such, one company's new idea is just that, an idea. But when multiple companies hit on the same thing – especially when they approach it with different solutions – that's a trend. It's larger than a single idea and becomes a potential shift in the market.



Clear polycarbonate was a big hit, from multiple manufacturers. This Heys piece was decorated with graphics by pop artist Britto. An accompanying (and obvious) trend: Matching packing cubes, for organizational purposes and keeping unsightly items out of sight.

source for Heys' visuals – and its X-Ray line with red, blue and rose gold handles and trim in 21", 26" and 30" sizes.

Triforce was among the manufacturers to have see-through accessory pieces like its transparent beauty case. And the trend wasn't restricted to hard-sides, either. Ballgame fans are long familiar with see-through "stadium bags," and there were handbags, totes and backpacks of clear vinyl and similarly flexible sewn materials in multiple booths.

Naturally, accompanying packing cubes were available from most transparent luggage vendors to keep private items safely out of sight, with color-matched packing organizers. But Heys might have hit upon the most interesting possibility, with its Britto-decorated packing cubes to accompany the artist's signature clear luggage, which raises the possibility for clear luggage that can be visually enhanced with decorated packing cubes. Perhaps something we'll see more of next year?

Gold is Coming Up Roses

In recent years rose gold has seen a resurgence in wrist watches and jewelry, and the trend has spilled over into the travel goods arena. There was some rose gold hardware in evidence last year, but 2019 is when it went mainstream.

Rose gold metallics were everywhere in luggage, both as a featured color and visual embellishment. "It's our number-one selling color," said Chris Doval, account executive with Triforce, which has featured rose gold in its luggage portfolio for three years. The Florida-based company displayed multiple pieces incorporating rose gold in its own line, as well as its David Tutera pieces.

The rose gold trend was especially evident in the more fashion-forward brands. Travelway Group International, which includes the Cosmopolitan license



Rose gold is enjoying a resurgence on fashion runways with jewelry, wrist watches, and now luggage. This color was everywhere, from solid all-over treatment like this pair from Triforce, but also as accents on zipper pulls, telescopic trolley handle extensions and wheel hubs.

under its umbrella, made copious use of rose gold-finished zipper pulls, telescopic trolley handles and the like.

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Newly launched itGirl, the self-professed fashion-conscious luxury brand spinoff from it luggage, made good use of rose gold accents on its more eye-catching pieces. The brand – which takes inspiration from its native London and fashion runway shows from glamour capitals like Paris and Milan – included daring, contrasting pairings of rose gold with quilted-texture leopard print hardsides, as well as more toned-down solids that showcased rose gold’s versatility as a highlight for black, white and every hue in between.

Chariot Travelware introduced rose gold hardware with its Chariot Park Avenue Collection in October 2018, and it’s become one of the strongest selling colors. “Rose gold has been a strong seller year after year. It’s what the consumer wants,” said Jamie McMullian, art director. “Rolling rose gold luggage through the airport brings a new level of glamour to travel.”

Glitter, Sparkle and Metallics

Last year’s profusion of glitter and sparkle finishes continued to find favor with designers in 2019, although this is a much stronger trend with hardsides than soft luggage, which seems to have largely moved on to a more pedestrian color palette.

Glitter and sparkle finishes gained momentum on this year’s Show floor, especially among fashion-focused brands like newly launched itGirl, with this exquisitely color-matched example.



Like rose gold, glitter and sparkle finishes were more evident with the more fashion-centric brands, with some nameplates fully embracing the trend with rose gold glitter; matched with rose gold hardware like wheel hubs, zipper pulls, trolley handle extensions and the like.

Metallic-finish polycarbonates were still hot this year, if not as prevalent as in 2017 and 2018. At this point you could call this one mainstreamed, with almost every hardside purveyor sporting metallics in its portfolio.

Gray is IN (and Red?)

Gray – in every tone, from light ash to dark smoke – was very prevalent while walking the exhibit floor. It’s always been a color contender, but this year seems to have marked a tipping point, crossing over from novelty to ubiquity. It’s arguably more dirt-resistant than black, stupendously easy to color match, and suitable for nondescript pieces that try to blend in, as well as highbrow statement items like briefcases and personal bags.

The more outdoorsy the brand, it seemed, the darker the gray favored in its portfolio – Matador’s smoke-gray bags being a good example. Items aimed at more of an urban audience skewed more toward ash than charcoal, like Solgaard, Briggs & Riley, Swiss Gear/Izod and Heys (with its Xero line).

Reds of all sorts – from deep, dark burgundy and crimson to bright, anodized hues – seem to be on the ascendant. While

not outright popular this year, there was a smattering of red in a lot of booths and product lineups, offering an eye-catching alternative to more pedestrian colors. Prediction: We’ll see more red next year.

Beauty Cases Are Back

Beauty cases are back and in a big way. But these aren’t the staid, rectangular top-opening versions commonly referred to as “train cases” touted by the likes of Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn in 1950s Technicolor features. The modern beauty case is likely to be as fashion forward as the person carrying it, with recent roundups appearing in *Allure*, *Elle* and other on-trend publications.

Today’s beauty cases tend to be purse-size, hard-sided clamshells resembling mini suitcases, or their soft equivalents. And they were seemingly everywhere. These were rarely standalone items. Although they could be purchased singly, most beauty cases were part of an extended set – the add-on fourth piece for an erstwhile 3-piece set.

Travel Kits

While the idea of ready-made travel kits isn’t new, it is an idea that’s gaining traction. This year’s crop of first-time exhibitors included the Travel Safety Kit from Plane It Safe, TimeAway’s Restroom Kit, and multiple kits from Potty Packs, among others.

The Travel Safety Kit from Plane It Safe includes antibacterial wet wipes, carbon-filtered face masks, hand sanitizer and foot covers to avoid shuffling through TSA checkpoints in stocking feet.

TimeAway’s Restroom Kit heads off restroom problems with a patented, oversize toilet seat cover, toilet paper and sanitizing hand and tush wipes.

Kit me up! Ready-to-go travel kits like Plane It Safe’s Travel Safety Kit are becoming more numerous, and seemed popular with retailers. Most are themed around health and wellness – restroom packs (toilet paper, seat covers, etc.) and first aid (insect bite/sunburn relief, analgesics, upset stomach remedies, etc.) were popular, but it seems like there’ll soon be kits for everything.



Potty Pack’s primary item is the eponymous Potty Pack, but the company also stocked its Launch Pod booth with its Park Packs (sunscreen, insect repellent, ear plugs, sting relief, sanitizing wipes), Hangover Kits (aspirin, antacid, electrolyte powder, lip balm and mint) and other pocket-size problem solvers.

RFID, USB & Technology Tamers

RFID blocking continues to march toward becoming a given, a trek which began shortly before U.S. passports first included RFID technology in 2007. At this point, most any luggage aimed at the carry-on set has at least one RFID shielding compartment or pocket, and nearly every accessory maker has RFID-blocking pouches to prevent contactless snooping of credit cards, passports and smartphones.

More and more everyday bags and carry-ons are incorporating USB pass-throughs to enable on-the-go charging of portable electronics. A few years ago almost everyone was scrambling to incorporate power banks into their designs, but that craze seems to have

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given way to the more sensible strategy of making it easy for users to deploy the power banks they may already have. For most, this means an internal pocket with integrated plug leading to an externally accessible USB port. The secondary strategy seems to be physical pass-through openings for users to thread their own USB cables through, the way some backpacks and shoulder bags incorporate headphone portals.

The more pervasive wireless technology becomes, the more we seem to rely on cables. And keeping tabs on all those cables and charging devices is now its own product category, spawning innumerable built-in compartments and standalone pouches with pockets for organizing and containing cables and electronic adapters. These can range from miniature packing cube-like zippered pouches to slide-in panels that allow you to array cords and accoutrements like a miniature slot wall display (Heys' web organizers being a prime example of the breed).

Look for more of these, and the advent of wireless charging pads in carry-on and business/everyday bags, as the wireless revolution continues to grow.

Wheel-less Carry-on

One area of new growth that has almost become its own segment is wheel-less carry-on, with companies like Cabin Zero, Nomatic and Thule spearheading this trend toward ultra-light bags that maximize the amount of gear that can be taken aboard as carry-on.

New exhibitor Nomatic crowd-funded more than \$3 million with its 40-liter carry-on, intended to be the sole piece of luggage for 3- to 7-day sojourns with dedicated laptop pockets, RFID- and cord-taming compartments, book pockets and laundry/shoe receptacles. It also brought a smaller 30-liter version (for 2- to 4-day trips), and a travel pack that netted \$2.9 million in crowdfunding on Kickstarter and Indiegogo, available as a 20-24-liter expanding everyday backpack or 20-30-liter expandable travel pack.

Thule's new Landmark backpack allows for an astonishing 60 liters of

carry-on, by virtue of combining a 40-liter max-size carry-on with a second, detachable 20-liter backpack. The smaller backpack can be detached and carried on board as a personal item, but may be piggybacked onto the main bag or be deployed as a "front pack" for a more balanced hands-free carry.

CabinZero's *raison d'être* is right there in its name: cabin-size, zero-hassle luggage. The company's entire product line is predicated on carry-on-size lightweight backpacks that maximize usable space within the limitations of airline carry-on dimensions. According to CabinZero's President USA Andrew Hamilton, the trend toward wheel-less carry-on is being driven from two directions: The move by budget (and, increasingly, mainstream) airlines to charge for overhead bin space, and millennial and Gen X travelers who are more experience-focused and "see the backpack as a way to travel independently, keeping all their belongings in one place and being free to travel as they want."

Tariff-free Zones

With the specter of increased China trade tariffs looming in the background, one new trend this year was growing

Wheel-less carry-on is now a bona-fide segment, with new offerings from Thule, Cabin Zero, first-time exhibitor Nomatic (pictured) and others. The new category is especially popular with millennials and Gen Z travelers, and those favoring local experiences over bringing a slice of home with them.



awareness of, and emphasis on, the supply chain. "Tariff free" signage and tags on individual pieces were everywhere. Some companies even went so far as to make this a dominant message – one company's entire back wall proclaimed, "U.S. zero-tariff manufacturing supply chain."

Continuing Trends: In-flight Comfort and One-bag-does-all

In-flight comfort enhancement continues to be a product category that garners a lot of attention. And as airlines continue to put the squeeze on passengers – literally, with ever-shrinking

space; and fiscally, with more add-on fees – this is a vein that will continue to be mined by newcomers and established companies alike.

New travel pillows continue to be launched, from first-time exhibitors like EazyCushion, Igloo4Travel with its Travel Pillow, and MyDaddysArms and its hand-like, formable pillow. And perennial exhibitors like Cabeau, Cloudz, Cocoon by Design Salt, Design Go, L.C. Industries, Travelon and others offered their own take on travel pillows.

FootFidget's portable foot roller and the Travel Mat by Thermalay, a full-body cushion, attempted to tackle the issue of in-flight comfort head on.

Sophomore exhibitor The Airhook and first-timer Bracketron both displayed adapters that attached smartphones and tablets to airline seatbacks, freeing up tray table space or allowing you to forego deploying it altogether (Airhook's device even included a cup holder).

Another category that continues to draw new designs is luggage that doubles in size, or collapses altogether. FUGU Luggage's 4-wheel Rollux was impressive with its ability to transform from a carry-on spinner into a 36" spinner suitcase with its novel, folding/collapsing lower section. And in the collapsible luggage category Solite International added its new Monreale, a hardside 4-wheel spinner that collapses like those cardboard banker's boxes we've all used for file storage and moving.

See the Future of Travel

The Travel Goods Show continues to be the industry's master showcase and catalog, the one place you can go to see hundreds of brands and the items they hope are destined for sales greatness.

But it's only a wish list. The real future is what comes of The Show. It's knowing items successfully catch the eye of the world's travel goods purveyors, and pique their interest enough to get added to inventory and offered up to consumers. This is the reality of what the year's market will look like, and as the world's travel goods bazaar, The Show is the only place to see this happen. It's still the only way to get the grand overview of what's to come, and divine the future.

See the future for yourself March 4-5, 2020, in storied New Orleans, LA. 