The journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single suitcase. The right luggage can help you travel more easily and efficiently. To choose a bag that suits your travel lifestyle, you’ll first want to answer some basic questions.

**Wheels or no wheels?** We were among the last converts to the now-ubiquitous wheeled carry-on luggage pioneered by flight crews. We found wheel-less bags provided greater mobility and were easier to handle on staircases. When we finally succumbed to wheels, we opted for StrongBags, a manufacturer of flight-crew bags. We like two-wheelers; four wheels take up more overhead space. Now we breeze down long airport concourses and through town centers without tiring.

**Soft-sided or hard-sided?** Soft-sided is squishable, an advantage when fitting a bag into a tight overhead space. We’ve carried Red Oxx’s AirBoss soft-sided carry-on for nearly 20 years. Developed by Jim Markel, a former Marine parachute rigger in Montana, the bag is guaranteed for life and has a strap called The Claw that won’t slide off your shoulder. Hard-sided luggage is unforgiving but provides protection for fragile items. Pelican, known for its indestructible shipping cases, makes a sturdy carry-on that’s waterproof.

**Briefcase or backpack?** Backpacks have replaced briefcases for us. Their hands-free nature makes them convenient, and they’re better for our posture.

**What color?** Color choice is personal. However, aesthetic trends in luggage shift from year to year, says Michele Marini Pittenger, president of the Travel Goods Association. “Gold and various metallics will be hard to miss this year, and keep an eye out for sparkle on baggage carousels.” Perhaps the most surprising trend, says Pittenger, is the debut of transparent polycarbonate luggage, which was on display at the association’s annual Travel Goods Show in March. So, if you don’t mind everyone seeing what’s in your suitcase, clear is the new black.

The range of choices has never been more diverse. While you can do initial research online, “It’s important to touch and feel a piece of luggage to test-drive it,” says Pittenger. “How does it handle? How is its height in relation to yours? E-commerce is convenient; however, comfort is hard to gauge from a computer screen.”

Another major trend spotted at this year’s show was ... wait for it ... wheel-less carry-on luggage that can fit under an airline seat. Sparked in part by some airlines’ charging for overhead bin space, travelers are again opting for bags that provide flexibility and maximize interior space. Maybe we were ahead of the curve.

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