

Flying With Kit



PHOTO BY: SIMON CROWTHER

TRAVELLING LIGHT?

There's so many options travelling to windsurfing rental centres all over the world, many of which have exceptional gear, but have you ever thought of taking your own gear? Certainly if you've got 75% + carbon kit then yours is probably better than hire kit, so it's definitely worth considering. I travel almost every month with around 100 kilos of gear for my INTuition coaching courses and have done with this kind of excess baggage about a hundred times in the last twenty years, so I'm used to it and find it's as easy as travelling with only one bag. It doesn't have to cost much either- at least relatively to renting gear, so here's my well oiled technique for travelling with kit.



“WHEN I TRAVEL, I DON'T CARRY MY GEAR AT ALL- IT GOES FROM VAN, TO TROLLEY, TO OVERSIZED BAGGAGE BELT, TO PLANE. IT'S ALMOST AS EASY AS HAVING JUST CARRY ON BAGGAGE”

Smooth travel starts with a 'Meet and Greet' service at the airport. I pack my windsurf gear at home, chuck it in the van, drive to the front door of the airport, chuck it onto trolleys and walk in, handing my keys to a nice chap from Holiday Extras (who'll take my van away, then return it the moment I step off the plane at the end of my trip.) No car parking hassles, no mini bus nightmares, no time wasted whatsoever, I leave my van at the airport front door and walk straight in. This Holiday Extras Meet and Greet service is the fastest hassle free way to get into your terminal and barely costs any more than a normal airport car park. Without it, I would find it very difficult to do my job. With it, I can easily travel with all my gear.

DAMAGED GOODS?

In over one hundred flights with gear, I have never lost a bag, only had about five bags delayed (never more than for 48 hours), and have only ever broken the nose of a board once and a boom once this decade. Pack it well and your gear should be fine.

Rigs- I use a single board bag for my masts, sails, booms, and mast extensions etc. It's well padded, fits a two piece mast, has the shape of a boom and is relatively light.

Boards- should go in oversized bags- the baggier the bag, the less chance of damage. A skin tight bag should not be used. Pad your boards with your harness (hook removed) wetsuits, towels, flip flops, shoes etc. Always pack the tail perfectly- if this is broken in transit, you're in trouble, if the nose is broken, no problem, a quick repair will be fine.



IMPORTANT- Always remove the pressure valve/ screw / bung (usually on the deck just in front of mast track). I place it in my front footstrap- a habit I've got into so never forget where it is. Also, if I went sailing without it, I'd soon realise when my front foot felt in the strap.

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BOOKING FLIGHTS

Before I ever book a flight, I check the excess baggage policy- and double check it. This is of utmost importance to me. Wherever possible use a charter flight (Thompson, TUI, Monarch, First Choice etc) as their excess baggage charges are significantly less than scheduled flights (Virgin, United, UAE etc)

Most European, Caribbean and Red Sea windsurfing destinations have direct charter flights and you can pre pay your excess baggage by contacting customer services. Pre paying is always better than risking it at the airport.

For long haul (Hawaii, South Africa etc) you'll need to hunt around for the best excess baggage deals. BA is a no go zone- they don't take anything over 2 metres, but Virgin and co all do, at a cost. Most scheduled flights charge per kilo BUT you'll find they also have a 'sporting goods' policy that will be a fixed charge per bag up to a certain weight, on a recent trip to Hawaii I paid about £100 each way to take a couple of large bags.

Easyjet and Ryanair have their own style of business. For smaller amounts of windsurf gear they can be fine, but triple check their online policies!

IMPORTANT- no airline will carry a bag over 32 kilos, and your windsurfing kit will always weigh much more than you think!

ARRANGING KIT STORAGE/ CAR HIRE

You will need to have pre-booked storage with your hotel or local rental centre before travelling, and a transfer from the airport as most local taxis won't put your kit on their roof!

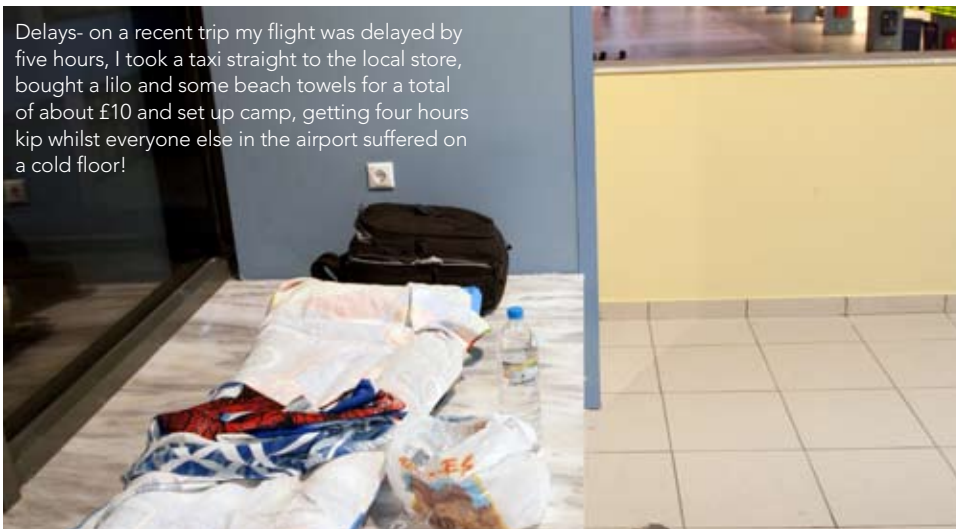
If booking a car hire but no roof rack, then at least get one with roof rails- you can bridge your booms across the rails and rest your gear on top of this, or do as most PWA sailors do- pay for the Super Damage Collision Waiver (turning hire car into rally car) and just strap the gear straight onto the roof! (The SDCW is usually cheaper per day than hiring a roof rack...)

IMPORTANT- always take roof rack straps whether you've arranged a transfer or a car hire!

AT THE AIRPORT

Gone are the days of trying to find the queue with the hot young check-in staff to try and charm (male or female.) Nowadays with filter queues it's a lottery who your check-in staff will be. Combine this with a recent clamp down and increase on baggage charges and you might get stung for more than you bargained for. ALWAYS check the airlines excess baggage policy thoroughly online, and ideally print it out and bring the information

Delays- on a recent trip my flight was delayed by five hours, I took a taxi straight to the local store, bought a lilo and some beach towels for a total of about £10 and set up camp, getting four hours kip whilst everyone else in the airport suffered on a cold floor!



to the airport, as invariably the check in staff will go online to check how much to charge. Golden rules- be polite and cheery. Some of the staff will be at the end of a long shift and don't need an argument, they're more likely to be sympathetic to nice people and take pity on the weak.

Most UK airport trolleys can be pushed sideways, so loading gear across two trolleys makes them easy to push.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

The queuing filter systems might have ruined the competitive element of finding the shortest queue, but have opened a wonderful opportunity for queue jumping. My favourite thing about travelling with kit (or babies) is being able to walk to the front of queues.

I never queue as it would of course be dangerous for me to do so with such large bags, better if I go directly down the side to the empty check-in desk ;-)

SUMMARY

Obviously if you're considering an overseas trip the first place you look is guycribb.com to see what courses I have to best improve your windsurfing and have a guaranteed good time, but secondly, get in touch with a windsurfing tour operator to find which centres or hotels will allow you to take your own gear and can arrange its transfer. Planet Windsurf 01273 921001

More info at www.guycribb.com
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