

Can I Take 3 Checked Bags On Southwest Airlines?

Direct answer: yes — and unlike a few years ago, it now costs money. Southwest accepts a third checked bag for **\$150**, on top of **\$45** for the first and **\$55** for the second. Three bags on a one-way therefore comes to **\$250**.

If that surprises you, it should. Southwest spent more than fifty years giving every passenger two free checked bags, and held a registered trademark on the phrase "Bags Fly Free." That ended on **28 May 2025**, when Southwest introduced checked bag fees for the first time in its history at \$35 and \$45. Less than a year later, on **9 April 2026**, it raised them by \$10 each to the current \$45 and \$55.

The good news is that Southwest still gives away free bags more generously than most competitors — through status, fare bundle and its credit card — and the **carry-on plus personal item remain free on every fare, including Basic**. Before paying \$250, check which of those routes applies to you. **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can price the options against your specific itinerary.

The current fee structure

Bag	Fee (mainland U.S.)
Carry-on bag	Free on every fare
Personal item	Free on every fare
First checked bag	\$45
Second checked bag	\$55
Third and each additional bag	\$150

These apply to Basic, Choice and Choice Preferred fares for reservations ticketed or voluntarily changed on or after 9 April 2026.

Hawaii interisland pricing is different and much lower. Hawaii residents receive two free checked bags on interisland trips. Non-residents flying interisland pay around \$30 for the first bag, \$40 for the second and \$50 for the third — a fraction of mainland rates.

The carry-on point matters more than it sounds

Southwest allows **one full-size carry-on and one personal item free on every fare, including Basic**, with no overhead bin restrictions by fare class.

That is a genuine and underappreciated advantage. United's domestic Basic Economy allows a personal item only and charges \$65 at the gate for a full-size bag. Several ultra-low-cost carriers

charge for carry-ons outright. On Southwest, the cheapest ticket still includes the bag most travellers actually need.

So the real question is often not "how do I pay for three checked bags" but "can two of these become a carry-on and a personal item." On Southwest, that arithmetic works better than almost anywhere else.

Who still gets free checked bags

Southwest retained more free-bag routes than its competitors did. Check each of these before paying.

Category	Free checked bags
Choice Extra fare	2
Rapid Rewards A-List Preferred	2
Rapid Rewards A-List	1
Rapid Rewards credit cardholders	1
Getaways by Southwest vacation packages	2 per person
Active-duty U.S. military	All checked bags free
Hawaii residents, interisland	2

Two details make these unusually valuable:

The A-List and cardholder benefits extend to companions. A-List and A-List Preferred bag benefits apply to **up to eight additional passengers on the same reservation**. So can a single A-List Preferred member cover a family of five? Yes — two free bags each. That is far more generous than the equivalent benefit at most airlines, where the free bag covers the member alone or the member plus one.

The credit card benefit requires your Rapid Rewards number on the booking. Include it at the time of booking, not afterwards. This is the condition that defeats most claims.

Active-duty military travel free on all checked bags with valid identification at check-in, subject to size and weight limits.

Weight and size limits

Standard checked bag: up to **50 pounds** and **62 linear inches** (length plus width plus height).

Surcharges stack on top of the per-bag fee and are steep:

Condition	Surcharge
51–70 lb	\$100
71–100 lb	\$200
63–80 linear inches	\$200
Over 100 lb or over 80 linear inches	Not accepted

One helpful nuance: if a bag is **both oversize and overweight**, **only one \$200 charge applies** rather than both, provided the bag stays under 100 pounds. That is more forgiving than several competitors.

Weigh at home. The step from 50 to 51 pounds costs \$100 — one of the most expensive pounds in travel.

Sporting equipment: better than you expect

This is where Southwest remains genuinely competitive. **Golf clubs, skis, snowboards, surfboards and bicycles travel at the standard checked bag fee with oversize fees waived up to 115 linear inches.**

That waiver is unusual and worth real money. At many airlines a surfboard or bicycle attracts a substantial special-handling charge. On Southwest it is simply a checked bag, provided it stays within the weight limit — overweight fees still apply from 51 pounds.

If you travel with bulky sports gear, this single provision may make Southwest the cheapest carrier on your route even after the end of Bags Fly Free.

What does not count as a checked bag

- **Mobility devices** — wheelchairs, walkers, canes — travel free and count against nothing, under U.S. accessibility rules rather than airline discretion
- **A car seat and a stroller** travel free for a ticketed child and do not count as checked bags
- **Trained service dog equipment** does not count against your allowance

Note a change here: **pet carriers and crates checked as baggage are no longer free.** For bookings made on or after 28 May 2025, standard checked bag fees apply to them.

Packing to avoid the third bag

Use the free carry-on and personal item properly. On Southwest this is the single biggest lever, because both are free on every fare.

Redistribute rather than add. Three two-thirds-full bags usually become two well-packed ones. Compression bags help with clothing volume.

Wear the heavy items. Coats and boots worn through the airport count against nothing.

Ship ahead for long stays. For relocations or extended trips, ground shipping often beats \$150 and arrives independently of your flight.

Buy at the destination for consumables and bulky low-value items.

When the fee is set

Baggage fees follow the rules in effect when the ticket was **purchased**, not when you check in. Southwest honoured the old terms for tickets bought before 28 May 2025, and the April 2026 increase applied to reservations ticketed or **voluntarily changed** on or after 9 April 2026.

That second phrase matters. Voluntarily changing an older booking can reset it to current fee rules. If you hold a ticket bought under the older structure, think twice before making a discretionary change.

Paying for bags on Southwest

One operational quirk: **Southwest does not currently let you prepay for checked bags online.** Bag fees are collected at the airport, which differs from carriers that discount prepaid bags.

The practical consequence is that you cannot lock in a lower rate by paying early, and you should budget for the transaction at the counter. Allow extra time, particularly with three bags.

If a bag is delayed or damaged

- **Report before leaving the airport.** File at the Southwest baggage service office in arrivals; reporting later is substantially harder.
- **Keep the bag tag receipt and fee receipt** — these are the evidence for any claim.
- **Interim expenses** for reasonable essentials during a delay are typically reimbursable. Keep receipts.
- **Ask about a fee refund** if a bag is significantly delayed. It is not applied automatically.
- **File damage claims at the airport.** Wheels, handles and scuffs are commonly excluded as normal wear; structural damage generally is not.

Common mistakes

Assuming bags still fly free. The policy ended in May 2025. Travellers who have not flown Southwest since then are the most likely to be caught out.

Forgetting to add the Rapid Rewards number. The cardholder free bag requires it on the booking.

Not checking whether a travelling companion has status. One A-List Preferred member covers up to eight people on the reservation.

Paying a special-handling charge you do not owe on sports equipment. Oversize is waived to 115 linear inches.

Voluntarily changing an old booking and resetting it to current fee rules.

Not weighing bags at home. The \$100 overweight surcharge stacks on top of the bag fee.

Checking in three bags on the day

Practical logistics, because three bags changes how the airport works — and Southwest's inability to prepay makes this more consequential than at other carriers.

Allow substantially more time. You cannot settle bag fees online, so the transaction happens at the counter. Three bags plus payment is not a quick interaction, particularly at a busy Southwest station like Denver, Las Vegas, Chicago Midway or Baltimore. Add 30 minutes over your usual buffer.

Use the full-service counter, not a kiosk. Bag fees must be paid to an agent.

Check the airport's baggage cut-off. Most airports require checked bags to be dropped a set time before departure, commonly 45 minutes domestically. Miss it and the bags do not travel even if you do.

Label everything inside and out. Put a card with your name, phone and destination address inside each bag as well as on the outside. External tags come off; internal ones are how bags without readable tags find their owners again.

Photograph each bag before checking it. If one goes missing, a photograph describes it far better than a verbal account under stress.

Have a card ready. Bag fees are card transactions at the counter.

Alternatives worth pricing

If three bags is a recurring need rather than a one-off, some options change the economics permanently.

A Rapid Rewards credit card includes a free first checked bag for the cardholder and up to eight companions on the same reservation, provided the Rapid Rewards number is on the booking. For a family that travels together even twice a year, this alone can exceed the annual fee several times over. Southwest offers cards at several fee levels.

Choice Extra bundles two free checked bags with an Extra Legroom seat and Group 1–2 boarding. If you were going to pay \$45 and \$55 for bags anyway, the bundle frequently costs less than buying those items on top of a cheaper fare. Price it every time.

A-List Preferred status delivers two free bags extending to up to eight companions. Not worth chasing purely for baggage, but transformative if you already fly Southwest regularly.

Ground shipping is the honest competitor to the \$150 third bag. For anything not needed on arrival day, a shipped box is often cheaper, arrives independently of your flight, and removes the airport handling entirely.

The free carry-on remains Southwest's best baggage feature. A full-size carry-on plus a personal item on every fare, including Basic, absorbs a surprising amount that would otherwise become a third checked bag.

Where to get help

Contact	Number	Best for
Travel reservations and baggage cost comparison	1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)	Pricing three bags against a Choice Extra fare, comparing total trip cost across airlines, checking whether a companion's status covers your bags
Southwest Airlines Reservations	Published on southwest.com	Fare bundle changes, baggage policy confirmation
Southwest baggage service	Published on southwest.com	Delayed, damaged or missing bags
Rapid Rewards service	Published on southwest.com	Status and cardholder bag benefits

Frequently asked questions

Can I check 3 bags on Southwest Airlines? Yes. The third bag costs \$150, following \$45 for the first and \$55 for the second on mainland U.S. routes.

Did Southwest really end Bags Fly Free? Yes, on 28 May 2025, after more than fifty years. Fees started at \$35 and \$45 and rose to \$45 and \$55 on 9 April 2026.

Is the carry-on still free on Southwest? Yes. One full-size carry-on and one personal item are free on every fare, including Basic, with no overhead bin restrictions by fare class.

Who gets free checked bags on Southwest now? Choice Extra fares and A-List Preferred members get two; A-List members and Rapid Rewards cardholders get one; active-duty military get all bags free; Hawaii residents get two interisland.

Does the A-List bag benefit cover my family? Yes — A-List and A-List Preferred bag benefits extend to up to eight additional passengers on the same reservation.

Can I prepay for bags on Southwest? No. Bag fees are collected at the airport.

How much are golf clubs or skis on Southwest? They travel at the standard checked bag fee, with oversize fees waived up to 115 linear inches. Overweight fees still apply from 51 pounds.

What if my bag is both overweight and oversize? Only one \$200 charge applies rather than both, as long as the bag is under 100 pounds.

Are pet carriers still free as checked baggage? No. For bookings made on or after 28 May 2025, standard checked bag fees apply.

The takeaway

Southwest will carry a third checked bag for **\$150**, bringing three bags to **\$250** on a mainland one-way. The airline that built its brand on free luggage now charges for it, and the April 2026 increase came less than a year after fees began.

But Southwest has not become an ordinary baggage operation. The **free carry-on and personal item on every fare** is more generous than United's Basic Economy or the ultra-low-cost carriers. The **oversize waiver to 115 linear inches** on sports equipment is genuinely unusual. And the **A-List and cardholder bag benefits extend to up to eight companions**, which can cover an entire family from one person's status.

Run those three checks before reaching for your card. And if you booked before 28 May 2025, avoid voluntary changes that would reset your ticket to current rules.

To compare three bags against a Choice Extra fare, or price the whole trip against another carrier, **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can work out the total rather than just the ticket.