AMERICAN AIRLINES SECRETLY ADDS FREE REAL-TIME BAG TRACKING

News / Airlines

American Airlines in recent weeks has quietly added free real-time online luggage tracking for checked bags, allowing customers to determine where their bag is - from check-in counter to baggage carousel pickup.

The service is useful not only for curious travelers, but in case a checked bag hasn't arrived at your destination. You'll know right away that your luggage is on the wrong plane, and you won't have to stand at baggage claim for an hour wondering if your bag will be coming. You'll know it went to Tokyo instead of Las Vegas and can seek help from the lost-bag department.

"It's something our customers have been asking for a really long time, and we're excited to make this available to them," said American Airlines spokeswoman Laura Nedbal.

Fliers can go to AA.com/baggage, click on "track your bags" and input a last name and record locator or bag-tag number. The site will return information on six bag-scan touch points, such as ticket counter check-in and loading on and off the aircraft.

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Tracking is also available on the mobile version of the website, but not yet on the American Airlines mobile app. For members of the airline's AAdvantage frequent-flier program, the baggage data is also available on their online profile. There is no extra charge for tracking.

A few other airlines, notably Delta Air Lines and US Airways, which is now merged with American, offer the service. Chicago-based United Airlines does not.

American already collects the baggage scan data for internal use but put it in a database that customers could access, Nedbal said.

The added feature quietly launched Aug. 21, but the airline wanted to give employees time to get used to a new scanning procedure before notifying customers publicly. American previously only scanned luggage as it was loaded onto an aircraft, while US Airways scanned it on and off. After merging policies, now all bags will be scanned on and off, Nedbal said.

"We wanted to make sure everything was ready to go before we started communicating about it," she said.

American, like many airlines, also has a separate tracing system where customers can track a lost bag after they report it as lost. American in July had a lost baggage rate of about four bags per 1,000 passengers, ranking ninth of 13 U.S. airlines, according to data from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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