

BLOG: Luggage labels

"Show me your luggage and I'll tell you who you are." - Louis Vuitton slogan



I was sitting onboard the Heathrow Express train recently, and in front of me was a luggage rack, filled with suitcases. One wheellie bag had around a dozen small, white, bar-coded luggage stickers attached to it, and I wondered "Are these the 21st century version of shipping labels and stickers which once adorned passenger baggage?"

Based on the 3-letter airport codes and 2-letter airline codes on these small stickers, I was able to determine this passenger had flown to Narita airport, Tokyo, flown Easyjet to Naples, and used Lufthansa somewhere. Others were more difficult to read, as they had been scuffed by some careless airport baggage carousel belt somewhere.



Leaving travel-related stickers and tags on luggage is not a recent phenomenon.

The golden age of luggage stickers started around 1870, but was at its peak from 1880-1920. In the 1920's more people had the opportunity to travel. Steamship and cruise companies, railway companies and hotels started producing these stickers.

It was relatively cheap advertising for the providers, and there was an air of pride with the traveller, having the opportunity to show the world "Look how I travelled! Look where I've been!" Travel had a reputation of luxury, adventure, comfort... and money. Shipping line labels were a necessity to ensure your luggage didn't go astray from the terminal building to cabin. I'm guessing, if you saw a 'White Star Line' label with "Titanic" on it, then you should perhaps tap the passenger on the shoulder and have a discreet word with him or her.

Anyway, the more labels that adorned your steamer trunk or suitcases, the more well-travelled you were, and therefore more affluent.

The years after the Second World War saw a boom time in travel. For Americans, it was Acapulco, Tijuana and Havana. For Europeans it was St. Moritz, Rome and the Amalfi Coast. There was a resurgence in the popularity of luggage stickers. However, they were focussed more on the destination rather than the travel provider or hotel.

We now look back at a simpler, more innocent age through our rose tinted Ray Bans, and miss the romance of this bygone era. At the time, however, it was an exciting time to travel, and to show off where you had been. I remember, in the 1970's, reading a newspaper story about a driver who had been pulled over by the police because his vision, through the rear window, must have been obscured by the number of destination stickers placed there. The police officer accused him of being more interested in where he had been, instead of where he was going. You don't see many stickers on rear windows these days. The most exciting sticker you are likely to see is something dull like "*I'd rather be sailing*".



Have our travel senses been numbed because of the ease in which we can fly around the world, or because travel magazines and television programs have killed the mystery of countless destinations? I remember when I first saw the Taj Mahal in 1991. There's no denying it's a beautiful building, but there were no surprises waiting for me. I honestly thought to myself "Yeah, I've seen it before, and I knew what to expect." I actually left just a little

disappointed - sorry.

So, plastering your suitcase, or to be up-to-date, your wheelee bag, with destination stickers these days does not appear cool, and would earn zero kudos from your fellow travellers.

To appear as a 21st century world traveller, you need to adopt a more subtle approach to this age old problem – how to appear well-travelled without appearing corny, or being out of touch by a generation.

In the early 2000's, the way to go was to leave your old airline baggage labels wrapped around your handle. I remember seeing one man, with up to a dozen such labels wrapped around his suitcase handle, leaving me in amazement he was actually able to pick his luggage up.

Some people say baggage handlers remove the old ones, although I still see collections of labels in place, so they are not always removed. With luggage processing becoming more

automated (official name: automated baggage tag - ABT), perhaps there are fewer opportunities for baggage handlers to remove them.

Those in the know suggest leaving old luggage labels in situ is a bad move. It is said your name, airline frequent flyer number, address and other personal information can all be accessed by using a barcode reader - which can be downloaded for free on the internet if your smart phone doesn't already have this capability. With identity theft all the rage at the moment, is this really worth the risk?

Scott