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The 10 U.S. Airlines That Charge the Most Baggage Fees, Ranked

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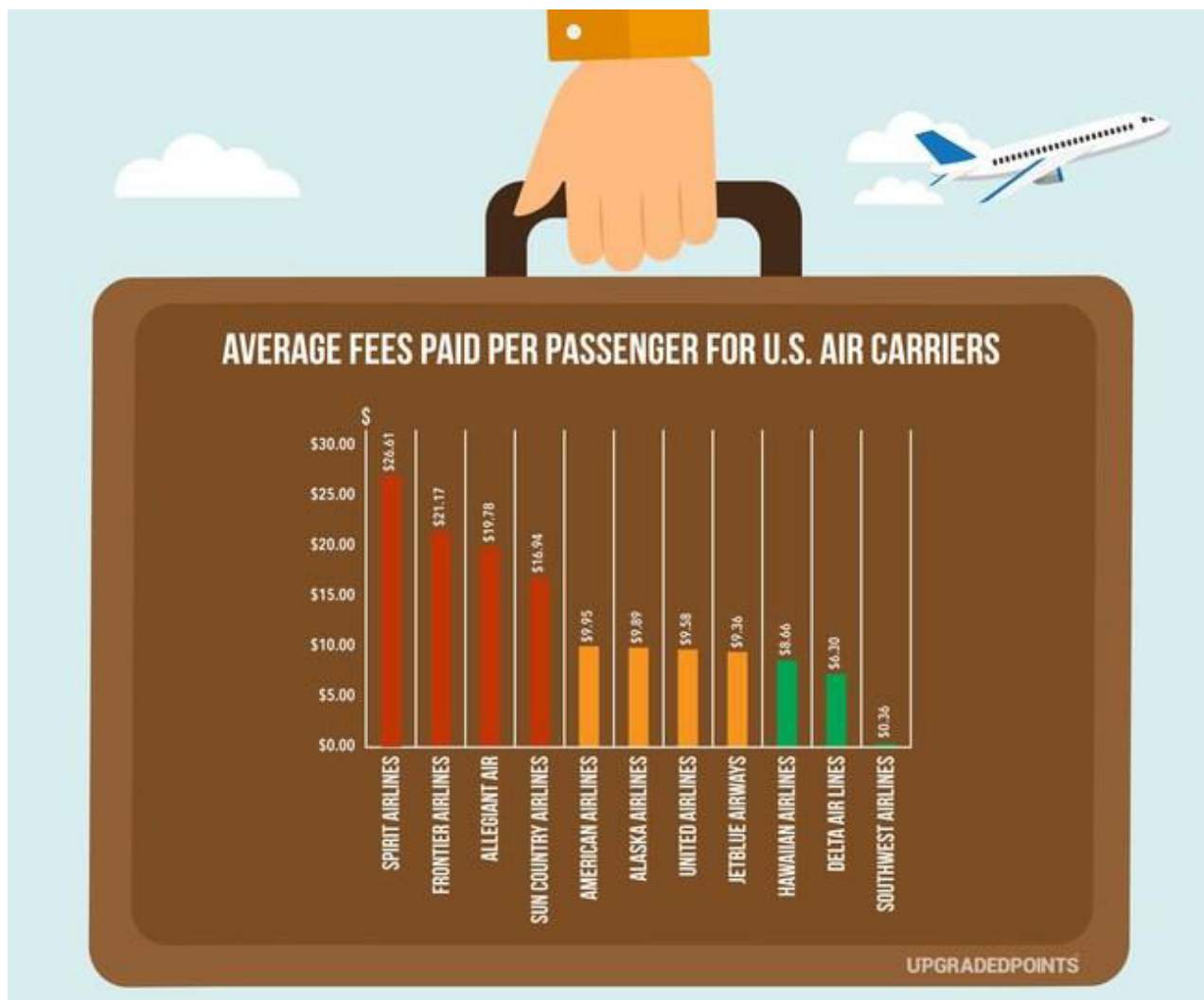
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According to a new [Upgraded Points study on U.S. airlines' baggage fees](#), American Airlines took in the most baggage fees overall last year, at \$1.24 billion. Other lines also took in big bucks for baggage fees, though not over a billion dollars: United was second with \$933 million in baggage fees, Delta took in \$817 million, and Spirit hit \$670 million. All took in more than a half-billion in just baggage fees. At the bottom of the baggage fees ranking is Southwest, which still offers two free checked bags, and took in \$50 million in bag fees.

According to the study, "Baggage fees continue to grow as a revenue source for U.S. airlines, which collected a record \$5.1 billion in charges over the past year."

The Airlines That Make the Most in Baggage Fees

But, those rankings change significantly when you break down revenue according to the airline's *size* to find the average baggage fees paid per passenger. In other words, the airlines that charge the most in baggage fees relative to their size are, in order from most bag fees to least: Spirit Frontier, Allegiant, American, Alaska, United, JetBlue, Hawaiian, Delta, and Southwest.



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baggage; all three also relied on other total ancillary charges for as much as 40 to 44 percent of total revenue.

Among the “Big Three” U.S. airlines (American, Delta, and United) American took in the most per passenger: \$9.95. Delta was the “winner” among the top three at \$6.30. Compare that to Southwest’s being less than a dollar. Looking at the visual above, it’s clear that Southwest is the only exception to the fact that baggage fees are now an important revenue source for all other airlines.

What do these figures mean to individual travelers? You can draw several conclusions:

- Spirit, Frontier, and Allegiant can offer really low total travel costs for anyone who (1) can travel without either checked or carry-on baggage and (2) don’t mind tight seating.
- If you can travel with a carry-on as your only bag and you’re willing to take random seating, those new “base economy” fares on the giant lines make some sense.
- If you check just one bag on a round-trip journey, Southwest’s free-baggage policy gives it an immediate minimum \$60 fare advantage over its competitors.

Other than the obvious “don’t check baggage” advice, you could also avoid baggage fees by using a credit card issued by the respective airline, or you can pay a higher fare class that includes more benefits. (Business fares typically include checked baggage.) Clearly, many travelers on the big three use some combination of these approaches, given the relatively low per-passenger take, comparatively.

But those are special-case options, not available to many ordinary travelers. For them, the caution is obvious: If you need a checked or carry-on bag, or both, be sure to include those costs when you compare flight options. Don’t let an airline nickel-and-dime you to a higher fare than you need.