

Air Travel with a Biathlon Rifle (& ammunition)

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Whether you're traveling domestically or internationally, bringing along a Biathlon rifle and ammunition requires extra considerations. This page is specifically geared toward air travel. Please note that this is not intended to be a comprehensive list and is subject to change. It is important to know TSA and airline regulations, local laws, etc.

Government ID or Passport

For domestic air travel, you must have a valid government-issued ID card. Every air traveler 18 years of age and older needs a REAL ID-compliant driver's license, state-issued enhanced driver's license, or another **acceptable form of ID** to fly within the United States.

While a passport is also valid identification for domestic travel, it is required for international travel. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Make sure it will expire no sooner than six months after you plan to return home.

Make copies of your passport. Put them in your rifle case, gear bag, backpack, and keep a digital copy on your phone. This can come in handy for identifying your bags or if you lose your passport!

Planning your Airline travel

Consider signing up for [TSA Pre-Check](#), as it can greatly reduce the time you spend going through security at the airport for domestic travel.

Signing up for [Global Entry](#) will reduce the time you spend clearing U.S. customs when returning from an international trip.

Airlines often have specific policies regarding firearms and ammunition, which change frequently. Before committing to any airline or itinerary, consider the following:

Minors

Most airlines have a policy that minors (under 18 years of age) cannot have a firearm in their checked bag. An adult must check the firearm under their own name. Check the specific airline's policy before committing, and plan ahead if a minor requires an accompanying adult on the trip.

Fees

Many foreign airlines charge extra fees for firearms specifically. This applies not only to their own flights but also to codeshares, which are identified by four-digit flight numbers and are labeled "operated by Lufthansa," for example. These fees can greatly add to your trip expenses, so look up the fee policies on the airline website prior to booking. Lufthansa is one example, as they recently re-categorized firearms as "sports baggage" and charge fees according to the flight's length.

Example: [Lufthansa Sports Baggage Fees](#) (scroll down to "Sport weapons")

Layover Lengths

Domestic: Generally, it's best to allow at least one hour for domestic layovers. Two hours gives you more leeway in case of flight delays to make sure your gear and firearms make the transfer.

International: Two hours or more is a good rule of thumb when transferring flights in another country. When in doubt, go with the longer time for international layovers. It increases the odds that your checked bags and firearm will make the transfer.

When traveling internationally, your first stop in the USA when returning home will be where you go through customs. Book at least a two-hour layover here, and perhaps more in the cities below, which are known to be especially slow with firearms: Newark (EWR) - Seattle (SEA) - Los Angeles (LAX)

Layover Locations

Some locations have local laws restricting firearms and ammunition, even for travelers just passing through. Here are some examples:

- Avoid layovers in the Hong Kong, Shanghai, UK, Paris, and Bogota, or allow several hours if you must travel there
- Layovers in Amsterdam (AMS) require a special permit, even if you are not leaving the airport
 - KLM Airlines [Weapons Permit Page](#)
 - Netherlands [Permit Application](#)
- European layovers in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria are generally safe.

Advanced Notification

Some foreign airlines, such as Air France, require advance notification that you will have a firearm and/or ammunition in your luggage. After purchasing your ticket, but well in advance of your trip, call/contact the airline(s) (they often have chat options on their website or via WhatsApp, for example) in your itinerary to inform them you will be traveling with a firearm and/or ammunition. Otherwise, they may deny you from bringing your firearm or ammunition on their flight at the airport. This applies to both outbound and return legs (to and from the USA).

[Air France's Firearms Policy](#): Submission of an approval request at least 48 hours in advance of departure. WhatsApp: +33 6 99 38 57 20. <https://wa.me/33699385720> Phone: 800-237-2747 (select reservations)

Always check your airline's firearm policies online! They can usually be found under Sports Baggage or Special Baggage.

Checked Baggage

Making your luggage easily identifiable and marking it with your contact information is important, especially at baggage claim or if your bag is misplaced during your travels.

U.S. Biathlon recommends the following:

- Do not rely on the flimsy airline ID tags
- Mark your baggage with a permanent tag if possible: metal or very strong plastic ID tags, etc

- Use a large indelible marker and clearly write your name & phone number with country code: Example - SUE SMITH +1-719-866-5555
- A good trick is to get duct tape in a favorite color (pink, red, Blue, or white) and add your Last name & Nation (USA) to all bags when traveling on a USBA Team Trip. Example - SUE SMITH - USA

Before you pack your bags, check baggage rules on your airline's website and look up your particular reservation to see what your baggage allowances are and what checked bags may cost. Usually, fees get pretty high when you go over 50 pounds or over two checked bags. Make sure to weigh your bags at home before you leave for the airport. If you are overweight, you can put some gear into your carry-on bag, but NO gun parts, ammo, or anything that could be confused as such by TSA can be carried onto the plane.

Before returning home after a competition, check your bags for any loose rounds of ammunition, including in your carry-on. Sometimes, athletes carry ammunition around at the range in the same backpack they carry onto the plane, so it is important to double-check all ammunition is secured in your checked bag within the proper packaging and/or container.

Changing Airlines

You may find inexpensive flight itineraries online on Orbitz, Kayak, etc. that have you changing airlines from one flight to the next. Keep in mind that one airline may not automatically transfer your firearm to the next airline unless they are partners. This means that at a layover, you may have to go to baggage claim, clear customs, and re-check your firearm for the next flight. Not only will this take extra time, but you may need a firearm permit for the layover country as well. It is a good idea to choose flight itineraries containing the same airline or codeshares operated by partners from departure to destination, even if they are not the cheapest.

Checking in at the Airport

If you're not traveling as part of a U.S. Biathlon trip, carry some documentation with you for the competition or training camp you are attending. (If you are traveling as part of the U.S. Biathlon trip, you should get any required documents from the trip leader.) Also, have your rifle permit for your destination country. Present all these things at the counter when you check in. This often helps expedite the process and hopefully inspires the agent to be a little more forgiving on overweight bag fees.

Always keep your bags - especially your firearm case - nearby, and do not leave unattended!

When checking in for your flight, you must declare that you have a firearm. You will sign a declaration that it is unloaded and place that piece of paper in the rifle case. Then you'll lock it up before completing the check-in process. You may use TSA locks, combination locks, or keyed locks to lock your rifle case, but do not use the cheap high school style round dial locks, as they can be difficult for border/TSA agents to get in if they need to. Delta Airlines (as an example) requires a lock in every available spot on your case, so be prepared with enough locks for every spot on your case that is made to accept a lock.

Some agents may ask to see the firearms to make sure they are unloaded. This is not required but sometimes agents are not experienced checking in firearms. Be polite, but you don't want to be uncasing your rifle in the airport for others to see. Ask for a supervisor if you are concerned with what you are being requested to do. This may be the very first firearm this agent has ever had to deal with, so be patient and understanding. After this, you may carry your rifle case to a special screening area or be asked to wait for TSA to swab your case down and test for explosives. You may have to unlock and open your rifle case again at the TSA station. After

they have done their inspection, either TSA will take your case to the plane, or they will escort you back to the airline check-in counter to drop it off. Sometimes this process does not occur at all, and the airline agent will put your bag on the belt and you'll be done.

You are allowed a maximum of 5 kg (11 lbs) of ammunition per person. This is international law. The TSA states you can place ammo in the gun case, or in your other checked bag, but be sure this is acceptable with the airline you are using. No matter what, do not pack ammo in your carry-on!!

Be educated on TSA's firearm/ammo policies! We encourage you to print this out and travel with it:

TSA: [Transporting Firearms and Ammunition](#)

Upon Arrival at Destination

Your firearm case will probably not come out on the regular baggage carousel with the rest of the checked luggage. Look for the oversized luggage area or the airline office near the baggage claim area. A baggage handler or airline agent will usually require you to show ID before handing off the firearm case.

International Specific Trips

Before you travel, it's best to read up on your destination country at the State Department's website. You'll find safety precautions, advisories, and more: U.S. Department of State [Country Information](#)
Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program ([STEP](#)) to notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate of your travels. You will receive important notifications and help in an emergency.

Rifle Permits

If you are traveling on an official U.S. Biathlon trip, you will receive directions on how to submit important information to the trip leader. U.S. Biathlon will work with the local organizing committees on behalf of the entire team.

If you are traveling internationally on your own, you'll need to obtain a rifle permit to legally carry your firearm and ammunition into other countries. These can take months to obtain, so start working on this early! The best resource is the local organizer of the event you are attending or a coach for the club where the training camp is happening. They will be familiar with the local laws and know what government agencies to contact.

Changing a rifle permit after it is issued can be difficult. Be sure you bring the exact firearms, ammunition, and any other items listed on your permit. Double-check this before leaving for the airport.

Do not hand over your firearm and permit to someone else and assume they will be able to get it into or out of another country for you. This puts them in a difficult position with the local authorities should any questions be asked. The permit is specific to the person, dates of travel, and often the exact arriving and departing flights. When arriving in a foreign country, have all your documents in your possession. Be prepared to show your passport, rifle permit, and any other supporting documentation. Maintain a sense of humor, calm, and patience as the Customs process can take a long time.

Some destinations require permits simply to transit, or prohibit firearms and ammunition altogether. See the above section on "Airlines" for more.

Minors

Some countries will issue rifle permits to minors (under 18 years of age), but most do not. If the permit is in the minor's name, consider carefully that airlines usually do not allow the minor to check the firearm under his/her own name. In this situation, an accompanying adult must check the firearm and must be on the exact same flight itinerary as the minor. The best way to handle this is to have the minor and adult under the same reservation. If this is not possible, call the airlines and have them cross-reference the two itineraries. This will ensure that the two passengers stay together, should there be any changes or canceled flights.

Customs Form 4457

This form allows you to prove to U.S. customs agents that you already owned your firearm (or any other valuable) when you left the country, which means you don't owe duty tax. (As opposed to if you bought the rifle overseas and are bringing it back home.) U.S. Customs could confiscate your firearms if you do not have this form with you.

To complete the form go to any major airport's customs office well in advance of your travel date. Most airports have one. It's often away from the main terminal areas, so just Google the location and phone number. Bring any firearms you will bring on an international trip in a locked hard case. They will fill out the form with each rifle's make, model, and serial number, then sign and stamp it to make it official. It is not valid until it has been stamped by a U.S. Customs officer prior to travel. This form does not expire once completed. Make copies and bring them with you when you travel. You can keep the original with your important documents, then put copies in your rifle case, gear bag, and backpack (along with copies of your passport—see above). You should keep a digital copy on your phone. You may or may not be asked to present it upon your return to the U.S., but always have it with you.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Information & link to find [Form 4457](#)

Ammunition Container

Every country has its own rules on firearms and ammunition. If you must travel with ammunition, ensure that you understand the rules for its transport on your carrier and upon arrival in the destination country. Some countries require that you have any ammunition in a separate container. You can pack it in your gear bag on the way over. People use a variety of things: metal military ammo cans, small Pelican cases, small coolers with secure closures, etc. Make sure it isn't too heavy to make your gear bag overweight. Label this container with your contact information, just like any other piece of luggage.

Additional Travel Considerations & Recommendations

Money

Look up your destination country's currency and the exchange rate with US Dollars. If you'd like to order some paper money from your bank before departing, a few hundred dollars' worth is probably a good start, but this is not essential. Avoid exchanging cash at an airport kiosk and hotel. You will usually get the best rate at ATMs which can be best found upon arrival at the airport baggage claim. But make sure to notify your credit card and/or debit card company before you depart that you'll be traveling and to what specific countries so they do not deny your international transactions! Some cards have transaction fees for overseas use, so be sure and research that ahead of time.

Mobile Phone

Do some research with your carrier to see what plans they have available for overseas travel. All carriers should have a variety of options depending on how much you'll be using your phone.

Best practice is to text whenever possible, as it will use less data. Apps such as WhatsApp are ideal for international texting and calling, as it uses wi-fi instead of data. In-room hotel phones often have very high rates, so use them only as a last resort.

Power

You'll probably need an electrical adapter for the outlets, as they are often different than in the USA. Any store like Walmart will have these. Check out these websites for country-specific information:

<https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets/>

<https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country>

Safety

If you are traveling with a team, know who is on your flight and watch out for each other. Know who is supposed to meet you where and have cell phone numbers handy for coaches just in case. Have the name and address of the hotel you're staying at. Your trip leader will send you this information.

Always have a buddy with you when outside the hotel or venue. Be careful about what you say and do, always. You are ambassadors for USA and U.S. Biathlon everywhere you go. Be polite, avoid politics, and remember that other countries often don't have the same customs or ideas about freedom of speech that we do.

Health

Every country has its own concerns or lack thereof in this regard, so be sure to do some research for yourself and consult your doctor on any concerns you may have. The U.S. State Department is a good place to start. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Research if any vaccinations are recommended for you in the country you are visiting
- Carry all medications in your carry-on bag, and bring more than you think you will need
- Considered International health insurance coverage. The USOPC commonly uses UHC Safe Trip which is inexpensive for a short-term policy.

Local Language, Culture, History, Food, etc

Challenge yourself to learn a few words, numbers, and phrases in the local language of whatever country you will be visiting. You will likely encounter plenty of English speakers, but the locals appreciate it when we make an effort to communicate in their language. You will likely get more out of the trip if you learn a little about the country's history, culture, and food before you depart. Be prepared to experience different food from your home nation! A best practice is to pack some foods to supplement the destination's food, prioritizing nutrients that are less available locally.