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Adorama's Camera and Notebook bag



Billingham 550



Crumpler backpack

## Taking it on the road

### Bags and cases for location photographers

*"What do you get a photographer who has everything?  
A bag to put it all in."*

—Old joke

Before you leave the relative safety and security of the studio to shoot on location, you need to start packing. It doesn't matter if you're slinging your own gear into the back of a Land Rover or if a baggage handler is stuffing it into an air cargo hold, you need tough, dependable bags and cases that can take it.

How do you pick the bags and cases that will hold your expensive equipment? Do you prefer inconspicuous bags that don't look like they hold valuable camera gear? Do you need a hard case? How about wheels? The answer to these questions and more in this installment of "One More Case to Schlep."

What's best for your gear depends on your assignments and the real-world limitations of the mode of travel. If you're a wedding photographer covering local events, your needs may be less demanding than the guy who travels cross-country to cover pro football.

Equipment carriers are made for varying degrees of protection: soft-sided, hard-shelled, metal, plastic, fabric with foam, fabric-covered hard shells, plywood laminate with metal corners, vacuum-formed ABS, and with or without wheels. Many soft bags are made from ballistic or Cordura nylon fabric, which is rated by the thickness and diameter of the fabric, as measured in deniers (D). The higher denier, the stronger the fabric. (Most soft-sided luggage, for example, is covered in 400D nylon.)

The most common error in packing any kind of case is leaving *too much* space around the gear. The snugger the fit, the better the protection. Don't look at any bag as a collection of features, but as a system with a base and useful add-ons.

**ROADWIRED** ([www.roadwired.com](http://www.roadwired.com)) is one the many manufacturers that offer accessory pouches, small bags, wraps, cable organizers, and memory card folios that complement other components of the system. Wheels can be a help, but the handle and wheel assembly can reduce the available storage space by as much as 25 percent. You'd need *another* case to hold the leftovers. A wheeled dolly that holds more than one case could be a better solution, and sometimes a mix is best.

In addition to cameras and lights, today's photographers often need to tote lots of technical gear, such as laptop computers, hard drives, removable media, cables, and software. All of your equipment needs to be protected during transport, but there are other criteria to consider, such as easy access for fast set-up. On location, this is critical. With a **TAMRAC** ([www.tamrac.com](http://www.tamrac.com)) Rolling Studio or Rolling StrongBox, all your gear is immediately accessible when you open the case.

If you want to carry all your gear on your back, you need to be able to grab the items want without having to unload the pack. The **TENBA** ([www.tenbagear.com](http://www.tenbagear.com)) DB-15C and DB-17C backpacks give you Quick Access Ports on the left and right sides, so you can reach your laptop, lens, or other gear just by swinging the bag to one shoulder.

Your carrying gear should be comfort-

able to tote, even when it's loaded. Ergonomic handles, harnesses and other features can minimize fatigue by cushioning and distributing the weight. Don't overlook the shoulder strap design. It might look good, but will it stay on your shoulder without digging in?

**KATA** ([www.bogenimaging.com](http://www.bogenimaging.com)) cases were designed with unique buckles and patented shoulder straps to give you both freedom of movement and optimal weight distribution.

Do you have a habit of overloading cases? Capacity is a definite consideration. **PELICAN'S** ([www.bkaphoto.com](http://www.bkaphoto.com)) soft-sided rolling bags (such as the PCS104) have a main compartment with a removable divider tray to organize your 35mm, medium-format, video or lighting equipment for transport.

You should be able to move every divider in your case to custom organize the interior for your gear. Many of **CRUMPLER'S** ([www.crumpler.com.au](http://www.crumpler.com.au)) bags feature a small storage area at the bottom of the bag to allow you access from the *side* instead of digging down through the top.

The photographer's away-from-home base must be mobile. The **PORTER CASE** ([www.portercase.com](http://www.portercase.com)) Pro Roller Series has a wheel system for maximum portability, a comfortable and reliable handle, and functional roominess.

**LIGHTWARE'S** ([www.lightwareinc.com](http://www.lightwareinc.com)) Rolling Stand Bag glides on a set of user-replaceable double-wide wheels, and can be checked with an airline.

Pros who schlep their gear into boardrooms and other high-profile locations will like **ADORAMA'S** ([www.adorama.com](http://www.adorama.com)) Camera and Notebook bag, which

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includes space for a notebook computer, pens, papers, and other stuff. The Executive model is leather.

Traveling can be hard on cases. Think sixty pounds of gear, tossed in and out of cars, dragged up and down stairs, and flung into and out of cargo holds. For air travel, some photographers prefer to pack their camera bags inside their luggage or hard cases. Many of Pelican's soft-sided bags fit *inside* the company's legendarily rugged hard-shell cases.

Does your carefully packed gear seem to disappear in the black void of your carrying case? You can't use it if you can't find it. **LOWEPRO'S** ([www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com)) vinyl-reinforced mesh accessory pockets keep your stuff organized and in plain view. With the Kata and **NORAZZA** ([www.norazza.com](http://www.norazza.com)) bags, your equipment will stand out against the bright yellow interiors.

Sometimes it all comes down to the fine details. Wedding photographers need silent zipper pulls, and outdoor sports and adventure shooters must have watertight zippers. And maybe what you really want is the timeless design of **BILLINGHAM'S** ([www.rtsphoto.com](http://www.rtsphoto.com)) classic leather and canvas cases, built to a standard, not a price point.

Don't hesitate to apply creative thinking to the practical matter of carrying cases. One manufacturer told



Kata's F-417



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Lightware Rolling Stand Bag



RoadWired's Travelock Security Kit



Tenba DB-15C

### Did somebody say security?

One of the best theft deterrents is to choose bags that don't look like camera bags, such as Crumpler's or Adorama's Slinger, especially in camouflage. For something more secure, RoadWired's Travelock Security Kit has a mechanically encoded keycard, which beats tiny, easy-to-lose metal keys or forgettable numeric combinations. The kit includes two PVC-coated, braided galvanized steel cables (one long, one short) and nickel-plated brass headers, and a laptop attachment that can be snapped into the keycard lock.



Pelican PCS104



Promag2AW



RoadWired's Photo/Video Pro

me that after his catalog showed one of his cases filled with Nikon gear, photographers wanted to know if he made cases for Canons, too. Visualize! And even though a bag is called a "digital camera case," you can fill it as you please. I took one look at Norazza's Ape digital camera case and stuffed it with a Bowen Pulsar radio slave system. It holds two transmitter/receivers, and has outside pockets for cables and the clever cord that clamps the receiver to your strobe head or light stand.

The ultimate decision of which case or bag system to use will be based on how, where, and what type of photography you do and how much you carry for backup, lighting, and accessories. □

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