

## Leaders of the Pack – June 1, 2006

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Here's something you probably haven't done in a while: Take a minute to check out your travel companion. No, not your business partner or co-vacationer. Look at your *luggage* (just a mental image will do if it's checked or in the overhead bin). Your bag travels with you everywhere, but does it really do the best possible job of helping you shuttle your belongings from Point A to Point B and back? Does it even remotely reflect your personal style? And what about all your other travel goods—neck pillows, luggage tags, passport wallets? Are they working for you? If not, maybe it's time to upgrade.

If you invested in new travel products last year in the U.S., you contributed toward the \$19.2 billion the country spent on travel goods. The Travel Goods Association (TGA), the trade organization that keeps track of such statistics, points out that a considerable chunk of this spending was on totes and messenger bags, which have become everyday accessories for both men and women. These days, wherever we go, we take more with us, says TGA President Michele Marini Pittenger. The rise of portable electronics such as iPods, mobile phones, and laptops means that “modern consumers carry more with them every day,” Pittenger notes. “Items like backpacks and totes—which were only common in airports and on college campuses—have crossed over and become everyday essentials.”

With all the high-tech innovations in travel products during the past few years (and don't worry—as you'll see below, there are plenty more debuting now), it's almost been possible to forget one of a bag's fundamental characteristics: A bag, especially one that's an “everyday essential,” is an *accessory*, like a watch or scarf. In addition to making your life on the road easier, your constant-companion travel bag can reflect who you are, perhaps better than any other item or garment you take along (face it—comfy walking shoes can only look *so* good). So as you're shopping for new travel gear, don't forget to look at form in addition to function. There's no longer any need to sacrifice one for the other; today's top travel goods companies are offering plenty of both.

We've evaluated the beauty of and brains behind the following totes, luggage, and travel accessories from the TGA's recent Travel Goods Show and beyond. Here are the leaders of the pack.

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For people who frequently catch colds when they travel, the **Plane Clean Air** filter may help. You already should be breathing easier knowing that United pioneered the inflight use of HEPA filters. Taking things a step further, the Plane Clean Air filter, which attaches easily to the overhead air nozzles on most commercial aircraft, removes 99.5 percent of viruses and bacteria from a stream of air that forms a protective “curtain” around the passenger's face (\$19.95; [planeleanair.com](http://planeleanair.com)).

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**Alicia Miller** is Hemispheres' *managing editor*. Her current travel companion is a red rollaboard with sparkly luggage tag.

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