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Convenience is in the bag at travel goods show

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By Kitty Bean Yancey, USA TODAY

Necessity is definitely the mother of travel-gear invention.



State of the art: The NeoMetro backpack is ideal for the gadget-carrying traveler.

By Leslie Smith Jr., USA TODAY

Just ask Tony Shaw, who recalls taking his daughter-in-law to the airport and helplessly watching her struggle through the security checkpoint with a diaper bag, purse, car seat and 2-year-old in tow.

"I couldn't get into the security area, and nobody was helping her," Shaw says. Thus was born the idea for the Pac Back, which enables parents to carry a car seat on their backs and keep both hands free.

Shaw's just-launched brainchild will be displayed to potential retailers this weekend at the annual Travel Goods Show in Washington, D.C.

Convenience is a byword this year, says Michele Marini Pittenger, president of the Travel Goods Association. "As travel becomes more difficult, travel goods have become easier" to carry and use, she says. Pittenger says she now flies with a 17-inch rolling bag that "believe it or not, can get everything in that I could in a 21-inch bag."

Among trends and the new products that typify them:

Plugged-in travelers

Toting a laptop and accessories can lap up a lot of the carry-on allotment. Tucano USA's compact travel kit holds a mini-mouse, lock, notebook light, modem cord coiled up tape-measure style and, best of all, compact adaptors that work on many continents. Suggested retail: \$89.99. It's due to be available in the USA in May at outlets including Fry's electronic stores.

Travelers juggling all the modern-day, must-have accouterments — laptops, cell phones, Palm Pilots, MP3 players and the like — might shoulder a new

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generation of hip, easy-to-carry, well-organized backpacks. Options include Sumdex's NeoMetro Commuter (\$99.95; 888-786-3391 or sumdex.com)

Compactness and portability

The carry-on crowd has never had so many appealing choices. One upcoming offering: High Sierra's new M² series, including a "Duffrite" — a lightweight mini-duffle that rolls upright.

The curved design and durability is designed to appeal to its target market: women 18 to 35, says George Patterson, vice president of sales for High Sierra's luggage division. "Women are the ones who buy the most luggage," Patterson says.

The Duffrite will be available this year in several sizes, starting at 21 inches (from about \$200 suggested retail; information, 800-323-9590).

Safety and security


Leaving a computer in a hotel room is sometimes unavoidable. A Notebook Security System from Sumdex, which works like a cable bike lock, lets travelers padlock a laptop to a hard-to-move piece of furniture (\$19.99 at sumdex.com).

Families on the go

The family car trip cleans up its act with High Road organizers from Talus Corp. The Kid's Car Organizer has space for games, CDs, lunches and art supplies; a tray top for drawing and playing games; drink holders and pockets for snacks and music players. (due in April, suggested retail, \$34.95; retailer information, 800-634-8180).

Meanwhile, Shaw's Pac Back is designed with an eye on airline recommendations that children weighing 20 to 40 pounds travel in a booster or car seat. The lightweight pack, which fits easily in overhead bins, was developed with the input of 150 parents.

A USA TODAY mom liked the concept but said the Pac Back felt bulky against her lower back, unless the seat was toted heavy end up (that wasn't what instructions pictured, but it worked fine). Shaw has had "not a complaint" and says many testers asked to purchase the Pac Back on the spot. Suggested retail price: \$49.95 (information about retailers can be requested at pacback.com).



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