



A Better Bag

[Orra's Travel gear helps eco-conscious globe-trotters pack in style](#)

By Ellen Carpenter
Illustration by Lucy Engelman

Orra, a new line of sustainably designed travel bags, has a decidedly trashy origin story. Ryan Thompson, a United pilot, was flying from California to Hawaii when he spotted the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the world's largest accumulation of ocean plastic—basically a floating dump that's twice the size of Texas. "I knew about it,

but seeing it was a gut check," Thompson recalls. "It literally hurt me. I realized I have to do something about this. At the time I had a young son and a little girl on the way, and I thought, They need to experience this ocean the way I have. We're dropping the ball as adults here."

Thompson took action by creating the travel gear brand Orra. The line, which launches this spring, offers duffels, backpacks, totes, and more, all made from upcycled materials, including textiles crafted from recycled plastic bottles and foam made with algae biomass from polluted waterways. "These materials are available for everyone, but it's not commonplace," says Thompson, who notes that some fashion companies (such as Adidas and Native) have embraced the use of algae-based foam. "These materials are expensive to source, so this really does feel like a huge roll of the dice. Are people ready to pay a little more but know that they've done right by the world?"

While sustainability is at Orra's core, that's not what Thompson hopes is the primary draw for customers. "I was

inspired by Tesla," he says. "People buy a Tesla because that's the coolest car on the road. It's the best performance, it's sleek, it's beautiful. The fact that it's positive for the environment is almost an afterthought. That's what I've tried to do with Orra. I want to give people the coolest bag, the most functional bag—and, oh, by the way, here's the environmental impact."

When coming up with the designs for Orra's products, Thompson didn't have a hard time soliciting opinions. "I've been polling all the pilots and flight attendants and friends of mine who are world travelers on what they want to see in a bag," he says with a laugh. One of the biggest requirements? Ergonomic soundness. The Orra duffel, for example, has two straps so it can be turned into a backpack—much easier on the shoulders.

Now, Thompson is looking forward to spotting passengers toting his gear on future flights. "I'm honored to take these folks around the world," he says, "but how do we enable them to do that in a smarter way? This is just one incremental way to do that."