

# **AirSafe.com Airline Complaint Guide**

By Todd Curtis

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## How to Use This Book

Most trips by air are lacking in drama, with at worst minor problems that travelers take in stride. Even when things go wrong, like a delayed or canceled flight, confusing security rules, or a lost bag, the situation may be frustrating, but either the passenger or the airline can deal with it very easily. When the situation isn't resolved, and a passenger loses money or has a ruined trip, complaining may be the best option for righting a wrong or getting compensation.

### What this book covers

This book focuses on complaints that airline passengers have with airlines and with airline security, specifically security complaints involving the TSA (Transportation Security Administration). What this book says about airline complaints can be applied around the world because the causes of airline-related complaints are similar for every airline. This book's advice about complaints to the TSA may not be useful for other security organizations or for law-enforcement institutions because of the widely varied regulations and legal traditions of these organizations both in the US and abroad.

Knowing when to complain and how to complain can get your problem resolved quickly and efficiently. If you go about it the wrong way, you can end up wasting your time and ending up even more frustrated with your situation. This book is built on the insights gained from over a decade of complaints that have been sent to AirSafe.com. It puts a lot of useful information in one convenient place, and can help you deal with your airline complaint. This book gives you information and practical advice in the following areas:

- \* How to avoid common problems that lead to complaints
- \* How to make informal airline complaints
- \* How to make formal airline complaints
- \* How to decide if you should file a complaint
- \* Where to send your complaints
- \* How to complain about your airline service
- \* How to complain about your treatment by the TSA
- \* Fear of flying information and solutions

### How information flows in this book

This book was designed primarily as an ebook that will be read on a smartphone, tablet computes like the iPad, or dedicated ebook devices like the Kindle and the Nook. The table of contents is designed like the home page of a web site with direct links to every article in the book. Links within each article may lead to another article in the book or to an online resource such as the AirSafe.com complaint system. At the end of every article is a link back to the home page. Also, there may be other links in the ebook that may take you to a variety of online information and resources.

Another way to find information is to use the search function of your device. Kindles, Nooks, iPads and ebook smartphone apps such as Apple's iBooks app or the [free Kindle app for smartphones and tablets](#) allow readers to search for specific words and phrases within the book.

Even if you are reading the PDF version of this book, the links should still work for you and should be able to use your PDF reader's search function to find specific topics.

### **Using the Table of Contents**

This book is meant to be used as a reference, and the best way to read it is to use the table of contents to find one or more articles that deal with your situation. The table of contents is divided into subject areas based on the information in the individual articles.

### **Getting the ebook version of this Guide**

This Guide is available in several formats, including PDF, MOBI (used on Kindles), and EPUB (used with iPad, iPhone, iPod touch, and Nook). If there are any free versions available, you can find them at [downloads.airsafe.com](http://downloads.airsafe.com). You can put different formats on different devices so you can try them out to find out what works best for you. Keep in mind that the free versions available at this location may not be the most up to date version of the ebook.

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Since 1996, AirSafe.com has provided the public with insights and advice about a wide range of airline topics on its web sites, blogs, podcasts, and downloadable documents, and many of the site's most popular airline complaint articles are included in this ebook.

### **Get a Kindle reader for your computer or smartphone**

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### **Feedback and questions**

If you want to contact the author Dr. Todd Curtis, or if you have any suggestions, feel free to pass them along. [Visit the About the Author section](#) at the end of this book for contact information.

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## Complaint Basics

A complaint is the response a customer has when a promise is broken, when expected standards are not kept, or when a rule is violated. Typically, the offending organization will not go about asking for complaints, but rather a customer must take the first step for anything to happen. The best outcome of making a complaint is that issue is addressed in a way that satisfies the customer.

An unacceptable outcome may be that the issue is addressed, but the customer is unsatisfied, or the issue isn't addressed at all. If a customer has a legitimate complaint, but doesn't make an effort to bring a problem to light, the most likely outcome is an unsatisfied customer, or a resolution that took longer than necessary.

The bottom line is that when it comes to complaints, the customer has to take action. While the result may not be in your favor, taking the initiative and trying to solve the problem is better than keeping silent about the problem and accepting the situation.

### Three ways to deal with a potential complaint

A complaint happens only when you have two things, a problem, and a resolution to that problem that doesn't make you happy. The basic idea behind this book is that avoiding a problem before it happens or dealing with a problem quickly and effectively is much better than complaining about it afterwards. This book focuses on both how to complain effectively, and more importantly, how to avoid having to complain in the first place. There are three basic ways to deal with a problem that have the potential to become a complaint:

1. Avoid potential problems entirely.
2. Reduce the likelihood of a problem occurring.
3. Limit the impact of a problem should one occur.

Following these three approaches when you travel is often not difficult, but it usually takes a bit of effort on the your part to understand some of the basics of the air travel experience, and the different kinds of problems that may happen in different parts of the air travel experience.

### How to keep a problem from becoming a complaint

When a problem happens, even after your best efforts to avoid that problem, the best thing for you to do is to have that problem resolved as soon as possible and with the least amount of effort:

**Deal with it as it happens** - It is always better to solve a problem in the present rather than waiting to deal with it in the future. This works best with issues that can be deal with the problem immediately. For example, if the aircraft cabin is too hot or too cold, get a flight attendant's attention and get the temperature changed. If you find that the airline put you family in seats in different parts of the plane, get the seats changed as soon as you find out.

**Follow any existing procedure for the problem** - For some problems, like missing

checked bag, the airline may have a form you have to fill out or a process that you have to complete. Doing so may not solve your problem, but not doing it may make it less likely that the airline will pay out on any future claim. If possible, keep copies of any paperwork or information that you submit to the airline.

**Keep your cool in hot situation** - Travel problems cause frustration for passengers and for anyone involved with dealing with your problem. If you feel a need to curse someone out or to raise your voice, step back and calm down before you do something that you may regret.

### **Don't file a complaint if you resolve the problem to your satisfaction**

If you have dealt with a problem, and it was resolved to your satisfaction, there is no real need to file a complaint. For example, if your out of pocket costs were reimbursed, or if you were not inconvenienced in a way that caused you some kind of measurable loss (typically something measured in money), then complaining won't get you any extra reimbursement.

### **Consider a formal complaint if the problem has not been resolved**

If on the other hand, you still have legitimate costs that should be reimbursed, have a desire for a formal apology, or feel that it is important that the organization that caused your bad experience have a record of what happened, then you should definitely take the time and effort to file your complaint.

### **A reasonable complaint has three parts**

A basic complaint has three parts, and if one or more of these parts are missing from your complaint, it is unlikely that your complaint will be fully addressed:

1. A clear explanation of why you are complaining.
2. Evidence, information, or documentation to support your complaint.
3. A description of what you want to happen to satisfy your complaint.

Being very clear about these three points is important for both an informal complaint, as well as for more formal complaints. If the air in the cabin is too cold, you may ask the flight attendant to turn up the heat. No need to formally list the three parts of the complaint, because it is pretty clear why you are complaining, the evidence to support your claim, and what outcome you want

On the other hand, if you file a formal request for an airline to reimburse you for something that cost you money out of pocket, you would have to be both very clear and very detailed about why you are complaining, the evidence supporting your complaint, and the amount of compensation that would satisfy you.

### **Formal complaints and informal complaints**

If you can make a complaint and get it resolved on the spot or in a very short amount of time without having to write something down on paper or in an email, then it is an informal complaint. If you have to put something in writing to get someone to address your problem, then it is a formal complaint.

Whether a complaint stays informal or becomes a formal one may depend on circumstances. For example, if an airline puts your checked bags on the wrong flight, but

they get it back to you within a couple of hours after your arrival and there was no damage, there usually won't be a reason to request any kind of compensation, and no real need to complain to the airline. On the other hand, if the bags were missing for days and you had buy replacements for some of the items in your bags, then making a formal complaint may be the only way to recover your costs.

**Additional Information**

[How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)

[How to Complain to the TSA](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

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## Avoiding Airline Complaints

Many situations could cause a passenger to complain. Some, like a weather delay that leads to a missed connection, are beyond the control of the passenger or the airline. However, many of the problems that lead to complaints can be avoided if the passenger does their part to keep a problem from happening in the first place.

### **Avoidable complaints**

While a failure or problem in almost any part of the air travel experience can lead to a complaint, there are many potential problem areas where your decisions or actions can completely avoid a problem. The following areas are discussed in greater detail later in this book:

**Checked Baggage** - Knowing what kinds of valuables should not be placed in checked baggage can keep you from having unreimbursed expenses should your checked bags be lost or damaged.

**Carry-on Baggage** - Understanding your airline's limitation on baggage size can keep you from having your bags checked at the gate, sparing you the risk of lost, delayed, or damaged checked bags.

**Security** - Knowing what you can and can't bring on board an aircraft can keep you from being delayed at security checkpoints. Making sure that you have proper documentation will also keep you from unnecessary delays.

**Missing a flight** - With rare exceptions such as and airline bumping you from a flight because of overbooking, airlines are not obligated to provide you any compensation for a missed flight or missed connection. Arriving at the airport with plenty of extra time for unexpected delays is one sensible thing to do. Also, if you know you have to make a connection, avoid the last connecting flight of the day. If for some reason your incoming flight is late, you have a better chance of making a later flight than avoiding an unexpected overnight stay.

**Decisions based on bad information** - For critical travel information such as airline policies, schedule changes, weather delays, and airline fees, you should get your information from the airline and not from an outside source such as a travel agent, online booking service, or an unrelated web site. While the airline's information may not be perfect, it will be more reliable than information from an outside source.

**Unaccompanied children issues** - Taking the time to understand the details of the airline's rules can keep you from getting surprised by unexpected charges. Also, rules for different airlines can be very different in areas such as what happens when an unaccompanied child is stranded overnight at an airport. Some airlines provide supervised hotel accommodations, while others may turn over your child to the local child protective service organization for the night.

**Confiscated duty-free items** - Because of security rules, most liquids are banned from the passenger cabin. If you plan on buying duty-free liquids such as alcohol or perfume, check with your airline and with the duty-free store to see if you can get your items without having any security issues.

Much of the advice and information in this book provides detailed information about common problems associated with these situations, and how to either avoid problems, reduce the chance that they occur, or reduce the impact of a problem. The book also emphasizes things that you can do to resolve a problem quickly and informally, rather than going through a longer process of filing a formal complaint. If all else fails, and you have to file a formal complaint, this book also provides tools and advice that give you the best chance of getting your complaint addressed to your satisfaction.

**Additional Information**

[How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

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## **Avoiding TSA Complaints**

When it comes to responding to complaints, the airlines are different from the TSA. The airlines have to follow national or international standards of quality and performance, standards that have developed over a number of decades. While there are many areas, such as delayed domestic flights, where US airlines are not required to compensate passengers, there are many other areas, such as lost and damaged checked luggage, and getting bumped from a flight, where the airlines are required to compensate passengers.

Also, with the airlines, if the airline performs its services in an incompetent or substandard way, or in ways that made your experience very unpleasant, it is often in the interest of the airline to offer compensation to help keep a passenger's loyalty, and to keep the passenger from complaining too much to other potential customers.

### **Why complaining to the TSA usually gets you nowhere**

The TSA has to meet a very different standard. With rare exceptions, the TSA does not have to offer compensation to passengers for slow or incompetent service, or for situations that cost passengers significant amounts of money. For example, if you have to discard a carry-on item because it is not allowed into the terminal, it doesn't matter if it were a \$2 bottle of water or a \$200 bottle of perfume, you can complain all you want, but you won't get any money back from the TSA.

It also turns out that the airlines don't have to compensate you for security-related problems such as delays that caused you to miss a flight. It doesn't matter if the delay were caused by the TSA not having enough staff to process passengers quickly, or if the staff on hand were especially inept, if your delay was not the airline's fault. While your airline may work with you to get you to your destination, there is no guarantee that you won't have to pay an extra airline fee.

Also, while some US airports use private companies to perform passenger security screening, the TSA essentially has a monopoly on screening passengers at US airports, so TSA has less of an incentive to satisfy their customers.

### **Avoiding complaints is the smartest option**

For passengers, the best way to deal with potential problems with the TSA is to follow the three general approaches mentioned in the [Complaint Basics](#) section: (1) avoiding the possibility of a problem, (2) making it less likely that a problem happens, and (3) limiting the impact of a problem should it occur.

The easiest way to make these three general approaches work for you is to understand how the basic TSA security screening process works. Once you understand the process, you can easily change your normal traveling routine to make it less likely that the screening process ruins your trip before you even get on the plane.

There are a few areas where complaining will likely get you a response of some kind. Claims of unfair treatment due to possible discrimination or civil rights violations are taken seriously by TSA, and they do have formal processes in place to deal with these issues.

Another area where complaints may be worth the trouble concerns checked luggage. TSA sometimes opens and inspects checked luggage, and items may be lost, damaged, or stolen. While there are detailed TSA procedures in place to deal with this situation, it is much more bureaucratic than the typical airline claim. This is another area where prevention is preferable to a successful complaint. Following the advice in the section [Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#) will make it much less likely that you will face a TSA problem that will lead to a complaint.

### **The normal screening process**

Many of the typical unexpected problems that happen during the normal security screening process are due to passengers not understanding the basics of the process. If you understand these basics, and take steps to deal with the most likely problem areas, you will have fewer problems with the TSA.

In the typical screening process, the TSA has four main tasks that have to be completed for each passenger:

1. Verifying passenger identification and travel documents
2. Screening carry-on luggage
3. Screening passengers
4. Screening checked luggage.

The first three tasks happen to all passengers, and the fourth happens only for passengers with checked bags. Below is a brief outline of the key problems that can happen, and the steps that passengers can take to deal with them.

### **Problem 1: You don't allow enough time for the screening process**

Because the time needed to screen passengers is unpredictable, the total time it takes to get processed by the TSA can vary widely from day to day or between airports. Many factors determine the time it takes to go through the line, factors like the number of passengers in the line ahead of you, the quality of the security screening staff, and whether the security equipment is operating at full capacity.

Since, there is no guarantee that you will get screened by a given amount of time, you can't eliminate the chance that you will miss a flight because of the time it takes to get screened. However, you can reduce the likelihood of this happening by arriving at the airport with time to spare.

Airlines and sometimes airport authorities sometimes provided regularly updated estimates of the time it will take to go through security at a particular airport. The sensible thing to do is to contact the airline's or airport's web site to see what the estimate wait will be, and add that time when the airline says you should arrive for your flight.

If you can't find current security wait time information for your airport, AirSafe.com suggests that you get to the airport at least 75 minutes before departure if you are on a domestic flight, only have carry-on bags, are traveling alone, have an ID that is acceptable to the TSA, and have printed your boarding pass before you get to the airport. If you have any of the complicating situations listed below, you should arrive even earlier (up to a

maximum of three hours before departure):

**Checking one or more bags** - Add 30 minutes.

**Checking one or more special items** - Add 45 minutes (for example, sports equipment, oversized checked bags, pets).

**Did not preprint your boarding pass** - Add 30 minutes (with or without checked luggage).

**Need to go to check in counter or airline customer service for any reason** - Add 30 minutes (with or without checked luggage).

**International flight** - Add 60 minutes.

**Traveling with a small group or family** - Add 30 minutes (with or without checked luggage).

**Traveling with a large group** - Add 60 minutes (with or without checked luggage).

If you have more than one complicating issue, you should add them up. For example, if you are on an international flight (60 minutes) with your family (30 minutes), and you are traveling with checked bags including one oversized bag (45 minutes), adding all these times to the baseline 75 minutes gives you 210 minutes or 3.5 hours. This is greater than AirSafe.com's suggested maximum time of three hours, so unless you have other reasons to get to the airport even earlier, then in most cases three hours will be sufficient.

Regardless of AirSafe.com's suggested times, it is always better to arrive too early than too late, so use your best judgment as well as these guidelines to make your arrival decision

### **Problem 2: You don't have an acceptable form of identification**

If you don't have an acceptable ID, the TSA will likely take extra time to confirm your identity. The worst case scenario is that TSA is unable to confirm your identity and you are not allowed to board your flight.

You can avoid this problem entirely by making sure you have the appropriate identification. If you review the book section [Identification Requirements](#), you will see exactly what kind of identification is acceptable, and what alternative forms of identification the TSA can use to identify you if you don't have an acceptable ID.

If you have any doubts about whether your ID will be accepted by the TSA, have some alternative forms of ID ready just in case you needed.

### **Problem 4: Your travel documents are not in order**

In order to go through security, you need to have an ID and a travel document and a boarding pass. Typical boarding pass problems include not having a boarding pass, names on your ID and the boarding pass not matching, or accidentally using the wrong boarding pass. Before you go to the airport, check to see that the names match, and that the pass is for the correct airline, airport, and date.

Before you get to the security line, make sure you have your boarding pass with you. If you forgot it at home, you can get another one printed at the baggage check in counter, or at an ATM-like machine that prints your boarding pass (if your airline has one at the

airport).

If the names on the ID and the boarding pass do not match, either use an acceptable ID that matches what is on your boarding pass, or ask the airline to make the name on your boarding pass match the name on your ID. Sometimes the airline's printed boarding pass does odd things to the name on the boarding pass, and if this is the case, it will usually not be an issue with the TSA.

**Problem 5: Your carry-on items are subjected to extra screening**

If you or your carry-on bags cause raises suspicion or causes an alarm on a screening device to go off, either you or the bag may be subject to additional screening or questioning by the TSA. If you take the basic steps outlined below, it will be less likely that you will face delays due to additional screening:

**Check your pockets and bags for banned items:** There are a number of items that you are not allowed to carry through security. Some, like weapons, are not allowed in the terminal or on the plane, many others may be allowed under some conditions. Form more complete details on what you should not carry though security, review the book sections [Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#) and [Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#). If you have a banned or restricted item, you may not be allowed to board your aircraft unless you either dispose of that item, place that item in your checked luggage or make other arrangements for that item.

Another set of common trouble areas for passengers are liquids, gels, and aerosols in their carry on bags. The book section [Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#) goes into much greater detail into how they should be carried, what items are allowed, and what exceptions exist.

**Know what carry-on items should be taken out:** The TSA requires that certain items like laptop computers be taken out of your carry-on bag to be screened by the X-ray devices used for carry-on items (TSA typically provides plastic bins for you to place your removed items for screening). If the TSA sees something suspicions in your carry-on bag, the TSA will inspect the bag, ask you about the contents of the bag, and possibly run it through the scanner a second time.

You can help yourself by taking out items like laptops, large metallic items, and oddly shaped items that may look suspicious to a TSA screener.

**Take off your shoes:** While no longer common outside the US, most travelers at US airports are required to remove their shoes before entering the walk-through metal detector at all US airports and put them through the x-ray machine for inspection. Current TSA practices allow children 12 and younger, and adults older than 75 to keep their shoes on during the screening process. If the passenger triggers an alarm, the passenger may have to remove their shoes and go through additional screening.

**Keep gifts unwrapped:** If you are carrying gifts, keep them unwrapped so security screeners can inspect the contents of the box or package.

**Problem 6: You have to go through additional screening**

A common way that you can get chosen for this kind of screening is when you leave item like coins or a mobile phone in your pocket, or forget to take off a belt with a metal belt buckle. Your additional screening may be as simple as removing the offending items and

walking through the detection device again, to being subjected to a more personal search that may include a hand-held metal detector or a pat-down search.

For many passengers, these more personal searches are more than an annoying delay; they are also an unwanted invasion of privacy. One guaranteed way to get a pat-down search is to refuse to use the standard passenger screening device like a metal detector or the full-body scanners in use at some airports. You may not be able to refuse these more personal searches, but if you have any concerns about it, for example a desire for more privacy, make your concerns known either to a security staff member or the TSA supervisor.

If you heed the following advice, you will reduce the chance that you have to go through additional personal screening:

**Remove as much metal as possible:** You should remove as much metal from your pockets and your body as you can. Security screeners have to identify any metal that is detected at the checkpoint. If you set off the alarm, you will undergo additional screening that may include use of a hand-held metal detector or a pat-down search. Items that may set off the metal detectors include keys, loose change, mobile phones and other personal electronic devices, jewelry, metal body piercings, and buttons or other clothing fasteners made out of metal.

**Answer all questions honestly:** If a screener asks you about something in your bag, in your pockets, or on your person, tell the truth. If the truth may embarrass you, don't answer so loud that others can hear you. If you did nothing wrong, any kind of lying or evasion will likely make the TSA more suspicious and more likely to search you and your belongings very carefully. If you did something wrong, like accidentally bring a prohibited item through security, then get ready to deal with the consequences.

**Give the security screeners a heads-up:** If you know that you will cause an alarm to go off, for example because you have a metallic medical implant, tell the security staff ahead of time so they can have a chance to make your screening as low-key as possible.

**Note on head coverings and loose clothing:** All members of the traveling public are permitted to wear head coverings (whether religious or not) through security checkpoints. You may be subjected to additional screening if your headwear or clothing (religious or otherwise) is loose fitting or large enough to hide prohibited items. If any security concern cannot be resolved through a pat-down search, you may be offered the opportunity to remove the head covering in a private screening area.

### **Problem 7: Your checked luggage gets abused**

The TSA screens each piece of checked luggage, and may open your checked item for a closer inspection. The TSA requires that you keep your luggage either unlocked, or use a TSA-approved lock. If you don't do this, your luggage may be damaged, and if this happens you will not be compensated. Any time your checked bag is opened, you have a greater chance of having an item misplaced, damaged, destroyed, or stolen. By following the advice in the book sections [Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#) and [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#), you will limit your potential risk.

## **Additional Resources**

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

[How to Travel with Duty-free Liquid Items](#)

[Top 10 Security Questions](#)

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## **When You Should Not Complain**

Complaints are justified when there was a problem caused by the airline that led to some kind of loss. For TSA security related problems, the same general rule applies. However, there are many kinds of situations where you may have a problem that led to a loss, but complaining about it will get you nowhere. Some of these general situations are described below:

### **If you didn't follow the rules and regulations**

Both the airlines and the TSA have rules and regulations that passengers are expected to follow. Airline rules and regulations can be rather detailed and complex, and every airline has some differences in what rules they apply. While this book covers general situations that lead to complaints, for example baggage, ticketing, prohibited items, and child travel, there are a wide variety of areas where you may think that you have a right to be compensated for your trouble, but in fact you don't.

If you are in a situation where you want to file a formal complaint, it may help you to review the appropriate rules and regulations to see where you stand. Airline web sites and the web site of the TSA usually have these rules and regulations readily available, and you should review them before you move forward with your complaint. Also, rules for compensation may vary widely among different airlines, and even among different types of flights within the same airline.

### **If the airline or the TSA are not responsible for the problem**

While airlines are in general responsible for problems that their organization may have caused, they are not responsible for problems caused by the passenger or problems caused by events outside of the airline's control. For example, if you have delays or cancellations due to weather, security issues, strikes, or acts of nature, the airline typically has no requirement to compensate travelers for their inconvenience.

The TSA and other security services may also delay a passenger for real or imagined security reasons, and if this leads to a problem like a missed flight, a passenger typically would not be compensated for any costs associated with their situation.

Another situation where the airlines may not be responsible is when a third party is involved in arranging your air travel. For example, if you missed a flight or had extra fees charged because of errors made by a travel agent or an online airline booking service, you will have to deal with that travel agent or booking site for any compensation.

### **If you are not asking for any specific action or compensation**

If you are not asking for anything to happen, a formal or an informal complaint is more of a nuisance than a help for either the passenger or the target of the complaint. For example, if you complain to the flight attendant that the cabin is too hot, tell the cabin attendant that you would like the cabin to be cooler. Similarly, if you are going to take the time to write to the airline with a formal complaint, make sure that you are very specific about what you want to happen. If you want an apology, ask for an apology, if you want money to compensate for a financial loss, ask for a specific amount and provide information that

justifies that amount.

### **If you were the source of the problem**

If you committed one or more acts that caused you a problem, you should not expect any compensation. For example, if you were obviously intoxicated when trying to board an aircraft, and the gate agent didn't let you on the plane, then you would be totally responsible for any cost that you would incur. If you improperly packed an item in a checked bag and as a result the contents of your bag were damaged or destroyed, that isn't the airline's fault or TSA's fault, it would be your fault.

### **If the airline or the TSA are not obligated to compensate you**

There are a surprising number of areas where the airlines and the TSA are not required to provide any compensation for problems that may cause passengers significant stress or financial losses. For example, in the US, if an airline has a delay for a domestic flight, even one that lasts for a day or more, there is typically no requirement to give the passenger any compensation for meals, lodging, transportation, or other losses.

On the security side, the TSA is allowed to do any number of things that may cause psychological stress for the passengers, including intimate pat-down searches, and though passengers are free to complain about TSA's procedures or processes, they will not get any compensation for doing so.

### **If someone isn't willing to make the effort to follow through**

No matter how trivial the problem, someone has to make an effort to give a complaint a chance to succeed. It doesn't mean that the passenger with the complaint has personally go through the process. For example, your family may have a designated person with the kind of personality to follow through with a complaint, no matter how long it may take.

In some cases, it may be inappropriate for the person who had the problem to make the complaint. For example, if a child has a serious problem during a flight as an unaccompanied minor, that child may not be able or willing to deal with a problem directly, but it would be very appropriate for a parent or other responsible adult to take over the complaint process.

### **If you don't do your homework**

Before you make a complaint, you should do some basic background work so that you can have the kind of specific information that you need. At the very least, you need to find out basic identifying information on the event, such as date, location, or flight number. If you are asking for financial compensation of some kind, make sure you have information such as cleaning or replacement costs for damaged or destroyed items, receipts for costs associated with your problem.

Depending on the organization that is the source of your complaint, you may want to review that organization's rules or guidelines related to your complaint. For airlines, their rules and guidelines are typically included on the airline's web site on a page or in a document that goes by various names, including 'contract of carriage' or 'conditions of carriage.' This document or web page would state things such as the air carrier's baggage loss and damage policies, including the items that the airline will not pay for if they are

lost, damaged, or stolen from checked baggage. To find this document for this airline, you can use a search engine to find pages that has the airline name and the word ‘carriage.’

**Additional Resources**

[Complaint Basics](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[How to Travel with Duty-free Liquid Items](#)

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## **How to Complain About Your Airline Service**

An airline flight can be a memorable experience, but there are times where the experience is memorable for all the wrong reasons: flight delays, cancelled flights, getting bumped from a flight, poor customer service, bad food, lost luggage, or any problem that results in a significant inconvenience or financial loss for the passenger. If you experience these kinds of problem with your airline, you may want to deal with it by lodging a complaint with the airline. However, filing a complaint may not be the best first move you can make.

This book's approach is that before filing a complaint, it may be best to first try to resolve a problem immediately and in an informal way. If you can't address your problem immediately, then you should next try to use any existing process the airline may have for dealing with your problem. You should file a complaint only after you have exhausted your options for dealing with your situation, or if the airline's responses to your other efforts were unacceptable.

### **Dealing with a problem immediately**

Whenever you can identify a problem on the spot, your best option will usually be to bring it to the airline's attention and give them a chance to resolve the issue. If you are at the airport, then contact the airline's customer service representatives, a manager, or some other employee who has the authority to immediately take care of your problem. If you are in flight, then contact a flight attendant.

For example, if you have a problem with some aspect of your flight, and the airline either resolves the problem or offers you some kind of reasonable compensation, then there is no need to take things further. If not, make another suggestions for dealing with the situation. If you and the airline still can't resolve the issue, then you should document your experience, gather relevant information from the airline, and prepare to file a formal complaint with the airline. Details on how to do that for various situations are provided elsewhere in this book.

### **Know your airline's rules**

When you purchase airline tickets, you and the airline have entered into a contract that covers many different situations that you may face during a flight. Your airline's rules and guidelines are typically included on the airline's web site on a page or in a document that goes by various names, including 'contract of carriage' or 'conditions of carriage.'

Each airline has a specific set of guidelines and compensation levels for situations such as flight delays and overbookings, as well as for lost or damaged luggage. It will also describe specific situations where the airline is not obligated to provide a passenger with compensation. When you face a situation where you have a problem you want to solve, or a situation that you want to resolve, it may be to your benefit to find out what the airline's rules are in that situation.

### **Follow the airline's existing process**

Airlines sometimes have existing formal processes for dealing with common passenger issues such as missing or damaged baggage. If you have a problem, ask if there is a form,

you have to fill out, or information you have to supply in order to deal with your problem. If there is a process in place, you should first work with that process to solve your problem, and should think about filing a formal complaint only after giving this process a chance to work.

### **Understand why you are complaining**

After you have decided to go forward with a complaint, and before you make that first phone call, send that first email, or write that first letter, you should take some time to know a few basic things about your particular circumstances:

- \* Why you are complaining.
- \* What situation caused you to complain.
- \* What people or organizations played a role in that situation.
- \* What has already done to address your problem and why it was not enough.
- \* How you want to have the complaint addressed.
- \* What should you reasonably expect as an outcome.

It may seem obvious to you why you want to complain and what you want to have happen, but you have to be very specific in a formal, written complaint to give yourself the best chance of success. If you are not able to come up with enough relevant details, or with a clear statement of what you want to happen, it would be difficult for even a well-meaning airline to be able to respond appropriately.

You must also be reasonable when it comes to the expected outcome of your complaint. You should only expect reasonable compensation for any losses you had. It is beyond the scope of this article to describe every kind of situation that may obligate the airline to compensate you. However, following the advice in this article will likely put you in a position to know if your complaint may also lead to some kind of compensation.

### **Complaining basics**

Taking the time to assess your situation at the beginning will make the rest of the complaint process as smooth as possible. That complaint process can be roughly broken down into the following three tasks:

1. Documenting the facts of your situation.
2. Defining what kind of compensation or outcome you want to have.
3. Submitting your complaint, along with any supporting information.

These basics are the same for an informal complaint, which is typically made and resolved at the time you have the problem, or a more formal complaint where you have submit something in writing to resolve your issue.

### **Documenting your airline complaint**

You should start documenting your situation, typically with written notes, relevant documents, and photographs, as soon as possible after you realize you are in a situation where you may want to complain to an airline. Much of the basic information, such as your flight number, is likely in your travel records. The most important details are the ones that are directly relevant to your situation. If you were given substandard service by a flight

attendant, that detail may be the name of a particular flight attendant. If your problem were a piece of checked luggage that was lost, then you would need any documentation that was associated with that lost bag.

One thing to remember is that your complaint should include only factual, relevant, and verifiable information. For example, claiming that a gate agent was rude, and charged you unnecessarily for an extra checked bag may be factual and verifiable, but discussing the inappropriate and rude behavior is not relevant if your objective is to be compensated for the baggage charge.

The key part of this part of the process is your summary of your complaint. You may have a long and involved story to tell, but it would help you and help the person handling your complaint if you can summarize your complaint in a paragraph or two.

### **How to fill out a form**

If you have to fill out a some kind of claim form, make sure that it is completely filled out. If required information is unavailable, give a reason why. When you make a claim for compensation for loss of damage to your personal property, you will likely be asked to provide justification for the amount that you are requesting, as well as additional information. You should be prepared to provide copies of supporting documentation, or information from supporting documentation, including at least some of the following:

1. Purchase receipt for the lost or damaged item. If this is unavailable use other supporting documentation such as credit card statements, bank statements, or an appraisal of the item's value.
2. Boarding passes, baggage claim tickets, and other documents related to your trip.
3. Repair estimates or actual repair costs for damaged items.
4. Replacement cost estimates for lost or broken items.
5. Documentation of other costs related to your claim.
6. Photographs of lost or damaged items.
7. Police reports, incident reports, or witness statements.
9. Copies of previous or related claims.

### **Filing a formal complaint**

If you can get your problem solved on the spot by talking with one or more airline representatives, or if you're satisfied with the compensation from the airline's claims process, there is no need to file a formal complaint.

If you can't get your problem taken care of immediately, or if your compensation from a previous claim was too low, then filing a formal complaint may be your next step. Be prepared to be patient since a formal complaint that involves submitting documents and other information will likely take days or weeks to get resolved. Be sure to keep track of any notes that you have made, all of your travel documents, as well as receipts for any out-of-pocket expenses that you incurred.

Keep in mind that you should file a formal complaint only if you have already tried whatever formal process the organization has in place to deal with your problem. You

don't have to wait until that process is finished, but if you file a formal complaint without first following an airline's existing resolution process, your formal complaint may be ignored or rejected.

### **How to communicate during the formal complaint process**

While you may contact one or more airline representatives face-to-face or by phone, your chance of getting any kind of resolution goes way up if you rely on written communication as your primary means of dealing with the airline. The following guidelines will help to get your message across more effectively:

**Provide full contact information:** If you send either a letter or an email, make sure that your message includes all available options for contacting you (phone number, fax number, email address, physical mailing address, etc.)

**Keep it short:** Limit your initial message to a maximum of one page (roughly 250 words). Include all of the relevant information that the airline (or other organization) would need to understand your problem

**Give a reimbursement amount:** If you incurred expenses or monetary losses, state the amount that you expect to be reimbursed.

**Be clear about your demands:** Be specific about the outcome that you want (reimbursement, other compensation, letter of apology, etc.).

**Keep a businesslike tone:** No matter how strong you may feel about what happened to you, this is not the place to deal with the emotional impact of your experience. Focus on the facts, and provide specific information like dates, names, and flight numbers.

**Keep original paperwork:** Send copies of tickets, receipts, or other documents to back up your claim and save the original documents.

**Clearly identify people involved in your complaint:** Include the names of any employees who were rude or made things worse, as well as anyone who were especially helpful.

**Be reasonable in your demands:** Don't ask for reimbursement for something that is beyond the airline's responsibility. For example, you can ask for reimbursement for any costs you incurred, but not for any time you may have spent dealing with your complaint.

If you follow these suggested guidelines, the airline will probably treat your complaint seriously. Your written communication with the airline will help the airline determine what caused your problem, and may help the airline to prevent the same problem from happening to others.

### **Complaining to the TSA rather than the airline**

Airlines in the US are not responsible for the security screening process, so any complaints related to security screenings for passengers and baggage should be directed to the TSA. Most complaints to the TSA revolve one of two issues: the security screening process, and damages or losses due to TSA inspection of checked baggage. Complaints about the security screening process are typically based on the behavior of TSA personnel during the process, the tools and techniques used during the process, and the time taken to pass

through the security checkpoint.

While problems related to checked bag inspections and issues related to the security screening process may be appropriate for a formal complaint, only complaints related to damages during the handling of checked luggage searches are likely to result in any monetary compensation. For more details on how to send a complaint to the TSA, review the book section [How to Complain to the TSA](#).

### **Additional complaint filing options**

In addition to filing a formal complaint with the airline or with the organization or company that caused your problem, you may want to submit your complaint to outside organizations. Three that you may want to consider are AirSafe.com, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the US Department of Transportation (DOT). None of these organizations will provide you with any compensation either for your submission or for any losses mentioned in your complaint, but all of these organizations may use your complaint to educate the public about air travel problems, or to improve air travel safety.

**Sending complaints to AirSafe.com:** Fill out the online complaint form at [complain.airsafe.com](http://complain.airsafe.com) and have AirSafe.com evaluate your complaint. Depending on the details of your complaint, it may be forwarded to an appropriate organization such as the NTSB, FAA, or DOT, or it may be published (with personal details removed) by AirSafe.com in [FlightsGoneBad.com](http://FlightsGoneBad.com), in another AirSafe.com related web site, or in an [AirSafe.com podcast](#).

**Sending complaints to the DOT:** If your complaint involved a US airline or a non-US airline operating in the United States, you may want to submit a complaint both to the airline and to the DOT if you feel that it is important for the DOT to be aware of what happened to you, and if you want to have your complaint become part of the public record. You can file a formal complaint in one of the following ways:

**By phone** - You can call the DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division at 202-366-2220 (TTY 202-366-0511) to record your complaint.

**Online** - You can also submit your complaint to the Department of Transportation's Aviation Consumer Protection Division using their online form at [airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/escomplaint/es.cfm](http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/escomplaint/es.cfm). Note that the DOT form requests personal information that the AirSafe.com form does not ask. Specifically, the DOT form asks whether you are a passenger, relative of a passenger, a lawyer acting on behalf of a client, or a travel agency. The AirSafe.com form makes no such distinctions and does not request this kind of personal information.

**Mail** - You can submit a written complaint to the following address:

Aviation Consumer Protection Division, C-75  
US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

These forwarded complaints are not used by the DOT to mediate individual disputes, but they are used by the DOT as a basis for rule making, legislation, and media reports. In one of the DOT reports, the monthly Air Travel Consumer Report, major US airlines are

ranked by several measures, including by the number of complaints. Normally, the DOT does not send any response to consumer complaint inputs. The DOT may recommend that a report be forwarded either to the FAA for aviation safety matters, or to the TSA for security issues.

**Sending safety complaints to the FAA:** When you want to point out a specific situation that you believe threatens the safety of passengers, crew, or other members of the public, it is important that you make the appropriate authority aware of this situation. In the United States, that authority is the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

For safety issues related to US airports, to any aircraft flying in the US, or to US registered aircraft flying anywhere in the world, you can contact the FAA by phone or by mail:

**By phone** - 1-866-TELL-FAA (1-866-835-5322)

**By mail** - You can submit a written complaint to the following address:

Federal Aviation Administration  
Aviation Safety Hotline, AAI-3  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

**Sending safety complaints to the TSA:** For security issues related to US airports, US airlines operating anywhere in the world, or non-US airlines flying to or from the US, you can contact the TSA by phone, email, or regular mail:

**By phone** - 1-866-289-9673

**By email** - TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov

**By mail** - You can submit a written complaint to the following address:

Transportation Security Administration  
601 South 12th Street  
Arlington, VA 20598

### **Additional Resources**

[Complaint Basics](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[How to Travel with Duty-free Liquid Items](#)

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## How to Complain to the TSA

The complaint process for the TSA is different from that of the airlines because there are a much narrower range of issues where the TSA may actually give a passenger monetary compensation. For example, while an airline may offer compensation for poor performance or substandard service, the TSA is not obligated to do so, even if you have incurred significant financial losses.

If you do want to complain to the TSA, the same basic guidelines for complaining to airlines (detailed in the section [How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)) would apply. Specifically, you should first try to address any problem immediately. If that is not possible, you should then use any existing process the TSA may have for dealing with your problem. You should file a complaint only after you have exhausted any other options for dealing with your situation.

### Reporting property loss and property damage claims

If you believe that the TSA was responsible for any property loss or damage you can submit a formal claims request using [TSA's Tort Claims Package form](#) you have to submit for a claim for property loss, confiscation, or damage. This form has specific instructions on what kind of information your need. As with an airline complaint, you should keep copies of anything that you submit. While mailing your complaint is an option, the TSA advises that communicating by fax or email will lead to a much quicker response:

**Email:** [tsaclaimsoffice@tsa.dhs.gov](mailto:tsaclaimsoffice@tsa.dhs.gov)

**Fax:** 1-571-227-1300

**Regular mail:**

Claims Management Branch

TSA (TSA - 9)

601 South 12th Street

Arlington, Virginia 20598-6009

Keep in mind that this claim form is for property loss or personal injury, and not for other issues.

### Reporting civil rights or discrimination complaints

If you believe that your treatment at the hands of the TSA is unlawful or discriminatory, you should contact the supervisor on duty to deal with the situation. If you are not satisfied by their response, or you only decide later that you want to complain, you can file a formal civil rights or civil liberties complaint with the TSA. Discriminatory treatment happens when someone is treated differently or less favorably due to race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or for any other reason.

There is a formal process for dealing with discrimination complaints, and [TSA provides a civil rights and civil liberties complaint form](#) with the kinds of details you have to submit. While you don't have to use this form, you do have to provide the details that the form requests.

You can submit the form by fax, email, or regular mail, though the TSA warns that it could take up to four weeks before they would receive regular. Once you have completed the forms, keep a copy for your records and send your complaint to the TSA:

**Email:** TSA-CRL@tsa.dhs.gov

**Fax:** 1-571-227-1921

**Regular mail:**

Transportation Security Administration  
Civil Rights & Liberties, Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement (TSA-6)  
Multicultural Branch  
701 S. 12th Street  
Arlington, VA 20598

**Filing other kinds of TSA complaints**

If you want to make a complaint to the TSA about something other than discrimination or getting financial compensation, you are largely out of luck. Costs you may have incurred because the TSA screening process delayed you so long that you missed a flight will likely not be covered by either the TSA or your airline, because neither organization is required by law or regulation.

If you want to submit a general complaint about the quality of TSA's service, or about the effectiveness or the usefulness of their procedures, you can send your concerns to the TSA Contact Center by email at [ContactCenter@dhs.gov](mailto:ContactCenter@dhs.gov), or by phone at 1-866-289-9673.

**Complaints to a private screening company**

At some US airports, a private company may be performing the security screening tasks normally performed by the TSA. While all of these companies operate under TSA supervision, if you want to request compensation or file a complaint with this company, you will have to follow that company's policies for these matters.

**Items left at the passenger screening area**

If you think that you may have left an item at the screening location, you should return to the screening area to look for it if you can spare the time. If you don't find it, or don't have the time to go back, [contact that airport's lost and found department](#).

**Additional Information**

[Complaint Basics](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[TSA claim form for monetary losses](#)

[TSA form for civil rights and civil liberties complaints](#)

[TSA contact numbers for airport lost and found offices](#)

[Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#)

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## Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage

One of the risks of checking your luggage is that it may be damaged, stolen, lost, or delayed for any number of reasons. If you followed the advice given in the sections [Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#) and [Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#), you have already taken sensible steps to minimize the impact of a lost, delayed, or damaged checked bag. Once you realize that you have a bag problem, you have to take action to give yourself the best chance of getting your situation resolved quickly, and to your satisfaction

### Dealing with delayed luggage

You usually know that your luggage will be delayed either because it was not in the baggage claim area after your arrival, or because an airline representative told you that your bags will not be on the plane with you. The latter situation sometimes happens if the airline decided, perhaps because of last minute schedule changes or cargo loading issues, that you and your bags will be on different flight. As soon as you are aware that your bags will be delayed, you should do the following:

**Contact the airline immediately:** If you don't see your bag in the baggage claim area, contact the airline's baggage office or baggage agent and report your missing bag. If the airline determines that the bag is arriving later and you are not able to wait for your bag at the airport, provide information on where you would like the bag delivered. Many airlines allow you only a limited amount of time to report missing luggage.

**Collect relevant information:** Make sure you keep all of your flight documentation, including the baggage claim ticket and boarding pass, so that you can provide the airline with information to help them find the bag, and to provide you with the basic information you may need to make a claim. You may also want to get information such as the name and contact information of the airline employee who is helping you, or of that person's manager or supervisor just in case you have to make a later claim.

**Keep track of related expenses:** If you have to buy necessities to replace items in your bag, keep any receipts so that you can justify any future reimbursement expense. Also, ask the airline if they provide any immediate benefits such as free basic toiletry items.

**Start the lost baggage compensation process:** Even if the airline assures you that your bag will arrive, start the process for getting compensation for lost luggage. If the airline has any forms that you will have to fill out, collect them now.

### Dealing with lost or damaged luggage

If you find that bag has significant damage or has missing items, or if you determine that your bag won't arrive, you should do the following as soon as you can:

**Fill out any claim forms:** If the airline has any lost or damaged claim forms, then fill them out and submit the documentation, along with a copy of any of your supporting information such as your claim ticket and boarding pass. Be sure to keep a

copy of any form or document that you submit. You may want to review the section [How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#) for pointers on how to fill out forms and what kinds of supporting documentation you may need.

**Get estimated or actual costs of any replacement items:** If you had to purchase replacement items, make sure you collect all the receipts so you can submit copies with any reimbursement claim to the airline. If you are not going to buy a replacement immediately, keep track of the estimated replacement costs in order to support any claim you will make to the airline.

**Review the airline's policies:** Find out what the airline will or will not reimburse by reviewing any documentation they have. If you don't get it directly from an airline representative, you can look for it on the airline's web site. If your only problem was damage was to your piece of luggage, keep in mind that airlines typically don't offer reimbursement for what they consider normal wear and tear, things like torn zippers or handles, or broken wheels. Also, airlines have limits on the maximum amount of monetary compensation for each claim, and also rules on what items will not be reimbursed.

### **When to complain if the compensation is not enough**

When your bag is lost, delayed or damaged, no matter how things turn out, you will have endured some level of stress and inconvenience. The best outcome for you is that the airline did the reasonable thing by either getting your checked bag back to you, or for providing appropriate compensation for lost or damaged luggage.

If you have followed all the appropriate airline procedures for your situation, and the final outcome isn't to your liking, you may want to file a complaint with the airline. If you decide to go this route, you may want to consider the following questions before dedicating the time and energy it would take to go through the process:

**Would the money be enough?** - If your goal is to get financial compensation for a loss, that loss should be worth more than the time it would take to go through with a complaint. For example, if you think you deserve an additional \$200 in compensation, then ask yourself if the time it would take you to complain is worth \$200.

**Will filing a complaint make you feel better?** - If your complaint gets the result you want, would it make you feel better? Would it make up for whatever hassle you had to go through because of a bag that was lost, stolen, damaged, or delayed? Is filing a complaint the right thing to do because it may benefit others? If you can answer 'yes' to at least one of these questions, then go ahead with the complaint. If you can't, then maybe filing a complaint is not the right thing for you to do.

### **Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)  
[How to Complain to the TSA](#)

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## **Compensation for Delays, Bumpings, and Overbookings**

When you fly, you can be delayed for any number of reasons. In most cases, US airlines are not required to compensate passengers delayed or cancelled flights. One exception is the case where a passenger has a confirmed reservation, but is denied boarding because the airline overbooked the flight. Getting denied boarding in this way is also known as getting bumped. Passengers on one of these overbooked flights who get get bumped are eligible to receive an amount of compensation that is set by government regulations, but they also have an opportunity to negotiate with the airline to volunteer to give up their seat in exchange for compensation that could be more valuable than the required minimums.

### **Delays and cancellations for domestic US flights**

With the exception of oversold flights, airlines operating a domestic flight in the US are not required to provide passengers with any compensation for a delayed or cancelled flight. However, airlines are in the business of making money, and they are motivated to address customer needs when things go wrong. Airline representatives may have some discretion when it comes to providing compensation when you face a significant delay or a cancelled flight. Often it may be something simple like a voucher to purchase a meal at the airport, or even a voucher for an overnight hotel stay. Depending on your needs, you can always ask for reasonable compensation for any extra costs you may have, but there is no guarantee that you would get anything.

### **Delays and cancellations for international flights**

On an international flight, the airline's policies on providing compensation for delays and flight cancellations will depend on the airline's policies, and the regulations under which that flight operates. Before you travel, you may want to review the airline's policies to see what compensation may be offered in the event of a delay or a cancellation.

### **Delays and cancellations for non-US domestic flights**

Rules for compensation for delayed and cancelled flights will depend on the rules of the country where that flight is operating. As is the case with international flights to or from the US, you should review the policies or regulations of your airline to see what compensation you can expect in the event of a delay or a cancellation.

### **Delays and cancellations involving unaccompanied minors**

If your child is traveling alone, and you are using the airline's unaccompanied minor program, you should absolutely check with the airline before the trip. As is the case with adult passengers, there are no US federal requirements for any special services or compensation for unaccompanied minors for most delayed or cancelled flights. At the very least, you should have an alternative plan in place to deal with the possibility of your child being delayed overnight or arriving at the destination airport well after the expected time. If you are considering having your child fly alone on an airplane, you should review the book section [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#). You can find additional resources on unaccompanied minors at [children.airsafe.com](http://children.airsafe.com).

### **Overbooking and involuntary bumping on domestic US flights**

US airlines are allowed to overbook flights to allow for "no-show" passengers, and may have to bump one or more passengers with confirmed reservations. However, before an airline bumps a passenger from a flight, the airline is required to ask for volunteers to give up their seats in exchange for compensation. This is where a passenger who volunteers to give up his or her seat has the advantage, and may be able to negotiate to get compensation that is better than the minimum compensation that airlines are required to provide.

### **Required compensation for bumped passengers**

When an airline bumps you from a flight, it must offer you compensation based on the amount of the delay. For US domestic flights, there is a sliding scale of the minimum required passenger compensation:

**Less than one hour delay:** There is no compensation if alternative transportation gets the passenger to the destination within one hour of the original scheduled arrival.

**Delays between one and two hours:** The airline must pay you an amount equal to 200% of your one-way fare to your final destination that day, with a \$650 maximum.

**Delays longer than two hours:** If the airline is able to get you to your destination more than two hours late, or if the airline does not make any substitute travel arrangements for you, the compensation doubles to 400% of your one-way fare, up to a maximum of \$1300 maximum.

There are exceptions to these rules. For example, this minimum compensation schedule does not apply to charter flights, or to scheduled flights using planes that hold 60 or fewer passengers. Check with your airline for more details on their exceptions.

### **Compensation for bumped passengers on international flights**

If you are bumped on an international flight that is inbound to the US, the compensation levels are the same as for domestic flights, but the delay times are different. You get the maximum \$650 compensation for delays between one and four hours, and the maximum \$1,300 compensation for delays greater than four hours. The rules for international flights leaving the US will depend on the rules for the destination country, so check with your airline for details.

### **Making a deal on an overbooked flight**

Before an airline involuntarily bumps passengers from an overbooked flight, they are required to first ask for volunteers who are willing to give up their seat. This sets up an opportunity for volunteers to make a deal that would give them more than the minimum compensation.

Passengers considering volunteering to give up their seat should be aware that if they volunteer to give up their seat, they will no longer be compensated under the denied boarding or involuntary bumping rules that are in effect for that flight. A passenger should volunteer to give up his or her seat only after determining the following:

1. Whether the later flight has a confirmed reservation and whether the scheduled arrival time is acceptable.
2. What will happen if the airline is unable to find you a seat on your alternative

flight, or if that flight is delayed or cancelled.

3. Whether the airline will pay for food, lodging, or other extra costs you may incur due to taking a later flight.
4. What the compensation would be if you were involuntarily bumped. Once you know this, you should ask for compensation that is at least as valuable to you.
5. What restrictions or limitations are on the compensation that the airline is offering.
6. Insist that any compensation be provided immediately, including any documentation you will need to claim the compensation.

### **Suggestions on the deal**

The airline is required to provide monetary compensation for involuntarily bumped passengers, but if you volunteer you may be able to get something that is more valuable than the money. Examples include a voucher for free round trip travel, a free first class upgrade on a future flight, or a combination of money plus travel vouchers. What you can get will depend on the airline's policies and the flexibility the airline's representative will have. If you can't come to an agreement on a deal, then don't volunteer to give up your seat. The worst that will happen is that you will get bumped and will get the minimum compensation.

### **Suggestions for unaccompanied minors**

If your child is flying as an unaccompanied minor, you should review the advice in the book section [Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#) to minimize the chance that your child will be on a delayed, canceled, or oversold flight. If your child is on a nonstop flight, the adult who brings your child to the airport should stay at the airport and be ready to deal with a situation involving a delayed or cancelled flight, including negotiating compensation if your child on an oversold flight.

If your child is on a flight that includes a stopover, you should instruct your child to never volunteer to give up a seat on an oversold flight. You should also check with the airline to see if their policies on oversold flights includes a statement that children under the age of 18 will be among the last categories of passengers who are involuntarily denied boarding.

### **Additional Information**

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

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## Four Passenger Complaints from FightsGoneBad.com

FlightsGoneBad.com is one of the web sites managed by AirSafe.com, and it features actual passenger complaints submitted to the AirSafe.com complaint system. The following four cases are a sample of the kinds of customer service, airport security, baggage handling, and other travel complaints that are regularly sent to AirSafe.com.

After each case, you will see the advice AirSafe.com would give to a passenger in that situation, as well as an opinion about whether the passenger should complain about what happened.

### **Case 1: Soldier leaves keys in checked bag**

The airline did not have my bag when I came back from an official military trip. I explained to them at the desk that all of my car and house keys were in that bag and I needed it, and would have no way to go get it. They told me that they would bring it to me. They said they had another flight coming in this morning and would make sure my bag was on it. They took down my address and number and said they'd call me before heading out to bring me my bag. Then today when I called they said they wouldn't bring it to me because I was outside of Manhattan city limits, and that if I wanted it I could either pay for a cab myself or they could FEDEX it to me, but they would not be paying for expedited shipping and it would not be going out until Monday.

I'm on active duty in the Army, just returned from a mission in the Great Lakes and will not drive 15 miles to bring me my bag with my car keys and mission essential items. I do not have \$100 to spend on cab fare.

### *AirSafe.com Responds*

If you fly often enough with checked bags, eventually you will have one lost, delayed, or stolen, so prepare for that possibility when you pack. AirSafe.com recommends that some things should never go in checked luggage, and should always stay with you in a carry-on bag. The kinds of things you should not put in checked bags include medicine, computers, electronic files, legal documents; credit cards, checks, or other financial documents; cash, jewelry, keys, and items of great sentimental value.

As for the airline rules on returning bags, remember that each airline has its own rules for returning bags, and those rules will often depend on what resources the airline has at your destination airport. Unfortunately, you usually don't find out what rules will apply to you until you have a lost bag.

While you can complain about what happened to you as well as request that you be reimbursed for your out of pocket expenses, it is unlikely that the airline will compensate you for two reasons. First, their contract of carriage (typically available on the airline's web site), which is the contract that spells out the airline's obligations to passengers, will probably include the regulation you mentioned about not delivering your bag beyond a certain distance from your arrival airport.

Second, the fact that you decided to place car keys and mission critical items in your

checked bag appeared to be your choice rather than the airline's choice, so the airline would likely not compensate you for any costs associated with you either not having those items available or travel costs to retrieve your items. However, given your situation as an active duty soldier on official business, if you requested that your mission critical items be carried as a carry-on bag rather than a checked bag, it is likely that the airline would have taken steps to accommodate your request.

### **Case 2: Last minute denied boarding leads to missed flight**

This complaint from Charles is an example of what can go wrong if you are denied boarding, but his actions kept the situation from getting much worse.

I booked reservations with Northwest Airlines for flight NW 4310 leaving Baton Rouge at 6:20 AM and for following flights. At the time of the reservation, I provided the airline with my credit card information and was advised that I had confirmed reservations and paid for tickets. I received a conformation by email. I arrived at the Baton Rouge airport and checked one bag. I was given a boarding pass, a baggage coupon that indicated a \$20 charge, and a baggage claim check. I was advised by the Delta counter person that I was "all set" and should proceed to the gate area.

After presenting the boarding pass and my ID to the TSA agent, I was allowed through the security screening and preceded to the assigned gate. The Delta agent at the gate explained that it was a small plane, gave me a claim check for my carry-on, and told me to surrender it at the end of the ramp before boarding the plane. I was perhaps the fifth person in line to board and when I tried to board the gate agent advised me "that there is something wrong with your boarding pass" and then asked me to wait until the others had boarded. After the plane was loaded, the agent had to ask another agent why the boarding pass wasn't valid.

The second agent advised me that the ticket had never been paid for and I needed to give him my credit card to pay for it. After I did, he advised me that there would be an additional fee (I believe it was \$35) since I was paying at the gate. When I objected to this, he told me there was nothing he could do about it, he then advised that it was too late to buy a ticket since it was within ten minutes prior to the flight departure.

I asked the gentleman to at least get my checked bag off the flight, as there were no other flights to Tulsa that day and I would have to hurry and drive to the New Orleans airport for a flight on Southwest. My bag was returned to me at the ticket counter where I was originally issued my boarding pass.

They had time to retrieve my checked baggage but didn't have time to sell me a ticket. I asked to speak to the manager, and a man came up who did not have a name tag, and did not introduce himself. I believe that the other counter attendant referred to him as Robert. I explained that I wanted compensation for denied boarding and Robert said it did not apply, as the airline had done nothing wrong. I asked to see a written copy of Delta's procedures on denied boarding and Robert refused. He then gave me a small note with a phone number and advised me to call Delta Customer Service if I had any complaints.

I asked Robert if there was any federal agency I could complain to and he responded "don't bother, they ignore complaints." I then asked him to at least issue a refund for the

\$20 they had charged for my checked baggage. Robert went into an inner office, and some twenty minutes later, he emerged to tell me he had canceled the charges for the checked baggage and had double checked to make sure there were no charges on my credit card for the tickets.

After my trip, using Southwest, my wife called Delta customer service at the number Robert had given me, only to learn that indeed there were charges for the tickets but the airline would issue a refund.

I believe that I was denied boarding on Delta flight NW4310 due to the mistakes of no one other than Delta personnel and subsequently I have been denied compensation. I would appreciate any assistance your office could provide me with this matter.

### *AirSafe.com Responds*

It seems that Charles did everything right. The ticket was purchased ahead of time, he received confirmation of the purchase by email, and the check in and security screening process went smoothly. For whatever reason, the airline issued a boarding pass, and by the time Charles when from the check in counter to the gate, the airline decided to not accept the ticket.

Unfortunately, there isn't much that Charles can do. Except for cases where a passenger is involuntarily bumped from a flight, there are no federal requirements for reimbursing passengers for delays or flight cancelations. If it turns out that the airline was mistaken about the ticket, then Charles may get some kind of compensation, but that would likely be up to the airline. Charles has certainly done everything to make that possible, including documenting the process.

At one point after he was denied boarding, Charles asked to see a copy of the airline's denied boarding procedure. This was a reasonable request, and he should ask the airline in writing for a copy of their policy. If Charles were to file a formal complaint to the airline, he should search the airline's web site for their contract of carriage or similar document, and find an airline regulation that directly applies to his case. Even if there is nothing that directly addresses his situation, the amount of detailed information provided by Charles may be justification for some kind of compensation from the airline. If the airline were at fault, requesting a refund of any extra costs associated with the trip is reasonable. However, Charles may want to consider other compensation such as one or two round-trip tickets.

AirSafe.com agrees with the airline that complaining about this situation to a federal government agency will likely do little good. The most relevant agency is the Department of Transportation (DOT), and at best the complaint may end up in a statistical summary of complaints for that airline. If Charles has gone through the process for complaining to the airline, then he can use that information to also file a complaint to the DOT.

### **Case 3: Always check with your airline to confirm your flight**

After much planning for the Christmas & New Years holidays, I had a less than pleasant experience on my leg from Kansas City to Salina, Kansas on Christmas Eve. Due to inclement weather, my flight (United flight 5096) was cancelled and rescheduled for the

next day. This flight was again cancelled and found that the next actual flight that made it to Salina, Kansas from Kansas City was for the night of December 26th. By the way, my luggage (a new red roller bag) finally showed up filthy at that time. This was a fairly recent purchase also. The only reason I made it to Salina was the kindness of strangers from Pennsylvania that invited me to drive there with them or I would have been stranded.

Before my return flight on January 1st on United flight 5033, I received a call from the Salina airport December 31 around 5pm indicating that my flight was cancelled due to lack of no one working to fly the plane. I was rescheduled for the same departure time and flight number for January 2nd and again informed by the Salina airport that this flight was cancelled due to lack of no one to fly the plane.

I was rescheduled to fly back on January 3rd. This is the "funny part;" I even received courtesy calls from Orbitz around 3:30 am January 1st saying that my flight from Salina to Kansas City was on time. Another "funny" is that two booking sites that I checked indicated that these flights were still booking passengers for the Friday and Saturday flights that were cancelled.

I work in Customer Service and although I had no problems with the people I dealt with as far as courtesy as they were apologetic, after spending \$594.40 for my round trip flight from Michigan to Kansas and not getting the service I paid for, along with luggage problems and added expenses and inconvenience, I am requesting two round trip non-blackout days tickets in the continental US. I feel this is the least I deserve after having to change plans inconveniencing myself and my family.

#### ***AirSafe.com Responds***

Unfortunately, US airlines on domestic flights are not required to compensate passengers for canceled flights or late flights, so this passenger would be lucky to get anything out of the airline. There is more hope about compensation for the damaged bag, so long as the passenger can document the condition of the bag before the flight, for example a receipt showing that it was a recent purchased plus photos showing the current condition of the bag.

While you may get information about a flight from an online service, you should contact the airline directly if you have any questions about your flight, especially for delays and cancellations. While a non-airline service like Orbitz may also provide flight information, the airline usually provides much more reliable and more frequently updated information on the status of current and future flights.

#### **Case 4: Always check your boarding pass for mistakes**

I admit I must have hit the date wrong on the crummy Delta Website causing a ticket to be reserved for the following month instead of today. It was a shuttle flight that was half empty on the BOS-LGA leg since it was a Saturday. When I could not get a boarding pass online for the return flight, I realized that the wrong date was entered. The Reissue clerk (who would not even listen to my explanation without babbling on about the change fee of \$150 per person, which would have cost an additional \$300 for two of us, simply refused to hear any plea EVEN IF THE PLANE TODAY WAS HALF EMPTY. I admit it must have been partially my mistake and partially their website mistake but come on \$150 to

change a ticket for the damn shuttle on a weekend.

### ***AirSafe.com Responds***

Always check and double check the information on any airline reservation or boarding pass, including the name, date and time of travel, flight number, departure airport, and destination airport. Especially important is your name since it must match the ID that all adults need in order to fly (while minors are not required to have an ID for domestic flights, it is a good idea to carry one if they have it).

Unfortunately, if you don't follow the airline's rules, you are at their mercy when it comes to things like change fees. You can try to talk to a customer service supervisor at the airport, but if that doesn't work, your best option is to file a formal complaint with the airline and hope for the best. You should request that the extra fees should be refunded, or if that is not possible you could ask for a discount on a future reservation with that airline.

### **Additional Information**

[Complaint Basics](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

[When You Should Not Complain](#)

[How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)

[FlightsGoneBad.com](#)

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## **Basic Baggage and Security Advice**

Only the rare passenger flies without carrying at least one piece of carry-on baggage, and many have to check one or more pieces of luggage as well. It is not possible to avoid all baggage-related and security-related problems that could lead to a complaint against the airline or the TSA, but there are many ways to either avoid the problem altogether, reduce the negative impact of problems should they occur, or give yourself the best chance of a positive outcome if you have to make a complaint.

No matter what precautions you take, there is always the risk of having items lost, misplaced, stolen, or damaged, many of the common risks can be reduced, avoided, or eliminated with a little bit of planning. The following pieces of advice provide some basic information on how to deal with many of the more common baggage related issues.

### **General baggage advice**

There are only a few basic things to always avoid when it comes to either carry-on bags or checked luggage, mostly having to do with prohibited items. There are the obvious items that you should never pack such as illegal drugs or explosive devices. However, most other items that you should not pack are not so obvious, especially items that may be allowed in checked bags but not in carry-on bags.

### **Baggage limits**

In general, airlines allow you to bring without additional charge up to two pieces of carry-on baggage (one of which can fit under your seat), plus some additional items such as umbrellas, and baby strollers. Additional baggage may cost you extra. Typically, you have to check in at least 30 minutes prior to departure for domestic flights in order to ensure that your checked luggage ends up on your airplane. Your airline may have more restrictive rules on check in time, especially for international flights. When in doubt, contact your airline for its specific baggage policies.

### **Identify your baggage**

You should clearly identify all of your baggage, both checked and carry-on bags. Identification should include your contact information on both the outside and inside of your bag. You should also put some kind of personalized identification on the outside like a ribbon or sticker to make it easier to spot in the baggage claim area. You should also do the same for any carry-on bag that is too big to fit under the seat, since in some cases your larger carry-on bag may be checked if there is no room in the overhead bins.

### **Know what you are carrying**

Watch your bags while you are at the airport and don't accept packages from strangers. Be prepared to answer questions about who packed your bags and whether you might have left them unattended at any time. Think carefully and answer honestly--history has shown that criminals and terrorists use unwitting passengers to carry bombs or other dangerous items on board aircraft, either by tricking passengers into carrying packages or by simply slipping items into unwatched bags. If you have any doubts, say so.

### **Expect to have your bags searched**

Both carry-on and checked bags are subject to being hand-searched, especially when airline security personnel cannot determine by X-ray the contents of a package. Leave gifts unwrapped until after you arrive at your destination. Airline security personnel will open it if X-rays are unable to identify the contents.

**Allow extra time for special circumstances**

During busy periods, or when traveling with young children or infants, or with elderly or disabled passengers, arrive earlier than you usually would.

**Keep your photo identification handy**

If you do not have a photo ID, make sure you have two pieces of identification, one of which must be issued by a government authority. The TSA does not require that minors aged 17 and younger have a government-issued photo identification for domestic US flights, though all passengers should have a passport if traveling internationally. Failure to have proper identification may result in additional security scrutiny. Some airlines may prohibit you from boarding without proper ID.

**Additional Information**

[Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints](#)

[Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols](#)

[How to Travel with Duty-free Liquid Items](#)

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## **Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice**

A reasonable approach to carry-on baggage is to keep in mind three things when you pack: think small, think smart, and think safe. If you follow these ideas, you will likely have fewer problems with your carry-ons.

### **Think small**

- \* The maximum size carry-on bag for most airlines is 45 linear inches (the total of the height, width, and depth of the bag). Anything larger should be checked.
- \* No oversize packages or large pieces of luggage can be carried in the overhead bins in the cabin.
- \* Important, hard to replace, and valuable items like prescription drugs, personal electronics, jewelry, and important documents, should always be in your carry-on bags.
- \* If you only have carry-on bags, you will avoid the checked bag fees charged by most airlines.

### **Think smart**

- \* If you plan to check one or more bags, put heavier and less valuable items in your checked bag, and keep your carry-on as light as possible.
- \* Check with your airline before packing to determine its carry-on guidelines. Typically, you are allowed to carry one bag that can fit in the overhead bin, one that can fit under the seat, and additional items like a coat, cane, or umbrella.
- \* In certain situations the airline may require larger carry-on bags to be checked, so be prepared to place all your valuable or necessary items in something small enough to fit under the seat (like a large purse or small backpack).
- \* Put contact information both inside and outside your carry-on in case the airline has to check it at the last minute.

### **Think safe**

- \* Beware of carry-on items that may fall from overhead bins during the flight.
- \* If possible, stow heavier items under the seat in front of you, not overhead.
- \* Don't crowd or stuff items into the overhead storage bin.
- \* If an emergency evacuation is necessary, leave your carry-on items on the plane.
- \* Remember, be safety conscious when stowing your carry-on items, or taking them out either in flight or after landing.

### **Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Common airline baggage fees](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

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## Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks

If you are traveling with carry-on luggage, even if it is just a small bag or purse, there are a few things you should do to avoid most of the problems you may face during security screening, in the terminal, or in the plane:

**Prepare to have your bags searched** - Before you get to the airplane, you have to go through airport security, and that means putting your carry-on baggage through the x-ray machine, and having your bags opened up and inspected by airport security.

**Know what's allowed in the cabin** - There are many rules about what is allowed in the aircraft in your carry-on baggage. Review the [descriptions of hazardous and prohibited items](#) elsewhere in this ebook, and also review the rules your particular airline may have.

**Keep track of your bags** - In the terminal, especially in the areas beyond the security screener checkpoints, unattended baggage may be a target for thieves, and may be confiscated or even destroyed by airport security.

**Prepare to have your carry-on checked** - If your airplane runs out of room in the overhead storage compartment, your airline may check your bag at the last minute. Keep critical items like medicine and eyeglasses and valuable items like jewelry and cash in a separate bag or pouch that is small enough to fit under an airline seat. If you are forced to check your carry-on, take out this smaller bag and keep it with you.

**Don't overpack your bag** - Make sure your carry-on bag is light enough for you or someone else to easily lift it and put it in the overhead bin.

**Beware of overhead bin hazards** - If someone puts a heavy bag or item in the overhead bin that is above your head, or if the bin is hard to close, you should ask a flight attendant to check the security of the overhead bin.

### Additional Information

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

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## Reducing Checked Luggage Complaints

Any time that you fly with checked luggage, you run the risk of having your bag damaged, stolen, lost, or delayed. While most airlines would not compensate you for minor damage and normal wear and tear (including broken wheels or torn handles), or for most cases of baggage theft, you may get compensated if the damage to the bag or its contents was significant, if the airline lost your bag, or if you did not get your bag back in a timely manner.

### **What is the chance that you will have a checked bag problem?**

If you fly enough times with checked luggage, you will very likely have a checked bag problem. The US Department of Transportation's *Air Travel Consumer Report* for February 2012 stated that in 2011, there were 3.51 reports of lost, delayed, damaged, or stolen checked bags for every 1,000 flights by *all* passengers on 16 of the largest US airlines, or about a 0.35% chance that an average passenger has this experience on a particular flight.

This seems to be a very low number until you consider that most passengers make a round trip whenever they fly, boosting the rate to about 0.7% per round trip. Also, this number was for all passengers, including those who don't check a bag. The rate experienced by passengers who actually check bags is likely greater than 1%, and possibly higher since some problems may have never been reported.

Assuming that there was a 1% chance that you will have a checked bag problem during a trip, a simple probability model (the binomial distribution for you math fans out there), shows that you have a 22% chance of a problem at least once every 25 round trips, and a 63% chance after 100 trips. If the actual probability were 2% rather than 1%, your chances increase to 40% after 25 trips and 87% after 100 trips. In other words, if you check bags on enough flights, you will likely experience having a checked bag lost, delayed, stolen, or damaged at least once.

### **Eliminating checked luggage risks**

While you may not be able to avoid problems with your checked bag, there are several things that you can do to eliminate the risk, or at least reduce the negative impacts of these kinds of events:

**Use only carry-on bags** - Not having checked luggage means no chance of a checked bag problem.

**Travel with as few checked bags as possible** - Your chance of a problem goes up with every additional bag. Also, airlines with checked bag fees may charge a premium if you have more than one checked bag.

**Make your checked bags easy to inspect** - In the US, the TSA has to be able to inspect a checked bag, so your bag should remain unlocked (with some exceptions such as firearms which must be placed in an appropriate locked container after inspection), or that you use a TSA-approved lock. If an improperly locked checked bag or its contents are damaged because of a security inspection, you will not be

compensated for any damage.

**Make sure that your checked bag is within airline limits** - Airlines have size and dimension limits for checked bags, so check before you pack.

**Make sure that your checked items are properly packaged** - Sports items such as golf clubs or skis, or other checked items that are not standard luggage items should be packed appropriately to prevent damage from normal handling.

**Make sure that your airline properly tags your bag** - At check in, make sure that the numbers on the tag the gate agent attaches to each piece of checked luggage matches the numbers on your baggage claim tickets. Also, ensure that you and your bag are going to the same destination airport.

**Put contact information on the outside and the inside of each checked bag** - This makes it easier for the airline to reunite you with your bag if it is delayed.

**Make your bag easy to identify** - To avoid taking the wrong bag from the baggage claim area (or having someone take your bag by mistake), make your bag easy to identify. Some easy things to do include attaching colored ribbons or stickers to the bag.

**Don't put valuables in a checked bag** - There are many categories of items that airlines will not pay to replace or repair if they are lost, damaged, or stolen. These categories include cash, jewelry, precious metals, cameras, electronic devices, and other high value items. These sorts of things should be kept on your person, or in your carry-on bags. Review the section [Things You Should Never Put In Checked Baggage](#) for more details on what you should keep out of your checked bag. If you must ship a valuable item in checked luggage, look into purchasing appropriate insurance to cover any financial losses if the item is stolen, damaged or lost.

**Don't put hard to replace items in a checked bag** - If an item will cause you excessive amounts of inconvenience if it is lost, stolen, or damaged, don't put it in a checked bag. This would include items like mail, checks, credit cards, prescription drugs, other medical items, eyeglasses, keys, identity documents such as passports and drivers licenses, and travel documents. Review the section [Things You Should Never Put In Checked Baggage](#) for more details on what you should keep out of your checked bag.

**Keep fragile items out of checked luggage** - Such items should be in your carry-on bags. Even a properly packed fragile item may be at risk in your checked luggage if that item has to be unwrapped in order to be inspected.

**Prepare for a lost, stolen, damaged, or delayed checked bag** - Checked bags that are delayed usually arrive within a day or two, so pack your carry-on bags so that you will be able to survive for 48 hours at your destination without your checked bags. If you are checking more than one piece of luggage, distribute items so that the loss of one bag will not cause undue hardship. Be prepared to keep a record of any costs related to your delayed or missing bag, or to any damage to the bag or contents so that you can later submit a claim to the airline or to the TSA.

**Check your bags after arrival** - Go through your checked luggage after arrival to see if anything is damaged or missing, or if extra items were placed in the bag. If there is a problem, make sure you contact your airline as soon as possible. When you

get your bag at your destination, make sure that the number or other identifying information on your claim ticket matches the information on your bag.

**Fill out appropriate paperwork as soon as possible** - If your checked bag doesn't arrive at the airport with you, or you notice any damage or other problem with your bag, contact the appropriate airline, airport security, or law enforcement representative and file the appropriate report, preferably before you leave the airport. Keep copies of any reports that you submit so that you can use them if you file a complaint in the future.

**Don't file a formal complaint too early** - While it may be appropriate to make an informal complaint when you have a checked bag problem, give the airline or the TSA time to resolve your problem before you file a formal complaint.

### **What to do once you know you have a problem**

The first step would be to immediately notify the airline, or other responsible organization, of the problem. If there is a report that you have to submit or some other process that you must perform, start the process as soon as possible.

Depending on the problem, you may not be able to complete this process while still at the airport. For example, if items from your luggage were missing or damaged, and you wanted to file a claim for compensation, you may have to take time to gather supporting documentation before you submit a claim. You should complete your documentation as soon as possible, making sure you keep copies of whatever you submit.

For much more detailed advice on what you should do after you know you have a checked luggage problem, including when to file a formal complaint, review the section [Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#).

### **Additional Information**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Complaint Basics](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[How to Complain About Your Airline Service](#)

[Dealing with Lost, Stolen, Damaged, or Delayed Luggage](#)

[Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage](#)

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## **Top 10 Baggage Tips**

If you heed the following advice, you will run into fewer baggage-related problems, and fewer opportunities to have your baggage problem turn into a formal complaint.

### **1. Travel with only carry-on luggage**

By using only carry-on luggage, you do not risk having checked luggage lost, damaged, or stolen.

### **2. Remember that you are responsible for carry-on items**

While airlines may compensate you for lost or damaged checked baggage items, your carry-on bags are your responsibility. However, if the airline has to check your carry-on bag, then checked bag rules apply.

### **3. Put your contact information inside and outside every bag.**

In addition to having contact information on the inside and outside of all your bags, including carry-ons, you may also want to put a copy of your itinerary inside every bag to make it easier for the airline to reunite you if you are separated from your luggage. You would do this with your carry-on bag in case you are forced to check that bag at the last minute. For personal security reasons, you may want to use an address other than your home address and a mobile phone number rather than a home number.

### **4. Customize the look of your bag to make it easy to identify.**

Many bags on a flight may have a similar design, so customize the bag to make it easy to spot in the baggage claim area. This will keep other passengers from picking it up by mistake, and help keep you from picking up someone else's bag by mistake.

### **5. Keep valuable items with you.**

Money, laptop computers, electronic files, and other items of high value or importance should be kept in a carry-on bag, preferably one that is small enough to stow under a seat. You want to keep the high value items in a bag small enough to fit under a seat because the airline may insist on checking larger carry-on bags if the overhead bins become filled.

### **6. Check that the tag on your checked luggage is for the correct destination.**

Every piece of checked luggage should have a three-letter airport identifier that matches your destination airport. If you are unsure of the city associated with the code, ask the ticket agent or skycap. Also, make sure that the claim number on each bag's tag matches the claim number on your receipt.

### **7. Make sure that you keep the stub or receipt from your checked luggage.**

This is the information you will need if your luggage is lost by the airline or if you are trying to prove that you own a piece of luggage.

### **8. Immediately report missing or damaged checked luggage.**

If your checked bag does not arrive at your destination, immediately report this problem to the baggage agent on duty, or to any other available representative from your airline. Also, if you see any significant damage to your checked bag, report it to the airline immediately.

Be sure to follow the airline's procedures, including filling out any appropriate documentation, and to keep a copy of any documentation you submit to the airline.

**9. Prepare to deal with a lost or delayed checked bag.**

Pack key items in your carry-on bag like extra underwear or essential items for a business meeting so you can continue your trip if your checked bags are lost or delayed.

**10. Be prepared to justify any claims for lost or damaged checked items**

For damaged items, it may be easy to demonstrate the amount of damage and the cost of a replacement. If your bag is lost, you will also have to demonstrate the cost of the replacement item, but if it were a high priced item, you may have to provide proof of the original cost.

**Bonus tip #1 - Traveling with gifts**

If you carry gifts, either in checked or carry-on baggage, make sure they are unwrapped. TSA has to be able to inspect any package and would have to unwrap a wrapped gift to do so. If you don't want to fly with unwrapped gifts, you can mail or ship wrapped gifts ahead of time, or wait until you arrive at your destination to wrap them.

**Bonus tip #2 - If your airline switches planes**

If you get assigned to a new aircraft, for example after a flight is cancelled, ask if you and your checked bags will be on the same plane. If not, be prepared to deal with the airline's lost or missing bag procedures. Also, be prepared to have your larger carry-on items become checked luggage if the new aircraft has smaller overhead bins, or if you are going to be squeezed into an already heavily booked flight.

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## **Top 10 Baggage Claim Tips**

If you check luggage, you will have to pick it up in the baggage claim area, sometimes called the baggage reclaim area in airports outside the US. No matter where you are in the world, you face the same kind of problems, like the airline losing or damaging your bag, or having someone stealing your luggage. If you follow the tips below, you can avoid most baggage claim problems.

### **1. Try to pack less**

The easiest way to avoid baggage claim problems is to not have any checked bags. If you plan on checking two bags, and you find that you can travel with only one checked bag, than do so. If you can get by with just carry-on items, that would be even better. In the US, most airlines allow one carry-on bag that can fit in the overhead bin, and one smaller item that can be placed under your seat. Also, there are many exceptions to carry-on limits for things like baby strollers, medical devices, and child seats.

### **2. Make your bag easy to find**

Many bags look alike, so to make it easy to find your bag quickly, do one or two things to the outside like tying a bright ribbon to a handle or putting a decal on the side.

### **3. Put your contact information on your bags and inside each bag**

Many bags come with a tag with a little address card. Put your name and contact information on the card. If you put an address, put one where you want the bag to be delivered. You may want to also put a phone number or email address where you can be reached when you are traveling. You may want to put the same information inside the bag as well.

### **4. Check the Information on the luggage tag**

At the check in counter, when the airline puts their luggage tag on the bag, make sure that the information is correct. The most important pieces of information are the origin and destination airports, which are three-letter codes that will be in capital letters. If you don't know what they are for your departure and arrival airports, ask when you check in. Many tags will also have information about the flight number, and perhaps your name. Make sure that any identification number or other information on your bag's tag matches the information on your claim ticket.

### **5. Get to the baggage claim area before your bags do**

After your plane gets to the gate, make your way to the baggage claim area. If you are in an unfamiliar airport with a large baggage claim area, there may be many baggage carousels. If you are not sure where to go, ask one of your airline's agents, or look for a baggage carousel information board that lists which carousel will have your flight's bags. Even if you are the last person out of a crowded plane, you should be able to get to the baggage claim area ahead of your bags.

### **6. Get into position to grab your bag**

By the time the baggage carousel starts and bags start to come out, there will likely be a crowd of people looking for bags. Because the baggage claim area is not in the secure part

of the terminal, you may have to deal with many other people besides the passengers on your flight, including potential thieves. Don't be shy; get close to the carousel so you can grab your bag the first time it comes by.

### **7. Keep off the baggage carousel**

If you get to the carousel before the bags arrive, it may not be moving, and it may be tempting to either sit on the carousel or to let your child play on it. Don't do it. The machine can start at any time and without warning.

### **8. Check your tags before you leave the baggage claim area**

After you collect all your bags, check the tags on your bags with your claim ticket. If the information does not match, check your bag more closely to see if you picked up the wrong bag. If you did, put it back on the carousel. If you accidentally take someone else's bag away from the baggage claim area, you will be responsible for returning it either to the airline or the bag's owner. Also, check to see that the number of bags you have matches the number of claim tickets you have. At the end of a long flight, you may be tired and not thinking clearly, so count your bags before you go.

### **9. Prepare for a missing, damaged, or stolen bag**

Sometimes bad things happen to your checked luggage even if you take reasonable precautions. A little bit of preparation can help the airline locate a missing bag, or help you get compensation for lost or damaged items. Among the things that you can do include keeping receipts from when you purchased your bag, or taking photos of the bag or its contents.

### **10. Check your bag for damage before you leave the airport**

While airlines won't compensate you for broken wheels, minor scratches, missing handles, or other things that they consider to be normal wear and tear, if you have major damage to your bag that you think was caused by the airline, report it to the airline as soon as possible. It is best to do it before you leave the airport. If you file a claim, make sure that you follow the airline's procedures for making claims for lost or damaged luggage. You should also keep copies of any documentation you submit to the airline.

### **Bonus Tip - Stolen or misidentified luggage is not the airline's responsibility**

The airline is only responsible for luggage that was lost or damaged while under their control. If someone steals your luggage from the baggage claim area, or if someone accidentally takes your luggage by mistake (or if you take someone else's luggage by mistake), the airline has no further responsibility. If your luggage was stolen, then you should contact the appropriate law enforcement agency. If someone takes a piece of luggage by mistake, it is the responsibility of that person to return that luggage to its rightful owner.

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## Items Banned from Checked and Carry-on Baggage

In the US, both the TSA and the airlines have baggage rules and restrictions that will determine what you can bring on board the aircraft or into the secure area of the airport terminal. Most other countries have similar rules about what is allowed and what is not allowed. Because airline rules and security threats may change at any time, you should check with your airline if you have any questions about any rule changes, or about a particular item that you may want to bring on board.

If you have banned items in your checked or carry-on baggage, you will either not be allowed to bring them on the aircraft, or they may be confiscated or destroyed by the authorities. You would likely be fully responsible for any costs, including fines, related to your banned items.

The following items are completely banned from aircraft, and should not be brought to the airport:

**Explosive and incendiary materials:** Gunpowder (including black powder and percussion caps), dynamite, blasting caps, fireworks, flares, plastic explosives, grenades, and replicas of incendiary or explosive devices.

**Flammable items:** Gasoline, gas torches, lighter fluid, cooking fuel, other types of flammable liquid fuel, flammable paints, paint thinner, turpentine, aerosols (exceptions for personal care items, toiletries, or medically related items).

**Lighters:** Torch lighters, which are commonly used to light cigars or pipes, are completely banned from the aircraft (though common cigarette lighters are allowed in carry-on baggage).

**Gases and pressure containers:** Aerosols (with the exception of personal care items or toiletries in limited quantities), carbon dioxide cartridges, tanks or cylinders containing compressed gases, mace, tear gas, pepper spray, self-inflating rafts, and deeply refrigerated gases such as liquid nitrogen.

**Poisons:** Weed killers, pesticides, insecticides, rodent poisons, arsenic, and cyanides.

**Matches:** All matches are banned from checked baggage, and strike-anywhere matches are banned completely from aircraft, but you can have a single book of safety (non-strike anywhere) matches with you in the passenger cabin.

**Oxidizers and organic peroxides:** Bleach, nitric acid, fertilizers, swimming pool or spa chemicals, and fiberglass repair kits.

**Infectious Materials:** Medical laboratory specimens, viral organisms, and bacterial cultures.

**Corrosives:** Drain cleaners, car batteries, wet cell batteries, acids, alkalis, lye, and mercury.

**Organics:** Fiberglass resins, peroxides.

**Radioactive materials:** Most such materials are banned, but there are some exceptions for implanted radioactive medical devices. Contact your airline for details

on how to ship other radioactive materials.

**Magnetic materials:** Strong magnets such as those in some loudspeakers and laboratory equipment.

**Note:** If you are in any doubt about whether your item may be hazardous, you should bring it to the attention of either your airline or the security screener.

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## Items Allowed Only in Checked Baggage

TSA has prohibited the following items from airplane cabins and carry-on baggage, but they may (with some exceptions) be carried in a checked bag. These limitations are similar for airlines around the world:

**Sporting goods:** Bats (baseball, softball, cricket), hockey sticks, lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows, skis, ski poles, spear guns, golf clubs, and pool cues.

**Knives:** Knives of any length, composition or description (except for plastic or round bladed butter knives), swords, machetes, and martial arts weapons such as throwing stars.

**Cutting instruments:** Carpet knives and box cutters (and spare blades), any device with a folding or retractable blade, ice picks, straight razors, and metal scissors with pointed tips. Small scissors with a cutting edge less than four inches (10 cm) are allowed in the cabin.

**Firearms:** Pistols, flare guns, BB guns, rifles, and other firearms must be unloaded, packed in a locked hard-sided container, and declared to the airline at check-in. There are limited exceptions to the firearms and ammunition rules for law enforcement officers. In the United States, federal laws apply to aircraft and to the secure areas of the airport such as the gate areas. State or local laws concerning the carrying of concealed or unconcealed weapons do not apply. Attempting to enter the secure area of the terminal with weapons, even accidentally, may lead to your arrest.

**Firearm replicas:** Realistic replicas of firearms must be carried as checked baggage. Toy weapons that are not realistic are allowed in checked or carry-on baggage.

**Firearm parts:** They should be treated like firearms and only carried in checked baggage.

**Ammunition:** In the US, small arms ammunitions for personal use must also be declared to the airline at check-in, and must be securely packed in fiber, wood or metal boxes or other packaging specifically designed to carry small amounts of ammunition. Ammunition, if properly packaged, can also be carried in the same hard-sided case as an unloaded firearm. You should check with the airline to see if it has additional restrictions on either firearms or ammunition.

**Paintball guns:** Compressed air guns, including paintball guns, may be carried in checked luggage without the compressed air cylinder attached. Tanks or cylinders with compressed gases are not allowed on aircraft.

**Tools:** Tools greater than seven inches (17.8 cm) in length can only be carried in checked baggage. Also, power tools such as drills should also be in checked baggage. Shorter tools, such as wrenches, screwdrivers, and pliers, may be carried in carry-on baggage. Any tool with a sharp or cutting edge like a hand saw, box cutter, or drill bit are also limited to checked baggage. If you have a toolbox in checked baggage, make sure you check every compartment to make sure that your toolbox does not have any containers with flammable liquids, utility lighters, micro torches, or other banned items. Larger equipment like a stepladder or circular saw should be

checked.

**Dry ice (frozen carbon dioxide):** Up to four pounds (1.8 kg) may be carried on board for packing perishables, providing the package is vented.

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## Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage

There are many items that are not hazardous or prohibited that you can carry either in checked baggage, in carry-on baggage, or on your person. However, if it is an item that is hard to replace, very expensive, or necessary for your health and well being, then you should never put that item in checked baggage. If you do place these kinds of items in checked luggage, and they are lost, damaged, or stolen, it is very unlikely that the airline will reimburse you for any losses:

**Money related items:** Cash, credit cards, travelers cheques, checkbooks, securities, and anything else that has monetary value should either be on your person or in your carry-on baggage. If you lose money-related items in your checked baggage, airlines are not obligated to compensate you.

**Jewelry:** Necklaces, rings, diamonds, other precious stones, gold, silver, other precious metals, expensive watches, and other small and valuable items should also stay out of checked baggage. Like the situation with money related items, the airline isn't obligated to compensate you for a loss.

**Musical instruments:** Airlines will not reimburse you for a lost or damaged musical instrument that was in checked baggage. If the instrument is too large to be a carry-on item and you need to use the instrument at your destination, you may want to consider purchasing additional insurance, shipping it separately, or buying another ticket and placing the instrument in the seat next to you.

**Computers, electronic devices, and accessories:** Laptops, cell phones, portable data storage devices, and other small personal electronic devices should remain on your person or in your carry-on bags.

**Medically related items:** Prescription medication, other medications, and other medical items should remain with you in the cabin.

**Perishable items:** Food items that may spoil after a day or two should be in your carry-on luggage. The only exception would be those items such as liquids or gels that are banned from the cabin.

**Other items:** If it is small and valuable, or if replacing it would be difficult or expensive, then keep it with you in the cabin. Examples include passports and other identification, keys, eyeglasses, photos, tickets, art, boarding passes, travel vouchers, mail, financial records, business documents, software, manuscripts, heirlooms, collectible items, and favorite toys. If you have something else that is small and that you don't want to lose, keep it with you.

### Last minute bag check

Sometimes on full or nearly full flights, the airplane may run out of room, and you may be forced to check your carry-on bag at the gate. You should pack your carry-on bag in a manner so that if it must be gate-checked, you can quickly remove the fragile, valuable and critical items and place them in a smaller bag that you can fit under a seat.

If your carry-on bag is too big to fit under your seat, and it contains valuable or very hard to replace items, insist that the bag stay with you in the cabin. If necessary, work with the

flight attendant to keep your items with you in the plane.

### **Other options**

If you have no choice but to put a valuable item in checked baggage, you should take steps to protect your items from theft, damage, or loss. This includes options like purchasing appropriate insurance, shipping it separately, leaving the item at home, or even buying another ticket and putting the valuable item in an adjacent passenger seat.

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## **Restrictions on Liquids, Gels, and Aerosols**

In August 2006, authorities in the United Kingdom uncovered an alleged plot to sabotage as many as 10 US airliners traveling from the United Kingdom to the United States, reportedly by using liquid and gel based explosives. Since then, the US and most other countries have restricted what liquids, gels, and aerosols a passenger may have in the passenger cabin.

If you have these kinds of items in your carry-on bags, you will likely either have to throw them away, put them in a checked bag, or ship them to your destination by some other means. It is the passenger's responsibility to understand these basic restrictions, so if you file a complaint because of the cost and inconvenience of dealing with these rules, you will likely get no compensation from the airlines or the TSA. In the US, the general TSA restrictions are as follows:

### **Liquid, gel, and aerosol products**

Passengers may bring these items into the secure area of the airport, so long as each individual container has a capacity of no greater than 3.4 fluid ounces (100 ml).

### **Snow globes**

Snow globes and similar liquid-filled decorations, no matter what size, can only be carried in checked luggage.

### **Food items**

Food items largely made out of liquid or gel products are only allowed in checked baggage. While you can buy these items in the secure part of the terminal after you pass through security, you are not allowed to bring liquid or gel type food items from outside the secure area of the airport. The following should either be placed in checked baggage or left at home:

- \* Cranberry sauce
- \* Creamy dips and spreads (cheeses, peanut butter, etc.)
- \* Gravy
- \* Jams, jellies, and syrup
- \* Oils and vinegars
- \* Salad dressing
- \* Salsa
- \* Sauces
- \* Soups
- \* Wine, liquor and beer
- \* Gift baskets with one or more of the above items

There are exceptions for small amounts of gels, liquids, and aerosols if the container has a capacity of less than 3.4 fluid ounces (100 ml). If it is in a larger container, and you can pour it, pump it, squeeze it, spread it, smear it, spray it, or spill it, you probably can't take it through security.

## **Exemptions for Liquid and gel products**

Passengers can go through the security screening with liquid, gel, or aerosol items if they fall under one of the following exemptions:

**Purchased after screening:** Once a passenger has passed through security screening, they can purchase liquid, aerosol, or gel products in the terminal and take them on to the plane.

**Prescription and over the counter drugs:** Prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and health related items such as diabetes related supplies, petroleum jelly, lubricating gels, eye drops, and saline solution.

**Disabled passengers:** Liquids including water, juice, or liquid nutrition or gels for passengers with a disability or medical condition.

**Life-support and life-sustaining liquids:** Items such as bone marrow, blood products, and transplant organs fit into this category. Frozen gels or liquids are permitted if they required to cool medical items or nutrition related supplies such as infant formula. Ice is permitted as long as there is no melted liquid present

**Certain prosthetic devices:** Items used to augment the body for medical or cosmetic reasons such as mastectomy products, prosthetic breasts; and bras or shells containing gels, saline solution, or other liquids.

**Infants and small children:** Baby formula, breast milk, juice or water is allowed for a traveling infant small child. Breast milk is in the same category as liquid medications. A mother flying without her child should be able to bring breast milk through the checkpoint, provided it is declared prior to screening.

**Cosmetic and hygiene items:** Solid cosmetics and personal hygiene items such as lipstick in a tube, solid deodorant, lip balm and similar solids are allowed. Please remember these items must be solid and not in liquid, gel or aerosol form.

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## **TSA Identification Requirements**

Before you can board a plane at a US airport, you have to have identification that meets TSA requirements. For domestic US travel, an unexpired passport (from any country) or other government-issued photo ID (from a number of national, state, or local entities in the US) is required for travelers age 18 and over. This ID must contain the following: name, date of birth, gender, expiration date and a tamper-resistant feature in order for a passenger to be allowed to go through the checkpoint.

While children under the age of 18 who are traveling on domestic flights are not required to have an approved IDs, it is a good idea for a child to use one if he or she has one. For international travel, children, even infants, have to meet the same identification requirements as adults, typically a valid passport.

### **Acceptable forms of ID for domestic US flights**

The TSA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has an extensive list of acceptable ID for flights between domestic US airports, including common forms of identification such as a drivers license or a state issued ID card:

- \* US passport
- \* US passport card
- \* DHS "Trusted Traveler" cards (NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST)
- \* US Military ID (active duty, retired, dependents, and DOD civilians)
- \* Permanent Resident Card (for non-US citizens residing in the US)
- \* Border Crossing Card
- \* DHS-designated enhanced drivers license
- \* Drivers Licenses or other state photo identity cards issued by a state Department of Motor Vehicles (or equivalent organization)
- \* Native American Tribal Photo ID
- \* Airline or airport-issued ID (if issued under a TSA-approved security plan)
- \* Passport issued by a national government
- \* Canadian provincial drivers license or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) card
- \* Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC)

Citizens of countries other than the US or Canada are not required to carry their passports if they have documents issued by the US government such as Permanent Resident Cards. Those who do not should be use their passports.

### **Unacceptable forms of ID**

Examples of types of ID, even if they are photo IDs, that are not accepted include the following:

- \* Employee badge
- \* School or university ID card
- \* Credit or debit card
- \* Library card

### **What if you don't have an acceptable ID?**

You may still be allowed to fly if you don't have an acceptable ID, though you should allow extra time for the TSA to use an alternative method of identification. Bring any ID or documents they have available (including expired valid photo IDs) to assist in verification of identity.

Passengers need at least two alternate forms of identification, such as a social security card, birth certificate, marriage license, or credit card. The documents must bear the name of the passenger. Also, one of these documents must bear identification information containing one of the following: date of birth, gender, address, or photo. If TSA can confirm your identity, you may be allowed to enter the secured part of the airport terminal area, but you may be subject to additional screening.

### **International travel**

In most cases, international travelers of any age will need to have a valid passport, and depending on the country being visited, a valid visa. Some countries, including the US and Canada, may have agreements that allow travelers from selected countries to use passport alternatives when entering the country.

Check with your airline or with the appropriate government office to find out what identification and visa requirements you have to follow for the countries you plan to visit. Many countries require that your passport be valid for at least six months after you enter the country. If you plan to stay in a country beyond your passport's expiration date, you may want to consider getting a new passport before you travel.

### **Tickets and boarding passes**

In the US, to enter the secure area of the airport, including boarding areas, most passengers will have to have both an acceptable form of identification and either a ticket or a boarding pass. Many travelers use electronic tickets, and those travelers will have to have a boarding pass before entering the security checkpoint. In many cases, if you don't have any checked baggage, you can print out your boarding pass before getting to the airport or at a special kiosk at the airport. If you have checked bags, you can get your boarding pass when you check your bags at the check-in counter.

### **Complaints related to identification and travel documents**

If you have a problem with your flight due to an identification issue, you may complain to the airline or to the TSA, but it is unlikely that you would be compensated for any losses. It is the passengers' responsibility to make sure that their travel documents are in order before they fly. For example, if you miss a flight because you had to take extra time to go through security because TSA needed to check your alternative IDs, neither the TSA nor the airline would owe you anything for any extra costs.

If your passport, visa, or other travel documents were not in order, and the airline did not allow you to board an international flight, you are responsible for any costs that you incur. Also, if you travel overseas and were not allowed to enter your destination country, the airline is obligated to fly you back to your departure airport, but you would be responsible for paying for any extra costs associated with that return ticket.

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## **How to Travel with Duty-free Liquid Items**

One situation where complaining won't help you is where you have to give up a duty-free item because you unknowingly violated some law or regulation. If this kind of problem happens, it isn't practical for you to file a complaint because the organization that forces you to give up your duty-free item is typically a national customs or border control agency that is following strict guidelines on what can be brought into that country.

While confiscations can happen for all kinds of goods, one of the more common situations involves duty-free items containing liquids, aerosols, and gels. Typically these are expensive items such as liquor, perfume, or cosmetics. You should take extra precautions to ensure that your items will not be confiscated by security in the US or elsewhere. If this happens, neither the airline, duty-free shop, or security organization will compensate you for your loss.

The following suggestions apply only to those items in containers that are larger than 100 ml (3.4 fluid ounces) because only larger containers are subject to many of the common restrictions on liquids, gels, and aerosols. Categories of duty-free items that fall under these restrictions include the following:

- \* Liquor
- \* Wine
- \* Perfume and body sprays
- \* Facial cleansers and creams
- \* Body or hand lotions
- \* Liquid makeup

Many countries have similar restrictions on liquids, gels and aerosols, so you should be aware of confiscation risks whenever you purchase duty-free items.

Countries have different rules on how and where duty-free liquids, gels, and aerosols can be purchased, and how they can be transported after the purchase. The best way to transport these kinds of items will depend on where you make the purchase, whether you have to make a connection before your final destination, and your destination country.

### **Nonstop international flights from the US**

Duty-free purchases at US airports can only be made after you pass through security, so if you are on a nonstop flight to your final destination, you will be able to purchase liquids, aerosols, and gels of any size. The only limitation would be whether your destination country allows you to bring a particular kind of product, or a particular amount of a product, into that country.

### **Flights from the US with international connections**

If you have one or more connecting flights outside of the US, you will likely have to pass through security at least one more time. Most, but not all, countries will allow you to carry those items if you have them in an approved tamper-evident bag. If the duty-free store offers this kind of bag, make sure that your items are placed in this bag and that the bag is

sealed before you leave the store.

Tamper-evident bags may work for you in most situations, but there may be some places where this will not work for you:

- \* Some countries, including Japan, do not use or accept the approved tamper-evident duty-free bags, and passengers making a connection in those countries will not be allowed to take their duty-free items through security.

- \* Depending on the origin of your flight, some countries may not allow duty-free items of any kind from entering that country, or may not allow the importation of some types of duty-free items.

- \* If you or anyone else opens the tamper-evident bag before you make your connecting flight, even if by accident, you may not be allowed to keep any of the items in the bag.

Alternative duty-free purchasing options include waiting until you reach your destination airport to purchase items. If the last leg of your flight is an international flight, you may also have the option of ordering duty-free items either before takeoff or while on the plane, and having your purchases delivered to you before landing. These alternative purchasing options may not exist for your flight or for your destination airport, so if you are interested in these options, check ahead of time.

### **Flights with a US domestic leg before your nonstop international flight**

If you make one or more domestic connections, and your final leg is a nonstop flight to your international destination, you should wait until you are at the airport just before you depart on your international leg to buy your duty-free items. This is because you may have a situation where you have to pass through TSA security a second time before your international flight. If you have larger duty-free liquids, aerosols, or gels, you may be forced to discard them, even if they are in an approved tamper-evident bag.

### **Inbound international flight with a US airport as final destination**

If this is the last leg of your flight, you do not have to pass through security to exit the airport, so you are allowed to bring in any item, including liquids, gels, or aerosol items of any size. The only limitations may be if US customs authorities do not allow a particular category of products into the country, or if you have exceeded customs limits for certain classes of items such as liquor.

### **Making a connection after an international US arrival**

If you are making a connecting flight after arriving in the US, you will have to pass through TSA security before you can board your next flight. This means that if you have any liquid, aerosol, or gel items in containers larger than 3.4 ounces (100 ml), will not be permitted in your carry-on luggage, even if they are in a tamper-evident bag, because TSA does not approve of their use.

You can get around this restriction if you have checked luggage. In the US, if you are arriving from overseas and will be making a connecting flight, you will be required to reclaim your checked bags prior to passing through customs inspection. You can use this opportunity to place your larger duty-free liquids, aerosols, and gels in your luggage before

rechecking them for your connecting flight.

If you don't have a checked bag, you would have to discard any liquid, gel, or aerosol items larger than 3.4 ounces (100 ml), including your duty-free purchases. If you know that you are going to purchase these kinds of duty-free items, you can check some kind of bag, even a largely empty one, at your departure airport, and place your purchases into them after arriving in the US.

### **Rules in other countries**

Each country has different rules regarding duty-free items. In general, if you purchase the duty-free item on the last leg of your trip, whether it was purchased on the plane, or purchased at the departure airport, you will be allowed to bring the item into your destination country. However, you should always check the current laws and regulations of your destination country to see if there are any restrictions on your duty-free items.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Things You Should Never Put in Checked Baggage](#)

[Basic Carry-on Baggage Advice](#)

[Reducing Carry-on Baggage Risks](#)

[Top 10 Baggage Tips](#)

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## Top 10 Security Questions

### 1. What kind of identification do I need to fly?

In the US, there are several kinds of acceptable identification that you can use (review the [Identification Requirements](#) section of this book for details). When you buy your ticket, you have to provide your name, gender, and date of birth to the airline, and that information must match the information on your approved ID. When you get to the airport, you have to provide the TSA with your boarding pass, as well as an approved ID if you are over 18. For international trips, every passenger, even infants, must have a passport.

### 2. Can I fly without an approved identification?

Yes, but only under certain conditions. For domestic US flights, children under the age of 18 can fly without a TSA approved ID. All adult passengers (age 18 and over) are required to show a valid US federal or state-issued photo ID that contains their name, date of birth, gender, and an expiration date. A complete list of approved IDs is in the [Identification Requirements](#) section.

### 3. What do I do if I don't have an approved ID?

If you have never acquired an approved ID, or if your ID is expired or missing, you do have some options if you are taking a domestic flight. The TSA will allow you to go through security if they can positively identify you with alternative identification documents. The TSA will need at least two alternate forms of identification, such as a social security card, birth certificate, marriage license, or credit card. The documents must include your name. Also, at least one of your documents must contain at least one of the following: your date of birth, gender, address, or photo. If TSA can confirm your identity, you may enter the secured area, but you could be subject to additional screening. If you are on an international flight but don't have your passport or visa, even if you can get past the TSA, you may have trouble leaving the US or entering your destination country.

### 4. What kind of identification does a child need?

For domestic US flights, children from age two to 17 only need a boarding pass. Children under the age of two who are traveling as a lap child will require a boarding verification document from the airline, but would not need either a boarding pass or an ID. If you are traveling with a child under two and have purchased a ticket so that your child can occupy a seat, your child will need to have a boarding pass. For international travel, children of all ages will have to have a passport in addition to a boarding pass or boarding verification document.

### 5. Should unaccompanied children fly without an ID?

For international flights, children will need a passport regardless of their age. Although it is not required for domestic flights, if your child happens to have some kind of ID, even if it is not on the TSA list of approved IDs, your child should carry it.

### 6. Are the TSA screening machines safe?

TSA uses several different kinds of screening technology for people and baggage. For carry-on items and checked luggage, the TSA uses x-ray machines that may damage very

sensitive camera film, but otherwise has no lasting effects on your belongings. For screening people, the two most common devices are metal detectors, which give off electromagnetic radiation, and full-body explosives detection scanners.

The scanners use one of two technologies, one based on x-rays and the other based on high frequency radio waves. While the TSA claims that the level of radiation used is very low, and that these devices are safe, the TSA does not claim that the devices pose no risk. Any kind of radiation exposure carries some risk, but it is unclear if that risk will result in any long-term negative health effects such as cancer.

### **7. Do I have to use the full-body scanner?**

The full-body scanners, which produce an image that shows if a passenger is concealing explosives, weapons, or other dangerous items, are frequently used by the TSA in the US. If you don't want to be screened using that device, you will have to allow the TSA to perform a pat-down search before you are allowed to enter the secure area of the airport.

### **8. Why does the TSA have to do pat-down searches?**

The TSA uses a variety of methods to prevent hazardous and prohibited items from getting onto aircraft, and physical searches are one of those methods. Pat-down searches may be used if a passenger triggers an alarm on one of the metal detectors or full-body scanners, or if a passenger does not want to use the full-body scanner.

### **9. What if the name on my boarding pass does not exactly match the name on my identification?**

If there is only a small difference between your boarding pass and ID, for example a missing middle initial, you should not have a problem. There might also be small differences caused by the boarding pass printing practices of individual airlines. However, if the TSA can't confirm your identity, you may not be allowed to get on your plane.

### **10. How do I check if I am on the no-fly list?**

The TSA uses a number of databases and watch lists to prevent selected individuals from boarding an airliner, or to identify individuals for additional screening. You can't check to see if you are on one of these lists. You will not know if you are on one of these lists until either your airline or the TSA tells you. If you are on the no-fly list, you will likely not be allowed to get on your aircraft. If you are on one of the other watch lists, you may be delayed because of additional screening. If you are on one of these watch lists because of a mistake, for example because you have a similar name to someone in the database, you may have to contact the US Department of Homeland Security to resolve this problem.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[TSA Identification Requirements](#)

[Avoiding Airline Complaints](#)

[Avoiding TSA Complaints](#)

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## Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children

Thinking about letting your child fly alone? Make sure you check with your airline before you buy your ticket. Most airlines allow a child well under the age of 18 to fly alone and unsupervised. For those airlines that have programs to supervise unaccompanied children, the rules may be very different among these airlines.

In the US, the FAA provides no clear regulatory guidelines either for travel by unaccompanied children, or for airline programs for supervising unaccompanied children, so it is important that you take the time to understand the special risks when children travel alone, as well as the rules, including any extra fees, of the unaccompanied child programs of the airlines that you may want to use. This overview will discuss the typical restrictions of these programs, as well as a number of issues that you may want to address before allowing your child to travel alone on an airplane.

### Typical airline age rules for children

Airlines treat children traveling alone differently depending on the age of the child, and the rules of that airline's unaccompanied child program. Most airlines have a minimum age for children traveling alone and unsupervised, typically around 12, and most airlines with an unaccompanied child program limits the program to children within a certain age range, typically between five and 12.

Below are a series of child travel scenarios, and the typical airline rules that may apply to that scenario. Because the rules vary by airline, the following scenarios may not exactly match the rules of any particular airline, but will likely be very similar to these rules:

**Children younger than five** - Must be accompanied either by an adult aged 18 or over, or by the child's parent or legal guardian.

**Children between five and 11** - The airline may require that you use their unaccompanied child program unless an older passenger accompanies the child. The minimum age of that older passenger may vary by airline, and may be as young as 12 and as old as 18. This rule may be applied with a group of two or more children if all of the children are between five and 11.

**Children 12 and over** - Can fly unaccompanied without restriction.

If your child appears to be above or below an age limit set by the airline, you or your child may be asked to provide some kind of proof of age, so be prepared to bring appropriate documentation to the airport.

### Other restrictions and requirements

For unaccompanied children traveling under the airline's supervision, there may be additional restrictions. While the number and type of restrictions vary by airline, typical restrictions may include the following:

- \* Restricting unaccompanied children to nonstop flights
- \* Having a higher minimum age if the child has to change planes

- \* Not allowing unaccompanied children on the last flight of the day
- \* Not allowing unaccompanied children on flights that involve a second carrier
- \* Requiring an earlier check in time
- \* Requiring the person dropping off the child to accompany the child to the departure gate
- \* Requiring that the person picking up the child show up prior to the scheduled arrival time
- \* Charging additional fees for unaccompanied children

One way around these restrictions is to simply not use the airline's program. This may only be an option for older children who are not required to use the airline's program, and would only make sense if you believe the child is mature enough to deal with typical airport situations such as navigating the security screening process or dealing with schedule changes and delays.

### **Issues with older children**

If a child is older than an airline's maximum age for their unaccompanied child program, but under the age of 18, that airline may allow that child to travel under their program's rules, but that child may not be able to use special services for unaccompanied children such as having an escort while at an airport or being allowed to board the aircraft early.

Older children who are flying alone, with or without the benefit of an airline's unaccompanied child program, face other issues. The most important is that the child will have to be able to deal with any travel problem that comes up. This may include lost, stolen, or damaged baggage; airline security issues, flight delays and cancellations, and personal safety. You should prepare your child for common air travel problems and make sure that your child understands what to do in these situations.

### **Identification requirements**

For domestic travel in the US, passengers under the age of 18 are not required to have TSA approved identification to get past security. Depending on the airline, they may not be required to have identification to purchase a ticket or get a boarding pass issued. However, the adults who are responsible for picking up and dropping off the child are required to have acceptable identification.

While airlines typically do not specify the identification required for the adult who drops off or picks up the child, the same kinds of government-issued photo identification that an adult uses for airline travel should be sufficient. You can review the [Identification Requirements](#) section for a detailed description of acceptable forms of ID.

While not required, it is a good idea for teenagers to have a valid photo ID, especially if the child is too old for the airline's unaccompanied child program. AirSafe.com recommends using an ID that would be acceptable for domestic travel and that does not contain the child's home address.

A US passport is especially attractive because it does not include the passport holder's address. The same is also true for passports from many other countries. State-issued photo

identification cards are typically issued by the same organizations that provide drivers licenses and they are also an acceptable form of identification.

### **Escorting the child to and from the aircraft**

You should escort your child all the way to the departure gate, even if the airline does not require it. Also, the person picking up the child should be waiting at the gate at the arrival airport. You will likely need to get an escort pass or similar document from the airline in order to enter the gate area. If you are not allowed to escort your child into the secure area of the airport, make sure that an appropriate airline representative is personally escorting your child.

### **Supervision by airline employees**

The level of supervision that the airline has for unaccompanied children will vary by airline. It is very unlikely that the airline will have an escort at your child's side in the aircraft. While in flight, your child will likely be supervised by the flight attendants. Make sure that a flight attendant, preferably the chief flight attendant, is aware of your unaccompanied child. Also, make sure that your child understands that if he or she has any questions or have any problems, then he or she should talk to a flight attendant.

If your child has to take a connecting flight, make sure that your child knows that they have to be escorted to the next flight by an airline representative. Once your child is in the waiting area, there may be an airline representative at that airport who will be responsible for supervising your child between flights, but that person will likely have additional duties, including supervising other children. Make sure that your child understands the need to stay within sight of the responsible airline employee. If you think that your child may not be able to handle this kind of situation, then only use nonstop flights.

### **What happens if the aircraft is diverted or delayed?**

Once the flight departs, the aircraft may have to make an unscheduled landing, either at the departure airport or at an alternate airport. Also, a connecting flight could be delayed or canceled. Typically, the airline will contact the persons responsible for picking up or dropping off the child and make alternate flight arrangements. This could include arranging transportation back to the departure airport, arranging a later flight to the original destination, or arranging a flight to an alternative airport where a responsible adult can pick up the child.

A child who is flying alone, but who is not using the airline's unaccompanied child program, will likely be treated like any other passenger. Your child should tell an airline representative of his or her travel situation, but that is no guarantee that the airline will be willing or able to offer any additional services.

Depending on the airline's policies, if the flight is delayed overnight, and your child is flying under the airline's unaccompanied child program, the airline may place your child in a hotel room under the supervision of an airline representative, in a hotel room alone, or in a hotel room with another unaccompanied child. The airline may also have a policy where it takes no responsibility for overnight accommodations for an unaccompanied child and may turn your child over to the local authorities for the night. It is important that you have a clear understanding of the airline's policies. Before you make a reservation, you should

go to the airline's web site and review the airline's policies on unaccompanied children.

### **What happens if no one is there to pick up my child?**

If for some reason there is no responsible adult at the destination airport, what happens next will depend on the airline's policies. The airline may make an effort to contact the person who was to pick up your child, and if there were some kind of short delay, there will likely not be any problems. If no one can be contacted at the destination, then the responsible adult at the departure airport may be contacted to discuss alternatives. For these reasons, it is very important that the airline have several alternatives for contacting a responsible adult at both the destination and departure airports. If no one is available to take responsibility for your child, the airline may have to turn over your child to the local authorities.

### **International flights**

If your child is traveling unaccompanied on an international flight, there may be additional requirements beyond what the airline may require. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to have additional documentation to allow your child to leave the departure country or to enter the destination country. Contact the appropriate authorities for each involved country to ensure that all requirements are being met.

### **Flights on partner airlines**

While you may arrange for your child's travel through one airline, your child may end up on a subsidiary of that airline or with a partner airline for part of the trip, or even the entire trip. Check with the airline to see if your child's trip will involve a subsidiary of that airline or a partner of that airline. If this is the case, review the policies for the other airline to see if those policies are acceptable to you. If they are not, you should make alternative travel arrangements.

### **Unaccompanied flying checklists**

The following checklists may be useful reminders for adults and children before and during a flight.

#### **Checklist for adults**

- \* Review the airline's written policies before making your reservation.
- \* Find out how to contact the appropriate airline representative at both the departure airport and the destination airport.
- \* Provide the airline with at least two ways to contact a responsible adult (preferably two or more responsible adults) at both the departure airport and the arrival airport.
- \* Have your child carry a copy of that same contact information.
- \* Make sure that the person dropping off or picking up your child has valid photo identification.
- \* If possible, escort your child to or from the aircraft.
- \* Remain at the airport at least until the aircraft takes off.
- \* Check on the progress of the flight, and if the flight will be delayed or diverted, contact both the airline and the responsible adult at the destination airport.

\*If your child is able to use a telephone, provide your child with the means to make phone calls (change, phone card, cell phone, etc.).

### **Checklist for children**

- \* At the airport, find out what person from the airline is responsible for you.
- \* While waiting to board your flight, stay in the gate area and in sight of the airline employee who is responsible for you.
- \*If you have to leave the gate area, make sure that an airline employee is either escorting you or is aware of your location.
- \* In the airplane, contact the flight attendant if there are any problems or if you have any questions.
- \* When you get on the airplane, ask a flight attendant if you can be seated so that no one is sitting next to you.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)

[Identification Requirements](#)

[Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints](#)

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## **Avoiding Unaccompanied Child Travel Complaints**

If you have to send your child on a trip alone, just the thought of your child being stranded in a strange city, or having his or her bags lost or damaged is more than a little stressful. You should not allow your child to travel alone, even if you use the airline's unaccompanied child program, unless you have made an effort to avoid potential problems.

As is the case with travel by adults, avoiding a problem before it happens or dealing with a problem quickly and effectively is much better than complaining about it afterwards. The best way to avoid serious travel problems is to take steps that will do one of three things:

1. Avoid potential problems entirely.
2. Reduce the likelihood of a problem occurring.
3. Limit the impact of a problem should one occur.

In addition to the usual risks that come with flying, there are additional risks that are associated with children flying alone. Many of these risks can be overcome by using common sense and taking a few basic precautions. The information in the article [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#), plus the following tips will help both a child traveling solo, and those responsible for the child, to deal with many common situations faced by unaccompanied children.

### **Consider the maturity of your child**

While airlines allow children as young as five to travel unaccompanied, younger children may not be ready or willing to be in the presence of strangers for several hours, and may not be able to handle unusual situations that he or she may encounter. AirSafe.com makes the following recommendation: if your child is old enough to travel alone on public transportation, and is able to spend time away from family in an organized setting like an overnight trip with a youth group, then your child is probably mature enough to travel unaccompanied on a flight. If your child is unable to meet this standard, then you should consider other travel options.

### **Coordinate with whoever is picking up your child**

While the airline is responsible for your child during the flight, you or whoever is picking up your child are responsible once the flight is over. Make sure that whoever is picking up the child knows all the relevant details of the child's trip and is able to contact either you or the airline to confirm the arrival time of the flight.

The person picking up your child should also have identification that matches the information that you supplied the airline. You should have the pickup person arrive early at the airport and contact you when he or she arrives. If you can't confirm the pickup person's arrival at the airport, have an alternate person pick up your child.

You should also give your child a copy of all of the contact information that you supplied the airline. If your child is able to use a telephone, you should provide the means for your child to contact someone (change, phone card, cell phone, etc.) in case there is a flight cancellation, flight delay, or other problem.

### **Tell your child what to expect during the flight**

You should explain clearly to your child what will likely happen during the flight, and what kind of experiences to expect. This is especially important if your child is an infrequent or first time flyer. He or she should know basic things such as how long the flight will be, and who should be meeting the plane at the destination airport. You may want to review this book's [fear of flying section](#) to help you talk about any concerns or anxieties your child may have about the flight. The book's section on [fear of flying warning signs](#) may help you to recognize if your child has any unspoken concerns.

### **Discuss appropriate behavior with your child**

Make sure you take the time to discuss appropriate behavior with your child. That includes the behavior of other passengers and the child's behavior. If another passenger acts in an inappropriate way, be sure that you tell your child to contact a flight attendant or other airline representative.

Inappropriate passenger behavior includes rude, offensive, or threatening comments; inappropriate touching; inappropriate conversations; taking food or other items away from your child; or other behavior that makes your child uncomfortable or fearful. In addition, inappropriate behavior would include any attempt to elicit personal information about your child. Make sure that your child understands that no other passenger needs to know his or her full name, home address, destination, or telephone number.

### **Request appropriate seating**

When you make a reservation, request to have your child seated in a row without any other passengers, or with at least one empty seat between the child and the next passenger. Also, request that your child not sit in the same row as passengers who are consuming alcohol. Tell your child that if he or she is uncomfortable in any way, from the temperature of the cabin to the behavior of other people (either in the terminal or on the plane), that he or she should contact a flight attendant or other airline representative immediately.

### **Review the airline's unaccompanied child policies**

Every airline has slightly different policies on how they accommodate unaccompanied children. Take special note of their policies for escorting children at connection airports and accommodations in the event that the flight is delayed or diverted. Note that some airlines do not provide hotel accommodations, and may turn over your child to local authorities if the flight is delayed overnight. General information and insights concerning airline policies are available in the book section [Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#).

For full details on an airline's rules for unaccompanied children, go to the airline's web site. These rules may be in a page dedicated to their unaccompanied child program, or it may be located in another part of the web site. You can use a search engine to find this information, or you can call the airline's customer service number and have someone help you find the information you need. If your child will be on a trip that involves flights on two or more different airlines, review the rules for each airline your child will use to see if there are any rules that may pose a problem for you or your child.

### **Take extra precautions for connecting flights**

If your child has to change planes, make sure that the airline has an adequate process for supervising your child when traveling between gates or while in the waiting area. Make sure that your child understands that her or she should be escorted when traveling between gates, and must remain in clear view of the escort or other responsible airline representative while in the waiting area.

### **Spend extra time at the airport**

You should plan on coming to the airport early and staying until you confirm that your child's flight has departed. If there are last minute changes before the flight's scheduled departure, getting there early gives you a better opportunity for dealing with the situation. Also, if there is a significant delay or a cancellation of the flight, you will be available to deal with the situation. For example, if your child has to change planes, and a flight delay means that your child may have to spend an unscheduled night in a strange city, you would likely want to work with the airline to reschedule your child's flight.

### **Identify the lead flight attendant**

Either you or your child should take the time to identify the lead flight attendant so that the attendant knows that there is an unaccompanied child on the flight. On larger aircraft, you should identify at least one flight attendant who will be in the immediate area of your child.

### **Don't check luggage**

If possible, have your child use carry-on bags only. Avoiding checked luggage makes the travel experience simpler for your child. If the carry-on bag is small enough to fit under the seat, it is much less likely that the airline would check the bag if the overhead bins were too full.

### **Have your child carry identification**

While the TSA and the airlines allow passengers under the age of 18 to travel without a government-issued identification, it would be a good idea to have your child carry some form of identification. Ideally, this would be a government-issued document such as a passport or state ID card. If not, some other kind of ID card or an official document with your child's name would help.

### **Have your child carry contact information**

Make sure your child has the contact information for anyone who will be responsible for picking up or dropping off your child at either the departure or arrival airports. Also make sure your child has contact information for an alternative or emergency contact person.

### **Escort the child to the seat**

Although you are not a passenger, you may be able to go to the check in counter and get a pass that allows you to get through security and escort your child to the plane. If possible, escort your child onto the aircraft and check the area around your child's seat for hazards such as heavy carry-on items in the overhead storage bins. If you are concerned about the seating situation or about nearby passengers, contact the lead flight attendant or a gate agent to help deal with the situation.

### **Additional resources**

[Basic Baggage and Security Advice](#)  
[Airline Rules for Unaccompanied Children](#)  
[What Is Fear of Flying?](#)  
[Fear of Flying Warning Signs](#)

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## **What Is Fear of Flying?**

Fear of flying is a complex psychological issue, one that has been made more complex by the security concerns of the last few years. There are many books, videos, and other resources that deal with the fear of flying, so deciding what may work for you may be a difficult process. The resources on this page and on this web site will give you an idea of what fear of flying is, what you can do to deal with it, and how passengers can conquer the fear of flying.

Without getting too technical, fear of flying, is an anxiety disorder. Such fears can come about during a flight, or even well before a person gets to the airport. Often, the source of the fear has little or nothing to do with the risks associated with the flight. Depending on the person, the fear of flying includes one or more of the following fears or concerns:

- \* Heights
- \* Being over water or having the aircraft land in water
- \* Darkness (flying at night)
- \* The unknown
- \* Airline accidents
- \* Hijackings, bombings, and other attacks
- \* Enclosed or crowded space
- \* Being idle for long periods of time
- \* Loss of personal freedom
- \* The security screening process
- \* Turbulence and other weather conditions
- \* The unfamiliar sights, sounds, and sensations of a normal flight
- \* Loss of control, or being dependent on technology or people
- \* Lingering issues from past psychological or physical trauma

Signs you may be afraid of flying include becoming anxious in elevators, having panic attacks before getting on a plane, or going out of your way to avoid air travel.

### **How many people are afraid of flying?**

The airline industry is clearly aware of the fear of flying and how it affects the traveling public. Research is somewhat sparse, with one of the most important studies on fear of flying dating back to 1980, when two Boeing researchers found that 18.1% of adults in the U.S. were afraid to fly, and that another 12.6% of adults experienced anxiety when they fly. In short, about one in three adult Americans were afraid to fly.

The study was also interesting in that it provided details about why the surveyed adults avoided flying, with only about 6% doing so because they considered flying unsafe. A more recent poll conducted by Newsweek magazine in 1999 found that 50% of the adults surveyed who flew on commercial airlines were frightened at least sometimes.

### **How does fear of flying affect people?**

Every person responds to fear of flying differently. A common reaction is to avoid flying as much as possible. There are a number of celebrities, including John Madden of video

game and NFL football fame, who go out of their way to arrange their personal and professional lives to avoid flying.

Once a person with flying anxieties is in the air, physical reactions may be absent or quite noticeable, including the kind of physical reactions associated with a white knuckle flyer, such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing, and nausea. Dealing with the stress by seeking answers to common questions about airline safety can have a positive effect on a passenger, but doing things like using drugs or alcohol to deal with stress can lead to a passenger being abusive to other passengers, the cabin crew, or to airline representatives.

### **Statistics and the fear of flying**

Often, the aviation safety experts point to the statistics associated with flying risk to show how flying is safe and that passengers should not be afraid. For most who have anxieties associated with flying, these statistics are meaningless because in most cases, the fear is not associated with flight risks. In other words, risk and safety are two different things, and you can't just use risk statistics to convince most people that flying is safe. Even if the chance of something bad happening is a million to one, most people are worried about whether their flight is going to be the one that doesn't end well.

### **How to conquer fear of flying**

If fear of flying is affecting you in a way that you don't like, there is no reason to accept it as normal. If you want to take positive steps to deal with it, there are plenty of options available. One of the first steps to take is to recognize that you may have a problem. The [Fear of Flying Warning Signs](#) section in this ebook has a very basic checklist to indicate if you may have significant anxieties associated with flying.

You can also visit [AirSafe.com](#) and review the story behind the [SOAR fear of flying program](#), which is one of the few programs designed to help people deal with fear of flying that is led by an airline pilot, Captain Tom Bunn, who is also a trained therapist. You can also [click here for more information or to order the SOAR program](#). If you use the coupon code AIRSAFEBOOK when you order, you will get a 20% discount on SOAR's most comprehensive programs.

### **Recommended fear of flying resources**

Licensed therapist and airline pilot Captain Tom Bunn offers a variety of fear of flying courses that can help you deal with the stress and anxiety that comes with a fear of flying, including the following:

- \* Fear of Flying App for iPad or iPhone
- \* Videos and other products from the SOAR Fear of Flying Program
- \* Additional Fear of Flying Resources from Captain Tom Bunn

For more information, please visit [fear.airsafe.com](#).

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## Fear of Flying Warning Signs and Solutions

Fear of flying is not just about flying, it could also be about some part of the flying experience that is unrelated to airplanes, but closely related to one or more situations that may make you stressful or anxious. Most of the symptoms listed below are not directly related to flying. However, the act of flying may make it difficult or impossible to avoid these stressful situations. For example, if you have a fear of enclosed spaces and get dizzy when you are in an elevator, you can always get out at the next stop. In an airplane, the next stop may be hours away, and the amount of stress that builds up over that time can be tremendous.

Whether you are a veteran passenger, or if you have never flown before, the following list may help you identify whether you have a fear of flying problem.

### **You may have a fear of flying if:**

- \* You don't like being in enclosed or crowded spaces.
- \* You don't like being around strangers.
- \* You would rather be in control of a situation, and you don't like to be dependent on technology or on other people to protect you.
- \* You like your personal freedom and don't like it when people tell you what to do, or what not to do.
- \* You have a fear of heights.
- \* You have a fear of being over water.
- \* Flying, or even the thought of flying, makes you tense, or leads to headaches, nausea, fatigue, or other physical discomfort.
- \* You have a fear of the dark or a fear of being out at night.
- \* You don't like invasions of privacy, especially searches of your belongings or physical searches of your body.
- \* You are very concerned about the risk of death or injury from aircraft accidents, or from hijackings or other deliberate attacks on an aircraft.
- \* You don't like being idle for long periods of time.
- \* You experience sudden or prolonged panic attacks when you fly or when you are about to get on an airplane.
- \* You arrange your life to limit the amount of flying that you do, or you avoid flying altogether.
- \* You become easily angered by others when you fly.
- \* The sounds and activities associated with a normal flight bother you.
- \* You are concerned about turbulence and other weather conditions.
- \* You are afraid of the unknown.

When you have to face these fears and anxieties over a long period of time, for example, during a flight, or even during the weeks leading up to the flight, you may have unhealthy reactions such as self-medicating with alcohol or drugs, or other reactions described in the [What Is Fear of Flying](#) section. If you have one or more of the symptoms listed above, it may be worth your while to do some personal research on the subject. The resources below may be a good start.

### **Dealing with your fear of flying**

Many people who have trouble with flying have tried "everything" on their own, tried therapy, tried medication, or even tried one or more fear of flying programs. They still have hope but they are very doubtful that anything will work. That doubt may be erased with a better approach. One of the approaches that has been used by thousands of anxious flyers is the SOAR program, which was created by airline captain and licensed therapist Captain Tom Bunn.

Captain Bunn has been directly involved with understanding and treating flying related anxieties since 1980 when he became part of the first fear of flying program run by a major US airline. Two years later in 1982, Captain Bunn founded SOAR to help passengers overcome their fear of flying by helping them to understand their anxieties, and more importantly how to overcome them. For more on the SOAR program, and for other information about fear of flying, [please visit SOAR](#).

### **Save 20% on SOAR products**

If you decide to buy any of the products offered by SOAR, simply use the coupon code AIRSAFEBOOK and to get a [20% discount when ordering selected SOAR products](#). This code is good until the end of 2013. Note that if you are ordering after this code expired, contact us at [tcurtis@airsafe.com](mailto:tcurtis@airsafe.com), and we will send you a new coupon code.

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## **About AirSafe.com**

The site was created in July 1996 by Dr. Todd Curtis to provide the aviation community and the flying public with timely and useful information about airline safety and airline security, with a focus on crashes that kill airline passengers. Over the years, the site has expanded its role by adding significant information and resources related to baggage issues, airline complaints, and fear of flying. AirSafe.com has also expanded its reach by creating a variety of information resources, including the following:

### **The AirSafe.com News**

**[www.airsafenews.com](http://www.airsafenews.com)**

This site features news and commentary about airline safety, airline security, plane crash updates, and airline policy developments. The articles also highlight problems passengers have with airline customer service representatives, airport security, baggage handling, and other travel hassles.

### **The Conversation at AirSafe.com podcast**

**[podcast.airsafe.com](http://podcast.airsafe.com)**

This audio and video podcast series features discussions of critical and timely issues related to aviation safety and aviation security. You can subscribe to the podcast using an RSS feed or through iTunes.

### **FlightsGoneBad.com**

**[www.flightsgonebad.com](http://www.flightsgonebad.com)**

This site features complaints from the AirSafe.com airline complaint system, as well as from other sources, that highlight problems passengers have with airline customer service, airport security, baggage handling, and other travel hassles.

### **The AirSafe.com YouTube channel**

**[video.airsafe.com](http://video.airsafe.com)**

Features several years worth of AirSafe.com videos, including analyses of accident investigations, and selected episodes of the video podcast.

### **Connect with AirSafe.com**

There are a number of ways to keep in touch with AirSafe.com, including Twitter, Facebook, and a mailing list:

**Twitter:** [twitter.airsafe.com](http://twitter.airsafe.com)

**Facebook:** [facebook.airsafe.com](http://facebook.airsafe.com)

**Mailing list:** [subscribe.airsafe.com](http://subscribe.airsafe.com)

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## **About the Author**

Dr. Todd Curtis is a published author who in 1996 created the Web's most popular airline safety site, [AirSafe.com](http://AirSafe.com). He holds a PhD in aviation risk assessment from the Union Institute, as well as engineering degrees from MIT, the University of Texas, and Princeton. His aviation safety work has been featured by numerous news organizations, including the New York Times, and he has appeared on CNN, CBS, Fox News, Discovery Channel, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and National Public Radio. This book highlights some of the most popular subjects covered in AiSafe.com, AirSafeNews.com, and other sites created by Dr. Curtis. Previously, he has published a number of technical papers in the areas of airline safety and aviation risk assessment and authored the 2000 book *Understanding Aviation Safety Data*. In 2007 he also published the online safety book [\*Parenting and the Internet\*](#), which was updated in 2011 for the ebook version.

### ***Other Books by Todd Curtis***

[AirSafe.com Baggage and Security Guide](#)

[Parenting and the Internet](#)

[The AirSafe.com Podcasting Production Manual](#)

[Understanding Aviation Safety Data](#)

### ***Connect with Dr. Curtis online***

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