

The Traveler's Back-up Plan: A Guidebook for Navigating Through the Anxiety of Delayed and Cancelled Airline Flights

Booking Your Airline Ticket

- If possible, your departing airport should offer more than one (1) daily flight to your destination (Spirit and Allegiant oftentimes have only one flight per day to specific destinations, for example).
 - A nominal difference in airfare could be worth the additional cost
- Whenever possible, book a morning flight
 - Planes scheduled for morning flights from non-hub airports typically arrive the night before, allowing you to at least confirm your aircraft is available and ready to go
 - Use FlightAware.com to see if your plane is physically at your departing airport the night before and plan accordingly
- If you are traveling with more than one person in your party, first check the airfare for just one person. Write down the price. Then check it for two or more. Check to see if the fares are the same. If there is only one inexpensive ticket available and you search for two or more, your search will not uncover the lower fare ticket. What to do? Book one ticket at the lower fare and the one at the higher fare. Then call the airline and have the two records “linked”. The airline will put a note in each record to reference the other.

What's in Your Bag?

Any information regarding your airline, flight, membership status, passenger rights, and important phone numbers should be tucked away in your carry-on bag or incorporated into an electronic document on your phone (you can type them onto a piece of paper and take a picture, if that's easier).

- Include all information related to the airline you are flying
 - Phone number for airline reservations
 - Your airline frequent flier number
 - Airline mobile app
 - Airline Day Pass (United Club, AA's Admiral's Club, etc.) can be purchased in advance or on site
- Copy of Passenger's Rights (key bullet features is okay)
- Fully charged portable battery charger

What's the (Social Media) Plan?

If you are the type of person who likes to post information to Facebook or Twitter about your current situation or status...STOP! The responses of “so sorry” and “good luck” will do nothing to help you get out of your jam. Instead, consider the following:

- Designate ONE (maybe two) friend or family member who will become the “information source” for other friends and family regarding updates on your situation.
- Use your network of “friends” wisely. Post a note regarding your situation and make CLEAR that you do NOT want sympathy...you want solutions.
 - Those with genuine thoughts for resolving the issue should post to your page and your designated “information source” person should monitor responses, NOT YOU
 - No texts or phone calls. If your flight has been cancelled, you will need an open phone line for more important conversations

Apps You Need to Have Handy

It costs nothing to have the following apps on your mobile device and yet they will provide you with more information and travel options when you absolutely need them most. Remember, if your flight was cancelled, the odds are that several thousand other passengers are scrambling for a solution too. Having these apps at-the-ready will increase your chances of securing alternative options and getting you on your way.

Every app listed below should be available on your mobile devices, according to our travel experts.

Seat Alerts by ExpertFlyer.com

The [Seat Alerts app](#) from ExpertFlyer.com allows travelers to get out of the middle seat or find a better seat on their flight. In cases where flights have been cancelled, Seat Alerts will help travelers find a seat on virtually any flight, including flights that are completely booked. Travelers do NOT need to have an airline ticket to create a Seat Alert. Paid subscribers to Expert Flyer can also set Aircraft Change Alerts, which lets you know if your airline has changed the aircraft for your flight.

Airline Apps

Following are links to a handful of mobile apps from popular domestic carriers. Travelers are encouraged to download the app from their preferred airline or any airline they use. Most airline apps provide access to customer service reps, ticket purchases, and other services.

[American Airlines](#)

[Delta Airlines](#)

[United Airlines](#)

[JetBlue Airlines](#)

[Alaska Airlines](#)

[Southwest Airlines](#)

FlightAware.com

[FlightAware](#) is the world's largest flight tracking data company and provides over 10,000 aircraft operators and service companies as well as over 12,000,000 passengers with global flight tracking solutions.

Uber / Lyft

Most consumers have either [Uber](#) or [Lyft](#) (or both) on their mobile devices but they remain a critical link to ground transportation when everyone else is seeking the same (just ask any pedestrian looking for a cab on a rainy day in New York City).

Rental Cars

Sometimes driving can be a good alternative to flying, depending on the distance of your destination and the reason for shifting gears. Regardless, having some or all of the following rental car apps available at a moment's notice can be viewed as another great tool in the toolbox.

[Avis](#)

[Hertz](#)

[Alamo](#)

[Dollar](#)

[Enterprise](#)

[National](#)

LoungeBuddy

[LoungeBuddy](#) revolutionizes the airport experience by giving any traveler the ability to discover, book, and access premium airport lounges worldwide. If your flight is delayed or cancelled, airline premium lounges offer two important features: an oasis to get away from the madness and catch your breath; and access to dedicated service reps to help you resolve your issue. There is a fee, but it could be worth its weight in gold.

GateGuru

[GateGuru](#) is like a personal assistant with itinerary listings and updates on your day of travel. Partnerships with other travel entities such as Avis rental cars gives you immediate access to other amenities with a couple of “taps” on your mobile device. Its AirportCard feature offers instant access to a host of amenities at the airport, which can be critical when everything does not go according to plan and JourneyCard provides real-time updates to changes in travel itineraries.

HotelTonight

All flights have been cancelled for the day. Thanks to your preparation for the worst, you have a flight booked for the next day, but you need a hotel for the night. Depending on the reasons for your initial flight’s cancellation, the airline may be responsible for the cost of your hotel night (refer to your Passenger’s Rights document).

If you have opened up this app, you have been through enough for one day. Forget who pays. Find a room. Remember, hundreds of others are trying to do the same and [HotelTonight](#) can be your best friend. Availability/ booking, pricing, and customer reviews are all available through the app. While others are arguing with the airline, you’ve just booked a place to sleep tonight.

Know Before You Go (to the airport)

There are a few things you could (and should) do before heading to the airport

- Check the departure status of your flight through the airline’s website
- Check-in to your flight the day before and print your boarding pass (or add the mobile boarding pass to mobile phone as soon as you can. “My airline’s IT system crashed the day of my flight and had to wait in a long line for a printed boarding ticket. I had no bags to check.”
- Confirm the weather report in departure and arrival cities
- Review checklist of items you must have readily accessible during your trip including all travel apps, airline reservation phone numbers, scheduled departure gate, etc.

Putting the Plan into Action

You get to the airport and discover that your flight has been cancelled. Even if it has only been delayed, you need to take immediate action. You have prepared for this unfortunate moment and it is time to rise to the challenge. It isn’t enough to have all the pieces in place. You need to know in what order you need to implement your Plan B. While specific situations may require slightly modified actions, the following steps should be taken in sequential order:

- 1) Get in line for the airline ticket counter, regardless of how long the line
- 2) Call the airline’s toll-free reservations number and put the call on speaker (there are other actions you need to take with your phone and want to make sure you know when an agent takes your call)

- 3) Send a text to your designated “information source” (friend or family member) alerting them to your current situation and let them know you will be posting a message to social media acknowledging them as the point-person for all suggestions
- 4) Post a brief message to Facebook explaining your situation and inviting them to offer credible solutions to your situation. Emphasize no phone calls or texts directly to you (your information source will sort through suggested solutions and will share those with you)
- 5) Have your current flight number and frequent flier number handy (a printout is a good idea since you will need to reference this information while communicating on the phone with an airline rep)
- 6) If a ticket agent answers your call before you reach the counter, stay in line while speaking with the agent on the phone.
 - a. While it may be difficult, maintain a pleasant demeanor with the agent. They have probably been verbally pistol-whipped by several passengers at this point. Have a heart.
 - b. Weigh all the options the agent presents to you including the option of traveling to another city with a connecting flight to your destination. If the weather condition or issue is with your destination city, do not book a flight through a connecting city.
 - c. Ask the ticket agent for advice. While they typically will not “guarantee” what they say, they are a source for “inside information.” If they feel it is best for you to book an early flight the next day, give it serious consideration.
 - d. If you have finalized changes to your travels with the online agent, stay in line and confirm everything with the agent at the counter
- 7) If you get to the ticket counter before an agent answers your call, you can hang up the phone and work directly with the counter agent.
 - a. Maintain your composure and be as pleasant and understanding of their situation as possible. You will see the frustration on their face and making their experience with you less confrontational will benefit both of you
 - b. That said, do not leave the counter until you are satisfied with the presented options, and you have decided on the option you will accept
 - c. Be certain you receive a printed document from the ticket agent verifying your decision (new flight with seat assignment, for example) and ask them to email that document to you
- 8) Contact your information source (friend or family member) and let them know your decision (booked on a later flight, catching a flight the next morning, etc.) and ask them to post an update to your Facebook page (you may want to update your status on social media yourself)
- 9) Secure any services needed based on your travel decision (order an Uber, book a hotel room, etc.)
- 10) If you are booked on a later flight the same day, you may want to purchase a day pass to your airline’s private lounge. While there, you can take a deep breath, reassess your decisions, contact friends directly, and have access to airline personnel who can assist with any new or unexpected changes to your itinerary.

Regardless of your travel situation, the key is to always stay calm, treat any airline employee with respect, and understand all your options before you make a decision. This series of tips should be viewed as a good guideline for preparing and customizing your own back-up plan or “Plan B” based on your personal travel habits.