

HOW TO TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF AIR TRAVEL

Klaus D. Mittorp

HOW TO TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF AIR TRAVEL

Your Guide to an Enjoyable
Flight Experience

✓ Burghley Books

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The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Cover: Jeremie (via Pixabay)

Published and printed by: Burghley Books an imprint of tredition GmbH
An der Strusbek 10

D-22926 Ahrensburg

ISBN:978-3-347-95332-1

e-Book ISBN: 978-3-347-95333-8

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To the passionate air travellers in my family:

Annegret

Jessica, Marco, Lars

Svenja, Bedo, Lena

Stella, Julian

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PREFACE

Air travel is the safest means of travel. As a major reference book for the airline industry puts it:¹ “A randomly chosen youth at a First World Airport is more likely to become the president/prime minister of her country, to win a Nobel Prize in Physics or to win an Olympic Gold Medal than to perish on her forthcoming flight.”

Travelling on a plane is not only extremely safe but also, ideally, supposed to be an enjoyable experience for the leisure traveller and, at least, a fast and efficient one for those travelling because they have to - either on business or for another given reason.

Unfortunately, real life experience shows that there are many variables that can get massively in the way of such aspiration.

A survey conducted by Priority Pass² showed that air travellers were most worried about getting stuck on the way to the airport, losing baggage, missing boarding and/or connecting flights and experiencing delays.

1 Belobaba, Odoni, Barnhart “The Global Airline Industry” 2nd Edition, 2016

2 <https://www.prioritypass.com/blog/2019/airport-stress-survey>

The same survey also highlighted the phases of travel people find the most stressful at the airport: baggage collection, transfers and passing security.

Indeed, many people I meet can tell stories about air travel mishaps – missed connections, lost baggage and the like. But most travellers talk about these occurrences quite naturally as if they were some sort of *force majeure*.

Some aspects are, obviously, completely out of your control – such as industrial action or adverse weather conditions – but I believe many others can be positively influenced by knowledge, savvy travel planning and conscious behaviour.

And, indeed, that is the purpose of this book: providing insights and ideas on tactics to adopt to avoid or at least minimise the hassle of air travel.

I have been travelling by air since I was a child and have enjoyed it - most of the time. I have accumulated millions of air miles on all continents and with them lots of insights into what works and what doesn't when you take a plane.

It goes without saying that what works well for me, may not work for others and not everything works equally well all over the world. But, based on my personal experience, I do strongly believe that a lot of the hassle air travellers are subject to can be avoided.

Let's assume you are travelling from A to C with a connection in B. You will, thus, have two flight segments: A to B and B to C. If you go for the minimum connecting time in B and choose a flight from A to B that is known to be delayed quite often, don't be surprised if you actually miss your flight from B to C and suffer the related hassle.

The choice of airport, airline and timing can all influence the way your travel turns out, as can the degree of intelligence and preparation you are willing to invest before embarking on your journey.

This book goes through all the various phases of air travel from planning to arriving and provides practical advice on how to navigate each of them. At the same time, it adds a few anecdotes from the plentiful world of air travel.

But, although it also touches some aspects of passenger rights, this book does not and cannot provide or replace any professional legal advice.

Equally, whilst the airline industry has become highly aware environmentally, this volume does not contemplate any related aspects, which, in my view, are down to individual judgement and, particularly, freedom of choice.

January 2024

ADVANCE PLANNING AND RESEARCH

Whilst it may sound trivial, it is still true: some potential future hassle is embedded in choices made or neglected at the earliest stage of travel – that of advance planning. Before you even start thinking about actually placing a booking with an airline, travel agent or operator there are already a few decisional waypoints that will strongly influence your later travel experience. And for those you can either make some informed choices or leave them to accident.

Experience shows that time and effort you invest at this stage in some research and planning is well spent and richly pays off not only in terms of potential cost saving but also with a better, less stressful travel experience.

Let us, thus, take a look at what matters at this stage.

When embarking on air travel there are numerous reasons that make it necessary for you to take a plane.

You may be planning a holiday which means you are potentially flexible in the choice of destination. Or you travel for a specific business (e.g. meeting) or personal

reason (e.g. visiting relatives or friends) in which case you normally have limited flexibility with your final destination.

In both cases there are a number of aspects that you should consider from the outset when planning the journey in order for things to work out well. In the case of a holiday, you can even, in some cases, make them part of the criteria for choosing a destination altogether.

The initial aspects I recommend to consider at this stage are:

- type of booking
- itinerary
- destination airport
- type of carrier
- potential airlines

As a first step let us look at these in more detail.

Type of Booking

Basically, there are two types of booking you can choose (and we will look at the booking process in more detail later in this book):

- either you book your air travel as part of a broader package or
- you book it ad-hoc as a single service.

This may, initially, sound irrelevant, but it can make a significant difference not only on price. In fact, in most jurisdictions laws and regulations governing these two types of booking are vastly different.

If you book a package, this will typically include accommodation, air travel, transfers and, possibly, additional services such as tours, meals etc. Legally, this means you have *one* tour operator as your contractual counterpart who sells the entire package.

Whilst this is convenient, it in turn limits your influence on the actual flight. In most cases you will not be entitled to travel on a specific flight with a specific airline at a specific time but only generically to air travel to the intended destination. In practice this means that the tour operators may be entitled to change the times and air carriers indicated in the original booking as they feel fit.

If, for example, you want to travel on a certain airline (or also specifically avoid one) this type of booking has the potential to cause you stress at some point. Equally, if things go wrong the assistance will have to come from the tour operator rather than the airline and, as tour operators are less present at airports than airlines, this may turn out to be a disadvantage.

On the other hand, having the tour operator as a single counterpart can be an advantage if you have to ask for a refund. This became clearly evident during times of COVID

restrictions when many people could not undertake their previously booked travel.

In many countries consumer rights made it easier for them to get their money back. In some jurisdictions³ this kind of booking is even governed by specific consumer friendly legislation. Some consumer associations have therefore issued recommendations for this type of booking.

Conversely, booking a specific flight with a specific airline provides you with different and stronger contractual rights vis-à-vis the airline (and possibly the travel agent) including liability in case of irregular operations.

To make it clear: I am not advocating one type of booking against the other. They both clearly have their advantages and disadvantages. The important aspect is that you consider *beforehand* which type of booking best suits your needs and budget in order to avoid later frustration.

Itinerary

If you have to fly from A to B, you might be wondering why you should bother about your itinerary.

There are various reasons. Let us assume you want to fly from New York to Athens. The first possibility is, obviously, to search for a direct flight on that route.

3 a prominent example being Germany

But there are other options. On the way from New York to Athens you have a number of European hubs, mainly London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Zurich, Madrid or Rome where you could stop-over on your way to Athens. If you are open to this kind of itinerary you will significantly broaden your choice of possible carriers and, hence, finding a better deal.

As airlines are in competition to each other they will sometimes offer attractive deals in the strong home markets of their competitors. A flight from, say, London to Chicago might be cheaper on British Airways if booked as Frankfurt-London-Chicago and, likewise, a flight from Frankfurt to Chicago on Lufthansa might be priced more attractively if you book e.g. Budapest-Frankfurt-Chicago.

Particularly if you are travelling out of Europe and are looking for attractive Business or First Class fares, you should consider such options.

There are also specialised websites and travel agents who specifically search for such deals. You should, however, always take into account that you have to actually commence your travel in the city where the booking starts and calculate the extra time and budget to get there before you embark on your actual travel⁴.

There are also other considerations such as time and hassle. If you are travelling, say, from Singapore to New York, you

4 on some tariffs you can find flexible stopover times so that you could, for example, use the feeder flight for a week-end escape to the city where the booking starts some time before you fly

have the option of a non-stop flight with Singapore Airlines. With over 9,500 miles, it is currently the longest non-stop flight available.⁵

But do you want to spend 19 hours in a row on a plane, even if you are travelling in Business Class? You may find this is highly convenient and exactly meets your needs.

If not, you have other options, even with Singapore Airlines. Alternatively, in fact, they have a Singapore-Frankfurt-New York connection, or, as described earlier, you can choose an itinerary through one of the numerous European hubs.

The world’s longest flights⁶

Route	Carrier	Distance (miles)	Aircraft
Singapore (SIN) to New York (JFK)	Singapore Airlines	9,537	A350
Singapore (SIN) to Newark (EWR)	Singapore Airlines	9,523	A350
Doha (DOH) to Auckland (AKL)	Qatar Airways	9,032	A350
Perth (PER) to London (LHR)	Qantas	9,010	B787

5 a list with the longest flights is shown on page 17
6 as of January 2024; Source: <https://onemileatatime.com/>

Route	Carrier	Distance (miles)	Aircraft
Melbourne (MEL) to Dallas (DFW)	Qantas	8,992	B787
Auckland (AKL) to New York (JFK)	Air New Zealand & Qantas	8,828	B787
Dubai (DXB) to Auckland (AKL)	Emirates	8,824	A380
Singapore (SIN) to Los Angeles (LAX)	Singapore Airlines	8,770	A350
Bangalore (BLR) to San Francisco (SFO)	Air India	8,701	B777
Houston (IAH) to Sydney (SYD)	United Airlines	8,596	B787
Sydney (SYD) to Dallas (DFW)	Qantas	8,578	B787
Manila (MNL) to New York (JFK)	Philippine Airlines	8,520	A350
Singapore (SIN) to San Francisco (SFO)	Singapore Airlines & United Airlines	8,446	A350/ B787

Destination Airport

If you are travelling to a certain destination, don't assume there is just one airport you can fly to.

Should your travel take you to a large international mega-city such as New York, London or Paris, you might be aware that you have three, four or even five airports serving the destination.

London, as a prime example, can be reached through the airports of Heathrow, Gatwick, City, Stansted and Luton. And this does not even consider that there are also the international airports of Bristol and Birmingham within a range of 100 miles.

But even if you are travelling to smaller places, you may have a plentiful choice. As an example, take the Italian city of Florence.

Florence has its own international airport (Peretola) but within a distance of less than 80 miles you have two other international airports: Bologna (Borgo Panigale) and Pisa (Galileo Galilei) which both even have a direct bus shuttle service to Florence.

But does this really matter to travel planning? Why bother?

It does actually matter for a number of reasons. Airports are served by very different airlines, different punctuality performance and have very different degrees of ground transportation. And both aspects may have decisive influence on the cost, time and, ultimately, hassle of your travel.

Furthermore, if you are travelling to a destination where you are going to transfer to a connecting flight you will want to avoid changing airports, if at all possible.

Transferring between La Guardia and John F. Kennedy airports in New York or between Gatwick and Heathrow in