

7 Tips for Surviving Summer Travel Chaos

(Courtesy of Caroline Morse Teel, The SMARTER TRAVEL)

Long lines pile up at airports worldwide as departure boards flash red with hundreds of delayed and canceled flights. Travel is back, and the airline industry wasn't ready for it. Staffing shortages, sold-out flights, and weather have created chaos this summer.

If you're flying this summer, you need to be prepared for a rough ride. Here's what you can do to prepare.

Don't Check a Bag

[Thousands of bags](#) piled up on the floor of London's Heathrow airport after technical issues and a labor shortage resulted in luggage not being loaded onto departing flights. A shortage of baggage handlers increases the odds of your suitcase getting lost or mishandled during this busy travel season.

Additionally, if your flight is delayed, you won't be able to switch on to an earlier flight if you've already checked a bag. Flying with just a carry-on will also save you time since you'll be able to skip long baggage drop lines, so you can check in online and head straight to your gate.

Arrive at the Airport Earlier Than Normal

[Lines at some European airports](#) are so long that they are stretching out of the terminal—and travelers who have arrived two hours before departure are still missing their flights. Arrive at the airport earlier than you usually would, so that you have plenty of time in case of long lines.

Pack Your Own Food and Drinks

Staffing shortages and supply chain issues have impacted airport restaurants as well. Flyers may find long lines at airport eateries and limited items to choose from. Plus, if you're stuck in a huge security line, you might not even have time to grab food before you board. Better to be prepared and pack your own food, plus a water bottle to fill up once you're past security.

Be Prepared

Before you leave, download the app for the airline that you're flying on. This will be the fastest way for you to be alerted to delays and cancellations, and will give you an easy way to reschedule your flight yourself without having to wait on hold (or in line) to talk to a person.

Save the contact information for any hotels and rental cars that you've booked so that you can easily make any changes necessary due to a delay. I recommend creating a Google Doc for your trip that has all your contact information and confirmation numbers in one place, so you can see it all at a glance.

If you have limited vacation time (and the ability to work remotely), you might want to pack your work laptop in case you get stranded somewhere and need to work.

Leave a Buffer

When booking summer travel, don't assume that anything will be on time. If you have a connecting flight, leave extra time in between in case your first flight is delayed. Traveling for something with a hard

deadline (like a wedding or cruise)? You'll definitely want to build in a buffer and plan to arrive a day or two before you actually have to be there.

This also applies to your return flight—if you absolutely have to be back at work on Monday, plan to come back on Saturday instead of Sunday.

Opt for Early Morning Flights

According to data from the [Bureau of Transportation Statistics \(BTS\)](#), flights scheduled to depart between 6 and 7 am are the least likely to be delayed. Flights later in the day are more likely to be delayed due to a cascading effect—where each delayed leg impacts the next flight.

Watch the Forecast

Weather delays and cancellations don't just happen in the winter—summer thunderstorms have a big impact on flights. If a major storm is forecasted, airlines will issue a free change notice, and you might be able to preemptively change your flight if it looks like it could be impacted by weather.