

Summer travel checklist: 11 things to do now to make your trip great

(Courtesy of Clint Henderson, The Points Guy)



It might be the middle of March, but there are things you should be doing now to make your summer vacation a hit.

Sure, booking your summer trips is an important step, but there are also some housekeeping items to take care of to make sure your summer travel goes off without a hitch.

Here's everything to add to your planning checklist so you can minimize travel headaches when away from home this summer.

Believe it or not, summer is just around the corner. Prices are already high and likely to get much higher, so it may be time to book those trips before you're priced out of your vacation.

A great tool to use for deals is [Google Flights](#). You can set an alert for the days and itineraries you are looking for and monitor everything for a week or two before pulling the trigger. Google will tell you the average airfare for your journey and whether you are getting a deal, so you can rest easy knowing you can make an informed decision. Google will even email you if the price jumps or drops drastically.

What about [when to book](#)?

There's no magical best day to book your trips, but you might be better off traveling on a Tuesday or Wednesday to score the best deals. Traveling midweek is likely to be your best chance at saving some cash, whether you're traveling in the U.S. or abroad.

Don't forget to also periodically double-check prices to see if you can get a credit if prices drop between now and your departure date.

If you are booking a hotel, make sure you purchase a refundable rate. That way, if the price drops, you can cancel and rebook at the lower price. That applies to points redemptions as well.

It's also a great time to check your airline seat maps and choose seats now. The longer you wait, the more the plane will fill, meaning fewer desirable seats will be left for you to choose from.

Triple-check your passport expiration date



CLINT HENDERSON/THE POINTS GUY

This may seem obvious, but it's always important to check your passport expiration date before an international trip. You typically need at least [six months of validity](#).

Don't forget to factor in [the renewal process](#) when planning a trip, too. Right now, it's taking up to 11 weeks for routine renewals and up to eight weeks for expedited service.

Some countries also require you to have at least one or two empty pages in your passport if you need a visa — one empty page is required for Mexico, Canada and many countries in Europe, while two are needed for countries like China and South Africa — so make sure your passport has ample free space.

Sign up for TSA PreCheck



GEORGE FREY/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

Have you ever been waiting in a long security line at the airport while people in the line next to you breeze on by? If you've ever wondered why they're able to do this, the answer is likely because they have [TSA PreCheck](#).

TSA PreCheck is an expedited airport security program administered by the U.S. government in which prescreened, low-risk travelers can use a designated security line rather than wait in the regular Transportation Security Administration line at the airport. The line is typically much faster than the regular security line because travelers in the TSA PreCheck line do not need to remove liquids or electronics from their carry-on luggage or take off their shoes, belts or light jackets before passing through metal detectors.

Currently, a five-year TSA PreCheck membership costs \$78 per person and can be renewed online for a reduced cost of \$70 per person. If you have the right credit cards in your wallet, however, you can have that fee reimbursed. Many [credit cards](#) offer up to a \$100 statement credit reimbursement for the application fees associated with TSA PreCheck and/or Global Entry, as long as you pay for your membership with that card.

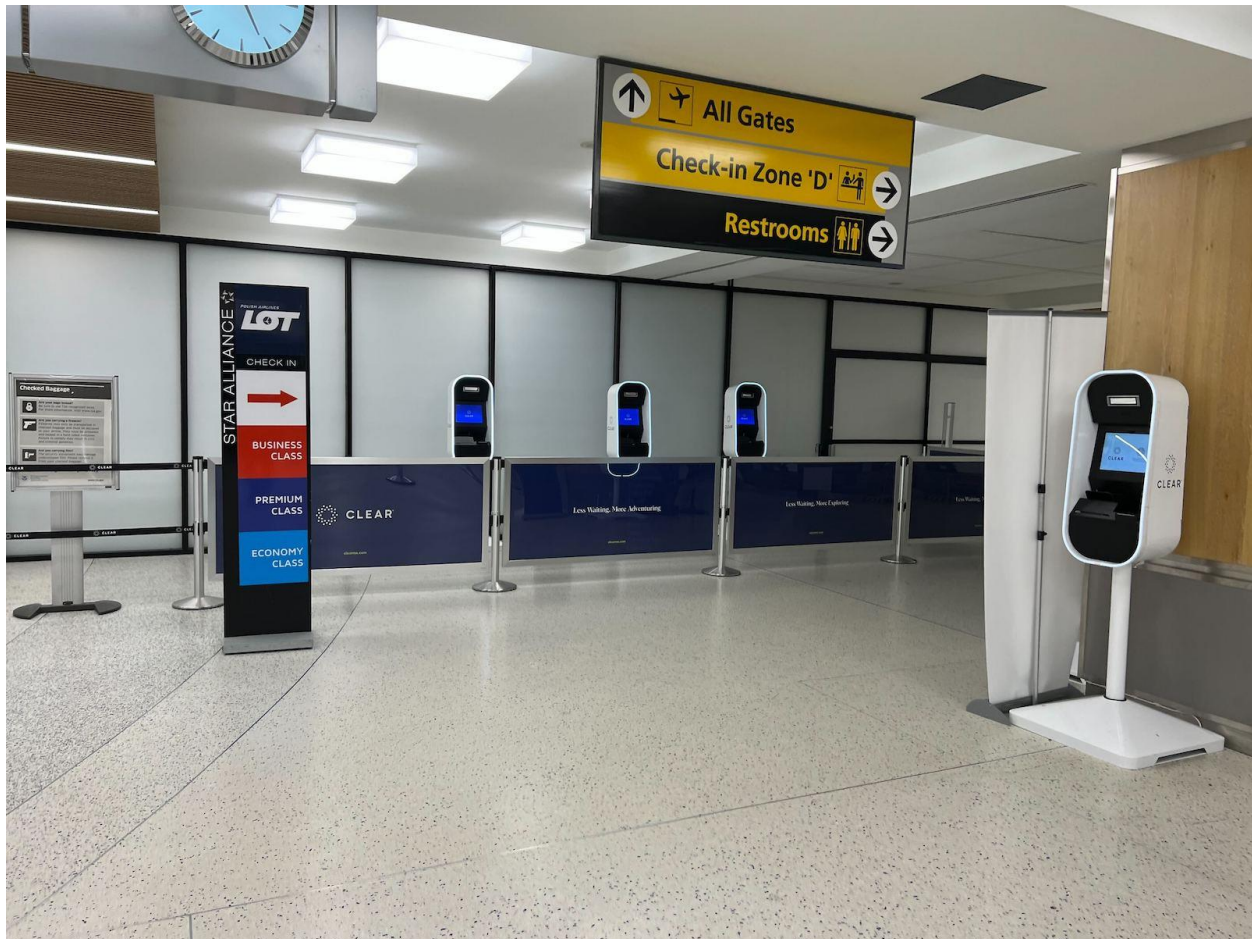
The following are just a few of the [nearly 50 cards](#) that cover TSA PreCheck (and/or Global Entry) fees:

- [The Platinum Card® from American Express.](#)
- [Marriott Bonvoy Brilliant® American Express® Card.](#)
- [Chase Sapphire Reserve.](#)
- [The Business Platinum Card® from American Express.](#)
- [Delta SkyMiles® Platinum American Express Card.](#)
- [Delta SkyMiles® Reserve American Express Card.](#)

If you have several international trips coming up, you may want to apply for Global Entry instead of TSA PreCheck. Global Entry is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection program that allows for expedited reentry into the U.S. after international travel. A Global Entry membership includes TSA PreCheck, so it may be worth the higher fee (\$100 for a five-year membership) if your summer travel plans include some international trips.

While going through the express security lane does come at a cost, it can significantly reduce the time you'll need to get from the ticket counter to your departure gate. This is especially important during busy travel times like Memorial Day weekend, Independence Day and Labor Day weekend.

Enroll in Clear



CLINT HENDERSON/THE POINTS GUY

Although some airports like Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) have reportedly still had long lines even when using Clear, being a member of this program can often save you a ton of time at airports like New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) and San Francisco International Airport (SFO).

But what exactly is this program?

Like TSA PreCheck and Global Entry, Clear is an expedited security program. It is now at 51 airports, among other [locations](#), and has more than 14 million members nationwide.

To [sign up for Clear](#), you'll need to allow the company to catalog identifying features, which Clear does through fingerprint and iris scans, to automate the identity verification step in the TSA screening process. Once you are enrolled, you can then enter a separate (often shorter) security lane with speedier access to the TSA agents and security screening. All you'll need to do is scan your eyes before a Clear representative escorts you to the front of the line for the traditional security screening machines.

If you have TSA PreCheck with Clear, there are sometimes special lines that will get you through security even faster.

While [Clear costs \\$189](#), making it pricier than a five-year membership for TSA PreCheck, some elite members are eligible for reduced or even free membership fees.

If you are a [Delta Diamond Medallion](#), Delta 360, United Global Services or United Premier 1K status holder, you can enroll in Clear for free. Delta Platinum, Gold and Silver Medallion members and United Platinum, Gold and Silver members can pay a reduced rate of \$149 per year. Even entry-level Delta SkyMiles and United MileagePlus members qualify for a discount; they'll pay just \$179 a year.

Some credit cards will also give you a statement credit for Clear.

Anyone with a Delta cobranded credit card, including the [Delta SkyMiles® Gold American Express Card](#), the [Delta SkyMiles® Platinum American Express Card](#), the [Delta SkyMiles® Reserve American Express Card](#), the [Delta SkyMiles® Gold Business American Express Card](#), the [Delta SkyMiles® Platinum Business American Express Card](#) and the [Delta SkyMiles® Reserve Business American Express Card](#), will pay only \$149 per year for the service.

The same applies to those with a United cobranded credit card, such as the [United Explorer Card](#), the [United Business Card](#) and the [United Club Infinite Card](#). Cardholders of these cards can enroll for a reduced rate of \$149 per year.

Additionally, you can get a free membership via these cards:

- [American Express® Green Card](#), including an annual statement credit for up to three family members.
- [The Platinum Card from American Express](#).
- [The Business Platinum Card from American Express](#).

The information for the Amex Green Card has been collected independently by The Points Guy. The card details on this page have not been reviewed or provided by the card issuer.

Check your global entry membership to make sure it's valid



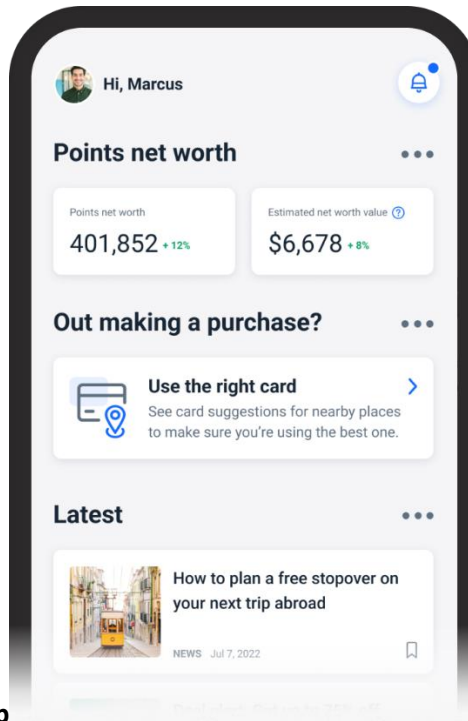
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If you already have Global Entry status to enter the U.S. after an international trip, then you already know how speedy it can make the immigration process. Global Entry works for both land ports of entry, like crossing the border from Canada or Mexico, and airports, and it's valid for five years.

Before you travel, make sure you check your [Global Entry card](#) for the expiration date so you [avoid the mistake this reader made](#) a few years ago. The expiration date for your Global Entry membership (which always falls on your birthday following the fifth anniversary of your approval date) appears both in your online account and on the back of your Global Entry card.

Due to delays in processing renewals, [CBP has extended grace periods of up to two years](#) for renewals, but you must submit your renewal application online in your account prior to the expiration date.

As a reminder, children are not able to go through Global Entry lanes with a parent unless they have their own membership. And remember, select credit cards offer Global Entry credits, so your membership may be free.



Download your airline's mobile app

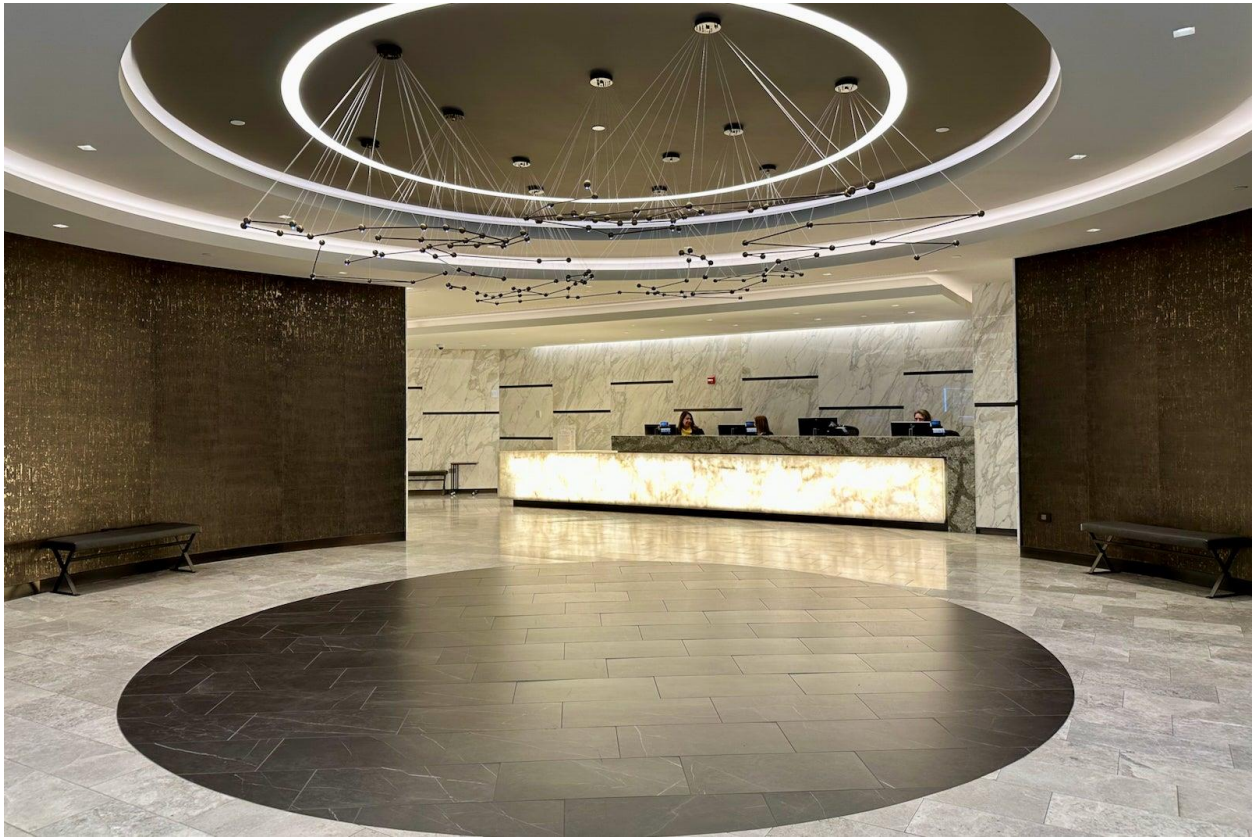
TPG App. THE POINTS GUY

Regardless of which airline you are flying, it's essential that you install the app of that carrier on your phone (and don't forget the [TPG App](#)).

Before you leave home, you'll want to download the app, log in to your account and set up push notifications so you'll know right away if there are any changes to your reservation. This will make it so you receive updates about your flight as soon as they're made available, which is especially helpful during irregular operations, as updates sometimes appear in the app before they are announced at the airport.

In situations involving delays or cancellations, having easy access to your airline's mobile app can be a huge help. In addition to receiving flight change notifications in one easy-to-access spot on your phone, you can track your flight to see where it's at. Some airline apps will even let you track your checked luggage, request to be placed on standby for an earlier flight, rebook yourself if something goes wrong with your original flight and chat with a live customer service agent should you need assistance.

Double-check lounge access policies



ZACH GRIFF/THE POINTS GUY

A lot has changed recently when it comes to [airport lounges](#). As such, you'll want to make sure you read up on airport lounge access, including guest restrictions, before you set out on your summer travels.

For example, just because you were able to bring the rest of your travel party into the lounge with you as guests last summer doesn't necessarily mean you'll be able to this time around. Earlier this year, [American Express updated the guest policy for its network of Centurion Lounges](#). Unless cardholders hit a \$75,000 minimum spending requirement on their eligible American Express card annually, they can no longer bring two guests in without incurring an additional charge. There are still ways to [ensure guest access to Centurion Lounges](#), but you'll have to pay (unless your entire travel party is younger than 2, in which case they can still enter for free).

Similarly, [Delta recently made its entry rules stricter than ever](#). Now, Sky Club members flying on basic economy tickets no longer have access to Sky Clubs unless they have an eligible Amex card with Sky Club access. Elite members on international flights in Main Cabin or Comfort+ seats are subject to the same restrictions but can also use their Sky Club membership to access Sky Club lounges.

It isn't all bad news regarding airport lounge access this summer. New lounges are popping up in frequently visited airports, giving you even more options for fueling up or resting up on travel days.

For example, Delta opened a [Sky Club at Kansas City International Airport \(MCI\)](#) in late February. Additionally, American Express opened a [new Amex Centurion Lounge at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport \(SEA\)](#), also at the end of February.

Book high-demand activities as soon as possible



Bangkok in 2023. CLINT HENDERSON/THE POINTS GUY

No matter where your travels take you this summer, it's likely others are headed to the same vacation hot spots as you. National parks, cabanas, tours and even theme park restaurants book up early for summer dates. Fortunately, there are a few tips for snagging reservations before they sell out.

National parks

Certain national parks have adopted advance reservation requirements in recent years to manage crowds. Currently, only Arches, Glacier, Haleakala and Rocky Mountain national parks require advance reservations, though other parks do deem it necessary to book select activities before you arrive.

To be sure you have the latest information for the parks you plan on visiting, check out the official national park websites.

Tours and attractions

As temperatures rise, so does the number of travelers wanting to visit or take guided tours of popular attractions. Some now require advance reservations or timed-entry tickets for guests.

For example, most of [Washington, D.C.'s Smithsonian museums](#) are free to visit, but a few require timed-entry passes that you can acquire in advance. Other must-dos, such as tours of government buildings like the U.S. Capitol, are also free but do not accept walk-ups; you'll need to request a tour in advance through the official online reservation system.

Disney tickets and restaurant reservations

Both Walt Disney World and Disneyland still require [theme park reservations](#) in addition to a ticket.

It's unlikely that every park would sell out on any given day, but it is possible that the park you want to visit could run out of entry slots. Because of this, it's vital that you purchase your tickets and make your park reservations as far in advance as you're able if you have your heart set on visiting a certain park during the busy summer months.

Likewise, reservations for popular Disney World and Disneyland restaurants often book up faster than you can say "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo," despite becoming available 60 days in advance. As a result, you'll want to lock in your dining reservations as soon as possible, especially if you are planning a princess dinner at Cinderella's Royal Table or a space-age cocktail at Oga's Cantina.

Beach and poolside cabanas

Unfortunately, you can't reserve shaded poolside cabanas with cushioned loungers and fully stocked coolers by throwing your towel over a chair and hoping everybody else who walks by thinks it's already taken.

Typically, you can reserve cabanas on the day of your visit, but during busy times of the year, you may want to do it ahead of time. This doesn't just include hotels; you'll also want to keep this in mind for [cruises](#) and [water parks](#).

Know your rights

What happens if something goes wrong when you're traveling?

You should know what you are entitled to if a trip is delayed or canceled by your airline. Fortunately, you are entitled to certain rights based on rules from the [Department of Transportation](#).

If the airline cancels your flight, [you are entitled to a full cash refund](#). Don't just accept a voucher for future travel (unless you are sure you can use it).

Long delays, however, are a different story. You are not guaranteed a refund in the event of a long delay, though it never hurts to ask for one.

Additionally, you'll want to be aware of any credit card protections that may apply, depending on how you booked your trip. Some [travel credit cards](#) offer compensation in the event of a canceled or long-delayed flight.

Here are just a few examples:

- [Chase Sapphire Reserve](#): Provides up to \$20,000 in trip cancellation coverage and trip delay benefits of up to \$500 per person that kick in at a delay lasting at least six hours.

- [Chase Sapphire Preferred Card](#): Includes [trip cancellation and interruption insurance](#), [trip delay reimbursement](#), [emergency assistance services](#) and more.
- [The Platinum Card from American Express](#): Provides [trip cancellation and interruption insurance](#)* for up to \$20,000 of a covered trip and incident.

If you realize your [flight is likely to be delayed](#) based on where it's coming from or because of bad weather, know that [standing in line](#) isn't the only way to get rebooked (though you may want to try that, too). You can also check the airline's app, visit an in-airport kiosk, call the airline or [reach out via the airline's social media channels](#) for rebooking options. If you decide to call and are stuck on a long hold, try [dialing an international number](#) for faster service.

Ultimately, you are your own best advocate when something goes sideways, so knowing the rules and rights you have will go a long way in helping yourself get out of a bind when something unexpected happens.

**Eligibility and benefit level varies by card. Terms, conditions and limitations apply. Visit americanexpress.com/benefitsguide for details. Policies are underwritten by New Hampshire Insurance Company, an AIG Company.*

Consider purchasing travel insurance

OneTrip Premier \$173 TOTAL COST The best coverage for dream vacations and remote destinations	OneTrip Prime \$113 TOTAL COST Our most popular plan for family vacations, cruises and tours	OneTrip Basic \$82 TOTAL COST The economical choice for domestic & international travelers
SELECT	SELECT	SELECT
Plan and Pricing Details (PDF)	Plan and Pricing Details (PDF)	Plan and Pricing Details (PDF)
Epidemic Coverage Endorsement ✓	Epidemic Coverage Endorsement ✓	Epidemic Coverage Endorsement ✓
Trip Cancellation \$2,000	Trip Cancellation \$2,000	Trip Cancellation \$2,000
Trip Interruption \$3,000	Trip Interruption \$3,000	Trip Interruption \$2,000
Emergency Medical \$50,000	Emergency Medical \$50,000	Emergency Medical \$10,000
Emergency Transportation \$1,000,000	Emergency Transportation \$500,000	Emergency Transportation \$50,000
Baggage Loss/Damage \$2,000	Baggage Loss/Damage \$1,000	Baggage Loss/Damage \$500
All Plan Benefits ▼ SELECT	All Plan Benefits ▼ SELECT	All Plan Benefits ▼ SELECT

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Travel insurance may be worth paying for, especially if you are traveling internationally. Before you invest in travel insurance, though, be sure to check if it's already covered with one of your credit cards.

Many premium cards offer trip interruption, delay or cancellation insurance, so you may not need to buy a separate policy.

However, in some cases, you may still want to buy extra insurance for added peace of mind. Depending on the policy you choose, you may receive coverage for situations like medical evacuations or illnesses that cause last-minute cancellations (many of which are part of ["cancel for any reason" insurance](#).)

Get a credit card that pays for your bags

Airline baggage fees can quickly add up, particularly for families and those taking trips that require a lot of gear or more [items than can fit in a carry-on bag](#).

The [fees vary greatly](#), with most starting around \$30 for the first checked bag. Depending on how many bags you check, you can easily end up adding an extra \$100 to \$200 to your travel costs just by bringing luggage.

Luckily, there are [a few ways you can avoid paying baggage fees](#). One of the easiest happens to involve having the right credit card in your wallet.

There are [more than 20 different cards](#) that offer free checked bags, most of which are cobranded cards from airlines. That means that travelers who are loyal to a particular airline can both benefit from waived checked bag fees and earn additional miles just by paying for their flights with a certain credit card.

Keep in mind that the rules vary by card when it comes to how many free checked bags are allowed under the benefit. Even if only one bag is covered, that money you save can go toward other vacation expenses, such as ride-hailing services, meals and attraction fees.