

Why you should get TSA PreCheck and Clear — and how you can save on both

(Courtesy of Eric Rosen, TravelPulse)

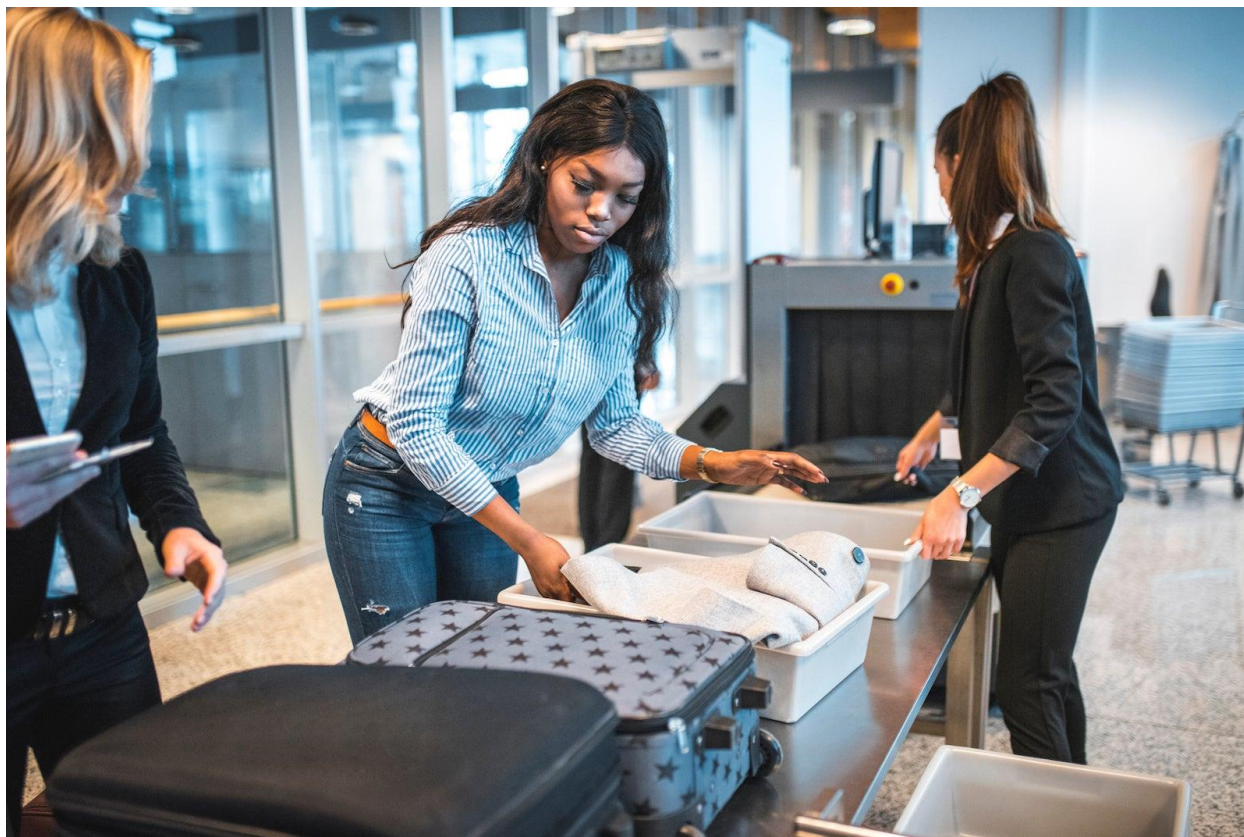


Editor's note: This is a recurring post, regularly updated with new information.

As we head into spring break, followed by summer vacation, travel is back in a big way.

With this in mind, it only makes sense to consider ways to expedite airport security screening. Whether during hectic travel times such as the summer or regularly scheduled travel throughout the rest of the year, no one wants to spend more time waiting in line than necessary.

Your two options for expedited airport security in the U.S. are [TSA PreCheck](#) and [Clear](#). Let's break down the two programs.



Getting through security at the airport swiftly and safely is something you should consider if you haven't already. AZMANL/GETTY IMAGES

TSA PreCheck vs. Clear

Overall, Clear's biometric identity verification process will get you to the front of the security line faster than TSA PreCheck. However, [TSA PreCheck](#) will ensure a speedier, more straightforward screening process after an agent has verified your identity.

You might assume that if you have Clear, you can also use the TSA PreCheck lane for the carry-on and personal screening process. This is not the case, though, which raises the question: Why not consider getting both?

Although neither program is free to join (detailed below), the right credit card or having elite status with certain airlines can significantly help, if not entirely, cover the cost.

For example, both the [American Express® Green Card](#) and [The Platinum Card® from American Express](#) offer an annual [Clear statement credit](#) of up to \$189 each calendar year to cover your membership. Note that enrollment is required for select benefits.

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.

Not to confuse you with a third option, but note that [Global Entry](#) is yet another expedited security program.

Global Entry allows preapproved, low-risk travelers to automate their way through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection processing when arriving in the U.S. Global Entry assigns a “trusted traveler” number that [also grants access](#) to TSA PreCheck lines.

For now, though, let’s focus on TSA PreCheck and Clear since they will get you through U.S. security lines faster.

	TSA PreCheck	Clear
Regular application fee	\$78.	\$189.
Membership period	Five years.	One year.
Total members	10 million-plus.	14 million-plus.
Age restriction	No age restriction, but travelers must be 13 to use the lane alone.	18 years-plus (children under 18 may use this lane for free when accompanied by a Clear member).
Application process	Online form followed by an in-person background check.	Online form followed by five-minute enrollment at participating airports with a valid ID.
Credit card discount	Yes.	Yes.
Elite status discount	No.	Yes.

TSA PreCheck

Launched in 2013, [TSA PreCheck](#) allows travelers deemed low risk by the Transportation Security Administration to use special security lines at airports. These travelers don't have to remove their shoes or belts or remove laptops or liquids from their bags. They're also usually screened with old-style walk-through machines rather than full-body scanners.

Availability: The program currently counts over 10 million members and works with [over 80 airlines in over 200 airports](#). That means folks traveling through those airports on a participating airline should be able to use the special PreCheck lanes.

During 2021, 97.6% of non-TSA PreCheck passengers waited less than 20 minutes at airport security checkpoints, compared to 96.2% of TSA PreCheck passengers who, on average, waited less than five minutes in those lanes, [per TSA data](#).



TSA PreCheck uses older-style screening methods. ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

Eligibility: To apply for TSA PreCheck, you must be a U.S. citizen or a foreign citizen who meets specific citizenship and residency requirements. There is no age restriction to apply, but children age 12 and under can use PreCheck lanes when traveling with a parent or guardian who is a member of the program. Children age 13-17 can go through TSA PreCheck alone or accompanied by parents if they have the TSA PreCheck indicator on their boarding pass.

Applying: To apply for TSA PreCheck, you must submit an [online application](#) and pay a \$78 application fee. Once the application is conditionally approved, you can schedule an in-person appointment at one of several hundred [enrollment centers](#) around the country. This step includes a background check.

Once you are approved, you receive a [Known Traveler Number](#), which you must enter into your frequent flyer profiles to automatically attach to any reservations you make. Barring that, you can always add it at check-in for a flight.

Expiration and renewal: TSA PreCheck membership is valid for five years. You can renew your membership [online](#) up to six months before your current TSA PreCheck status expires. All you need is your name, date of birth and KTN, though some members may be directed to renew in person at an enrollment center.

How to get PreCheck discounted or free: As previously mentioned, many credit cards now include a statement credit for a TSA PreCheck (or Global Entry) application fee as part of their benefits (up to \$100), meaning you can essentially apply and be reimbursed for the fee.

Among the popular cards that feature this benefit are:

- [The Platinum Card from American Express.](#)
- [Chase Sapphire Reserve.](#)
- [Capital One Venture Rewards Credit Card.](#)
- [Bank of America® Premium Rewards® credit card.](#)

Pros: There are many reasons to apply for TSA PreCheck, including the wide availability of TSA PreCheck lanes at hundreds of airports around the country, the ease of applying and the fact that many credit cards include a statement credit that covers the application fee.

Cons: Because of the program's popularity, TSA PreCheck lanes can sometimes be longer than the normal security ones. However, an extra few minutes of waiting here and there might be worth it to avoid having to strip down and "assume the position" in a scanner every time you fly. Please do note, though, that TSA PreCheck members are not guaranteed access to expedited security every time they fly and can be randomly excluded.

Clear

Next up, let's discuss Clear. You might have noticed a line for Clear members at more than 40 airports around the U.S. You can read our [full guide to Clear here](#), but let's summarize the benefits and how you can apply.



BING GUAN/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

Clear is a secure identity platform that collects biometric data on members, including fingerprint and iris scans. It then uses them to automate the identity verification step in the security screening process. Travelers who enroll in Clear can use a separate lane with dedicated kiosks for this part of the [airport experience](#) rather than lining up to wait for a TSA agent to glance over their license or passport.

Once your identity is confirmed, a Clear representative escorts you to the front of the line for security screening machines. If you are enrolled in TSA PreCheck, you can head to the PreCheck screening lines and not worry about removing your shoes and belt or items from your carry-on. However, if you do not have TSA PreCheck, you have to use the normal screening lines, which is why you might consider enrolling in both.

Availability: Clear is currently available at [50 airports](#) across the country and loads of stadiums and arenas.

Eligibility: To join Clear, you must be a U.S. citizen or permanent legal resident at least 18 years old. You must also present a valid form of unexpired ID, such as a U.S. driver's license, a U.S. passport or passport card, a U.S.-issued Permanent Resident Card, a state-issued ID, a U.S. military ID or a Global Entry card.

Applying: Enrolling in Clear takes as little as [five minutes](#). You can start by registering online or completing the entire process in person with a representative at a Clear kiosk at participating airports. You will need to answer a few identifying questions, scan your fingerprints and the irises of your eyes at one of the machines, snap a profile photo and hand over your identification card or document for another scan.

Once you belong to Clear, you can add up to three family members for \$60 per person per year. Children under 18 years of age can use Clear lanes for free when accompanied by a Clear member.

Expiration and renewal: Clear membership is only good for one calendar year. You can set it to renew automatically or cancel it before your renewal date by logging in to your account online and changing your settings.

How to get it discounted or free: Clear membership costs \$189 per year, but there are ways to reduce that figure.

- [Try Clear for free for two months](#).
- Use your [American Express Green Card](#) or [The Platinum Card from American Express](#) for an annual up-to-\$189 statement credit when you use the card to purchase a membership.
- If you're a Delta Air Lines or United Airlines member, you can stack your card's statement credit with another discount. However, [these discounts diminished on Feb. 1](#). Delta SkyMiles members can enjoy a reduced annual membership fee of \$179 per year. Silver, Gold and Platinum Medallions and folks with a Delta credit card such as the [Delta SkyMiles® Gold American Express Card](#) or the [Delta SkyMiles® Platinum American Express Card](#) get it for \$149 per year. [Delta Diamond Medallion elite members](#) can enjoy Clear for free.

United has a [similar partnership](#) with Clear.

- General MileagePlus members only have to pay \$179 annually.
- Premier Silver, Gold and Platinum elite members and flyers with a United cobranded credit card, such as the [United Explorer Card](#) or [United Club Infinite Card](#), can get Clear for \$149 per year.
- Top-tier [United Premier 1K elite members](#) get it for free.

Pros: Unlike TSA PreCheck, you will not be randomly excluded from using the kiosks if you're an active Clear member. Likewise, even if you're not flying an airline participating in TSA PreCheck, you can still use the Clear kiosks.

Cons: If you want to use TSA PreCheck security screening, you must join that program separately. Joining Clear requires handing over your biometric data.

Bottom line

TSA PreCheck shortened security wait times for millions of flyers who either joined the program or were occasionally granted access to the expedited security lanes. It continues to be a great way to improve the process of getting through an airport for frequent travelers.

Clear reduces your wait time even further by automating the identity verification process and whisking travelers to the front of security lines. However, having Clear does not automatically confer TSA PreCheck status, as Global Entry usually does. It's also available at far fewer airports than TSA PreCheck.

Some flyers might not feel the need to join both programs, but if you spend a lot of time in airports that have Clear, it will allow you to skip the ID line and perhaps use PreCheck screening lanes where you won't have the hassle of removing clothing items or belongings from your bags.

You can reduce the expense with credit cards that reimburse cardholders for [TSA PreCheck \(or Global Entry\)](#) applications and [Clear membership](#) (hint, the [Amex Platinum Card](#)). And simply joining a frequent flyer program significantly cuts down on Clear membership fees.