

How to Handle A "Bumpy" Flight: Travel Advise

by Maureen Austin, PassPorter Guest Contributor

About a month ago, I adventured down to Walt Disney World for a long, relaxing weekend with many of my dear PassPorter friends. I've made the air travel journey to Orlando more times than I can even count. For the most part, it's been an easy, smooth and problem free experience. However, on my recent journey I became a student of the what-happens-when-multiple-things-go-wrong class in air travel. I penned a few things I've learned; in hopes it will help other travelers. I'll break that adventure down, mishap by mishap and share solutions that seemed to finally put the horror to an end.

Let's begin with the first flight. I'm not in an area that has non stop service, so I make a connection at one of the country's busiest airports - Dallas Fort Worth. When I arrived at my regional airport, having checked in online - I was told my flight to Texas had been delayed by 1 hour due to high winds and that all east bound flights from Dallas had also been delayed. What I did right: Checked in online. Doing that and doing it early reduced my risk of being bumped and being delayed even later. What I did wrong: I didn't call ahead to check the status of the flight. As a result, I sat in a very small airport for over 2 hours, waiting and waiting, which added to my tension.

Finally, my 4:50 flight began boarding at 6:20 pm. My connection to Orlando was to leave Dallas at 7:05. However, I had been assured that all flights were delayed so I would make that flight. I confirmed with the flight attendant on board about the Dallas delays so although I was already a wee bit frustrated, I settled in and accepted what will be will be.

No problems with arrival at Dallas and knowing my gate number, I deplane. What I did wrong: Make my way towards that terminal, contemplating the possibility of grabbing a light meal. What I did right: Then it occurred to me I had better check on the flight to be sure and found a departures board. My eyes nearly popped when I saw flashing red words next to the flight number and gate - my flight was boarding! So picture the scene from Home Alone, except that it's me instead of a blond haired kid running frantically through the airport. What I did wrong: I initially assumed that the information given to me on board the first flight was ultimately correct. Never do this. Think of the information given while still in the air as a guide but at any time things can change. If you are delayed or making a tight connection, either find

a gate agent or look at a departures board to reconfirm information. If an airport is experiencing major delays, employees may be dispatched to assist travelers who have already been displaced, need special assistance, etc. Yes, ideally they should be there to assist every passenger without passengers having to ask but let's face it, it doesn't always happen that way. In these times, look out for number one-yourself and don't depend on assurances or estimations to get where you need to be.

Okay. So I make it to the connection just as the gate agent was about to shut the door. I might add I am not the type to shout randomly across a terminal full of people but when I saw that agent's hand on the door, you better believe I was yelping. I make it on to the flight and the door was closed behind me.

As I got settled, I began to listen to the complaints of other passengers, some of whom were extremely rude to the flight crew going on about everything from being bumped to almost missing the flight like I did. The result of these tirades was a tension so thick you could snap a rubber band. Certainly, I have been on flights with less than friendly flight crews but I'm thinking these three ladies didn't message up to the big man upstairs asking for wind gusts nor did they call the airline's operations control begging to inconvenience thousands of people on a Friday night. What I did right: I followed crew instructions, let these employees do their jobs and made a note to lodge any complaints, if I had any, to the right departments.

Let's take a moment here to talk about complaints. If you've got one, you can address it in a number of ways. If it is something that can be addressed immediately at the employee or supervisor level, state your complaint without screaming or yelling. If it can't be addressed then, or you aren't having much success, ask for a corporate address or phone number. You can also find this information on the airline's website or in the in flight magazine. When you email, write or phone, have as much information as you can available including a flight number, date of travel and any names of people you encountered that you want to mention. If possible, try to address it first on the spot, then move up the chain of command. You can also contact the government to file a complaint against the airline at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov>.

Back to this twisty adventure. On the flight to Orlando, I might add I heard someone mention to one of the loudest passengers that she might consider the alternative - have this flight and all the others leave on time and then us all be at risk for wind shear, which can take a plane down. Interesting how quiet it got after that! How an airline handles your delay is one thing- the reason FOR the delay is another. I've been

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on flights where there is a mechanical problem. Inconvenient? Yes. But I'd rather they find it and take care of it on the ground than at 35,000 feet. Planes are like cars. Things happen and sometimes, not at the best time.

Touching down at Orlando at nearly midnight, I thought all my troubles were over. I was tired and almost 2 hours late, but I was glad to be there safely. Two of my best PassPorter friends were there to greet me. What they did right: Called the airline for flight updates via the 800 number. As a result, they spent time they would have been sitting around waiting on me, wandering around the World Showcase.

As usually happens, it took quite awhile for the baggage carousel to get going. So we waited and as the steady stream of oddly shaped boxes, colorful and not so colorful suitcases passed by, there slowly arose an uneasy feeling that my adventure was not over. And indeed, my luggage was nowhere to be found. What I did right: I waited until the carousel stopped and proceeded to the baggage office. This is usually located within close proximity to the airline's carousels. If you don't see it, ask. Do not ever, ever leave the airport without reporting lost baggage!

As you can imagine, there was a line. I was totally exhausted but I really had no other choice than to wait. When I got to the counter, I was faced with a not so friendly agent. Did I feel like screaming? Yes, sort of but what I wanted most was my stuff and screaming wasn't going to make the luggage magically appear. She proceeded to ask me questions about my luggage- including a description. What I did right: I was specific, down to the colors of my Mickey luggage tag. If you use a ribbon or colorful identifier on your luggage- make sure you mention it. It could mean getting your luggage that much quicker! What I did wrong: I wasn't able to give the agent a really good list of what was in my suitcase. Yes, I knew clothes and shoes were in there but I forgot a lot of other things that were worth some value like some gifts for my friends. It seems "Type A" to make a list but if the luggage is indeed actually lost, the airline will need an itemized listing of contents in order to reimburse you. Take a few photos.

As we got further into the report, giving her information on my hotel and my contact information, I asked her if there was any possibility that the luggage might be coming on a following flight. She did tell me the last flight of the night was arriving at 1:05 and it was likely my bag would be on it. At that point, I decided it was worth the extra 30 minutes to have my bag in hand- even if just a possibility. My wonderful friends agreed and we waited. It worked! When the luggage came rolling out from the next flight, there was my suitcase. What I did right: Even though I was ready to get to Disney as it was nearly 1:30 am, I went back

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to the baggage claim to report the bag had been found.

What if it wasn't on that flight? Baggage is delivered to the passenger by the airline. In most cases, it can take anywhere from 12-72 hours. If it still is not found, then it would be considered missing and you would need to file a lost property claim with the airline.

Sometimes damage to your belongings or missing belongings may be a result of the security inspection process. If you open your suitcase to find the calling card that the TSA has inspected your bag and then discover damage or missing items, visit their website at www.tsaclaims.org to file a claim. If you lock your suitcase and the damage is a result of the TSA having to break it to gain access, you are not entitled to any reimbursement. I use plastic cable ties that can be cut and never had any issues with any kind of damage.

I did finally arrive at Disney and begin my vacation, having learned a few new things along the way. Preparing well for any travel adventure can help you avoid disaster from the unexpected. Happy and smarter travels!

About The Author: Maureen Austin is co-owner of Ears to You Travel and a proud Florida native. Born in South Florida and having lived all over the state, she enjoys writing about the Sunshine State's many attractions and natural beauty.

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