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15 Travel Tips for First-time Fliers



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From packing your bags to getting to your gate on time, going on your first flight can be intimidating. These travel tips for first-time fliers will hopefully **reduce your anxiety** so you can enjoy your adventure.

8 General Tips for Stress-free Flights

Commercial aviation is the **safest form of transportation** in the nation, but the experience can still be a source of anxiety for even the most seasoned travelers. Add in irritations like long lines and cramped spaces, and it's little wonder people get tense when flying. Our tips for stress-free flights can help you minimize the tension.

Check Your Airlines Luggage Restrictions

As a first-time flier, you may not realize that each airline has luggage restrictions designed to keep both the plane and baggage handlers safe. That's enough of a reason to check out the rules for your airlines, but you also don't want to be the person at the check-in desk frantically trying to repack your bags.

So what kind of restrictions might you run into? Here are some common ones:

- **Number.** Most airlines limit passengers to one checked bag and one carry-on. Some airlines may allow more, but they typically charge an additional fee for the privilege. Your airline may also let you carry a personal item on the flight, like a coat or a purse.
- **Weight.** The maximum weight for checked bags is usually 50 pounds. Again, that can vary by airline, and some airlines may allow heavier bags for an additional fee.
- **Size.** Airlines may also enforce a size limit on your checked luggage, usually restricting bags to about 62 linear inches (i.e., the total of the bag's length, width, and height). For carry-on luggage, the limit is typically 45 linear inches.

Bonus tip: Airport security can inspect checked luggage, so you might want to get a TSA-approved lock for your suitcase. Doing so minimizes the chances of your lock or bag being damaged if security personnel decide to open it.

Pack Early

Rushing to throw your stuff into a bag on the day of your flight is a good way to forget important items — or worse, pack something that's prohibited by the TSA. Packing early gives you the opportunity to make sure you have what you need and check that your luggage meets your airline's size and weight restrictions.

When you give yourself enough time to pack, you can also organize your luggage so you have certain items handy. For instance, putting medications in your carry-on bag ensures you have them when you need them. The same goes for your identification.

Make Digital Copies of Documents

You may want to take a moment to make digital copies of some of your travel documents and save them either to the cloud, your smartphone, or a USB storage device. Any of these makes your documents accessible even if the originals are lost or stolen.

To be clear, some documents, like identification, are only usable in their original form. But digital copies of some can be very useful, such as:

- A list of medications
- A [travel insurance certificate](#)
- Room and car reservation information

Knowing you have an accessible copy ready can give you some peace of mind on your trip.

Download Entertainment Before You Go to the Airport

Many airlines offer WiFi or inflight entertainment to help you kill time while you're in the air. However, the options can be limited and the service might be spotty or expensive. But if you download books, movies, and podcasts to your phone or tablet before you head out the door, you can be fairly confident that you'll be entertained for the duration of your flight.

Check-in Online

Once upon a time, you had to go to the airport and wait in line to check in to a flight. But now most people can choose to check in via their airline's website or app a full 24 hours ahead of their flight.

For a first-time flier, the benefits are pretty substantial. First, checking in early means you have one less line to wait in — which means spend fewer anxious minutes wondering if you gave yourself enough time to get to your gate. Plus, you'll get a copy of your boarding pass on your phone. That's one less piece of paper to track!

Arrive Early

Even when you check in online, you want to get to the airport in plenty of time for your flight. That generally means arriving at the airport at least:

- Two hours prior to the departure time for a domestic flight
- Three hours prior to the departure time for an international flight

Some people prefer using your flight's boarding time as the guide to when you should arrive at the airport. The difference is only about 30 minutes, and you can easily fill that time if you've already downloaded entertainment for your flight.

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Be Ready for Security

Air travelers often gripe about security lines, but much of their troubles could be avoided with a little preparation. The place to start? The [TSA's Travel Checklist](#). It has a lot of good tips for first-time fliers, including:

- Checking your bag for prohibited items before you pack
- Understanding the [3-1-1 liquids rule](#)
- Wearing easy-to-remove shoes
- Having your identification and boarding pass in hand as you enter security

Another option for getting through security is signing up for [TSA Precheck](#) or [Global Entry](#), especially if you see more air travel in your future.

Get Travel Insurance

One of the most stress-inducing parts of air travel are the what-ifs: What if I miss a connection? What if my flight gets canceled? What if the airline loses my luggage?

Worst-case scenarios like these can keep even veteran travelers up at night. But one way to combat that anxiety is to get [travel insurance](#). Quality coverage from a trustworthy provider can help you relax and enjoy your trip.

3 Health Tips for First-time Fliers

Commercial flying may be the safest mode of transportation, but it can still have an effect on your body. In fact, feeling unwell or uncomfortable during a flight is common and often the result of being at altitude and in close quarters. While we can't change that situation, we can give some health-related flight advice.

Drink Plenty of Water

Flying can be very dehydrating, in part because the air at high altitudes has little moisture. Not only can this leave passengers feeling tired, it can cause dry mouth, dizziness, and headaches.

To make sure you're hydrated throughout your flight, you can:

- **Drink liquids.** Water is the best choice, but sports drinks with lots of electrolytes are another option.
- **Pack a refillable water bottle.** You can't take an open container through security, but you can bring a reusable water bottle to fill up at drinking fountains in the airport.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Drinking alcohol might seem like a good way to deal with the stress of flying, but wine, beer, and spirits are actually diuretics and will only increase dehydration symptoms.
- **Avoid caffeine.** Don't reach for coffee if you're feeling drowsy on your flight. Like alcohol, caffeine is a diuretic and may make you feel worse.

Bonus tip: Take your contacts out before you fly to minimize discomfort caused by dry eyes.

Flex and Stretch

On a long flight, you can find yourself sitting rather still for several hours. That's seldom a good idea for your body, and in the worst-case scenario, it can even lead to deep vein thrombosis — a serious medical condition where a blood clot forms that could potentially cause a pulmonary embolism.

The solution is to use your muscles during the course of your flight. Tapping your feet or walking up and down the aisle are both good ways to get your blood flowing. While you're at it, you might also try some seated airplane stretches.

Get Some Rest

Being in close proximity to people, like you are when you're in an airplane cabin, exposes you to germs. That's enough to put you at risk for catching a cold, but flying can also make your body less prepared to fight those germs.

Keeping hydrated is the first step in warding off illness while in flight, but the next is making sure you get some sleep. That may mean you need to:

- **Book a window seat.** That way you won't have people climbing over you to use the restroom, and you can control the window shade.
- **Invest in a travel pillow.** Neck pillows support your head so you're more comfortable and more likely to sleep.
- **Buy noise-canceling headphones.** A good pair of headphones, or even just a decent set of earplugs, can reduce sounds that may keep you awake.

A noisy plane cabin isn't going to provide you with your best night of sleep, but you want to do what you can to relax and get some rest.

4 Tips for Long Flights and International Travel

All of our flying tips so far also apply to international travel. However, flying overseas comes with its own set of concerns, so we've added these tips for long flights.

Review Entry Requirements

Before you fly anywhere, you want to research your destination, and that's even more important if you're headed to another country. Most countries have entry requirements that you'll need to know before you go. For example, depending on your travel plans, you may need:

- **A valid passport with blank pages.** The fact that you need a passport when you travel internationally isn't a huge surprise. But many countries want it to be valid for six months beyond your travel dates. Moreover, some might require you to have a certain number of blank pages for visas.
- **A visa.** Where your passport serves as your identification, a visa is the document that officially grants your access to a particular country. These are often stamped or glued into your passport book. Not every country requires visas, but you want to check before you purchase a ticket.
- **Proof of immunizations.** International travel can expose you to diseases that are rare in your home country. Getting vaccinated before you go protects and minimizes your chances of spreading those illnesses when you return.

Remember, these are just a few examples of what you may need. You'll want to research information specific to your destination, and a good place to start is the [Americans Traveling Abroad](#) published by the state department.

Register With STEP

One of the smartest things you can do before hopping on an international flight is to sign up for the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP) from the US Department of State — Bureau of Consumer Affairs. This is a free service for international travelers that sends email updates regarding their travel destination, including:

- News and weather information
- Health and safety alerts
- Travel advisories

Most importantly, enrolling in STEP means the local US embassy can contact you in a family emergency or there's civil unrest or a natural disaster in the country you're visiting.

Adjust Your Sleep Pattern

Our tips for getting some rest while on a plane hold true for long-haul flights, but you may also want to try changing your regular sleep schedule before you take off. Start by moving your regular bedtime back (or forward, as the case may be) three days before your departure. Then add another hour each day as your trip approaches to help you more easily adjust to the change in time zone.

Bring Your Own Travel Pillow and Blanket

In all honesty, neck pillows may look kind of funny, but they're infinitely more comfortable than the pillows offered on your flight — and that's important if you want to get some rest on the plane.

You might also want to invest in a travel blanket, preferably a thin one that doesn't take up too much room in your carry-on. Airplane cabins are notoriously chilly, and while blankets may be available on your flight, you can't always count on it.



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