

Travel Tips: Learn Your Rights as an Airline Passenger



Interview by [Mara Miller](#)

It's important to know your rights as an airline passenger when you fly frequently. Even A-list passengers run into unpleasant situations when jetting off on [celebrity vacations](#). In some situations, you may be traveling with pets or run into restroom issues on the plane. You may even be denied boarding. In these travel tips, we have partnered with AirHelp to get some answers to our questions.

Check out travel tips from AirHelp on how to make the most of your passenger rights:

1. Many airline passengers aren't aware of the rights they have when they fly. What are your rights if you are denied boarding?

In a recent survey, AirHelp found that 92% of U.S. travelers don't know their rights, which extend to when they are traveling abroad. Specifically, passengers' rights if they are denied boarding are dependent on their situation, but the main regulations that protect passengers in these instances are EC 261 and U.S. National law.

EC 261 is a European law that covers travelers flying to Europe on an EU airline, or out of Europe on any airline, including for U.S. citizens. In cases of denied boarding, passengers can be eligible to claim up to \$700 each, as long as they did not volunteer to give up their seat in exchange for vouchers or perks.

Under U.S. national law, U.S. travelers are entitled to compensation for up to \$1,350 if denied boarding as a result of an overbooked flight, depending on the value of the ticket fare and ultimate delay in arrival to their final destination. If travelers find themselves in situations like Mayim Bialik, where she was denied boarding on a domestic flight and did not volunteer to give up her seat, they may be eligible for compensation, in addition to re-routing to their destination on an alternate flight.

In all situations at [AirHelp](#), we recommend holding onto boarding passes and other travel documents, and immediately requesting compensation. You should also hold onto receipts for expenses incurred because of the disruption. You may be

eligible for reimbursement from the airline.

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2. If an airline loses your luggage, what do you do? Are you entitled to compensation?

Earlier this year, [Matt Damon](#) made headlines when his luggage was lost and he had to borrow someone else's suit. Additionally, last summer, [Rihanna's](#) makeup artist lost her luggage and her [celebrity beauty](#) supplies. In these situations, and for many other passengers who experience similar issues, travelers can file for compensation from the airline.

In the United States, travelers are protected by two laws when it comes to luggage problems, including U.S. national law and the Montreal Convention. U.S. national law covers travelers on domestic flights, and the Montreal Convention covers travelers flying internationally. In either case, the amount of compensation is based on the value of the baggage and should be negotiated with the airline. Under U.S. national law, the maximum compensation is \$3,500 and under the Montreal Convention, the maximum is \$1,525. Airlines will work to keep costs down by paying depreciated value for things and not covering certain types of items at all like jewelry and electronics, so it is important for passengers to know that they are entitled to compensation by law, and not just based on an airline's goodwill.

A passenger's right to compensation extinguishes if they don't bring an action within two years under the Montreal Convention, but there are also other time constraints passengers should be aware of. Damages to luggage need to be reported within seven days of receipt, and we advise travelers to take photos of their luggage before leaving the airport to prove that damages happened while the luggage was in an

airline's care. Complaints about delayed luggage should be filed within 21 days, and passengers must notify the airline if their luggage is missing before leaving the airport and fill out a Property Irregularity Report (PIR) detailing the contents of their lost baggage. If a passenger's luggage doesn't arrive within 21 days, it is considered lost, so after this period there is no time limit for complaints.

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3. If your flight turns around mid-flight and doesn't make it to its destination, what are your rights?

If your flight does not make it to its final destination, your rights to compensation are dependent on the circumstance. If your flight is eligible under EC 261, as long as your flight isn't turned around because of "extraordinary circumstances" like weather, terrorism, air traffic control restrictions, or political unrest, you could be entitled to up to \$700 in compensation per person if you arrive at your destination with delays of more than three hours. This means that if your flight turns around like [Chrissy Teigen's](#) did and it was eligible, you could claim compensation.

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4. A broken toilet on a plane can be a huge inconvenience. What can you do as a passenger if this happens?

If a broken toilet causes a flight disruption, travelers should check for eligibility under EC 261. Specifically, if a delay is caused by a broken toilet, passengers are entitled to compensation under EC 261 as this is considered a technical error. However, in cases when toilets become unusable just before takeoff, such as if they are caused by a sick passenger, it is often beyond the airline's control, and therefore travelers aren't eligible under EC 261.

5. What are your rights when it comes to traveling with pets?

Animal lovers don't have to skip their vacations, as long as they make themselves familiar with individual airlines' pet rules. This is especially important in light of recent tragedies. If you wish to travel with your furry best friend, at AirHelp, we advise you to research the airline's rules. For example, some airlines only allow assistance or guide dogs to travel in the cabin. Others base their paw fees on your pet's size and weight, plus their carrier's measurements. When making the decision of whether to bring your pet along, you should consider: the size of your pet; the pet carrier; pet/dog carrier fees; the temperament of your four-legged friend; and the airline's overhead bin space availability.

6. Are there different rights for disabled passengers? What are they?

Airlines cannot refuse to accommodate passengers with disabilities; in fact, they are required by law to make sure accommodations are available. This is because of the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), a law which makes it illegal for airlines to discriminate against passengers because of their disability. Airlines are also required to provide passengers with disabilities many types of assistance, including wheelchairs or other guided assistance to board, deplane, or connect to another flight; seating accommodation assistance that meets passengers' disability-related needs; and assistance with the loading and stowing of assistive devices.

7. When it comes to frustrating delays, what are some useful hints that passengers can apply?

Below are some tips that travelers should consider when flying to have the best chance of a smooth, disruption-free experience:

- **Fly during off-peak days or times to avoid the largest crowds at airports.** The late night flights are often the

least crowded, which means that your flight may be less likely to be overbooked, and your wait time at security will be shorter.

- **Use the free AirHelp app to check for compensation eligibility and flight disruptions while on-the-go.** The app provides travelers with information about compensation eligibility when travelers enter their information.
- **Leave extra time for traveling to and from the airport.** No matter when people are traveling, they should anticipate traffic near the airport. Schedule extra time for driving, and be sure to leave ample time to get through lines at security in case of large crowds. If it is easy, travelers can also consider public transportation to eliminate parking fees and cut costs.
- **Pack light or only use a carry-on to skip baggage claim.** With larger flights, waiting for luggage can take a lot of extra time at the airport. For short trips, travelers may consider using only a carry-on item, as long as all items fall under TSA requirements.
- **Bring chargers and extra entertainment for the airport.** Sometimes, flight disruptions are inevitable, so consider packing an extra phone charger and book to take on the flight.
- **Know your rights for flight disruptions, as you could be eligible to claim compensation.** If you are flying within the U.S. and you are denied boarding due to an overbooked flight, you may be eligible to claim 400% of the one-way fare to your destination in compensation, of a value up to \$1,350. Also, for flight cancellations or lengthy delays, if you're flying to the EU on an EU airline, or departing from an EU airport, you may be eligible to claim up to \$700 per person in compensation under European law EC 261.

8. Is there a time limit on submitting a claim?

Under EC 261, passengers can file claims for up to three years after the disruption.

Have you had any disruptive flight experiences? Let us know in the comments below!