

# Commercial Airline Travel Will Not Be as Busy This Holiday Season

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The Wednesday before Thanksgiving is the busiest air travel day of the year but the days before and after Christmas will be bustling, too.

The Air Transport Association of America (ATA) released its forecast last week that 2.5% fewer people will fly during the 21-day holiday season, from Dec. 17 to Jan. 6, compared to last year. That still leaves 41 million people catching flights during the Christmas travel period and planes will be crowded despite projections for less-crowded skies. Airlines have scaled back the number of flights to save money in the face of rising fuel prices and the recession.

ATA President James May explains, "Capacity reductions will likely mean fuller flights on many days. The "fragile economy" is the primary culprit for the decline in passengers."

ATA spokesman David Castelveter noted that the decrease is less dramatic than in the Thanksgiving travel period, which was forecast to fall 4% compared to the prior year. "You're seeing some improvement," Mr. Castelveter said. "I think these numbers reflect that there is some growing confidence by travelers." Castelveter added that the moderate decline - along with the federal government's decision to open military airspace to commercial air travel during the busiest days - will help relieve congestion in the air.

If you are flying during the holiday season here are a few helpful hints:

## **Airline Hubs**

Avoid them if possible. Southern hubs are better than northern ones this time of the year because of the weather. But even if one hub has good weather and the flights at departure and arrival airports are on time, the aircraft may be coming from a hub or airport that has delays.

## **Direct Flights and Non-Stop Flights**

Take a non-stop flight whenever you can. A direct flight means the passenger does not have to change aircraft on their trip. Non-stop means just that. The flight takes off and lands at the destination without a scheduled stop in between. Nonstop flights have fewer problems due to their nature but the passenger usually pays more for airfare.

## **Travel Light**

Try not to check luggage and only bring carry-on bags. Not only is there more luggage on flights this time of the year but the increased volume makes lost luggage more likely.

So happy flying, everybody. May you reach your destination safely and have a joyful holiday with your loved ones.

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