

Common Terms in Air Travel

This is an explanation of common terminology used in the air transportation industry to assist consumers in understanding the rules that govern air travel.

This explanation of frequently used terms is provided for informational purposes only. It is important to understand that each individual airline (also referred to as carrier) has its own contract of carriage, which is the legally binding contract between the carrier and its passengers. Each airline's contract of carriage has its own terms and definitions. Therefore, passengers should review the contract of carriage of the carrier providing transportation.

Advance Notice means the notice a passenger provides an airline of a needed service or accommodation prior to the travel date. For example, a passenger with a disability may be required to provide the airline advance notice if the passenger needs certain special assistance during travel. Under the Air Carrier Access Act and its implementing regulation, 14 CFR Part 382, a passenger with a disability is not required to provide advance notice in order to obtain services or accommodations, except in some limited circumstances. The rule lists these circumstances, including but not limited to, passengers traveling with an emotional support animal or psychiatric service animals, passengers who may need an on-board wheelchair on certain aircraft, or passengers who need to transport an electric wheelchair on certain small aircraft. For a full list of disability-related services that may require advance notice, passengers may see [14 CFR Part 382](#), and the website of the carrier the passenger plans to use.

Alternate Transportation is used in a situation in which a passenger is denied boarding because the flight is oversold and the carrier offers the passenger transportation on a different flight or other transportation accepted and used by the passenger. For more information related to the Department's rules on denied boarding, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/oversales>.

Baggage Allowance means the number of pieces of carry-on luggage a passenger may bring into the aircraft cabin, the number of pieces of luggage a passenger may check in the baggage compartment of the aircraft, and the size and weight limitations that apply to both carry-on luggage and checked luggage. Allowances may vary for different airlines. Therefore, passengers are encouraged to check with the airline in advance regarding limits on the size, weight, and number of pieces of baggage for their specific itinerary.

Baggage Fee means the fee an airline charges for carrying on or checking a piece of luggage. There may be additional fees for oversize or overweight baggage that exceeds a carrier's baggage allowance. A passenger should check the carrier's website and his or her e-ticket confirmation to learn the fee that applies for the journey. For more information related to regulations governing the disclosure of baggage fees, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/baggage>.

Class of Service means the cabin location and type of accommodation a passenger receives depending on the type of fare he or she buys. Many carriers have different classes of service that have different amenities. To identify the class of service, a passenger must refer to the fare purchased and the carrier's rules associated with that fare.

Checked baggage means passenger baggage that is transported in the baggage compartment of the aircraft, not in the cabin. Typically a passenger will receive a baggage claim ticket when the passenger checks baggage with a carrier.

- The liability limit for baggage that is lost, damaged, or delayed on domestic trips is \$3,400 at the time of this writing (August 2014). For domestic trips, the DOT does not prohibit airlines from excluding liability for loss, damage or delay of goods and baggage, including valuable, fragile, or perishable items. However, airlines are required to provide notice of the existence of such exclusions.
- The passenger liability limit for baggage that is lost, damaged, or delayed on an international journey is set by the Montreal Convention. As of August 2014, the limit is 1,131 Special Drawing Rights, a unit defined and maintained by the International Monetary Fund. For current valuation, use this link: http://www.imf.org/external/np/fin/data/rms_sdrv.aspx. International passenger liability limits for baggage apply to domestic legs of international itineraries. For more information about regulations governing baggage liability, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/baggage>.

Code-share Flight means a flight that is operated by an airline other than the one in whose identity the flight is marketed. When a flight is a code-share flight, the “designator code” (typically a two character code that is either two letters or a combination of a letter and a number) for the flight will be the code of the marketing carrier, rather than the code of the airline that will actually operate the flight. Airlines and travel agents must disclose the existence of a code-share flight to consumers when they market air transportation in their name or code that is operated by another carrier. For more information about code-share disclosure requirements, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/codeshare-disclosure>.

Confirmed reserved space means space on a specific date and on a specific flight and class of service that has been requested by a passenger and verified by the airline as being reserved for the accommodation of the passenger. It does not usually mean a specific seat on the aircraft.

Contingency Plans for Lengthy Tarmac Delays are plans for lengthy tarmac delays at U.S. airports during which passengers do not have the opportunity to deplane. Most larger U.S. and foreign carriers are required to have such a plan. The plans must include an assurance that the carrier will not permit an aircraft to remain on the tarmac longer than three hours for domestic flights and four hours for international flights without providing the opportunity to deplane, subject to safety, security, and air traffic control reasons. Carriers must provide assurances regarding services such as food and water that the carrier will provide during a lengthy tarmac delay. Each carrier must post its contingency plan for lengthy tarmac delays on its website in an easily accessible form. For more information about the regulations governing tarmac delays, including which carriers are required to adopt them, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/flight-delays>.

Fare means not only the amount paid for air transportation but also the category of ticket a passenger can buy. There are many categories of fares offered by carriers and each fare category generally has its own specific rules. A passenger should read the rules associated with the fare before purchase to understand whether the fare is refundable or allows changes to the itinerary.

Force Majeure Event means an event outside of the carrier’s control that can alter a carrier’s schedule resulting in flight delays, schedule changes, and flight cancellations. Usually these events include weather conditions, acts of God, or any other event not reasonably foreseeable by the carrier and not within the airline’s control.

Denied Boarding Compensation is compensation to which a passenger may be entitled if the passenger is involuntarily denied boarding from a flight on which the passenger holds a confirmed reserved space and more passengers check in than there are available seats on the flight. For more detailed information about the rule

that governs passenger compensation and procedures for involuntary denied boarding, including when a passenger is not entitled to compensation, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/oversales>.

Interline itinerary means an itinerary other than a code-share flight (see above) that includes transportation on two or more airlines on one ticket during a single journey.

Minimum Connecting Time means the shortest time interval required in order to transfer a passenger and his or her luggage from one flight to a connecting flight. Minimum connecting times are published for each airport and for various itineraries at that airport (e.g., online vs. interline connection, domestic vs. international itinerary). Sometimes the minimum connecting time at a particular airport will also vary by airline. Minimum connecting times are not specified by or regulated by the federal government.

Passenger Check-in Requirements are the requirements a passenger must meet to complete check-in. A carrier may cancel a reservation if the passenger does not meet all applicable requirements. These requirements may include:

- cut-off time prior to departure to obtain a boarding pass or document verification (if necessary, for example, if traveling on an international itinerary),
- time limits applicable to checking baggage in accordance with the carrier's rules, and
- arrival at the departure gate.

It is the passenger's responsibility to arrive at the airport with sufficient time to complete all ticketing, baggage check, and security procedures, and to be at the gate prior to the airline's deadline for arriving there. Passengers should check with their airline or travel agent for applicable check-in requirements for their flight.

Qualified Individual with a Disability is a term used by the Department to identify airline passengers who are entitled to certain accommodations under the Department's regulation implementing the Air Carrier Access Act. The full definition and the full rule, 14 CFR Part 382, can be found at www.dot.gov/airconsumer/disability.

Standby Passenger is a passenger attempting to travel on a flight without confirmed reserved space on that flight. For example, a passenger may fly standby if the passenger misses a flight or the passenger tries to switch to an earlier flight. As the passenger does not have a reservation on the flight for which he or she is standing by, the passenger is not guaranteed to travel on that flight. Seats sometimes become available for standby passengers as a result of "no shows" — passengers holding confirmed reserved space who do not appear for their flight and do not cancel their reservation.

Stopover means a deliberate interruption of a journey between the origin and destination that is agreed to by the carrier and the passenger, and is scheduled to exceed a specified number of hours (often 4 hours on a domestic itinerary and over 24 hours on international itineraries).

Travel Credit/Voucher can mean a coupon or other document (such as an electronic voucher) that can be applied toward the purchase of air transportation on that airline. Vouchers and travel credits are sometimes given by a carrier as compensation in lieu of denied boarding compensation and for service disruptions. Acceptance of the voucher may release the carrier from the obligation to provide other or additional compensation in the limited cases where such compensation is required (e.g., involuntary denied boarding compensation). To review the rules governing denied boarding compensation, including disclosures that carriers must make when they offer a voucher or travel credit in lieu of a check for involuntary denied boarding compensation, see <http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/oversales>.

Consumers should be aware, that because there are different types of travel credits and vouchers, each kind has its own terms and conditions that apply to its use. The most common conditions are:

- Expiration dates (i.e. the voucher must be used within a certain period of time from its issuance to the passenger),
- Nontransferable status (i.e. the voucher cannot be used by a person other than the person to whom the airline issued it),
- Blackout dates or city restrictions (e.g., the voucher can only be used on flights within the 48 contiguous United States, the voucher can only be used for certain types of midweek travel, the voucher cannot be used during holiday travel periods), and
- Capacity controls, whereby some travel vouchers and credits can only be used for a certain number of seats on a flight, even if other seats are still available for sale. When this is the case it can limit the number of flights on which a consumer can use the voucher or credit.

Unaccompanied Minor means a youth who travels without an adult. Most airlines offer certain Unaccompanied Minor services, usually for a fee. Airline policies, including age restrictions, vary on unaccompanied minors, so if a parent is considering purchasing the service, he or she should check the airline's policies before buying a ticket. Airlines often require a legal guardian to fill out forms specifying who will be meeting the child at the airport.