

Best airports for stranded travelers

Harriet Baskas, Special for USA TODAY

7:03 a.m. EST January 22, 2014



(Photo: Salt Lick Bar-B-Que)

Earlier this month a tsunami of snowstorms and bitter cold air (the so-called "polar vortex") forced the pre-emptive and day-of [cancellation of tens of thousands of flights and hours-long delays](#) for thousands of others.

That wacky weather also left plenty of passengers stuck at airports large and small.

No traveler (well, except me ...) enjoys spending more time in airport terminals than they have to, but weather, mechanical issues and other snafus are

simply a fact of modern-day flying.

In some airports the wait can be more than pleasant than in others. So we asked frequent travelers to help us make a list of the best airports to be stranded in.

Dana Freeman of Burlington, Vt., said she never minds spending a few extra hours at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. "It has great local food, free Wi-Fi, clean spaces, and they got the architecture just right; the main space is voluminous and gets in plenty of light, making it feel really big for a medium-sized airport."

With 23 concerts at various venues throughout the terminal each week, AUS also leads the list of airports that keep delayed travelers entertained with live performances that help time fly by.

Amanda Castleman is happy to wait out a delay at her hometown airport, Seattle-Tacoma International, "Thanks to the free Wi-Fi, good restaurants, Vino Volo, Butter London nail salon, the Massage Bar, etc."

Here are some of the other airports – and airport amenities – that help travelers find the upside of being stranded.

Stress-busting amenities

Francine Cohen, a New York-based hospitality industry consultant, is keen on Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT) for the rocking chairs, a stress-busting amenity found also at airports in Boston, Seattle, Philadelphia, Houston, Sacramento and other cities.

"They provide a great sense of calm when you're stuck" said Cohen, "Not only because rocking is soothing," but because the chairs offer a great perch for watching planes take off and land and people stream by.

CLT also got the nod from frequent travelers for the Terminal Getaway Spa, which will be opening three new branches at Chicago's O'Hare airport and one at Orlando International Airport in the next few weeks.

The massages, manicures, pedicures and other services offered by XpresSpa, Massage Bar and other companies with multiple or one-off airport locations also factor into which airport many travelers are willing to wait out a delay. But whenever Stephanie Caro of Houston has extra hours to spend at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, she heads straight for Minute Suites on Concourse B. The small rooms for napping or working rent by the hour and are also available at Philadelphia International and DFW airports.

Yoga rooms also scored high on the list of amenities that helped make airport delays bearable and these are currently available at DFW Airport, Chicago O'Hare, Vermont's Burlington International Airport and at San Francisco International, which is opening its second space devoted to yoga on Jan. 28, in United Airlines' new Boarding Area E.

Kid-friendly spaces

Sally Farhat Kassab loves "the huge selection of shops and the interesting people from around the world that I meet every time" she's at London's Heathrow Airport and appreciates the "Stay & Play" areas staffed by "play coordinators" who host craft activities and storytelling sessions and help parents keep an eye on their kids.

We haven't found any U.S. airports with play attendants on duty, but the kids' activity centers offered by airports in cities such as Dallas/Fort Worth, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, Cincinnati and Las Vegas got raves from parents who have needed to entertain children during a delay. The new beach-themed play area in the Tom Bradley International Terminal (TBIT) at Los Angeles International Airport is gathering fans as well.

Best for eating and drinking

When you're dashing between flights, a grab-n-go sandwich will often do. But when you're hanging around an airport for hours, there's time to focus on where to dine.

USA TODAY readers weighed in via a [USA TODAY/10Best.com poll](#) that gave high marks to Vino Volo (with branches in more than 20 airports), the Salt Lick Bar-B-Que at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, the healthy seasonal Southern California comfort food at Lemonade in LAX and all things crab at Obrycki's at Baltimore-Washington International Airport. One Flew South, serving "Southernational" cuisine (and great sushi) is a perennial favorite at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, but flight attendant Heather Poole said she's always happy to wait out a delay at Miami International Airport because then she can visit her favorite restaurant there, La Carreta, for Cuban food. "I'd skip any first-class meal for that," she said.

The "best" airport food and beverage outlets have also been sliced and diced by everyone from the [Moodie Report](#) to the [Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine](#), [The Daily Meal](#), and [GQ](#).

Art, culture and history

Passengers can kill time during a delay reading books, watching movies or catching up on e-mail, of course, but those willing to venture from their gates will be rewarded with intriguing art and/or history exhibits at many airports. Miami, San Diego, Phoenix, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Seattle, and New York's Albany International Airport are among the airports with great art programs or in-house museums, as are the airports that made it onto this USA TODAY/10Best.com [best U.S. airports for art](#) list.

Escape planning

When a delay stretches from minutes to hours, a canceled flight can't be far behind. That's when an airport that can be easily escaped from has its charms.

Miami International, Chicago O'Hare, DFW, Orlando, Tampa, Detroit and Houston's George Bush International are among the airports with hotels connected to the terminals, making that fresh start in the morning a bit easier to imagine. And Seattle, Portland, Ore., Atlanta, Boston, Miami, Chicago and Washington, D.C., are among the cities offering easy and inexpensive public transit to and from town.

Did we miss your favorite? If you "had" to get stranded at an airport, which would you choose, and why? Feel free to add your comments below.

Harriet Baskas is the author of seven books, including *Hidden Treasures: What Museums Can't or Won't Show You*, and the *Stuck at the Airport* blog. Follow her on Twitter at [@hbaskas](https://twitter.com/hbaskas).

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