

How to Plan and Prepare for Air Travel

A guide for first-time flyers

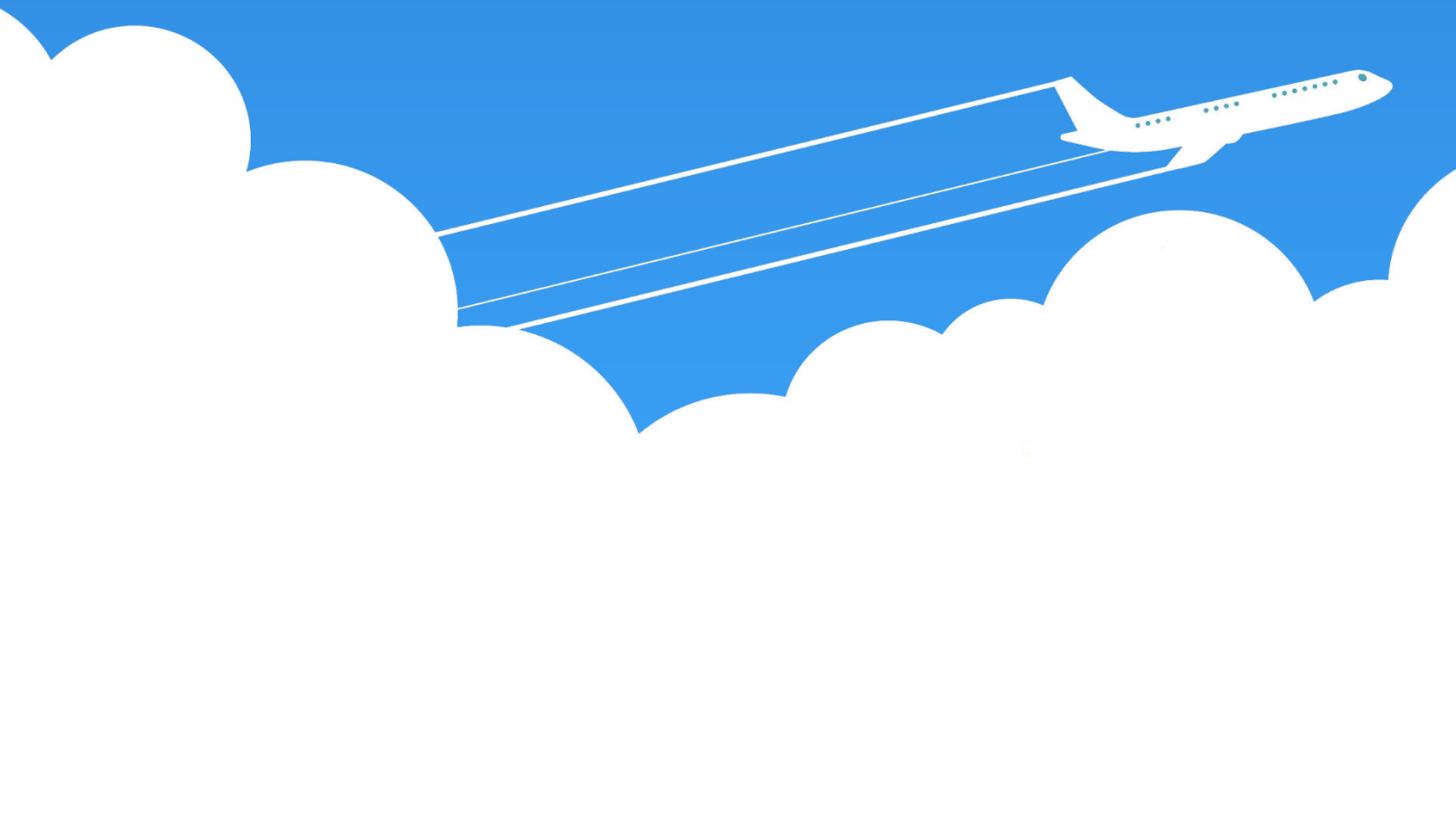


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Preface

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How to Plan and Prepare for Air Travel is intended for Canadian travellers who have little to no experience flying domestically and/or internationally. Its contents include information about air travel procedures and guidelines.

Disclaimer

This document was created to fulfill the requirements for Simon Fraser University's TCOM120: Technical Writing and Editing course. The author assumes no responsibility or liability for any losses or damages resulting from the accuracy or completeness of the information provided.

For the most current information on domestic and international air travel, visit the Government of Canada's travel and tourism website at travel.gc.ca. Additionally, refer to your destination country's local laws, customs restrictions, and visa requirements before your flight.

Acknowledgements

This document's cover and contents were designed using resources from freepik.com. The following list includes links to the artists whose works were used in this document:

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Introduction

Flying on a plane can be a thrilling or nerve-wracking experience. Air travel involves plenty of complicated procedures and new experiences for first-time flyers. Adventurous first-time flyers feel excited about travelling 35,000 feet in the air to their destination. However, nervous first-time flyers feel anxious about things like flight delays and extreme heights. No matter how you feel towards air travel, you can plan ahead to help ensure that your journey is as smooth and relaxed as possible.

What's in this guide

This guide prepares you for the air travel procedures and experiences that you'll encounter before, during, and after your flight. In this guide, you'll learn effective ways to manage long-haul flights. You'll also learn how to pack your baggage, navigate through busy airports, and connect to another flight. Knowing what to expect during your travels will help you improve your overall travel experience and create more positive memories of your trip.

Chapter 1: Preparing for the Flight

Preparing for a flight involves careful and detailed planning. This chapter describes how to choose the right type of baggage and belongings to bring on your trip. You'll also learn how to choose what to wear on your flight, how to pack your baggage, and how to get to the airport on time.

Choosing the right travel baggage

The first step towards preparing for your trip is choosing the right travel baggage.

You can bring two main types of baggage with you on a plane:

- **Carry-on baggage:** You're allowed to bring smaller types of baggage that you can carry along the plane and store in the overhead baggage compartment. This type of baggage includes small suitcases, backpacks, and overnight bags (Figure 1).
 - **Personal item:** Most airlines allow you to bring an extra bag or item, such as a small purse, musical instrument, and camera bag, that won't count towards your carry-on limit. The personal item must be small enough to fit under the plane seat in front of you.
- **Checked baggage:** You're allowed to bring larger types of baggage that baggage handlers transport to the plane's cargo area. This type of baggage includes large suitcases and other large bags that are too big to be considered carry-on baggage (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Types of carry-on baggage.



Figure 2. Types of checked baggage.

**NOTE:**

To ensure that you can bring all your baggage on the plane, you should confirm your airline's baggage limits by visiting the airline's website or calling its customer support number. If you bring too much baggage or if your bag is too large or too heavy, you may need to pay extra fees.

Table 1 shows the common maximum sizes, weights, and numbers of baggage for most airlines. Baggage limits vary from airline to airline.

Table 1. Common maximum baggage limits for most airlines.

	Carry-on baggage	Checked baggage
Maximum size dimensions	56 cm x 35 cm x 22 cm	70 cm x 50 cm x 38 cm
Maximum weight	15 lb. (7 kg.)	50 lb. (23 kg.)
Maximum number	One carry-on baggage and one personal item (e.g. backpack, purse, or laptop bag)	Varies depending on your passenger group (e.g. First Class, Business Class, or Economy Class)

To choose the right travel baggage that best suits your needs, consider the following:

- **Length of trip:** For short trips, you may not need to pack as many belongings. If you don't need to carry a lot with you, consider bringing only carry-on baggage to save yourself time packing and checking in at the airport.
- **Size:** Larger baggage can carry more things, but they are heavier. If you're unsure whether a bag is too big to meet your airline's baggage limits, consider choosing baggage that is small enough to be considered carry-on baggage.
- **Equipment:** If you plan to participate in activities during your trip that require large equipment, you will likely need large baggage to fit them.
- **Souvenirs:** If you plan to bring home gifts and souvenirs, think about how much space you will need to fit them with everything you brought with you on your trip.
- **Budget:** Most high-quality baggage are expensive. If you plan to travel often, consider investing in durable baggage that can last you many trips. However, you can still find well-made baggage at reasonable prices.

- **Convenience:** Travelling through airports can be physically exhausting. For better convenience, consider a wheeled suitcase or a backpack.
- **Features:** Some baggage have useful features, such as waterproof materials, separate compartments, and security locks, which help keep your personal belongings safe and more organized.

Choosing what to bring onboard

When choosing what to bring on the flight, you should first familiarize yourself with the items you can and can't bring on the plane. The **Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA)** has a complete online list of acceptable and banned items.¹ Be selective and avoid over-packing. Over-packing results in heavy baggage and possible extra fees.

Consider your options and bring the essentials:

- **Travel documents and wallet:** Bring your ID, airline ticket, and boarding pass (if you checked in online), as well as your wallet (with cash and credit card) and travel itinerary.
- **Medicine:** Bring prescription medicine, medical supplies and documents (e.g. prescriptions), and over-the-counter medicine (e.g. medicine for upset stomach and motion sickness) to maintain your well-being during your trip. It's also a good idea to bring earplugs and a basic first-aid kit just in case.
- **Clothes:** Bring weather-appropriate clothes and shoes for your destination.
- **Electronics and entertainment:** Bring things like a book or a portable gaming console to keep yourself entertained at the airport and during your flight. Don't forget to bring chargers and batteries for your electronic devices.
- **Travel accessories:** Bring a travel blanket and pillow if you have extra room. Some airlines don't wash their blankets and pillows frequently.
- **Toiletries:** Bring toiletries if you have extra room. You can buy these items at the airport's stores or at your destination. Most airlines also provide toiletries during long-haul flights.
- **Snacks:** Bring some snacks if you have extra room. Food at the airport is usually expensive, and most airlines don't provide food during short flights.

Choosing what to wear

When choosing what to wear on the day of your flight, **comfort is key**. Wear loose, comfortable clothes and shoes that you can easily take off and put on. Aircraft cabins can get cold, so it's also a good idea to bring a sweater or light jacket in your carry-on bag to stay warm. To make the security screening process quicker and easier, avoid wearing too many piercings, jewelry, and clothes and shoes with metallic materials.

Packing your baggage

Ideally, you should start packing at least a week or two in advance. Waiting until the last minute can cause you to forget something important. If you forget to pack something, you still have a chance to buy things at the airport’s stores or at your destination.

Travel documents

Depending on your destination, you need to show certain types of **travel documents**² during check-in (Figure 3). Some countries require specific documents, such as a passport, travel visa, or credit card that you used to pay for your airline ticket, so research your destination ahead of time. Table 2 shows the types of documents that you must show when you check in at a Canadian airport.



Figure 3. Different types of travel documents.

Table 2. The travel documents required to check in at a Canadian airport.

Domestic (within Canada)	International
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ One piece of valid government-issued photo ID with your name, gender, and date of birth <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Two pieces of valid government-issued ID with matching names and at least one piece that includes your gender and date of birth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ One piece of valid government-issued photo ID with your name, gender, and date of birth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Airline ticket that includes your booking reference number <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Boarding pass (if you checked in online)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Airline ticket that includes your booking reference number <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Boarding pass (if you checked in online)</p>

**NOTE:**

If you plan to travel internationally using a passport, ensure that it is valid for **at least 6 months** after your final day of travel. Some countries refuse entry to travellers whose passports expire less than 6 months before their date of arrival. Review your destination country's entry requirements and renew your passport if necessary.

Liquids, toiletries, and the 3-1-1 rule

The **3-1-1 rule** states that each passenger can bring one quart-sized resealable bag that contains 3.4-ounce (or smaller) liquid containers. If you want to bring toiletries onboard the plane (Figure 4), you need to limit the amount of liquids, aerosols, and gels that you pack in your carry-on baggage. Certain items, such as baby food and prescription medicine, are exempted from the 3-1-1 rule.

For more information, see the CATSA's online guide for packing liquids, toiletries, and non-solid food.³

Table 3 shows how much liquid you can pack in your carry-on and checked baggage.



Figure 4. Different types of toiletries

Table 3. The 3-1-1 rule for carry-on and checked baggage.

	Carry-on baggage	Checked baggage
Container size	Less than 3.4 ounces (100 mL)	More than 3.4 ounces (100 mL)
Limit per person	Must fit in one quart-sized, clear, plastic, resealable bag	No limit if contents meet airline regulations
Screening process	Placed in a plastic bin at the security checkpoint	May be inspected during security screening

Carry-on baggage

You can access the items in your carry-on baggage during the flight. Put things that you need to use at the airport and onboard the plane inside your carry-on baggage.



NOTE:

Always put fragile and valuable items in your carry-on baggage. Baggage handlers tend to handle checked baggage roughly, and things can go missing during a checked baggage security screening.

To pack your carry-on baggage efficiently:

1. Put everything you plan to bring in an open space in front of you and organize by category.
2. Write your full name and contact information on the baggage tag.
3. Open your carry-on bag and familiarize yourself with its pockets and compartments.
4. Pack your belongings, starting with the largest and heaviest items:
 - a) **Heavy items and shoes:** Put your shoes and heavy items at the bottom of the bag. You can also stuff small items inside your shoes and in between gaps to save room.
 - b) **Clothes:** Fold or roll your clothes and place them vertically inside the bag's main compartment to save space and to make it easier to see everything at a quick glance.
 - c) **Electronics and entertainment:** Put electronic devices and other related items in a separate pocket or towards the top and middle of the bag's main compartment to help protect them from damage during transport.
 - d) **Medicine:** Put your medicine with their original packaging in a clear bag. Put the clear bag containing your medicine along with any medical supplies and documents in a separate pouch or pocket for easy access.
 - e) **Fragile and valuable items:** Wrap fragile items individually and put them along with your valuable items towards the top and middle of the bag's main compartment to help protect them from damage during transport.
 - f) **Travel documents and wallet:** Put your travel documents, wallet, and itinerary in a separate pouch, folder, or pocket for easy access.

- g) **Toiletries:** Put the quart-sized resealable bag containing your toiletries in a reachable area for easy access when you arrive at the security checkpoint.
 - h) **Snacks:** Put snacks in a reachable area for easy access.
5. Fasten all buckles and close all pockets and compartments.
 6. Weigh your carry-on bag.
 - If it weighs more than your airline's maximum weight limit, open it and remove some items that you don't need for your trip.

Checked baggage

You can't access the items in your checked baggage during the flight. Put things that you don't need to use at the airport and onboard the plane inside your checked baggage.

To pack your checked baggage efficiently:

1. Write your full name and contact information on the baggage tag.
2. Open your checked bag and familiarize yourself with its pockets and compartments.
3. Pack your belongings, starting with the largest and heaviest items:
 - a) **Heavy items and shoes:** Put your shoes and heavy items at the bottom of the bag. You can also stuff small items inside your shoes and in between gaps to save room.
 - b) **Clothes:** Fold or roll your clothes and place them vertically inside the bag's main compartment to save space and to make it easier to see everything at a quick glance.
 - c) **Toiletries:** Use tape to cover bottle openings and put all toiletries in a separate bag to prevent them from leaking all over your other items.
4. Fasten all buckles and close all pockets and compartments.
5. Weigh your checked bag.
 - If it weighs more than your airline's maximum weight limit, open it and remove some items that you don't need for your trip.

Travelling to the airport

To ensure that you have enough time to go through all the airport procedures, you should arrive at the airport at least **two hours (for domestic flights)** or **three hours (for international flights)** before your flight's scheduled departure time.

Before you leave, have a plan for how you get to the airport. Ask a friend or family member to drive you to the airport's drop-off area. Other options include renting a car or using public transit (if you only have carry-on baggage), a taxi, or a ride-sharing service. Some airports also provide shuttle services to and from the airport.

Chapter 2: Waiting at the Airport

Waiting at the airport involves going through different safety and regulation procedures to ensure that you're ready for your flight. This chapter describes the four airport departure procedures that you need to go through before you can board the plane (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The four airport departure procedures required before boarding a plane.

Depending on the airport's size, there may be multiple **terminals**, which are buildings in an airport where passengers board and disembark planes. Some airports have large terminals, so you may need to walk long distances. If you have special needs, your airline may have an **accessibility aid** service that can assist you as you walk to your designated boarding gate.

Checking in

Before you board a plane, you need a **boarding pass** issued by the airline (Figure 6). During **check-in**, an airline agent weighs and attaches a tag with your name and destination to your baggage. Afterwards, airport security screens and possibly searches your checked baggage.



Figure 6. A typical boarding pass.

During busy hours, check-in can take more than an hour to complete, so you should check in as soon as possible to ensure that you don't miss your flight.

You can check in using one of three methods:

- **Check-in counter:** Wait in line for an airline agent who processes your travel documents and checks you in.
- **Check-in kiosk:** Use a self-serve kiosk to process your travel documents and check yourself in.
- **Online check-in:** Use a computer or smartphone app to check yourself in. This is a quicker method that lets you print your boarding pass and save a digital copy on your smartphone.

To check in at the airport, find your airline's **check-in gate** (Figure 7). You can find your airline's designated check-in gate on the airport's **flight information display system (FIDS)**. The FIDS is a system of computer monitors that display departure and arrival flight information (Figure 8).

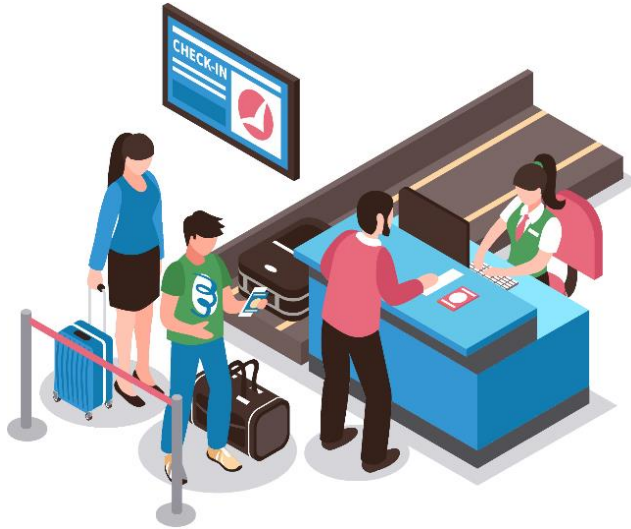


Figure 7. An airline's check-in gate.

Flight	Time	Destination	Gate
VO 326	05:34	AMSTERDAM	A27
EP 623	05:45	PARIS	B6
UVK592	06:10	MUNICH	C18
WS0448	06:23	ROME	A09
IQ 803	06:45	TOKYO	B9
JV 578	07:05	NEW YORK	A3
QF 270	07:15	BANGKOK	C18
UGS915	07:30	LONDON	D89
MX 326	08:00	BARCELONA	B09
AE 276	08:15	ATHENS	C3
NF6357	08:45	DUBLIN	A87
TH 026	09:10	LISBOA	B4
MV 678	09:15	MEXICO D. F.	D63

Figure 8. A FIDS monitor showing boarding gates and departure times.

Online check-in

If you already checked in online and **don't have any baggage to check**, you can go directly to the security checkpoint.

If you **have baggage to check**, go to a check-in counter and take the following steps:

1. Wait in line at a check-in counter.
2. Show your boarding pass and baggage to check to the airline agent.
3. Take your tagged baggage from the airline agent.
4. Go to the baggage drop-off area to drop off your checked baggage.

Check-in counter and check-in kiosk

If you didn't check in online, check in at a check-in counter or check-in kiosk.

To check in at a check-in counter or check-in kiosk:

1. Wait in line at a check-in counter or check-in kiosk.
2. Check in at the check-in counter or check-in kiosk:
 - **If you're checking in at a check-in counter:**
 - a) Show your airline ticket, travel documents, and any baggage to check to the airline agent.
 - b) Take your boarding pass and tagged baggage from the airline agent.
 - **If you're checking in at a check-in kiosk:**
 - a) Swipe your passport or credit card, or scan your boarding pass or itinerary barcode.
 - b) Follow the kiosk's directions and enter your information.
 - c) Print out and take your boarding pass.
 - d) Bring any baggage to check to an airline agent near the kiosk area.
 - e) Take your tagged baggage from the airline agent.
3. Go to the baggage drop-off area to drop off your checked baggage.

Overbooked flights

Occasionally, an airline will book too many passengers on a flight. When a flight gets overbooked, airline staff will ask if any passengers are willing to give up their seat. Some airlines may offer compensation, such as money, a voucher, or a free airline ticket, to passengers who volunteer to give up their seat.

If not enough passengers volunteer, airline staff will choose passengers to bump off the flight. If you're bumped off your flight, your airline may offer compensation depending on certain conditions. To avoid getting bumped off a flight, check in as soon as you can. Airlines tend to bump off passengers who checked in late or paid for cheaper airline fare.

For more information about boarding denial, see the subsection on delayed, cancelled, and missed flights on page 17.

Dropping off your baggage

The **baggage drop-off area** is where you drop off your checked baggage for baggage handlers to transport on the plane. Most airports now have self-serve **baggage drop-off kiosks** that process and take your checked baggage.

To drop off your baggage:

1. Wait in line at a baggage drop-off kiosk.
2. Put your checked baggage on the kiosk's belt.
3. Scan the barcode on your boarding pass.
4. Follow the directions and confirm your flight information.
5. Print out and take your baggage label.
6. Attach the baggage label to your checked baggage's handle.
7. Confirm that you attached the label and take your baggage claim receipt.
8. Go to the security checkpoint.

Going through the security checkpoint

The **security checkpoint** is where airport security officers screen and search you and your carry-on baggage for any banned items (Figure 9). The screening and searching process is a necessary step to ensure everybody's safety at the airport and during the flight. If you're flying internationally, you may also need to go through **immigration (passport control) and customs screening**.

For more information about immigration (passport control) and customs, see pages 29 and 32, respectively.



NOTE:

Airports take their security extremely seriously. **Don't** make any jokes about illegal items, bombs, or terrorist threats.



Figure 9. The security checkpoint.

To get through the security checkpoint, keep your ID and boarding pass handy with you and take the following steps:

1. Wait in line at the security checkpoint.
2. Show your ID and boarding pass to the airport security officer.
3. Remove the following types of clothing and items, and place them in a plastic bin along with your carry-on baggage for separate screening through an x-ray machine and possible searching:
 - Outerwear (e.g. jackets and sweaters), shoes with metallic materials, and small handbags.
 - Metal objects (e.g. belts, keys, and coins).

- Electronics (e.g. cameras, phones, and tablets) can stay in your bag. Laptops must be taken out of your bag.
 - Clear, plastic, resealable bag containing toiletries.
4. Wait until the airport security officer tells you to walk through the metal detector.
 - If you have a pacemaker or surgical implant, notify the airport security officer before walking through the metal detector.
 5. Walk through the metal detector.
 - If the metal detector goes off, you may need to go through another screening process, either through a full-body scanner or a physical search.
 6. Go to the end of the conveyor belt and take your clothing, items, and carry-on bag from the plastic bin.
 - If you're required to go through immigration (passport control) and customs screening, show your ID and other relevant travel documents to the border services officer.
 7. Go to the departure area.

Boarding the plane

The **departure area** is where you find the boarding gates for all departing flights, and the **boarding gate** is where you wait for your flight before you board the plane (Figure 10). To find your designated boarding gate, look for the gate number and letter on your boarding pass or on a FIDS monitor. Boarding gates are typically grouped together based on the type of flight (i.e. domestic or international). Don't hesitate to ask airport staff for directions if you need help finding your boarding gate.



NOTE:

To ensure that you don't miss your flight, you should arrive at the boarding gate at least 20 minutes before your departure time. Boarding gates may change, so you should keep track of your flight information on a FIDS monitor and listen to announcements.



Figure 10. The seating area at a boarding gate.

If you have some spare time, the departure area also has stores, restaurants, and services that you can visit and use while you wait for your flight.



NOTE:

The departure area is a **secure area**. If you leave a secure area, you need to go through the security checkpoint again.

Delayed, cancelled, and missed flights

Occasionally, airlines must deny passengers from boarding a flight. Flights can be delayed or cancelled. Airlines also deny passengers who checked in or arrived at their boarding gate too late.

If you're denied boarding, don't worry. Canadian air passengers have **passenger rights**⁴ that entitle them to compensation depending on certain conditions. Your airline may offer to rebook your flight or refund your airline ticket. If you have any questions about the status of your flight, airline staff will address your concerns and do their best to help you.

Boarding gate

Before you can board the plane, your airline requires you to have your travel documents ready and to line up in a specific order.

To prepare for boarding:

1. Wait in the seating area and keep alert of any delays or changes to your flight by listening to announcements and looking at a FIDS monitor.
2. Prepare your ID, boarding pass, and carry-on baggage when the plane arrives.
 - A gate attendant will ask passengers to board the plane in the following order:
 - Passengers in First Class.
 - Passengers with special needs.
 - Passengers in Business Class or who are part of the airline's frequent-flyer reward program.
 - Passengers in Economy Class.
3. Get in line when you hear your passenger group.
4. Show your ID and boarding pass to the gate attendant.
5. Walk through the passenger boarding bridge.
 - A cabin crew member may ask to see your ID and boarding pass before allowing you to board the plane.
6. Board the plane.

Chapter 3: During the Flight

Flying on a plane involves many kinds of new experiences for first-time flyers. This chapter describes how to make your flight a relaxed and enjoyable one. You'll first learn about a routine procedure that you'll need to go through before take-off. You'll also learn ways to keep yourself entertained and helpful guidelines for eating and drinking on a plane. Additionally, you'll learn how flying affects your body and effective ways to manage your health and well-being.

Figure 11 shows the back of a typical plane seat with features that you can use during the flight.

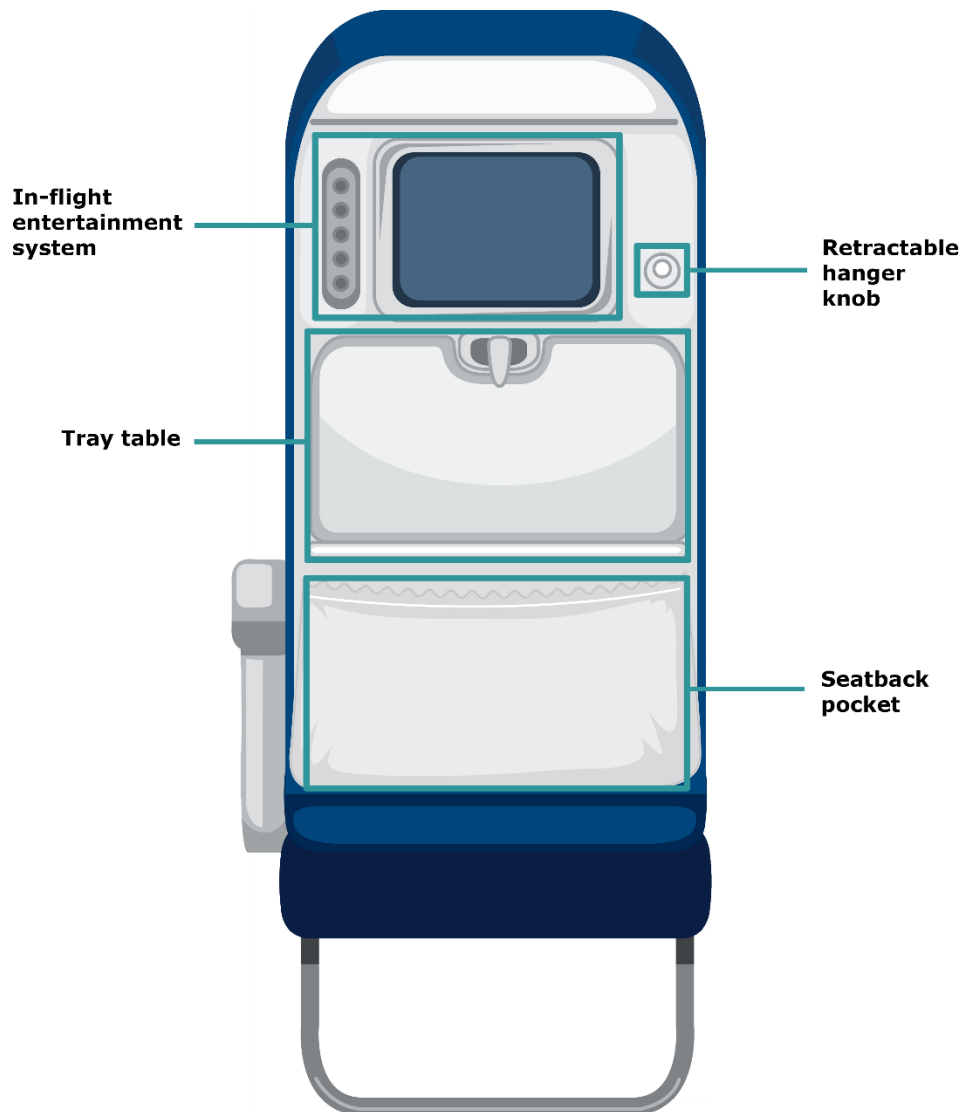


Figure 11. The back of a typical plane seat.

Preparing for take-off

Before take-off, you need to store your carry-on baggage and understand important flight safety procedures.

To prepare for take-off:

1. Find your seat by looking at your seat number on your boarding pass and at the row numbers labelled below the overhead baggage compartments.
2. Store your carry-on baggage and personal belongings in the overhead baggage compartment and/or under the plane seat in front of you.
 - Be aware not to block the aisle for flight attendants and other passengers. If you need assistance, press the call button to request help from a flight attendant.
3. Sit down in your seat.
4. Listen to the flight captain's announcements.
5. Watch the flight attendant's flight safety demonstration.
6. Familiarize yourself with flight safety procedures from the emergency instruction booklet in the seatback pocket in front of you.
7. Turn off your electronic devices or turn on airplane mode.
8. Fasten your seatbelt by inserting the latch into the buckle until it clicks.
 - To tighten your seatbelt, pull the outer part of the strap outward.
 - To loosen your seatbelt, pull the inner part of the strap inward.
 - To unfasten your seatbelt, lift the buckle's flap.



NOTE:

The seatbelt light turns on during take-off, landing, and times when there is turbulence. Walking around the cabin when the seatbelt light is on can be dangerous. When the seatbelt light turns on, fasten your seatbelt. If you're somewhere else in the cabin, return to your seat and fasten your seatbelt. You can unfasten your seatbelt when the seatbelt light turns off.

Keeping yourself entertained

Sitting for long hours on a plane doesn't have to be dull and boring.

Here are ways to keep yourself entertained during the flight:

- Use the plane's in-flight entertainment system, which includes games, movies, and a real-time map of the plane's location.
- Listen to music, a podcast, or an audiobook.
- Read a book or the airline's in-flight magazine.
- Log in to the plane's Wi-Fi and browse the internet on your phone or laptop.
- Learn your destination's local language by using a language learning app.
- Research interesting places to visit and events going on at your destination.
- Chat with your seat neighbor.

Eating and drinking

Depending on your type of flight, flight attendants serve you food and drinks on the plane (Figure 12). During short flights, airlines don't provide meals to their passengers. However, some airlines provide free snacks and non-alcoholic drinks. If you want a small meal or an alcoholic drink, some airlines have a **buy onboard menu** that includes food and drinks that you can buy onboard the plane.

During long-haul flights, airlines provide scheduled meals to their passengers. When you buy your airline ticket, you can request a different meal option, such as a vegetarian or kosher meal, if you have any dietary preferences or restrictions. You can also choose from the airline's buy onboard menu if you want to buy an alcoholic drink or a meal that isn't included as a part of your airline ticket purchase.

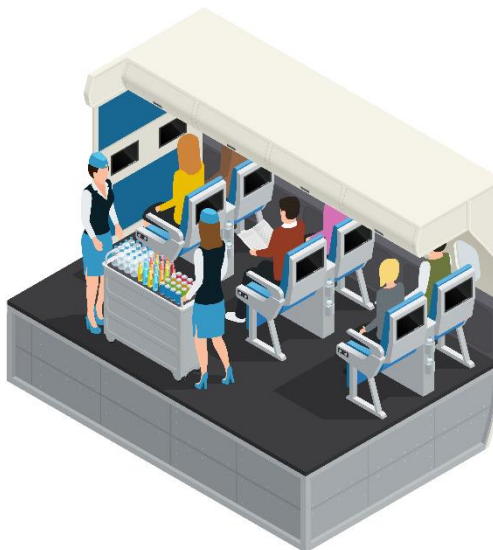


Figure 12. Flight attendants serving food and drinks.

When eating and drinking during the flight, consider the following guidelines:

- **Avoid overeating:** When you're inactive for long periods of time, your body has more difficulty digesting food, which can cause uncomfortable bloating. Changes in altitude and cabin pressure also affect your sense of taste, particularly with sweet and salty food. If you're not careful, you can accidentally consume too much sugar and sodium.
- **Moderate soft drinks:** Changes in altitude and cabin pressure affect how gas in your body expands. Drinking soft drinks can cause uncomfortable bloating.
- **Moderate alcohol:** Don't use alcohol to relieve anxiety or fall asleep. Alcohol's negative effects on your body are more noticeable in high altitudes. Drinking too much alcohol can affect your sleep quality and dehydrate you. Avoid getting a hangover, especially if you have to connect to another flight. Airlines will deny passengers who appear drunk.
- **Moderate caffeine:** Drinking too much caffeine can affect how easily you fall asleep, which can worsen your jet lag recovery if you're on a long-haul flight. Caffeine also has a mild diuretic effect, which can cause you to feel the need to use the washroom more often.

Managing your health and well-being

When you travel 35,000 feet in the air, high altitudes affect how your body feels and works. Although flying can cause uncomfortable symptoms, you can prepare and take specific actions to manage your health and well-being during the flight.

Pressure changes

Rapid air pressure changes during take-off and landing can cause you to experience a popping sensation in your ears. This sensation, commonly known as **airplane ear**, happens when your middle ear tries to equalize the air pressure between the inside and outside of your eardrum. Airplane ear is a temporary condition that goes away after a few minutes.

Here are tips to alleviate airplane ear symptoms:

- Avoid sleeping during take-off and landing so you can prepare for cabin pressure changes.
- Wear earplugs.
- Yawn or swallow.
- Chew gum or suck on hard candy.
- Pinch your nose shut, inhale through your mouth, and blow through your nose gently.
- Take antihistamine or decongestant medicine.

Humidity changes

The air at high altitudes has less moisture compared to air at sea level. When a plane ascends into the air, the humidity level in the cabin decreases. Low humidity results in dry air that can irritate your skin, eyes, and nose.

Here are tips to manage the effects of dry air from low humidity:

- Stay hydrated by drinking non-caffeinated drinks, such as water or juice.
- Moisturize your skin with lotion, ointment, or cream.
- Use a saline nasal spray or gel.
- Use eye drops.
- Switch from contacts to glasses.
- Request a hot cup of water and inhale the steam.

Hygiene and sanitation

Dry air in the cabin can also make you more vulnerable to bacterial and viral illnesses. When hundreds of passengers board a plane, there's a high chance that germs will spread rapidly in the cabin.

Infrequent interior deep cleanings also result in germs lingering on objects, such as seatbelt buckles, seatback pockets, and tray tables. Although it's difficult to completely avoid germs in the cabin, you can help protect yourself by practicing personal hygiene and sanitizing contaminated surfaces.

Here are tips to protect yourself from germs that can make you sick:

- Buy a bottle of water to bring onboard after you go through the security checkpoint.
- Wash your hands often or use antibacterial hand sanitizer.
- Use disinfecting wipes to wipe down commonly used objects and surfaces.
- Use your own travel blanket and pillow.
- Store items in your carry-on bag instead of using the seatback pocket.
- Choose prepackaged beverages, such as juice and soft drinks, without ice cubes when ordering drinks from a flight attendant.
- Wear your shoes when walking around the cabin and using the washroom.
- Use a tissue or paper towel to open the washroom door.
- Don't drink tap water from the washroom sink or use it to brush your teeth.

Deep vein thrombosis

Sitting and staying inactive for long periods of time during a flight can put you at risk of developing a harmful blood clot in a deep vein. This condition, called **deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**, can block blood flow and cause warmth, swelling, and pain in the affected area. DVT typically happens in one leg. However, some people with DVT don't show any symptoms.

Certain factors, such as smoking, obesity, and a recent surgery, can increase your risk of developing DVT. If you think you have an extra risk of developing DVT, talk to your doctor before your trip. To prevent DVT, ensure that you maintain good blood circulation throughout the flight.

Here are tips to improve your blood circulation:

- Get up and walk around the cabin regularly.
- Avoid crossing your legs for too long.
- Relax your muscles and do stretches.
- Do light exercises⁵ in your seat.
- Wear compression socks.

Sleep and jet lag

For passengers who travel internationally, jet lag is a common problem. **Jet lag** is a temporary sleep disorder that happens when you travel across two or more time zones. Symptoms of jet lag include headaches, fatigue, and insomnia.

Travelling across multiple time zones, especially eastward, disrupts your circadian rhythm, which regulates when you sleep and wake up. It can take a few days to adjust to your destination's time zone, but you can change parts of your lifestyle to make it easier to fully recover from jet lag.

Here are tips to improve your sleep quality and reduce the effects of jet lag:

- Go to sleep earlier for a few nights before the day of your flight, especially if you're travelling eastward.
- Set the time on your watch to your destination's time.
- Moderate your alcohol and caffeine intake.
- Take strategic 45-minute naps if you'll be arriving at your destination during the day.
- Use a travel pillow, eye mask, and/or earplugs.
- Use a sleep-aid app.
- Meditate, do breathing exercises, and/or listen to relaxing sounds or white noise.

Preparing for landing and disembarking

When the plane approaches the airport, you need to go through a procedure similar to the one during take-off. If you are arriving at an airport in a different country, a flight attendant may give you a **declaration card**. Complete the card by declaring the items that you are bringing with you and have it ready to give to a border services officer at the airport's immigration (passport control) booth.

For more information about declaration cards, see page 29.

To prepare for landing:

1. Turn off your electronic devices or turn on airplane mode.
2. Fasten your seatbelt when the seatbelt light turns on.
 - If you're somewhere else in the cabin, return to your seat and fasten your seatbelt.
3. Stay in your seat, keep your seatbelt on, and listen to the flight captain's announcements.

To disembark the plane:

1. Unfasten your seatbelt when the seatbelt light turns off.
2. Wait for a flight attendant's permission before standing up to retrieve your carry-on baggage and personal belongings.
3. Retrieve your carry-on baggage and personal belongings from the overhead baggage compartment and/or under the plane seat in front of you.
 - Ensure that you retrieved all your belongings because you won't be allowed back on the plane.
4. Leave the plane in a single-file line.
5. Walk through the passenger boarding bridge.
6. Go to the airport's arrival area.

Chapter 4: Arriving at the Next Airport

The **arrival area** is the area of the airport that you enter after you disembark the plane through the passenger boarding bridge. This chapter describes the airport arrival procedures that you may need to go through before you reach the arrival hall (Figure 13).



Figure 13. The airport arrival procedures required after arriving at a different airport.

Airport arrival procedures differ depending on the airport and the stage of your journey:

- If you need to board another plane, see the next section on connecting to another flight.
- If you arrived at your destination after a domestic flight, go to the baggage reclaim area (see page 30).
- If you arrived at your destination after an international flight, go to the immigration (passport control) booths (see page 29).

Connecting to another flight

If your itinerary involves multiple flights, you'll experience a **layover**, which is a waiting period before connecting to another flight. Layovers can last from 30 minutes to four hours. If you're flying internationally, you may experience a **stopover**, which is a long layover that can last over 24 hours. If you have a stopover, you may have time to explore the layover city and you may need to book a hotel.

Layover procedures may differ depending on the airport and country. If you need help connecting to your next flight, don't hesitate to ask airport staff for directions.

NOTE:

The same rules for boarding a flight apply when connecting to another flight. To ensure that you don't miss your connecting flight, you should arrive at the boarding gate at least 20 minutes before your departure time.

If you're travelling **domestically**, here's what you should know:

- **Security:** You don't need to go through security unless the layover airport has separate security checkpoints for different terminals.
- **Boarding passes:** If you booked your flights together in one itinerary, you should have received the two boarding passes during your check-in at the first airport.
- **Checked baggage:** You don't need to reclaim your checked baggage until you reach the airport at your final destination.
- **Immigration (passport control) and customs:** You don't need to go through immigration and customs procedures.

If you're travelling **internationally**, here's what you should know:

- **Security:** You most likely need to go through at least one security checkpoint at the layover airport.
- **Boarding passes:** If you booked your flights with the same airline or two partnering airlines, you likely have received the two boarding passes that you need after you checked in at the first airport. If you only received one boarding pass or if you booked your flights with two different airlines, you need to check in again at the layover airport to receive your second boarding pass.
- **Checked baggage:** Depending on the layover airport, you may need to reclaim and recheck your baggage. If you're unsure whether you need to reclaim your baggage, ask the airline agent during check-in at the layover airport.
- **Immigration (passport control) and customs:** Depending on the layover airport, you may need to go through immigration and customs procedures. If the layover airport has a sign for **transit or transfer passengers** (i.e. people who won't be leaving the airport and staying in the country), you likely don't need to go through immigration and customs.

If you have a stopover, you need to go through immigration and customs to leave the layover airport if you want to explore the city or stay at a hotel.

Direct flights with one or more stops

A **direct flight** is a flight with a single flight number and involves one or more intermediate stops. If the plane must stop to refuel or to take on and/or let off passengers, the airline or airport will require you to stay on the plane or wait in a transit or holding area. These stops usually last up to around two hours. If you stay on the plane, the airport's ground crew will enter the plane to clean the interior cabin.

If you wait in a transit or holding area, you are allowed to walk around the airport. However, be aware not to leave the transit, holding, or secure area and miss announcements about your flight.

Going through immigration (passport control)

After arriving from a different country, you must go through **immigration (passport control)**. During this process, a border services officer confirms your identity and processes your travel documents and declaration card. If you brought purchases, gifts, and items like food or plant products from a different country, you must declare all of them to a border services officer.

When you arrive back in Canada, you may be eligible for a personal exemption limit depending on your residency status.⁶ A **personal exemption limit** is the value of goods that you can bring into Canada without having to pay regular duty and taxes. If you're ineligible or if you exceed your personal exemption limit, you need to pay duty and taxes.



NOTE:

Failure to declare an item can result in penalties, fines, and confiscation of the item. If you're unsure whether to declare an item, declare it anyway. A border services officer can assist you if you need help declaring your items.

To get through immigration (passport control), keep your ID, completed declaration card, and other travel documents and purchase receipts handy with you and take the following steps:

1. Follow the signs and wait in the designated line according to your residency status.
 - For faster processing, some airports have automated passport control (APC) kiosks for eligible passengers.
2. Show your ID, completed declaration card, and other relevant travel documents and receipts to the border services officer.
3. Answer the border services officer's interview questions.
 - You may be required to have your fingerprints and photo taken.
4. Go to the baggage reclaim area.

Claiming your baggage

The **baggage reclaim area** is where you pick up your baggage from a baggage carousel (Figure 14).



Figure 14. The baggage carousel in the baggage reclaim area.

To pick up your baggage:

1. Wait near your designated baggage carousel.
2. Check the bag's baggage tag to ensure that the bag belongs to you.
3. Take your baggage and inspect it for any damage.
 - If your baggage is damaged, take photos and/or record video for documentation.
 - To report damaged baggage, see the next subsection on lost, damaged, and delayed baggage for more information.
4. Leave the baggage reclaim area:
 - If you arrived at the airport after a domestic flight, go directly to the arrival hall (see page 33).
 - If you arrived at the airport after an international flight, go to the customs checkpoint (see page 32).

Lost, damaged, and delayed baggage

Occasionally, checked baggage can get lost, damaged, or delayed. Depending on certain conditions, your airline may offer compensation. Table 4 shows information about airline compensation for delayed, damaged, and lost baggage.

Table 4. Airline compensation for delayed, damaged, and lost baggage.*

	Delayed baggage	Damaged baggage	Lost baggage
When to report	Not delivered upon arrival at your destination	Damaged when you receive your baggage	Missing for more than 21 days or airline declares that the baggage is lost
Compensation principles and limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic itineraries within Canada: Up to CAD\$2,300 (approx.) • Domestic itineraries within the US: Up to US\$3,500 • International itineraries (including to the US): Up to CAD\$2,300 (approx.) • Refund of baggage fee 		
Deadlines and required actions for compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within 21 days of receiving baggage: Write a complaint to the airline • Within two years of your arrival: Start legal action against the airline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within seven days: Write a complaint to the airline • Within two years: Start legal action against the airline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within two years of your arrival: Start legal action against the airline

*Updated as of July 15, 2019. Regulations may be subject to change.

To report missing or damaged baggage:

1. Go to the lost baggage counter.
2. Report your missing or damaged baggage to the counter attendant.
 - **If your baggage is missing:**
 - a) Describe what your missing baggage looks like with great detail.
 - b) Show your baggage claim receipt that you received during check-in and photos of your missing baggage if you have any.
 - c) If your baggage is still missing after airport staff search for it, complete a property irregularity report form.
 - **If your baggage is damaged:**
 - a) Show photos and/or video of your damaged baggage.
 - b) Complete a property irregularity report form.

To file for compensation for delayed, damaged, or lost baggage, see the Air Passenger Rights' online baggage guides⁷ for more details.

Going through customs

Before you can enter the arrival hall, you must go through customs processing after arriving from a different country. The **customs checkpoint** is where border services officers process your travel documents and declaration card, as well as inspect and search your baggage if necessary (Figure 15).



Figure 15. The customs checkpoint.

To get through the customs checkpoint, keep your ID, completed declaration card, and other travel documents and receipts handy with you and take the following steps:

1. Follow the signs and wait in the designated line according to your residency status.
2. Show your ID, completed declaration card, and other relevant travel documents and receipts to the border services officer.
3. Answer the border services officer's interview questions.
 - A border services officer may inspect and search your baggage. If you're selected for further inspection, keep your declaration form handy with you and go to the inspection station.
4. Go to the arrival hall.

Quarantine inspection

Depending on your destination, your baggage may need to go through a quarantine inspection. During a **quarantine inspection**, a border services officer or food inspection specialist inspects any animals, animal by-products, and plant products that you brought with you from a different country.

This procedure ensures that animals and plants coming into the country don't introduce pests or diseases that can threaten the country's environment, agriculture industry, and human health. If your baggage needs to go through a quarantine inspection, you may need to pay additional fees.

Entering the arrival hall

After going through the necessary airport arrival procedures, you'll reach the **arrival hall** where you can meet family and friends. The arrival hall has stores, restaurants, and services that you can visit and use before you leave the airport.

If you're new to your destination city, the arrival hall also has an **information desk** that can provide you with information about the following things:

- Ground transportation, such as taxis, public transit, and car rentals.
- Local events, tourist attractions, and places of interest.
- Hotels, resorts, and other accommodations.

Useful links

- ¹ The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA)'s complete list of acceptable and banned items: catsa-acsta.gc.ca/en/whatcanlbring
- ² The Government of Canada's list of travel documents required for international travel: travel.gc.ca/travelling/documents
- ³ The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA)'s guide for packing liquids, toiletries, and non-liquid food: cacsta.gc.ca/en/liquids-non-solid-food-personal-items
- ⁴ Air Passenger Rights' guide for boarding denial: airpassengerrights.ca/en/practical-guides/denied-boarding
- ⁵ Darebee's guide for airplane workout exercises: darebee.com/pdf/workouts/airplane-workout.pdf
- ⁶ The Government of Canada's guide for personal exemptions: travel.gc.ca/returning/customs/bringing-to-canada/personal-exemptions-mini-guide
- ⁷ Air Passenger Rights' guides for delayed, damaged, and lost baggage: airpassengerrights.ca/en/practical-guides/baggage

Glossary

3-1-1 rule A rule that states that each passenger can bring one quart-sized resealable bag that contains 3.4-ounce (or smaller) liquid containers in a carry-on bag

accessibility aid An airline service that can assist passengers who require additional assistance getting through an airport

airplane ear A temporary popping sensation in the ear caused by rapid air pressure changes during take-off and landing

arrival hall The area of an airport where passengers can meet family and friends after going through airport arrival procedures

arrival area The area of an airport where passengers enter after disembarking the plane via the passenger boarding bridge

baggage carousel A conveyer belt in the baggage reclaim area that delivers checked baggage to passengers

baggage drop-off area The area of an airport where passengers drop off their checked baggage for baggage handlers to transport on the plane

baggage drop-off kiosk An automated kiosk in the baggage drop-off area that passengers can use to process and drop off their checked baggage

baggage reclaim area The area of an airport where passengers pick up their baggage from a baggage carousel

boarding gate The area of an airport where passengers wait for their flight before boarding a plane

boarding pass A document issued by an airline during check-in that allows passengers to board a plane

buy onboard menu A menu that includes food and drinks that are not included in a passenger's airline ticket purchase

Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) The Canadian Crown Corporation that oversees the security screening processes and identification administration at Canadian airports

carry-on baggage Smaller types of baggage that passengers can carry along the plane and store in the overhead baggage compartment

checked baggage Larger types of baggage that baggage handlers transport to the plane's cargo area

check-in A process in which an airline agent processes travel documents, tags baggage, and issues a boarding pass, and airport security screens and searches checked baggage

check-in counter A counter where passengers go to have an airline agent check them in to receive a boarding pass

check-in gate The area of an airport where passengers check in with their airline

check-in kiosk An automated kiosk in the check-in area that passengers can use to check themselves in

customs checkpoint The area of an airport where border services officers process travel documents and declaration cards, as well as inspect and search baggage

damaged baggage Baggage that is damaged upon arrival at a passenger's destination

declaration card A document that passengers may need to complete during international flights, which requires information about the type of items they will be bringing with them from a different country

deep vein thrombosis (DVT) A condition in which a blood clot blocks blood flow in a deep vein and causes warmth, swelling, and/or pain in the affected area

delayed baggage Baggage that is not delivered upon arrival at a passenger's destination

departure area The area of an airport where passengers find and wait at their boarding gate before boarding a plane

direct flight A flight with a single flight number that may stop to refuel or to take on and/or let off passengers at an airport

domestic flight A flight that involves travel within a country

flight information display system (FIDS) A system of computer monitors that display departure and arrival flight information

immigration (passport control) A process in which a border services officer confirms the identities of passengers arriving from a different country and processes travel documents and declaration cards

information desk A desk where passengers can get information about the airport and the city's ground transportation, local events and attractions, and hotels

international flight A flight that involves travel to a different country

jet lag A temporary sleep disorder that occurs after travelling across two or more time zones and includes symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and insomnia

layover A waiting period that typically lasts from 30 minutes to four hours before passengers can connect to another flight

lost baggage Baggage that is missing for more than 21 days or that the airline declares as lost

online check-in A process in which passengers check themselves in using a computer or smartphone app

overbooked flight A flight in which an airline books too many passengers and must bump off passengers before departure

passenger rights Rights that entitle passengers to compensation for flight and baggage complications depending on certain conditions

personal exemption limit The value of goods that passengers can bring into Canada without having to pay regular duty and taxes

personal item An extra bag or item that does not count towards a passenger's carry-on bag limit

quarantine inspection A process in which a border services officer and/or food inspection specialist inspects any animals, animal by-products, and plant products that passengers bring with them from a different country

secure area The area of an airport that requires a security screening and possible searching before entering

security checkpoint The area of an airport where airport security officers screen and search passengers and their carry-on baggage for any banned items

stopover A long layover that can last over 24 hours long

terminal A building in an airport where passengers board and disembark planes

transit or transfer passenger A passenger who has a layover or stopover and will not be leaving the airport and staying in the country

travel document An identification document required for passengers to travel by plane across domestic and international borders

