SWA Announces New Routes & Fares

PAGE 4

7 Tricks for A Happy Road Warrior

PAGE 5

AIRPORT CONSTRUCTION CAUSES SUMMER DELAYS

PAGE 2
“They’ve Been Working on the Airport” doesn’t have the lyrical bite or melodic charm of that old railroad folk song, but it has the benefit of being true. Tens of billions of dollars are being thrown at airports around the globe to improve amenities for travelers and facilities for the aircraft that transport us.

Yet for every bit of good news—United Airlines’ sleek new digs at Boston’s Logan Airport or American Airlines’ much-needed new commuter gates at Dallas/Fort Worth—there is dirt and dust, delays and confusion. Airport construction throws a spanner into our carefully honed road routines. Nothing is more annoying, nothing seems as endless and nothing has the potential to unravel our tightly wound schedules.

Or, as a spokeswoman for always-under-construction Los Angeles International Airport almost gleefully told the Associated Press earlier this month: "Now you’re going to start to feel the pain."

How much pain? Your mileage will vary based on your travel patterns. But many of the nation’s most important airports (and the ever-important Heathrow in London) will be in the throes of construction projects during the busy spring and summer travel seasons. Here’s an airport-by-airport guide to what may most annoy and delay you in the months ahead.

Dallas’ double whammy

Weeks of drama over who gets a pair of not-yet-built gates at Dallas Love Field ended on Monday when city officials awarded them to Virgin America. Rights to use the gates were part of the merger settlement American Airlines struck last year with the Justice Department.

But the Texas-style soap opera only highlights the fact that Love Field, where Southwest Airlines rules the roost, has been physically messy for months. The payoff won’t happen until late October when terminal construction at the close-in, in-town airport is completed and Southwest and Virgin America initiate a slew of new routes.

On the other side of the so-called Metroplex, gargantuan Dallas/Fort Worth Airport has hit its 40th anniversary and is sprucing up to mask its age. There’ll even be a light-rail station opening in August—although you have to wonder whether a minor rail-transport link makes much sense given the auto-centric nature of the sprawling metropolitan area.

Denver’s delayed denouement

Twenty years after it first opened, Denver International is finally getting an airport hotel, a mass-transit center and a "public space" for visitors. The hotel is due next year while the transit center won’t arrive until at least 2016, but the diversions and detours are happening now. Watch out for roadway changes throughout the rest of the year. And beware of construction around vehicular bridges and in Concourse C, where new gates are being added.

Dulles does rail the Washington way

A rail line linking the Washington Metro with far-out Dulles International Airport is a typical how-Washington-works saga. The so-called Silver Line is late, been frequently renamed, is well over budget and, when it's completed, won't actually
American Airlines has discontinued its group discount program, effective May 1, and has eliminated its group and meeting travel sales team as the company further integrates with merger partner US Airways, according to the carrier. "The teams at legacy American and legacy US Airways are working hard to integrate our group programs, policies, and procedures," a spokesperson for American Airlines said.

"As part of this policy alignment, the new American will undergo some changes in how the group travel space is managed, and legacy American will sunset what has traditionally been known as the group and meeting travel team in global sales," the spokesperson said. According to the company, its revenue management department will manage group travel going forward.

While American will honor current discount agreements, it will not accept any alterations to established meeting contracts, including changes to sites or dates. Those booking group travel—including 10 or more people traveling from different origins to one common destination—on legacy American flights can continue to use zone fare agreements, and both legacy carriers will continue to offer space agreements for groups traveling together.

TSA: 40 Percent Of U.S. Travelers Now Get Expedited Screening

By Jay Boehmer, Business Travel News

Forty percent of the U.S. traveling public now passes through expedited airport security screening lanes, due in large part to the expansion of the PreCheck program, Transportation Security Administration administrator John Pistole said Wednesday during a Senate committee hearing. Pistole predicted that a "majority" of passengers would benefit from expedited screening as TSA further expands PreCheck and other programs.

Winning favor among many frequent travelers, the PreCheck program allows "low-risk passengers," in the words of Pistole, to pass through security checkpoints while leaving on their shoes, light outerwear and belts, and keeping laptops and allowable liquids in carry-on bags.

Noting that the goal of PreCheck is to "get people through in five minutes or less," Pistole said the lanes double hourly throughput compared with standard screening lanes.

Pistole recounted the program's sustained growth since it first launched, noting that the program now is at 118 U.S. airports nationwide, represents 600 of TSA’s 2,200 screening lanes and continues to grow in terms of eligible passengers. (Pistole noted that only 300 of those lanes are full-time, with the other half designated as PreCheck during peak travel times.)

Meanwhile, TSA this week welcomed Air Canada as its first international airline partner in PreCheck and indicated that it expects more to join.

Once an invitation-only program for elite-level frequent flyers or members of other trusted-traveler programs, TSA last year enabled passengers to apply directly to participate, provided they pass a background check and pay a fee. Pistole noted in prepared remarks on Wednesday that "more than 180,000 people have submitted applications at the 240-plus application centers nationwide." And, he noted in an exchange with senators, that number is growing.

TSA has expanded access to expedited lanes to military personnel, "and in April of this year extended eligibility to all civilian employees of the Department of Defense," according to Pistole. "TSA is currently working with a number of other Federal departments and agencies to include other lower-risk populations into TSA PreCheck."

Counted in Pistole’s 40 percent figure, "Numerous other risk-based changes are in effect nationwide, including expedited screening procedures for children 12 and under and adults 75 and older, airline pilots and flight attendants," he noted.

Meanwhile, Pistole said that TSA uses "real-time and intelligence-based methods, such as Managed Inclusion and TSA PreCheck Risk Assessments to identify additional passengers eligible for expedited physical screening on a trip-by-trip basis."

Pistole previously revealed a target to have 50 percent of the traveling public passing through expedited security-screening lanes by the end of 2014.

Most Punctual Airline for April 2014: Alaska Airline

Alaska Airlines in April was the most punctual major U.S. airline, with an on-time arrival rate of 89.9 percent, according to FlightStats. On average, North American airlines delivered 79.9 percent of their flights to the gate within 15 minutes of schedule. Among the eight largest U.S.-based carriers, excluding regional partners, Virgin America (86.7 percent), Delta (84.7 percent), US Airways (83.5 percent), American (82.8 percent) and United (81.5 percent) posted above-average on-time ratings.
Get ready to pack your bags and head off to a new destination via Southwest Airlines.

The Dallas-based carrier announced on Monday that new non-stop flights from Love Field Airport will include Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, Orlando, Las Vegas, Baltimore, Denver and several other locations.

Non-stop flights to Punta Cana, the Dominican Republic and Mexico City will also be offered.

The airline is offering $99 tickets for its new flights, which take off starting in October and November.

Seats are available now. By law, when you run a promotion like this, 10 percent of the seats on a plane have to be available at that price. So while $99 is the big headline of the day, the longer-term story sounds like lower prices across the board for North Texas travelers in the foreseeable future.

"Today — and I mean right now — you are free to book non-stop travel out of Dallas Love Field to those new, faraway, non-stop destinations for the first time in our history," said Southwest spokesman Kevin Krone.

The $99 one-way destinations coming online October 13, are:
- Washington Reagan
- Los Angeles International
- Chicago Midway
- Orlando
- Baltimore
- Las Vegas
- Denver

On November 2, Southwest begins flying non-stop from Love Field to:
- New York LaGuardia
- Ft. Lauderdale
- Atlanta
- Tampa
- San Diego
- Orange County

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
An infrequent business traveler booked a ticket from Philadelphia to San Francisco last week and then promptly called me to complain.

"They offered me an upgrade to first class for $350. That's ridiculous," she said. "Why can't everyone have a good seat?"

By the time I explained airline economics, disabused her of the notion of in-flight equality and convinced her to spring for the $350 to sit in a quiet and comfortable environment on a six-hour flight, the upgrade was gone. She ended up sitting in coach--in a middle seat, of course--and was hardly ready to hit the ground running for a late-day meeting in the city by the bay.

Her mistake may be excusable because she is, after all, an infrequent business traveler. But those of us who live our lives on the road make too many mistakes, too. We can and should train ourselves to be better business travelers because it will save us time, make us more productive and lessen the wear-and-tear on our hearts, our heads and our bodies.

Here are seven simple tips to make it so.

**Ask for the upgrade**

As in life, there are times in travel when less is more. But coach seats and tiny hotel rooms are definitely not those times. Unless you're an elite player in their frequent travel plan, airlines and hotels generally don't give away upgrades anymore. But you sometimes can get them cheap just by asking. With the rise of premium-economy seating on flights, more legroom is often available for a bump of just a few bucks over the price of your coach ticket. And it never hurts to ask at the gate if there are first- or business-class seats available at reasonable prices. Many airlines have an at-the-gate upsell policy. At hotels, the sweet spot for suites is at the front desk. When you arrive, ask if better rooms are available and politely state your bargaining position. You'd be surprised how often a pleasantly uttered like "Would $20 more get me a suite tonight?" actually works.

**Tame the technology**

Robert Browning, the poet who first phrased the "less is more" meme, and Mies van der Rohe, the architect who practiced it, would both be shocked by the amount of technological detritus we now schlep. Look at your carry-on bag: Is there a laptop in there? A tablet? An ebook reader? A music player? How many cables and peripherals go with that torrent of tech? It's too much. Most business travelers are far better served by carrying just two devices. Trim down to the basics: a good smartphone and either a tablet or a laptop. They'll do everything you need.

**A bag for your carry-on bag**

Speaking of carry-ons, carry a few small ziplock storage bags with you. That's all it takes to have a much more felicitous experience at airport security checkpoints. Instead of dumping the contents of your pockets into those annoying plastic baskets that the TSA uses, take a second to plan before your...
Alaska Airlines is seeking Department of Transportation approval to serve Los Cabos and Puerto Vallarta from Portland, Ore.

If approved, the Portland-Los Cabos route would operate from Nov. 3 through April 27, while Portland-Puerto Vallarta would run from Nov. 4 through April 26.

Alaska announced in April that is seeking regulatory approval to resume seasonal service between Seattle and Cancun, a route it flew for nine years before suspending it in 2010.

If approved, the route would run from Nov. 6 through the end of April.

SOUTHWEST CONTINUED

Phoenix
Nashville

"That $99 fare will be out there, and we hope a lot people take advantage of it," Krone said, adding this advice: "Book quick and enjoy the travel."

Krone conceded that while these are promotional fares, "That's what we're famous for — low fares — and we want to make sure everyone knows Southwest has low fares."

Southwest has drawn attention for higher overall fares in recent years. Travel expert Rick Seaney, with FareCompare.com, says the new destinations from Love Field will have a dramatic effect on pushing down everyone's prices, including Virgin America at Love Field and American Airlines at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

"If you're willing to be proactive, get that October, November, December ticket. It's going to be the cheapest you've ever seen it, and on certain types of days, on non-stops, which is the convenience that you covet," Seaney said.

And he's talking not just Southwest, but everyone. FareCompare has already seen Virgin dropping its prices to compete with Southwest.

Southwest's ticket special ends on May 23.

"There are some big gifts for everyone in this holiday schedule: our initial nonstop offerings for a liberated Love Field in Dallas, and nearly triple the flights we currently offer at Reagan National Airport," Southwest Airlines executive Bob Jordan said. "We're also bringing Southwest service to the final two international destinations on the network we created after acquiring AirTran Airways in 2011. That integration will be completed on-plan by the end of this year."

Alaska aims to serve Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta from Portland

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• Nashville

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reach the checkpoint. Gather your pens, coins, keys, wallet, phone and the other contents of your pockets and slip them in one of the ziplocks. Put the bag in an outside pocket of your carry-on. It'll be one less hassle to deal with at the checkpoint. A granular tip: I prefer quart-sized freezer bags for this task, but your mileage may vary.

**Have a travel 'go bag'**

Disaster-prep specialists recommend having a pre-packed "go bag" if the worst happens. Parents-to-be have a go bag for when it's time to hustle to the hospital. So why don't more business travelers have a pre-packed (or at least partially packed) go bag? Make sure your carry-on is prepped with the basics: a change of undies, socks and a back-up shirt or blouse; your fully stocked toiletries kit; your tech bag with cords and other gear; and whatever else you know you're always going to take with your. My carry-on bag has internal pockets that are stocked with pens, notepads and a stash of other office supplies; business cards; breath mints; a fold-down umbrella; and back-up eyeglasses and sunglasses. The key to smart go-bag management: Refill and refresh it at the end of each trip. This way, when the next call to fly comes, you're ready to go without fumbling for (or forgetting) the basics.

**Get elite**

The more you travel, the more you realize that you're going to get all the points and miles you'll need to score a free holiday. Smarter travelers focus on attaining as much "elite" status as they can manage. Elite status is the fast track to free upgrades, more personalized service and, frankly, a less-dehumanizing travel experience. Back in the day (which may have only been a decade ago), the travel industry was more selective about who got to be an elite. Today, most will happily match your status in another program to get your business or offer you a fast path to elite. Some will even give it to you as part of a package of perks bundled with their affinity credit card. Get as much elite as you can because you never know when you'll need an airline or hotel chain that you otherwise don't patronize.

**Say their name**

If you think the travel experience is dehumanizing for us, imagine what it is like for those underpaid customer-facing employees at airlines, hotels and car-rental firms. The best way to get them engaged and energized to help you is to connect with them on a personal level. And that doesn't take much these days. Simply addressing them kindly and respectfully by name will often do the trick. Want great hotel service? Make sure to catch the name of the person checking you in. Say thank you when you leave the front desk. When you get to your room, call down to the front desk, ask for them, and thank them again. It works wonders.

**Be a big(ger) spender**

I've never understood why business travelers--who are, after all, business people first--don't fully embrace the concept of tipping. More specifically, the concept tipping well and often. At some level, we're all in this for the money. The more you spread around, wisely and discreetly, the better service you will receive. Money talks and will be heard even over the day-to-day din of business travel.
Automated Passport Control (APC) kiosks at IAH Terminal E mean shorter wait times to clear Customs and Border Protection (CBP). U.S. and Canadian citizens now clear through passport control at IAH in 10 - 15 minutes, on average, compared to 25 minutes previously. U.S. and Canadian citizens – with or without checked bags – can use the kiosks in English, Spanish and French. Customers are not required to pay fees or to pre-register to use the kiosks.

United offers new service between Chicago and Edinburgh

Nonstop seasonal service between Chicago O'Hare (ORD) and Edinburgh, Scotland (EDI), operates five times weekly from May 22 - June 11; daily from June 12 - Sept. 1; and four times weekly between Sept. 2 - Oct. 5, 2014. Boeing 757 - 200 aircraft will be used, featuring 16 flat-bed seats in United BusinessFirst, and 153 seats in United Economy, including 45 extra legroom seats in Economy Plus. United also offers service between New York / Newark (EWR) and both EDI and Glasgow (GLA).

AIRPORT DELAYS CONTINUED

reach Dulles Airport. The closest stop will be a football field away, meaning passengers will have to hoof it between the station and the terminal. Of course, that's years in the future because the first phase of the Silver Line, due to open later this year, will only connect East Falls Church, Tysons Corner and Reston, Virginia. The second phase, the one that will actually get to within a hail-mary pass of Dulles, won't open until 2018. But there are plenty of road delays and reroutings to inconvenience you now.

London, the Queen's way

London's Heathrow Airport, the world's most important airport, seems to have been under continual construction since it opened in 1929 in what was then the hamlet of Heathrow. The last big project, Terminal 5, was a disaster for months after its 2008 debut. Heathrow's owners hope to do better when the rebuilt Terminal 2, now dubbed The Queen's Terminal, opens on June 4. Airlines slated to move into Terminal 2—primarily United Airlines and its Star Alliance partners—will switch in waves. United will be the first to relocate, bringing its bifurcated presence at Heathrow under once roof for the first time since its 2010 merger with Continental Airlines. But United did such a miserable job merging with Continental in 2012 that you might be wise to steer clear until the dust definitively settles. And as if to prove that no Heathrow unification goes unpunished, be aware that Delta Air Lines last month split its London presence. It now operates some flights out of Terminal 3 and some out of Terminal 4.

Los Angeles' long march

LAX claims that more people start there journey there than any other airport in the world, but it went decades after the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics without an upgrade. Now it's rushing to catch up. That's meant an ongoing series of construction projects, infuriating delays and diversions, and piles of rubbish and debris everywhere. Construction continues on the recently renovated Tom Bradley International Terminal and there are projects underway at most other terminals, support buildings, walkways, baggage-handling systems and the congested airport roadways. It's all exacerbated by the fact that LAX is one of the few airports where major carriers are trading competitive blows to establish hub supremacy. If the minutiae fascinates you, you can examine the operational blow-by-blow. Most of us will be more interested in the annoying delays and diversions that the projects are causing.

Newark goes off the rails

For an airline with a seemingly logical three-terminal layout, Newark Liberty International is an infuriating, only-in-New-York-even-if-it's-New-Jersey experience. The annoyance factor is currently magnified by the closure of the AirTrain, the airport’s transportation backbone. The monorail usually handles as many as 30,000 people a day and connects terminals, parking lots, carrental and airport-hotel shuttles and even a rail station serving Amtrak and local commuter trains. In place of the AirTrain, the airport is operating buses on an as-needed schedule, which strains the already gridlocked surface roads. Monorail repairs are due to continue until July 15. But it's New York (well, New Jersey) and nothing ever runs to schedule, so reschedule accordingly.

San Francisco's foggy future

A remake of parts of San Francisco International’s terminal three went off without a hitch earlier this year. We're not likely to be so lucky with the closure of two of the airport’s four runways, scheduled to last through the summer. The airport insists that the shutdown won't seriously delay flights, but that claim is incredulous. SFO is one of the nation’s most chronically delayed airports even when all four runways are operating. If you're headed for the Bay Area, consider alternatives such as Oakland or San Jose. If you use SFO as a gateway to Asia, consider rerouting through another U.S. gateway.