



**Christopher Elliott, Special for USA TODAY** 6 p.m. EDT June 14, 2015

If you're flying somewhere this summer, you'll spend a lot more money on a direct flight instead of one with a connection.

Also, you'll always save money by booking early and should avoid big hub airports such as JFK. But here's a little good news: You won't have to worry about weather delays as much as you do during the winter.

That's all untrue. Every. Last. Word.

Now that the busy summer travel season is in full swing, maybe it's time to confront these air travel myths head-on, before you make plans based on misinformation.

Here are the top summer air travel myths debunked:

**A direct flight costs more than a connecting flight.**

In fact, in a study of more than 57 million tickets sold last year, the Airlines Reporting Corp. (ARC) found there was an insignificant fare difference between a direct/non-stop and connecting flight. On average, a connecting ticket was only \$1.03 less expensive than a direct ticket. The findings affect summer travelers the most, because they tend to be less experienced and more price-sensitive. How do you lower your ticket price? ARC found that buying your ticket in advance and including a Saturday night stayover could save you a lot more money.

**If you book early, you'll save.**

Not necessarily true. Summer flights can sell out fast, which is the biggest reason to buy early. But sometimes fare sales happen on routes that aren't selling quickly enough, sending fares plummeting lower than the typical two-week advance-purchase price, experts say. "Airlines will run last-minute specials," says Brent Jenson, a travel specialist at the Salt Lake City-based Morris Murdock Travel. "Many travelers think that if they book a flight early, they will get a cheaper ticket, but that's not always the case." Oh, and don't look now, but fares are actually down 4% from the same period last year, according to a recent Adobe Travel Report.

**You should avoid large hubs such as JFK, LAX and O'Hare.**

Yes, those are busy airports, but no, you don't want to avoid them, says Ron DiLeo, the chief commercial officer of Altour, a travel management company. "That would be nuts," he says. "I would actually steer towards those markets, not away from them." The reason? Because they're so big, there's lots of competition at those airports, so your odds of getting a good deal actually rise when you include them in your fare search. This is a popular misinterpretation of an otherwise solid piece of advice, which is to include alternate airports in your search criteria. For example, if you're flying to Los Angeles,

check the box that lets you search nearby airports such as Burbank, Long Beach and Ontario. You may have a better travel experience by using these alternate airports — but please, don't avoid the big ones.

### **You're going to spend more to fly this summer.**

Summer travelers actually plan to spend less than they did last summer, a new survey by Fatwallet suggests. Forty-two percent of those surveyed said they plan to spend more than \$1,500 this summer — down from 46% in 2014. More than seven in 10 travelers said they would turn to the Internet for special offers and travel deals, or use miles, points or cash-back offers to lower booking prices. That means either airfares will have to come down to meet demand, or a lot of Americans plan to drive to their vacation destinations. This is the "new" normal many in the airline industry feared would happen: that even after a long recession, air travelers would continue their penny-pinching ways. It also may explain the creative fees being developed by airlines in an effort to squeeze a little more ancillary revenue from us.

### **Weather isn't as much of a problem during the summer.**

Considering all the headlines about winter weather, it would be easy to conclude that summertime is smooth sailing when it comes to air travel. Not so, the pros say. "With severe thunderstorms and tropical storms ever-present in the forecast, summer travelers tend to see the most flight delays and cancellations," says Mike Kelly, the chief executive of On Call International, a Salem, N.H., travel risk management company. "Adding on to that misconception, most consumers believe that their airline will put them up in a hotel and cover all costs in the event of a delay or cancellation, and this generally is not the case." Actually, that's putting it politely. Every airline's contract of carriage, the legal agreement between you and the carrier, stipulates that if a flight is canceled because of weather, the airline owes you no compensation.

These are by no means the only summer air travel misconceptions, but they're the biggies. For those of you who work in the travel industry and already know this, here's my recommendation: Instead of leaving angry comments about how everyone should know this, why not tell a person in your life who isn't a travel expert about these myths?

Share the knowledge. If you do, it'll be a great summer to fly.

### **Even more air travel myths**

- **All flights will be crowded.** "It depends on where you fly," says Jessica Coane, founder of an online loyalty program marketplace called PEX+. "If you fly to Orlando when school is out, you're likely to have a bunch of families traveling to Disney World. If you're traveling to Anchorage, not so much."

- **It doesn't matter when you travel — expect chaos.** Not if you fly during the week. Everyone else wants to arrive on a weekend and return Friday, but Jaimee Ratliff, a travel blogger, says you can find a pocket of sanity Tuesday or Wednesday — even during the summer. "Don't travel when most people do," Ratliff advises.

- **The deeper into summer, the less chance of a bargain.** Untrue. This year, Labor Day offers the cheapest flights compared with other summer holidays, according to the Adobe report. Whoever said procrastination doesn't pay?