

SOLACE GLOBAL

WINTER TRAVEL 2019/2020



Winter Travel Advisory – 2019/2020



The end of the year marks the start of the Northern Hemisphere's coldest months, which can lead to travel misery, delays and all-around chaos. In preparation for businesses winding down and employees preparing to travel over the Christmas period, it is important for travellers and businesses to be aware of the possibility of this disruption, the dangers associated with the adverse weather and what they can do to help mitigate the disruption and risk.

While most of us won't be able to solve many of the problems, sheer willpower will not clear the snow blocking the highways, stop flooding from closing whole regions or remove the fog grounding flights at the airport, preparations can be made to ensure that you avoid being left stuck. Much of the advice listed below will be common sense for seasoned travellers; however, it is always good to be reminded of little tips that might make that big difference.

Snow, ice, strong winds and heavy rain will present heightened risks for those travelling somewhere warm for Christmas, for an early 2020 holiday or even to and from work in the winter months. This holidays, trips and commutes can easily become nightmare journeys as flights are slowly cancelled and roads blocked. Indeed, we have already had a taster of the travel disruption that can come with winter weather following the snowstorms in the United States over Thanksgiving. The storms, while causing significant disruption to Americans looking to make it home to celebrate Thanksgiving, also resulted in fatalities, highlighting not only the disruption they cause but the danger they present. Further snow and heavy rain are expected in the coming days, especially in the Midwest of the US.

It is not just North America that will be impacted, northern Germany, Scandinavia and parts of eastern Europe have all already seen short periods of cold weather, while south-eastern France and north-eastern Italy have also been impacted by heavy rainfall that resulted in widespread travel disruption and led to a number of fatalities. As January approaches, snow, rainfall, strong winds are all likely across the globe. Travellers can expect further disruption and adverse weather at the beginning of 2020. Even without large storms, the cold weather will bring ice and frost, increasing the risk to road users and result in travel delays.

As such, below are our seven tips that can help travellers prepare, whether they are undertaking business or leisure activities, navigate the Christmas and winter period. A few simple tips can help those travelling be ready in advance to react to weather systems,

and be prepared should their flights be delayed or cancelled; and finally, take the necessary steps when stuck with a million other people at an airport where flight operations are coming to a slow standstill.

Fly early and fly direct

As nice as it would be to get a few extra hours of sleep, and as annoying as it may be having to kill time once you reach your destination; book the earliest flight possible. This can be especially true if you are flying to places that have multiple flights per day; London to Dublin, Tokyo to Seoul or New York to Toronto for example. Booking early flights has significant advantages over even the second or third flight of the day; as the aircraft is usually already at the airport, at the stand, waiting for passengers to board. This means the chances of your flight being impacted by the aircraft being delayed whilst at another airport are much lower. It also mitigates against the chance that knock-on delays will affect your journey.

Additionally, if your flight is affected, then, chances are, there is plenty of time for the airline to solve the problem and get you on your way. If you are travelling on a route that has multiple flights, this will also give you the opportunity to be put on the next flight or even with another airline's flight to the same destination, if there is room. This also extends to if flights are being cancelled, with only one set of passengers, as well as a not so full airport, you will be the first to be able to react to the coming bad weather, meaning there will still be hotel rooms available, staff will not be inundated by so many requests and rebooking may still be possible. Be on the third or fourth flight of the day, with all those before yours being cancelled, then you are much lower down the queue, with no hotels left and staff who are exhausted from dealing with the chaos for the past hours.



If the early flight is not possible, due to a client meeting for example, then the second to last flight is another clever option as it will always give you another flight as a back-up option. Additionally, in Europe and America, Thursday flights tend to be less busy than those at other times.

Flying direct also helps minimise the threat of being impacted by disruption at another airport. When you only have one leg and the flight is cancelled; you can wait at home, or at your hotel, waiting to hopefully be put on one of the upcoming flights mentioned in the previous paragraphs. However, if you have multiple legs, then the chance of running into problems

multiplies. Delays to your flight could result in you missing the next leg, or if your second flight is cancelled altogether, then you'll be stuck, at an airport, possibly in a third country with limited options.

Become a weather expert

The big mistake most people make is only realising that bad weather will impact them when flights are beginning to be cancelled and it is snowing outside. Winter weather is quite predictable and 72-hour forecasts are very accurate.

If you can see that Frankfurt – where you are planning to fly from – will be hit by a blizzard in three days, begin planning immediately! See if you can modify your flights. Even a small fee here could see you saving big in the long run. While insurance companies do not cover winter delays that have not happened yet, airlines can be more accommodating. Should an airline see an upcoming period of poor weather, they may recognise the savings they will also make and waive any additional charges.

However, do not expect miracles, many people may have the same ideas. As such, patience and politeness can go a long way. There is never any harm in asking! Airline workers want to get you home too and are there to try and help.

Flexibility

This leads directly into point three; flexibility. Buying tickets that allow you to make amendments or changes can cost extra but can save money in the long run. By having the option of moving your flight, you may be able to leave a day earlier, beating the storm and arriving at your destination.

Flexibility should be factored into all your travel plans during the festive period. If you see that everything has gone wrong, flights are being cancelled and though there still is a chance you might make it out, you're on your third cancelled flight already. Then the best option may be to book a hotel now; make a reservation for a hotel that can be cancelled. Even if nothing has gone wrong yet. For example, it may only be an hour delay at the moment and a light flurry, or maybe you just checked the weather and thought snow and -2 degrees does not fill you with confidence. By having a cancellable booking, you are ahead of the crowd and could end up saving yourself money, stress and, in some cases, from sleeping on the airport floor.



Chargers, power banks and battery saver

The worst has happened, your flight has been cancelled, it is snowing sideways, and the airport is packed.

It is likely that should you find yourself in such a situation then so will many others, the airports charging areas will quickly be taken by people busy watching episodes on their tablets or desperately trying to charge their phones in order to change their flights. The help desks will also quickly begin seeing long queues and staff patience will begin to wear thin.

As such, making sure your devices have at least a bit of juice left is vital for instances like this. It will allow you to rebook flights and call customer services if you cannot get through the plethora of people at the information desks. It will also allow you to book transport, check weather updates and book hotels instantly.

However, maybe you were also watching the latest series on Netflix, and your phone is running low on battery or maybe possibly you have just not been able to preserve the battery on your phone? Having a back-up power bank should be one of the first things a business traveller packs. They can be vital in many situations and, as such, it is important to keep this power bank routinely topped up. Ensuring your charger is easily available and having a vehicle charger are also positive methods of keeping devices charged. If you have 30 minutes to kill and there is a plug available, it can always be a good idea to plug your device in, you never know if you will need that charge later. On flights as well, while many airlines have Wi-Fi now, if you are not using your device, switch it off, this will stop you from occasionally checking the phone and running the battery down. If you do want to keep the device on, then put it in Airplane Mode or Battery Saver, to help preserve the battery.

Insurance

If your flight is delayed or cancelled due to severe weather; airlines can be very helpful but do remember they have little legal obligations to help. Additionally, if it is just you and a few others affected then it can be easy for the airline to manage and place you on the next flight. However, should a heavy snowstorm result in the shutting down of a major international airport for even a few

hours, hundreds of flights will be delayed or cancelled, and tens of thousands of passengers will need new seats or hotels, which are likely to book up fast.

The large number of people disrupted puts massive pressure on the infrastructure of airlines and airports. As such, it is likely you as an individual are going to be very low on the airline's priority list. As such, ensuring that you have adequate insurance is vital. Aspects such as travel delay coverage, 24/7 assistance and missed connection coverage can both help you get home, or to where you are going quicker, and help bear the brunt of possibly spiralling hotel, food and travel costs. Adequate insurance coverage will help smooth out what could be a rocky process as you try and book a room for the night and pay for meals, or a strong drink after the day you have had.

Security

Just because it is Christmas or cold outside does not mean that criminals and others do not operate. With people wrapping up warm and the large number of people travelling around with the possibility of disruption, there is ample opportunity for pickpockets. Elsewhere, religious ceremonies, Christmas markets and New Year's celebrations also provide opportunities for extremist actors; as demonstrated by the 2016 arrests in Melbourne over a plot to carry out a terror attack on Christmas Day in the city, the Turkish nightclub shooting in the early hours of 1 January 2017 or the 2016 attack on a Berlin Christmas market.

The large number of people located in Christmas markets give a would-be terrorist the perfect opportunity to conduct a potentially high-profile attack. Despite this, and mainly due to previous attacks, many Christmas markets are well policed and now fortified against possible truck attacks. This security apparatus was demonstrated in the Strasbourg attack where Operation Sentinelle soldiers quickly responded to the incident; exchanging fire with the attacker.

The best advice for travellers is to remain aware of your surroundings, especially in crowded areas. Regardless of what level of security is installed; individuals acting alone in 'lone wolf' style attacks are always difficult to detect and protect against. While arrests are made regularly, these attacks do and will continue to occur. Whether at home or abroad, ensure that you are aware of the local emergency numbers and report any suspicious behaviour to the police. Keep up to date with local and in-country news, remain vigilant in public areas; especially at Christmas markets, crowded areas on New Year's Eve and other locations where people gather.



Personal safety

In a similar vein, it is important to be aware that business travellers are far more likely to be involved in a vehicle accident than a terrorist incident. The icy or snowy conditions make driving more challenging, the average difference in claims frequency per mile between December/January/February and June/July/August 2013-2015 was 20 percent according to UK insurers. This results in the need to drive more cautiously and slowly and may alter the time it takes to get to the airport.

Additionally, slips and falls are the main cause of workplace injuries in the US and in 2014 there were 42,480 workplace injuries or illnesses from ice, sleet or snow that required at least one day off work as a result. Of these, 82 percent were due to slips or falls on level ground.

Safety also extends to what you are wearing, walking on slippery surfaces, in cold conditions and the pouring rain. Making sure you dress appropriately for the conditions; having a thick coat, wearing waterproofs and the appropriate footwear are all just as important

as being aware of your surroundings and having adequate insurance. Dressing in layers is also useful allowing you to remove and add as needed while getting in and out of taxis, offices or boarding aircraft; the worst thing would be going from being too cold to too hot.

The last thing you want to be doing on icy pavements is rushing for a flight or a train. Winter weather can result in delays on roads, book your taxi to the airport to arrive an extra 15-30 minutes early, catch the quarter-to train instead of the one on the hour and always think about delays a little more; even if conducting a journey you are extremely familiar with. This will avoid rushing or running in often icy conditions; resulting in a slip or fall.

Advice Summary

- Book early flights and where possible, fly direct to minimise chances of flights being delayed or cancelled and the risk of being left stranded.
- Monitor the weather, being aware of the possibility of bad weather gives you the opportunity to prepare.
- Remain flexible and give yourself options; last minute changes may be needed including taking completely different flights.
- Keep vital electronics charged and always carry back-up powerpacks.
- Ensure you have comprehensive travel insurance for help if you get stuck as well as providing compensation should things go wrong.
- Remain aware of your surroundings; especially in crowded areas such as Christmas markets, airports, train stations and shopping centres.
- Stay warm; ensure you are appropriately dressed for the conditions. Your favourite travel dress or that comfy suit may be useful when travelling in summer, but slightly more rugged clothing and footwear may help you make that icy walk between terminals.
- Allow a little extra time, even when completing journeys, you are familiar with, to account for weather and wintry delays.

If driving in the winter months, below are some additional points to help ensure you reach your destination safely

- Vehicle maintenance is essential. Ensure tyres are in good condition and contain enough air, the antifreeze is topped up and the vehicle is running well.
- Double check that your lights, windscreens and mirrors are clear before departing.
- Be aware of the weather conditions before travel, only travel through poor conditions if absolutely necessary and have a suitable vehicle to do so safely
- Using dipped headlights even during the day is advisable, the lower light and occasionally poor visibility can make vehicles harder to see.
- Allow for extra distance to the vehicle in front should you need to brake on slippery surfaces, or should you need to correct slides or skids; avoid harsh vehicle inputs (braking, accelerating or steering) that will test the limited grip that your vehicle has.
- The low sun can result in difficult driving conditions, especially if it is reflecting on wet or icy surfaces, having sunglasses to hand can help mitigate this risk.
- Use the highest gear possible if pulling away in, or stuck in, snow.
- Keep a coat, blanket in the car in case you do get stuck. Do not drive with the car too warm, as this can make you drowsy, instead keep the vehicle at a comfortable temperature and well ventilated.