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# Travel agents share their best tips on common issues, so you don't make the same mistakes

**[Josh Rivera](#)**

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*"How to travel better" is a five-part series focusing on uncomfortable or inefficient travel experiences and how the industry can do better. If you'd like to contribute to our future reporting and share your experience as a source, you can fill out this quick form.*

For Frank Jung in Missouri, it's when people kick the back of his seat. For May Wong of California, it's people who bare their feet during a flight. For others, like Regina Blye of the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation who has a spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair, the most annoying part of traveling could result in a serious injury affecting their health and well-being.

While visiting a new place (or returning to a familiar one) can be a wonderful experience, the process of getting there comes with difficulties that are only exacerbated by red tape, outdated equipment, unhelpful platforms or accessibility issues.

Readers reached out to voice their concerns over what grieved them most about traveling. For most, fellow passengers were a critical part of their experience. As one reader, Nathan Germelman, who uses a wheelchair, said, "I get the ugliest, rudest and most hateful stares like it's my fault my connecting flight was late, and they boarded me last in the aisle wheelchair."

There are many areas where the travel industry could improve, especially for those with disabilities and different needs. For the past month, the USA TODAY Travel team has been looking into how we can make the process better for everyone involved.

To make the process somewhat easier, we asked travel agents about common issues travelers encounter on their journeys. Here's what they said.

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## **A theme park ticket isn't enough, reservations are required**

Nina Byrd, owner of Kissimmee, Florida-based SmartVaycay, has helped hundreds of people plan vacations over the years. Having visited theme parks upwards of 40 times herself, she's an expert on what she calls the three Rs: rides, resorts and restaurants.

A huge hiccup she's seen among theme parkgoers is related to another R, reservations.

"The biggest thing that I run into is people freaking out on Facebook, 'I just got here, and I can't get in. What do I do?'" she said.

Various theme parks around the country began requiring reservations on top of admission tickets during the pandemic. Most parks have phased those out, but both Disneyland and Walt Disney World still require park reservations.

"A lot of people still do not know that," Byrd said. "They buy their park tickets and they show up, and they're turned away because the park is at capacity."

Some guests may get lucky and be able to make last-minute reservations or reservations for another park, but the problem and potential disappointment are easily avoided. Disney guests can make park reservations as soon as they buy their tickets. Authorized Disney travel agents, who offer their services for free, can also make park or high-demand dining reservations for their clients.

"A lot of these restaurants book out now 60 days in advance," Byrd said. "Especially the harder ones like Cinderella's Royal Table, Be Our Guest and Ohana ... I mean, you just cannot get in if you don't have a reservation. It's really, really hard."

Disney guests can book reservations on their own through the resort's website or mobile app. There are also apps like MouseWatcher and Mouse Dining that alert customers when tables open up.

"Those typically are a lifesaver when you need a last-minute reservation," Byrd said. "You do have to pay for them though." She subscribes to several on her clients' behalf.

Reservations are also important at other theme parks like Universal Orlando, which is home to three of the top 10 theme park restaurants, according to 10Best readers.

"A lot of times with Universal, you just can't get into places if you don't have a reservation," she said, adding that "Universal doesn't take nearly the planning that Disney does."

— *Eve Chen*

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## The cheapest flight isn't always the best option

Jenita Lawal, owner of Lawal Travel Services, specializes in luxury travel and creates personalized travel experiences for her clients, like elopements in Jamaica and anniversary trips to Los Cabos, Mexico. An avid traveler herself, she knows everything there is to know about booking flights.

She's noticed that far too often, people only look for the lowest cost flights – understandable if you want to save money – but they "aren't always the best deal or best experience," she said.

"Consider it an equation of time, value, experience and money," Lawal said. "A 19-hour layover may not be worth saving \$300. Is it really a deal if you have to pay for your carry-on and get stuck with a middle seat at the back of the plane near the bathroom on a three-hour flight?"

*Story continues below.*

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Her advice to staying within budget while not ruining your well-being with a terrible flight experience is to "follow the flight deal" – typically the "most volatile price component" of your trip anyway. She suggests tracking your flights with tools such as Scott's Cheap Flights or Google Flights.

Another option is to focus on earning airline miles with your credit card. "Let your everyday expenses earn you miles," she said.

You could also cut costs intentionally by packing lighter to save money on check-in luggage or choose the basic class option offered by airlines. "Keep in mind that these fares come with some restrictions, like not choosing your seat."

Lastly, she offered an alternative that works well for international trips to Europe: If you have the extra time, take a cheaper flight to another city or country, then travel via train or small European airline – which tend to be lower in cost – to your final destination. "For my trip to Paris this past May, I flew to Nuremberg, Germany, and stayed overnight before hopping on a train to Paris," she said. "It was a new country for me and still ended up saving me about \$500."

— *Kathleen Wong*

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## Not reading cruise documentation

The fine print can cause frustration for travelers, particularly when they don't read it. Stephanie Goldberg-Glazer, owner of the travel agency Live Well, Travel Often, said "the biggest issue" she encounters is travelers not reading the documentation provided by their travel adviser, cruise line, or other vendors.

Passengers on some closed-loop cruises – those that start and end at the same U.S. port – may not need to bring passports, for instance. "So, a lot of times, people will read, 'Oh, you don't need a passport if you're a U.S. citizen,' and stop at the end of that sentence," she said. However, they will need a birth certificate and government-issued photo ID, which they may not realize.

*Story continues below.*

Travelers may also miss key information about when to show up at the port or any remaining COVID-19 requirements. "Cruise documentation ... is 20 pages long, it's really boring, and

nobody reads it," she said, but they should know some highlights, including the port they are sailing from and which items are generally prohibited on board, such as irons.

Goldberg-Glazer said when her agency books international travel for new clients, they ask the travelers to send a copy of their passport. If they don't have one, the agency advises the client on what other documentation they will need.

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She also recommended travelers ask a lot of questions during the booking process and do some research on the front end, noting that there are a number of online forums where other cruisers share their experiences. "The truth is a little bit of homework at the beginning can save you a lot of headaches at the end and help you enjoy your trip significantly more," she said.

— *Nathan Diller*

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## What do you think could improve in the travel industry?