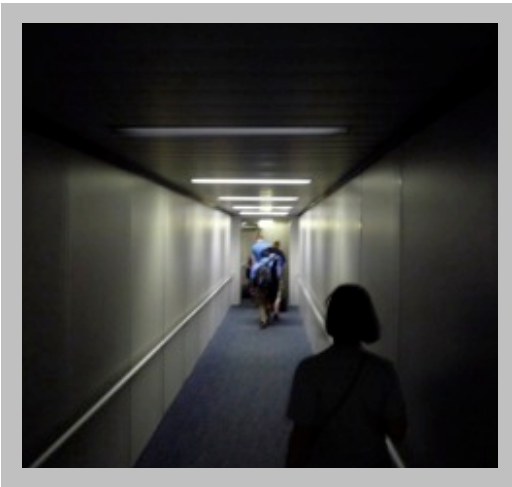


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Flight Delays

You're under enough stress; you didn't need this.

Weather delays, mechanical failures, air traffic system congestion, and crew time-outs are unfortunately all terms frequent flyers have come to know in recent years. Airlines are running tight operations, using fewer, smaller aircraft and performing heavy maintenance largely overseas. Airframe and engine technology is more advanced and reliable, and better maintenance methods have reduced the need to hold spare aircraft and parts. But this efficiency leaves little margin for recovery, especially on long-range flights. And when it happens, it can throw your whole trip into disarray.

Personal Experience

We experienced this scenario on a July 2009 flight from Minnesota to Japan. The 747 Delta uses to operate the flight comes in from Tokyo at 1:00 pm, turns around at Minneapolis, and two hours later heads back out to Tokyo. Our particular aircraft was hit by lightning shortly before arriving at Minneapolis and landed safely. As the flight and ground crews inspected the airplane, they determined several electrical components needed to be replaced. Delta gate staff advised us of the issue at 1:30 pm and estimated only a small delay from our scheduled departure at 3:00.

However, the delay kept growing, and by 2:30 the aircraft was towed away to a hangar as the problem needed more resources to fix. Our departure was pushed back to 4:00, then 5:00, then 6:00. Finally at 6 pm the decision was made to cancel the flight for that day and try again first thing in the morning. Immediately Delta set up a line of tables and started handing out emergency amenity kits and hotel vouchers for the passengers connecting from other cities, as everyone's bags had already been loaded. We walked back to our car and drove home.

The next four hours after getting home were a nightmare of repeated phone calls to Expedia, whose computer wasn't able to help us reschedule a return flight or the reservation at our hotel. I had to call Delta directly – and they were remarkably helpful; changed our return flight with no penalties and even found three seats together on what to me had looked like a sold-out flight. I also had to call the hotel in Japan directly – and they were remarkably UN-helpful, refusing to move our reservation. I ultimately cancelled the reservation at that hotel and found one in another part of the city through Expedia, as we were literally a few hours away

Contact info for Continental Airlines

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from finding ourselves "homeless" in Tokyo.

The next morning we left again for the airport, and this time everything happened as it was supposed to. Delta flight attendants came through the cabin halfway across the Canadian Shield with vouchers for 25,000 SkyMiles for all the passengers as an apology. Our hotel was in a great neighborhood, and we ended up having a great time.

If it happens to you

Thankfully, on your adoption trip you'll have a whole team of professionals looking out for you. Your agency representative in China has the local connections and know-how to adjust your hotel reservations, ground transportation, and if necessary, meetings for paperwork.

If you encounter a flight problem on your home side of the Pacific, or while connecting at Tokyo, in the first five minutes, make these calls:

- Your adoption agency's travel contact to let them know of your situation, and that you won't be arriving on time.
- Your airline (or, if you used a travel agent who specializes in adoption, that person) to reschedule your outbound flight as close as possible to your original travel time. Depending on your jumping-off point and time of day, you might have same-day flight options through another connecting point. Most likely, you'll be flying the next day.
- Finally, call your agency contact again with your new flight information so they know where and when to collect you in China.

Then, go get in line with the other stranded passengers to get your amenity kit and vouchers...

If the problem happens in China

Your agency travel coordinator tries to keep adoptive families on nonstop flights as much as possible to reduce the risk of your getting stuck in some intermediate airport where they have no local contacts.

Therefore in the event of a delay, your contact at your destination will already know about your situation (perhaps even before you do.)

If your flight is cancelled, the rep in the city you're leaving from probably already knows. This would be about the only situation where you might need to make a phone call; ask to borrow a line from the gate agent or a fellow Westerner if you aren't carrying a Chinese cellphone. (This scenario isn't a good enough reason to rent a cellphone in China. But it does underscore why you need to carry your emergency contact information in one of your carry-on bags.)