

Plane Facts

Your essential
guide to air travel



UPDATED 2016

This publication is available in other formats on request.

Contact the Consumer Council
0800 121 6022 or
info@consumercouncil.org.uk

There is also an air travel podcast you can download onto your phone or tablet before travelling! Download it for free on www.consumercouncil.org.uk

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the information provided in this guide is accurate and correct at the time of going to print but no legal responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions or misleading statements.

Please note the information in this guide could be subject to change. You will be able to download an updated version from the Consumer Council's website: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

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Introduction

Every year millions of people fly to and from Northern Ireland's airports. Although most passengers have a trouble-free journey some do experience unexpected disruption to their travel plans.

The Consumer Council represents air passengers and handles complaints about flights to and from Northern Ireland. This guide provides information on:

1. Planning your journey;
2. Your rights if your flight is delayed, cancelled or if you are denied boarding;
3. Your right to assistance if you have a disability or reduced mobility;
4. What to do if your luggage is damaged, delayed or lost; and
5. How to make a complaint if you are unsatisfied with the service you receive from an airport or airline.

2

Planning your journey

Booking your flight

Booking a flight is not always straightforward. Airlines may add a number of charges to the advertised fare and customers can end up paying significantly more than they expected to.

The following section provides guidance on how to get the best deal and avoid problems when booking a flight:

1. Shop around to get the best deal available;
2. The earlier you book your flight the cheaper it is likely to be;
3. Add up all additional charges such as baggage charges and payment method fees when comparing the cost of travel between airlines. Compare some of these additional charges on our website www.consumercouncil.org.uk.



4. It is often cheaper to book your luggage allowance online before you travel rather than paying for it at the airport;
5. Double check your details before confirming your booking. Airlines often charge administration fees to make changes after a booking has been confirmed. Be aware, some airlines may also charge you extra if the price of the flight has gone up since the time of booking; and
6. Always read the terms and conditions before confirming the booking.

Connecting flights booked on a single ticket

1. If you have booked more than one flight on a single ticket or on a 'codeshare' ticket and flight disruption causes you to miss a connecting flight, the airline is responsible for rearranging your flight to your final destination.
2. The airline is also responsible for providing meals and overnight accommodation if necessary.

Codeshare arrangement - this is when two airlines work together to cover different legs of a journey booked on the same ticket.

Booking connecting flights

Connecting flights booked on separate tickets

1. If you book your connecting flights on separate tickets with different airlines and your first flight is delayed or cancelled, neither airline is obliged to assist or compensate you if you miss your connection.
2. If you book two separate flights with the same airline with the intention of connecting, the airline is under no obligation to assist you if you miss your connection.
3. Remember, if you are booking connecting flights on separate tickets always leave plenty of time between flights.



Luggage and packing

1. Always pack your passport, money, medication and valuables in your hand luggage, along with any items that you will need if your flight is cancelled or delayed.
2. If you need to carry medication, baby milk or baby food or special dietary foods in your hand luggage contact the airport or airline.
3. If you wish to carry liquids, aerosols or gels as part of your hand luggage each must be in a container **no larger than 100 millilitres**.
4. All hand luggage must adhere to the airline's size and weight limits. You may be able to save money by only taking hand luggage.

Remember, all items must be placed in a transparent, re-sealable plastic bag, which holds no more than one litre and is no larger than 20cm x 20cm. Only one plastic bag per passenger is allowed.

Luggage and packing continued...

5. If your luggage is over the airline's weight limit, you will pay extra. Check the airline's weight limit and weigh your luggage.
6. Label your baggage clearly, inside and out, with your name, home address and destination address. When checking it make sure a destination tag is attached to each bag. Check that tags have the correct three-letter code for your destination airport, eg LHR London Heathrow.

Travel documents

Make sure you have all your travel documents. If you are unsure of the form of identification needed, contact your airline or travel agent.

Check List

- Tickets.
- If checking in online, do so within the timeframe applied by the airline and print out a boarding card.
- Leave adequate time to check-in for your flight.
- Passport - make sure it is in good condition and valid for six months **after** your date of return.
- Travel insurance.



Travel insurance

A good travel insurance policy should provide cover for:

1. Missed flights and missed connections;
2. If flying from an airport in the Republic of Ireland, check your insurance policy covers you for missed or delayed flights from these airports;
3. Cancellation or shortening of your holiday caused by unexpected events eg illness;
4. Illness, injury or death while you are away;
5. Repatriation (getting you back home);
6. Loss, theft or damage to your belongings or luggage;
7. Liability for accidents involving others;
8. The airline going out of business;
9. Natural disasters, natural events eg volcanic ash cloud and severe weather;
10. Political instability; and
11. Security risks.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The EHIC allows you to access healthcare in most European countries at a reduced cost or sometimes free of charge. **It is not an alternative to travel insurance.** It will not cover private medical healthcare, the cost of things such as mountain rescue in ski resorts, repatriation to the UK and lost or stolen property. There is no charge for an EHIC and it is valid for up to five years.

For more information call **0300 330 1350** or visit **www.ehic.org.uk**.



Financial protection for your holiday

ATOL

ATOL (the Air Travel Organiser's Licence) is a financial protection scheme. If you book an ATOL protected holiday or charter flight and your tour operator, airline or accommodation provider goes out of business before you travel you can claim a full refund. If a service provider goes out of business while you are abroad you will be able to continue your holiday. Arrangements will be made for you to fly home once the holiday is over.

Charter flights are flights sold by a tour operator which cannot be bought directly from the airline by a member of the public.

Flight Plus

Flight-Plus flights sold along with overseas accommodation or car hire are also protected by ATOL. All Flight-Plus bookings are protected, regardless of whether they are made by telephone, online or on the high street.

To qualify as Flight-Plus the flight and accommodation or car hire have to be requested on the same day or within one day either side but it does not matter which is requested first. Also, the flight must depart from the UK.

If you arrange your own bookings for flights and accommodation or car hire as separate purchases from different companies you will not be protected by Flight-Plus.

Please note:

1. **Flight-Plus protection does not apply to flights booked along with accommodation or car hire directly from an airline website.** However the protection does apply to bookings purchased from an airline's holiday company website. If you are in doubt regarding whether your holiday is ATOL protected, check with the seller before you book.
2. Domestic flights do not form part of a Flight-Plus.
3. Flight-Plus does not cover bookings made in the UK where the flight departs from the Republic of Ireland.

ATOL Certificate

Before booking you should check with the travel agent or tour operator whether your flight or holiday package is ATOL protected. If it is protected you should be issued with an ATOL certificate as soon as you pay, even a deposit. The ATOL Certificate is a standardised document which makes it clear how the trip is protected.

Keep your ATOL certificate safe and make sure you bring it with you when you go on holiday.

Financial protection if you are not covered by ATOL

If your flight is not ATOL protected you should ensure your travel insurance policy provides cover if the airline goes out of business. If you buy a ticket using a credit card and the airline goes out of business, you may be able to claim a refund from your credit card company under the Consumer Credit Act. The cost of a single (ie one leg) ticket must be at least £100.

If you buy flights using a debit or prepaid card (such as a Visa, MasterCard or American Express card), you may be able to use the card provider's 'chargeback' process to claim back your money if the airline goes out of business. Usually, you must make a chargeback claim within 120 days.

Template letters on how to claim a refund from your credit card provider are available to download: www.consumercouncil.org.uk or telephone 0800 121 6022.



Your rights if things go wrong

- ✓ If your flight is delayed or cancelled you are entitled to assistance and in some cases compensation. If you are denied boarding because the airline has overbooked the flight, you are entitled to compensation.
- ✓ Your rights are protected by European Law (Regulation (EC) 261/2004) and are the same regardless of the airline you are travelling with.
- ✓ Your rights are protected for any flight from or within the European Union and on a flight from a non-EU country into the EU, provided the airline is licensed in the EU.

Delayed flights

Assistance

The following assistance must be provided by the airline regardless of the cause of the delay:

1. Your airline is required to provide you with meals and refreshments appropriate to the length of the delay and two free telephone calls or emails if you are delayed by:
 - 2 hours** or more for a flight less than 1,500 kilometres eg Belfast – London;
 - 3 hours** or more for a flight between 1,500 and 3,500 kilometres eg Belfast – Faro; and
 - 4 hours** or more for a flight more than 3,500 kilometres eg Belfast – New York.
2. If you are delayed overnight your airline is required to provide you with hotel accommodation and transport to and from the hotel.

3. If you are delayed by more than five hours and decide not to travel, you are entitled to a refund. **Refunds should be paid by the airline within seven days.**
4. If your flight is delayed but the airline does not provide you with the above assistance:
- ✓ Keep the receipts for any meals and refreshments you buy;
 - ✓ You should send copies (not the originals) of these receipts to the airline along with a request for a full refund; and
 - ✓ If you made essential calls on your mobile during the delay, you should also send a copy of your bill with the calls highlighted.



Compensation

If your flight is delayed you may be entitled to compensation. The amount will depend on the length of your flight and the length of the delay.

Compensation will be paid at the following rates:

Table 1

Length of flight	Delay in reaching your destination airport	Compensation
Less than 1,500km	More than three hours	€250
1,500km to 3,500 km	More than three hours	€400
More than 3,500 km	More than three hours but less than four hours	€300
More than 3,500 km	More than four hours	€600

However, if the airline can prove the delay was caused by "extraordinary circumstances" you will not receive compensation (please see page 20 for more information).



Cancelled flights

Assistance

If your flight is cancelled you are entitled to:

1. A refund within seven days; or
2. Alternative transport to your final destination.

If the airline cannot fly you to your intended airport, it is allowed to fly you to another airport within the same region. The airline must then transfer you to either your intended airport or a close by location agreed with you.

If you choose an alternative flight, you are also entitled to the same assistance offered to delayed passengers – overnight accommodation if necessary, meals, refreshments, phone calls and emails.

Compensation

If your flight is cancelled you may be entitled to compensation. The amount will depend on the length of your flight and the impact the cancellation has in delaying your arrival to your final destination. Compensation will be paid at the following rates:

Table 2

Distance of flight	Impact on arrival time to destination airport	Compensation
0 – 1,500 km	less than 2 hours	€125
	more than 2 hours	€250
1,500 – 3,500 km	less than 3 hours	€200
	more than 3 hours	€400
More than 3,500 km	less than 4 hours	€300
	more than 4 hours	€600

However, passengers will **not** be entitled to compensation if:

1. You are told of the cancellation at least two weeks before the departure date;
2. You are told of the cancellation between seven days and two weeks before the departure date and are offered alternative travel arrangements. The flight(s) must allow you to depart no more than two hours before your original departure time and get you to your final destination less than four hours after your original arrival time; and

3. You are informed of the cancellation less than seven days before the departure date and are offered alternative travel arrangements. The flight must allow you to depart no more than one hour before your original departure time and must also arrive at your final destination less than two hours after your original arrival time.

Passengers will not be entitled to compensation if the flight is cancelled because of extraordinary circumstances. However, they are still entitled to a full refund or alternative travel arrangements plus assistance.

Extraordinary Circumstances

Extraordinary circumstances are events outside an airline's control which prevent a flight from departing as scheduled. They include:

- Severe weather;
- Security risks;
- Some types of strike action;
- Political instability;
- Air traffic management decisions which prevent a flight from departing; and
- Technical problems with an aircraft caused by something out of the ordinary.

Technical problems do not always amount to extraordinary circumstances. If in doubt, ask the airline for further information or contact the Consumer Council on **0800 121 6022** or email **complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk**.

Denied boarding

When an airline has overbooked a flight they must first ask for volunteers to give up their seats before passengers are denied boarding.

If you volunteer to give up your seat:

1. You must be provided with compensation, either cash or airline vouchers. The level of compensation must be agreed with you;
2. If you decide to continue your journey, the airline must also book you onto an alternative flight. If the airline cannot fly you to your intended airport, it is allowed to fly you to another airport within the same region. The airline must then transfer you to either your intended airport or a close by location agreed with you; and
3. If you decide not to continue your journey the airline must refund your ticket and give you a flight back to the original point of departure if relevant. Refunds should be provided by the airline within seven days.

Denied boarding continued...

If an insufficient number of passengers volunteer to give up their seats, the airline will deny boarding to a number of passengers.

If the airline denies you boarding:

1. You are entitled to immediate compensation. (Please see table 2 on page 18 for compensation rates);
2. You are also entitled to a refund or alternative travel arrangements.

If the airline cannot fly you to your intended airport, it is allowed to fly you to another airport within the same region. The airline must then transfer you to either your intended airport or a close by location agreed with you.

Compensation and assistance will **not** be provided to passengers who are denied boarding because they are deemed unfit to travel by the airline.

Additional information

1. You should be fully informed of your rights by a clear notice at check-in.
2. If your flight is delayed, cancelled or you are denied boarding, the airline should immediately provide you with written information about the rules for compensation and assistance.
3. If your flight is delayed or cancelled assistance may not be provided if it will cause further delay for the passengers who are waiting for an alternative or delayed flight.

It is the airline's responsibility to provide visually impaired passengers with this information in an alternative format.

4

Passengers with a disability or reduced mobility

All airports and airlines in the EU have a legal responsibility to assist passengers with a disability or reduced mobility throughout their journey. All disabilities are covered including hidden disabilities such as learning difficulties, autism and hearing loss. A passenger may have reduced mobility because of their age or because of a temporary injury such as a broken leg.

It is against the law for airlines, tour operators or travel agents to refuse a booking on the grounds of disability or reduced mobility. The only exceptions to this rule are:

1. Restrictions imposed for safety reasons; and
2. Instances where the size of an aircraft or its doors prevents access by the passenger requiring assistance.



How to book assistance

1. You should let the airline know about the assistance you need at least 48 hours before travelling. It's often easiest to provide this information when booking your flight. It is then the responsibility of the airline to let the airport know of your specific requirements.
2. If you book through a travel agent it must pass on details of your assistance needs to the airline. The airline in turn must inform your departure and arrival airports of the services you need.
3. You are allowed to travel with two items of mobility equipment free of charge.
4. If you need to carry any medical equipment you should contact the airline in advance and find out if you require a medical certificate or other documentation.
5. For more information contact the Consumer Council on 0800 121 6022 or download a copy of Access to Air Travel from www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications.

Depending on the level of assistance you require, the airline may ask you to arrange for another person (a family member, friend or carer) to accompany you in order to comply with safety rules.

How to book assistance continued...

Making a complaint about assistance

1. If you are not happy with the assistance you receive, complain to the airline or airport to give them the opportunity to put things right.
2. If you are not satisfied with the airline's or airport's response, the Consumer Council can help. We can investigate the complaint on your behalf.

For more information on your rights or to make a complaint contact **0800 121 6022** or email **complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk**.





Luggage

This section aims to help passengers by outlining what to do if your luggage is damaged, lost or delayed.

Compensation

1. You are entitled to compensation¹ of around £1,000² if your luggage is destroyed, damaged or lost.
2. If the value of your luggage is greater than £1,000 you need to declare the value to the airline when checking in.
3. You should also ensure your insurance policy is sufficient to cover the contents of your luggage.
4. If your luggage has been damaged:
 - Report the problem to airline staff in the baggage hall before you leave the airport;
 - This should be recorded in a Property Irregularity Report (PIR);
 - Make sure to obtain a copy of the PIR as this will support your claim for compensation from the airline;

¹ Under the Montreal Convention.

² Maximum compensation is 1,131 International Monetary Fund Special Drawings Rights.

5. To assist your claim for compensation, keep the luggage tags which were attached at check-in. If possible take photographs of the damage caused to your luggage;
6. You must make a written complaint within **seven days** from the date you receive your luggage otherwise you will be unable to claim compensation; and
7. To ensure you have proof of delivery, send your complaint by recorded delivery.

Delayed luggage

Airlines have different rules about how they can help if your luggage is delayed. Airlines can offer one of the following options:

1. An immediate, one off cash payment to cover emergency purchases;
2. A set amount per day until the delayed bag is returned; and
3. A refund for emergency purchases and essential expenses on submission of receipts.

Lost luggage

If your luggage hasn't been found after 21 days you should write to the airline to claim compensation detailing the value of the items lost.



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How to complain

If you need to complain about an airline or airport, follow our six-step guide to complaining effectively.

Step 1

If you are not satisfied with the service you receive, contact a member of the airline or airport staff. They may be able to resolve the problem at the time of travel.

Step 2

If the airport/airline cannot resolve the problem at the time of travel put your complaint in a letter or an email detailing what went wrong. Template letters are available to download for free from www.consumercouncil.org.uk

Step 3

In your letter/email provide the time, date and route of your journey and the flight number.

Step 4

If you think you are entitled to compensation, state how much you expect from the airline.



Step 5

Send copies of tickets or receipts if you are claiming for a refund.



Step 6

If you have made a complaint and you are not satisfied with the outcome, contact the Consumer Council on **0800 121 6022** or **complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk**. We have the legal power to investigate the complaint on your behalf.

The Consumer Council handles complaints concerning flights to and from Northern Ireland. If your flight was not to or from Northern Ireland, we will direct you to the organisation responsible for handling your complaint.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

From Spring 2016, some airlines may offer an ADR scheme to passengers who are not happy with the outcome of their complaint. ADR is a process of resolving complaints without going to court. For more information contact the Consumer Council on 0800 121 6022.

Travel notes:



Floor 3, Seatem House
28 - 32 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8EN

 **0800 121 6022**

 **028 9025 1600**

 **info@consumercouncil.org.uk**
complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk

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