

Trip Doctor

by Diana Hubbell



STATUS

DELAYED

Q+A

I'VE BEEN THE VICTIM OF MORE THAN A FEW AIRLINE AND TRAVEL COMPANY MESS-UPS AND MISADVENTURES. HOW DO I GET MY MONEY BACK WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?

Whether it's a missed connection that leaves you stranded or a wayward suitcase with all your bare necessities, sometimes our journeys don't quite go as planned. When luck turns foul though, there are often ways to salvage something from your travails. →

The Fix

Your flight is delayed

A slightly longer layover may be no big deal, but if it drags on for hours it can cost you precious beach time or, worse, make you miss your next flight.

If the latter happens to be the case, some airlines will spring for accommodation while you wait. Even some budget options such as **AirAsia** (airasia.com) will comp a hotel, food costs and transportation as long as your connecting flight was purchased with the same booking number.

Translation: if you've booked two separate flights, even through the same airline, you may end up with nada. Be sure to check the individual airline's policy carefully; while **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com) will cover accommodation and dining expenses, their low-cost offshoot **Scot** (flyscot.com) will likely leave you with nothing more than a \$50 voucher.

The good news is that, depending on the airline and where it flies from, even a relatively short delay could

make you eligible for a hefty refund. Under EU regulations, any flight of 1,500 kilometers or more that is delayed for at least three hours entitles passengers to €250, a number that could go as high as €600 with the distance and length of the delay. The only exception is when there are "extraordinary" circumstances outside of the airline's control. Passengers on U.S. internal flights may get compensation if they are denied boarding, though the rules are stricter and the airlines usually less generous. Unfortunately, there are no overarching aviation rules covering compensation in different Asian countries, so you're at the mercy of your airline.

So why should you care about European regulations if you live in Asia? "This regulation is not only applicable for EU residents—we also have many customers from all over the world whose flights were delayed or canceled and

which come within the provisions of the European law," says Dr. Philipp Kadelbach, CEO and cofounder of Flightright.

As long as your flight flew either to or from the EU, Iceland, Switzerland or Norway, you may have a shot. Unsurprisingly, airlines have hotly contested these regulations and are notorious for stalling or denying claims. "In most cases, airlines reject compensation requests when they are filed by an individual passenger," Kadelbach says.

To save yourself the hassle and improve your odds, you can enlist a service such as **Flightright** (flightright.com) or **AirHelp** (getairhelp.com) to duke it out with the airline on your behalf. Both will take a 25-percent cut, but will only charge if they win. Given that it only takes a few minutes to file a claim, that it's possible to file even three years after the incident, and that Flightright has a 98 percent success rate, there's no harm in trying.

Your luggage is MIA

Don't panic and don't leave the airport. If you turn up and your checked bag is nowhere to be seen, file a full report before you go anywhere. It helps if you can accurately list the contents of your suitcase and carry a photo of your luggage on your phone. Your bag will not officially be considered lost for 21 days under the Montreal Convention, a

treaty signed by 109 countries plus the EU, but you may need to file a written claim within that period in order to get anything at all. Although in theory, the treaty offers some protection and may provide compensation of up to SDR1,131 in IMF currency (about US\$1,600) for lost or damaged luggage, it can be tough to prove the value of your bag's contents, and it may be a challenge to get actual cash back without a trip to court. To stay on the safe side, always tote your valuables in your carry-on.

Your vacation rental doesn't meet expectations

If you roll into town only to find that the pristine loft you saw online isn't what you were hoping for, speak up. Vacation rental sites can't afford to risk too many dissatisfied customers and will usually help you get a refund. With **Airbnb** (airbnb.com), you can get your bucks back if the host cancels last minute, the listing isn't what was described online, or the place is a mess. That means if there's no freshly washed bedding or towels or any amenities are missing, you should not get stuck with the bill. **HomeAway** (homeaway.com) will ask hosts to offer a partial refund or to refund your cleaning fee if the place truly is a pigsty. You can get a refund for any unused nights if you are forced to vacate the property for any reason during your stay. +

