

Survival Tips: What to Do if You're Stranded

BY JAMES D. BUTLER | AUGUST 2008

You choose to fly privately to avoid delays and other hassles. Yet, just as with the commercial airlines, summer is a heavy travel season for all private jet providers—fractionals, jet card companies and charter operators. In such heavy demand periods, variables like weather and equipment problems, as well as pilot work rules, can wreak havoc on flight schedules—inevitably causing delays and even some flight cancellations. It makes sense to plan for this possibility. Here are five tips that will help you survive.

Establish Your Rights Up Front. Whether you're flying under a fractional share, a jet card or just a one-time charter, review your contract and make sure that it spells out clearly the promises made by your jet company regarding on-time departure, the so-called force majeure delays (like inclement weather) that are deemed to be outside its control, and your rights in the event that an unexcused delay occurs.

Negotiate, Negotiate, Negotiate! Often times, contract provisions regarding performance are negotiable. Don't be afraid to try! Try to minimize the excused delays. For instance labor disputes generally are not beyond the operator's control and, if the operator is based in more than one location, bad weather where the jet is coming from shouldn't preclude the operator from bringing in an aircraft from another location.

Get it in Writing. If your flight is delayed, maintain a paper trail establishing that fact and the reasons given so that later on you can prove that you're entitled to compensation. Keep copies of all documentation including the time the trip was scheduled, the requested and actual departure times, the actual arrival time and the reasons stated for any delays. Also, ask for a copy of the provider's service record for the flight. If nothing else, keep notes on your conversations—who you spoke to, when you spoke to them, and what they said. Talk to the pilots as they're often more

candid than home office personnel.

The Squeaky Wheel... If you're not getting the response you need, respectfully ask to speak with senior management personnel. (It helps to have their email addresses and direct dial phone numbers handy). If you're a fractional or jet card customer and you're comfortable taking a charter, insist that your provider charter a comparable aircraft for you.

Follow Up and Insist Upon Compensation that is Valuable to You. Once you get home, review your contract and your paper trail, and consider what form of compensation will be of most value to you. Fractional providers often offer an extra hour or two of flight time, but you'll pay standard rates for that time and if you're not using all your flight hours as it is, this compensation will be of no value to you. However, if you take a lot of short flights, a short leg waiver that charges that trip at its actual flight time rather than the standard one-hour minimum will provide a substantial cost savings. Other benefits might include a guaranteed right to fly on a peak travel day, a waiver of ferry fees on a trip outside the prime service area or the right to a guaranteed upgrade to a larger aircraft. The key is to secure a concession that has real value to you.

No one enjoys flight delays and they're even more maddening when the main reason you're paying a premium to fly privately is to avoid such problems. But delays do occur and hopefully, armed with these survival tips, you'll be able to make the best of them.

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