



# What am I to do?

When planning spring breaks, consumers need to be aware of hidden charges

## You're grounded!

What are my rights when a flight is cancelled?

If you cancel a flight booking, your rights depend on the terms and conditions of your contract, and may be minimal. But if the airline cancels your flight at short notice, you should receive a refund of your ticket or a rerouting to your final destination.

You are also entitled to free meals and refreshments while you wait, hotel accommodation if an overnight stay becomes necessary, transport between the airport and place of accommodation and two phone calls, emails, faxes or telexes. You may also be entitled to financial compensation, depending on how long you are delayed, and the length of your flight.

But there are some get-out clauses for the airlines. They do not have to compensate you if:

- they give you more than two weeks notice of cancellation
- a rerouted flight departs and arrives within a short time of the original flight
- the cancellation was due to 'extraordinary circumstances' outside the airline's control, such as political instability, extreme weather conditions, security risks or strikes.

If an airline fails to provide you with relevant information or with your entitlements, you may report it to the Commission for Aviation Regulation. You could also take a claim to the Small Claims Court (see *Useful contacts*).

## Lost luggage

We flew to Barcelona from Dublin but our luggage never turned up. What should we do?

As an airline passenger, you are protected under an international agreement called the Montreal Convention. This means that if your baggage is delayed, lost or damaged, the airline is liable unless it took all reasonable measures to avoid the delay, or it was impossible to take such measures.

If your bags don't turn up, you should immediately report the problem to the airline at the baggage hall. Most airlines will want you to complete a 'Property Irregularity Report' before leaving the baggage hall. This report is proof that you notified them of the problem at the time of discovery, so you should make sure to get a copy of it. Also, keep all boarding cards and baggage reference numbers.

Your next step is to make a separate written claim to the airline. You can seek maximum compensation of around €1,200 for a delay or loss, but you must make that claim within 21 days of the bags being returned to you. If they still don't turn up within 21 days they will be considered lost.

Always consider taking out insurance on more valuable items such as jewellery, cameras and electrical goods. Some insurance policies will also reimburse you for 'emergency purchases' of clothing and other essentials. If so, don't forget to hold onto the receipts, and get the airline to confirm the length of the delay.

## High prices

What should I look out for when paying for flights?

As a consumer you are entitled to know the full price of an airline ticket before deciding whether to purchase it or not. But it can be very difficult to compare the various offers available. One particularly annoying practice by airlines is to add hidden extras to the initial price quote. So the golden rule is to remember that the first price you see is rarely the final price.

As a consumer, you are entitled to a clear indication of the total amount payable. In other words, taxes, handling fees for credit/debit card transactions, airport charges, charges for checked-in baggage and travel insurance costs should all be clearly outlined and included in the quoted price. The best advice when buying a flight is to keep an eye on all the charges involved as you make your way through the booking process and always double-check the final figures before paying.

### Useful contacts

Commission for Aviation Regulation  
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Dublin 2  
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info@aviationreg.ie  
fax (01) 661 1269

National Consumer Agency  
4 Harcourt Road  
Dublin 2  
1890 432 432  
www.consumerconnect.ie

Small Claims Court  
www.smallclaims.ie