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TRAVEL TIPS

# 12 Tips (and Carry-On Essentials) for Surviving a Long-Haul Flight

Thanks to the miracle of human flight, we can now fly direct from Newark, New Jersey, to Singapore in just under 19 hours. That also means people spend nearly an entire day of their lives off the ground, in cruising altitude limbo, only to land with the kind of jet-lag that eclipses exhaustion. For any serious traveler, long-haul flights are a necessary evil. How do they do it? Here, 12 tips for surviving—even enjoying—a day in the air.

By Lindsey Olander June 18, 2019



I'm no stranger to long-haul flights. You know them: those epic, day-long journeys through the clouds that get you from one side of the globe to the other. You might even say I sniff them out on purpose. I've flown from New York City straight to Australia's Northern Territory, which requires connections in Los Angeles and Sydney, *twice*. Compared to that 25-hour haul (excluding layovers), my 15-hour journey to Johannesburg felt like a breeze. Unless you're being pampered in First Class, long-haul flights are no picnic, but there *are* a few tricks to making the experience a bit more bearable. Here's what I've learned, in 12 easy steps.







Photo courtesy of World Expeditions/Great Walks of Australia

## *1. Buy your ticket as early as possible*

Waiting and hoping for that \$20 price drop, more often than not, is not worth the trouble. Not only does buying early give you peace of mind in the weeks and months leading up to your departure, it increases the likelihood that enough seats remain open for you to pick where you want to sit—whether you prefer to cuddle up to a window, have easy access to the aisle, or stretch your legs in an exit row. Wait until the last minute and chances are good that you (and your elbows) will be sandwiched into a dreaded middle seat. Frequent flyer? The time to cash those miles in on an upgrade is now.

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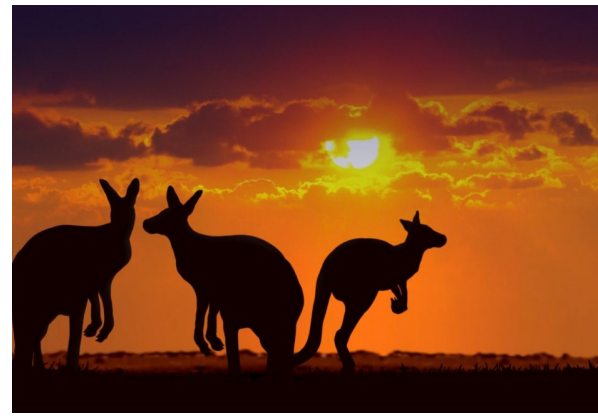
## *2. Wear your most comfortable outfit*

That fitted blouse and skin-tight pair of jeans might make you feel like you're 20 again, but trust us—after sitting (and attempting to sleep) in them for 15 hours, you'll never want to look at that outfit again. When it comes to long-distance travel, stick to a “comfy-chic” dress code of neutral, loose-fitting layers you can move around in. Besides keeping cozy on a flight, you'll also guard against deep vein thrombosis—a serious condition that's aggravated when you sit in cramped positions for long periods of time. Experts also recommend wearing compression socks, which reduce swelling and decrease the risk of blood clots. Another must for the ladies: your favorite pashmina/scarf, which does triple-duty as a stylish accessory, an extra layer for beating cabin chills, and, when folded, an extra pillow to lean on.

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### *3. Invest in a good travel pillow, earplugs, and sleep mask*

We get it: the excitement of opening up your own little long-haul care package is tempting—The tiny toothpaste! The woolly socks! The ear plugs you always forget!—but even on the best international carriers, these tiny conveniences never quite live up to their potential. (We can't count how many times we've suffered through broken sleep-mask bands, pillows that instantly deflate, and ear plugs that never quite stay in.) Embarking on a 12+ hour flight? It's time to invest in the right pair of moldable plugs that will stay in your ears, a silky (even cute!) sleep mask you'll hardly feel you're wearing, and a quality neck pillow—one that provides comfort while also keeping your spine aligned, so you don't wake up with a crick in your neck. Memory foam works wonders.



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*4. Pack your own headphones*

Just picture it: you're reaching cruising altitude and have that perfect movie lined up on your in-flight entertainment console. You dig for the headphones provided in your seat-back pocket, pop them on, and then it hits you—thanks to those roaring engines and crying toddler in the next row, you can't hear a *thing* Tom Hanks is talking about onscreen. Solution: bring your own noise-canceling headphones. Besides being more comfortable than those “one-size-fits-none” plastic contraptions, they aid in blocking out white noise.

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## *5. Take the smallest personal item you can*

No matter how tall or short you are, when it comes to sitting in the same seat for hours on end, every inch of leg room is sacred. Don't limit yours with a needlessly large personal item, which you'll be forced to stow under the seat in front of you if you've also brought a carry-on onboard. Opt for a bag that's versatile and soft, so you can squash it down if need be.



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## *6. Bring your own snacks, or buy some before boarding*

One of the beauties of long-haul flights is how well you're fed—often, at least two full meals and a mid-flight snack to curb your cravings are provided. But what about when the lights are out, flight attendants are nowhere to be found, and hunger pangs strike? What then? Be prepared with your own munchies and a bottle of water—especially if you're the type that craves salt.

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### *7. Be friendly to and respectful of your seatmate—you're both in this together*

This might be self-explanatory, but be nice. Learn the rules of the air: unless you're in the middle seat, hogging an interior armrest is a jerk move. Before reclining your chair, glance back to make sure it won't disrupt anyone, and whatever you do, don't do it during meal service. Also, whether you're on the window or the aisle, expect—especially during long hauls—that everyone is

going to have to use the lavatory at least a few times. Be forgiving and courteous, and you might even make a new friend in the process.

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## *8. DON'T wear makeup; DO moisturize*

This ain't no beauty contest. Your skin has enough to deal with at 30,000 feet (dry cabin air; decreased blood flow) without throwing pore-clogging products into the mix. Instead, apply a serum and moisturizer to keep your skin aglow (just make sure they're less than 100ml and can pass through security), apply eyedrops to counteract irritation, and dab on some chapstick before your lips dry out.



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## *9. Choose your in-flight food (and drinks) carefully*



That cheesy chicken parmesan wafting down the center aisle might smell delectable, but you may want to reconsider. Heavy meals keep you awake, and are more difficult to digest when all you'll be doing for the next 15 hours is sitting, sitting, and sitting some more. If you can, avoid foods and drinks high on sugar, salt, or caffeine. The same goes for alcohol. While it can act as a sedative for anxious fliers, it is also extremely dehydrating. Instead, try an herbal tea, which induces drowsiness without the consequences of liquor.



*10. Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate*

Because planes are constantly replenishing cabin air with the air outside, the levels of humidity inside plane cabins are comparable to what you'd find in a desert—bone dry. The effects are two-fold: the extreme dryness dulls the skin, and, if not addressed, dehydration leads to worsened jet lag. It's vital to drink plenty of water—approximately 8 ounces per hour, according to some experts.

## *11. Brush your teeth*

Do you struggle with sleeping in the air? We feel you. Blocking out those roaring engines, crying babies, and your neighbor's reading light is hard enough, but getting your body's sleep clock to adjust to new timezones is a talent that still eludes many. A helpful tip: brush your teeth before nodding off—and, if you want, gargle mouthwash and wash your face. These simple but effective habits help trick your body into thinking it's sleep time.

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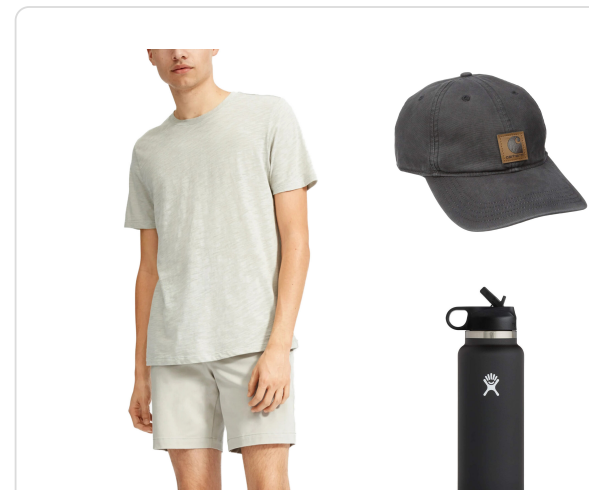
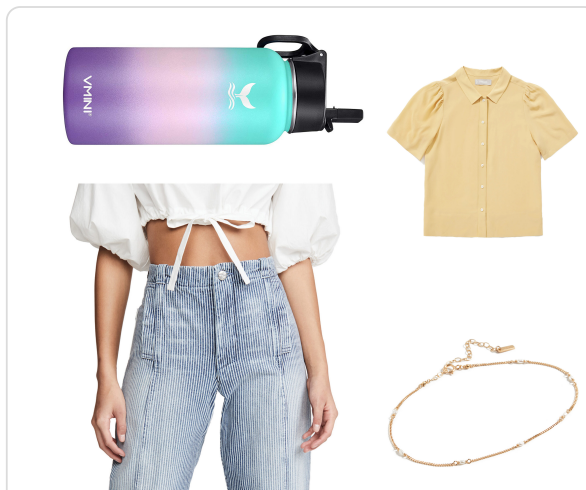


## *12. Get up every few hours to keep the blood flowing*

Pressurized cabins spell less oxygen for passengers and, over periods of time, symptoms due to lower blood oxygen levels that include fatigue, headaches, swollen limbs, and dehydration. The best solution? Stretch. Walk up and down the aisle to boost blood flow and practice some non-intrusive exercises in your seat, like rolling your shoulders and rotating your ankles.

## **What to Wear on a Long-Haul Flight**

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