

## **Plane travel tips How airports are designed to make you duty-free shop**

Right-handed people pulling suitcases will look to the right more than the left.

Passenger activity at airports - in the most simple terms - boils down to three things: departing, arriving and waiting.

Travellers hanging around a terminal building are a captive audience, with disposable income, often lots of time, and literally nowhere else to go. So it shouldn't be surprising that airports are carefully designed to make you spend your hard-earned cash.

### **1. The duty-free shop sits right outside security**

After the stressful ordeal of getting through airport security, travellers are immediately led to what is - relatively speaking - a relaxing haven: the duty free shopping area.

Passengers must walk through the duty free section.

Travellers are more likely to be in a self-indulgent mood after the stresses of waiting in line, removing their belt and shoes, being patted down by a stranger, and perhaps having another rifle through their belongings. A report by Intervistas, an aviation consultant, titled Maximizing Airport Retail Revenue, describes this as the "re-compure zone". It adds: "The view of the retail environment will cue the customer's brain that it is time to shop."

### **2. And you HAVE to walk through it**

"The classic airport design forces the passenger flow through the duty-free store, while people often have to walk through a duty-free shop again in order to reach their gates," Julian Lukaszewicz, senior business designer at Designit and a former lecturer in aviation management at Buckinghamshire New University, said.

### **3. Walkways curve to the left**

Most of us might not have noticed, but walkways in the duty-free areas usually curve to the left. And it is for a good reason, according to the Intervistas report.

The majority of passengers are right-handed, and pull their suitcases with their right hand, forcing them to walk in an anticlockwise direction to have more balance. They therefore "look to the right far more than the left, and see more things on the right than the left".

It adds: "As a result, more sales are generated if a walkway curves from right to left with more merchandise and space on the right side because passengers are looking right while (perhaps unconsciously) walking left."

Kenneth Currie, chief commercial officer at Intervistas and the author of the report, told Telegraph Travel:

"People are disposed to look more often to the right and veer to the right when they are comfortable. The reason why the UK and some other countries continue to drive on the left hand side of the road is because it feels safer - so when people panic, they tend to veer to the left, rather than into oncoming traffic, which in the UK is on the right."

### **4. The "golden hour" is key**

The time passengers spend idle, after security clearance but before boarding their flight, is dubbed the "golden hour" - that prime spending period that airports and retailers want to maximise.

"Many airports want to prolong and expand this hour, because that translates to revenues," Mr Lukaszewicz said.

"The equation is simple: The more time passengers spend in the golden hour, the more money they will spend. And every minute counts."

So airports aren't streamlining security checks, and introducing innovations like mobile check-in, just for your benefit. "It's so passengers don't waste their time in a security queue when they could be spending," says Mr Lukaszewicz.

### **5. Maximum relaxation for maximum spending**

While different airports around the world might offer various ways of relaxing - massage chairs, sleeping pods and showers, for example - these are all also ploys to ultimately make passengers spend more because they are feeling more relaxed, Mr Lukaszewicz claims.

He says: "Passenger propensity to spend is affected by stress levels. That is why many airports want to provide information to passengers, create stress-free environment so that passengers feel more relaxed and spend more money.

"In one airport, for instance, the security area has wood panels and plants, to minimise anxiety and stress levels of security procedures."

The report adds: "Flight information directories should be plentiful and easy to read so that customer stress level remains low and perceives that they are in control."

## **6. Signs are everywhere**

There's no shortage of signs and screen in airports, and it's all about reassuring passengers, and therefore keeping them relaxed and spending money.

"There are many ways in which airport design influences passenger spending behaviour," Mr Lukaszewicz notes. "For instance, in many airports the signage has been adapted to show the walking time to the farthest gate, rather than distance, because minutes are much better understood than perhaps in metres. Therefore passengers know how much longer they can spend in the shopping area, before they have to reach their gate."

## **7. Natural light and other inviting features**

More natural light in any space is always a plus, and it also increases the chances that a passenger will enter a shop.

"Shops at airports tend to be located where there are a lot of big windows, so that there is a lot of natural sunlight coming to the shop," says Mr Lukaszewicz. "This is because people are much more inclined to walk into a shop with natural light, rather than artificial light."

The shops themselves have also been built to be user friendly and inviting, with wide aisles big enough to accommodate people with suitcases and fixtures strategically placed diagonal to the main hall so that customers can have a better view of more items. The most popular goods are prominently displayed and made easy to reach. "Customers will not buy if they are bumped or jostled while shopping, and shops should be wide, not deep, so more merchandise is visible," the Intervistas report notes. "The merchandise should be displayed within an arm's reach, and pyramid-shaped fixtures enhance the sense of space and the view of merchandise on lower shelves."

## **8. A serpentine layout**

The shopping priorities of a passengers at an airport are topped by duty-free goods, followed by food and drink, newspapers/magazines and gifts and specialty items, according to the study, and airport venues are laid out to cater to these priorities.

It explains: "Duty-free shops configured in a serpentine walk-through layout achieve sales as much as 60 per cent higher than other configurations because 100 per cent of customers are exposed," the study notes. Ikea has been doing it for years.

## **9. A bustling market place feel**

Airports strives to create an appealing sense of place, similar to the style and flavour of the airport's location, around the duty-free shopping area, similar to the style of a vibrant market. Local products, live music and performance art, tastings and other activities further engage the senses.

"People shop with all of their senses, so the ability to touch, smell, and taste goods for sale is important," says Kenneth Currie.

Robert O'Meara, a spokesperson for the Airports Council International's European division, told Telegraph Travel: "Airports are no longer just competing with the high street – they have to compete with the internet as well, so airport design has become about creating a pleasant moment of pause when a person is waiting."

## **10. Time is money**

Long dwell times in a shop do not equate to higher spending, according to the study. The ideal scenario is a passenger purchasing one or two items on a quick visit.

"Any aspect of the shopping experience that slows them down risks loss of a sale. Airport customers are no exception," the survey notes.

"One hour more at an airport is around \$7 (\$A9) more spent per passenger," said Mr Lukaszewicz.

But passenger spending varies from one airport to another. Mr O'Meara said: "A hub airport will have high peak moments during the day when the airport is full of passengers as waves of hub flights arrive and depart.

Naturally, these patterns are borne in mind by retailers at airports, so that the selection of services on offer can be at its best."

The amount a consumer spends also varies according to their country of origin, so passengers from high tax countries or countries with significant gifting cultures spend significantly more than passengers where the difference between duty-free prices and high street prices is less significant, notes Mr Currie.