

Airport check-in processes are inconvenient even on the rare occasions when they go smoothly. We can't help being angry about it, because the tight security was totally unnecessary when we flew in earlier years.

It started in the 1970s when a bunch of freaks decided hijacking, killing innocent people, blowing up their own insane butts and destroying commercial aircraft would advance their crazy causes.

Particularly since 9/11/01, the security agony continues for every flight to anywhere. That said, there are ways to make your own check-in process easier. While you can't do anything to change the security system, you can take personal steps to help get through it with a minimum of &%%\$#§ (choose your own curse word) frustration. Here are some suggestions:

1. Use your computer to get boarding passes early. The best way is to click in to the airline website exactly 24 hours in advance of your flight, follow instructions and you'll get a form you can print out at home.

2. You can also pre-register on your computer, then print your ticket quickly for free when you arrive at the airport from one of your airline's ticket kiosks.

3. Heed the oft-repeated instructions from your airline to arrive at the airport from one to two hours prior to your flight. That will give you plenty of time to get through security and go on to your gate without rushing. Of course, it's also a good idea to call the airline from home within three or four hours of the scheduled flight and make sure it's on time.

That way you won't have to go to the airport and find you have a &%%\$#§ seven-hour wait (as we did in Fort Lauderdale several months ago), or worse, your flight has been cancelled, and you must dash around the &%%\$#§ airport trying to make other arrangements (as we had to do in Las Vegas once last year).

4. Unless you're going on a long cruise or dress-up vacation and need lots of clothes, try to fly with just carry-on suitcases. Checking and retrieving baggage is not only time-consuming (if it isn't lost), but now some airlines make you pay for it. Also, if you must check your bags, when you get to the airport, see if there's an employee outside to check your bags. It could speed up the process a bit, and you won't have to lug stuff all over the airport until you find a check-in counter.

5. Security, of course, is the biggest stumbling block to smooth progress to the gate. Before you leave home, when you pack, know what is not allowed on flights, such as certain liquids, mercury thermometers, pointed metal and wooden objects and many, many more &%%\$#§ restrictions. If you have any questions, call or surf websites of the airline or TSA (Transportation Security Administration) before you leave home.

6. When you approach the first guard desk before you get to the main security area, make sure

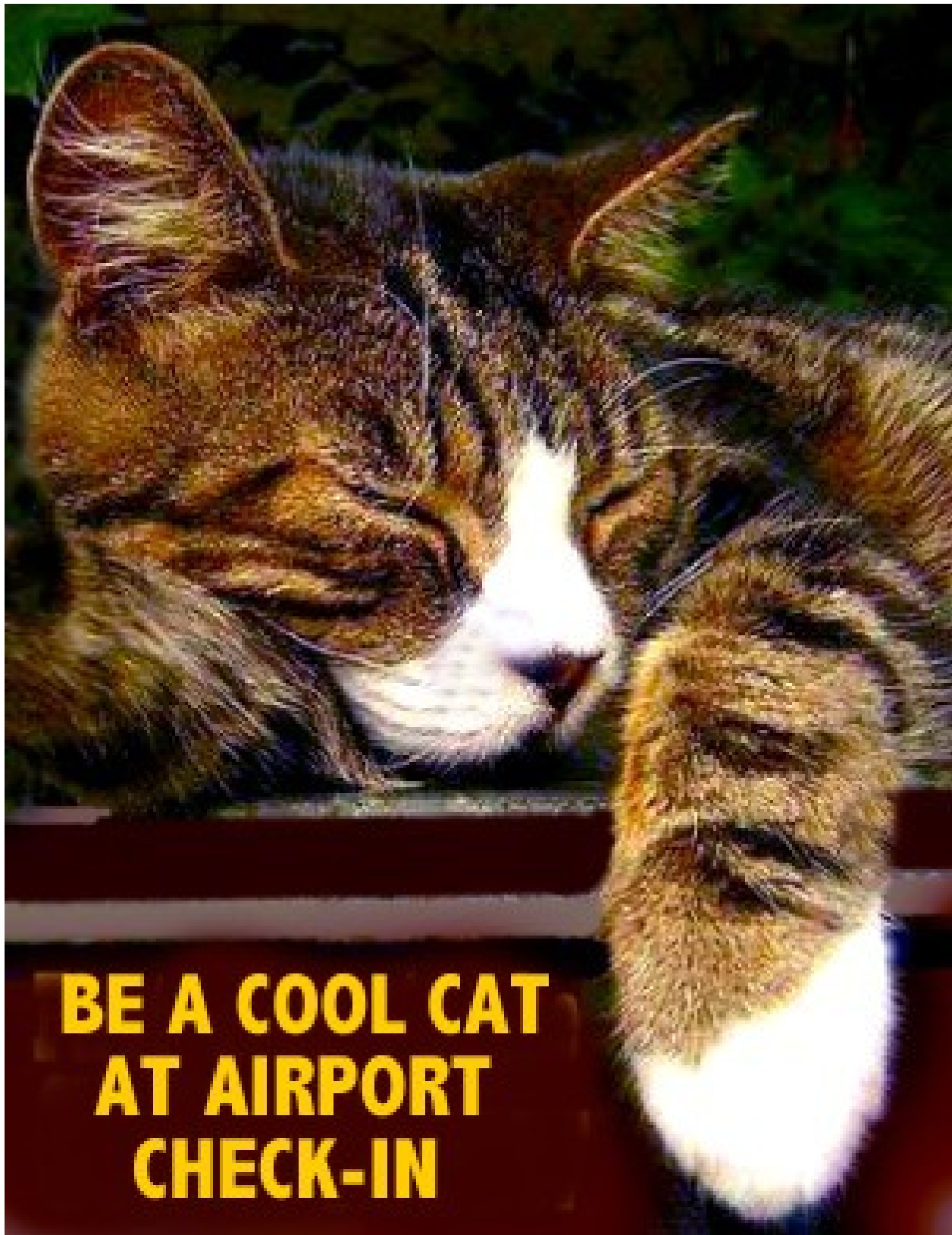
you have your boarding pass and driver's license in hand and ready to show. This avoids digging and fumbling while everyone behind you says &%"#\$ and other choice words about you.

7. Most important is to prepare as much as possible in advance at security before you get to that moving beltline just before everything goes into that magic x-ray machine. After you haul your carry-ons onto the beltline, take off your shoes (should be easy slip-ons) and add laptops, belts, coins, earrings, pens and other metal stuff and put them in the plastic box. We usually have coats with both outside and inside pockets, so all that metal stuff can be secured in pockets while riding in the box. Some suggest you use a separate box just for your laptop and other sensitive electronic gear.

8. Bring stuff with you to fight the boredom of the waiting area, sitting on the &%"#\$ tarmac and while in flight. My simplest prop is a stack of crossword puzzles. The concentration seems to make the time go much faster than it does just sitting, cursing and fretting. Of course, in this magic age of electronics, an all-purpose laptop, DVD and/or CD player, iPod, video cellphone or any of the little communication doodads can also help pass the time.

9. If you're traveling with little kids, realize that they reflect your mood. If you're restless and angry, they'll be, too. If you handle all situations calmly and can reassure the kids, everyone will have smoother going. Incidentally, all the adult playthings mentioned above, plus kid-only stuff, can help your young companions pass the time more comfortably.

10. Finally, keep your cool. No matter how angry you get or the number of curses you can hurl at the airline, there's nothing you can do to make your check-in, waiting time and flight go any smoother. Anyhow, you hurt no one but yourself by raising your blood pressure to boiling. If possible, find a comfy spot and try a little cat nap to pass the time. If an alcoholic drink can help, get one at the airport bar. Just don't overdo it, because I certainly don't want you sitting next to me when you need that &%"#\$ little white paper bag.



**BE A COOL CAT  
AT AIRPORT  
CHECK-IN**