

US airlines say they're ready for record holiday travel

December 21 2023



Travelers wait in the security line in Terminal A at Boston Logan International Airport in Boston, Massachusetts on December 21, 2023.

US airlines are gearing up for record traffic this holiday season, having beefed up staffing in the hopes of avoiding a repeat of last Christmas's

operational meltdown.

Authorities expect more than 267,000 flights between December 20 and 26, with a peak of nearly 49,000 flights on Thursday, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Southwest Airlines will be facing particular scrutiny after last year's fiasco that saw it cancel some 16,900 flights, leading to a \$140 million federal fine announced earlier this week.

Southwest's problems last year stemmed from severe winter weather that exposed a lack of de-icing capacity at key airports and an obsolete computer scheduling systems that stranded staff and customers.

The disaster was spotlighted at a February congressional hearing that included stories of a woman who missed her own wedding and a stage-four cancer patient who missed treatment.

The current forecast from the National Weather Service suggests more benign conditions compared with last year, although it discusses "[heavy snow](#)" in the southern Rockies and north-central plains over the weekend.

Southwest "completed many infrastructure and efficiency investments to better support our Customers, our people, and our operation during extreme winter weather events," the company said in an email to AFP.

These include the purchase of more deicing trucks and high-powered heaters, the securing of additional space for deicing operations and the hiring and training of more employees skilled in the practice.

The company has also enhanced software and [communication systems](#) to support staff in scheduling.

Southwest has said it expects record fourth-quarter revenues and passengers.

United Airlines and American Airlines have also pointed to record traffic this year, with United projecting around nine million passengers and American nearly 12.7 million on more than 110,000 flights.

United plans nearly 4,000 flights a day during the holiday period, with Dec. 22 and 23 expected to be the busiest stretch. The company has more than 150 de-icing trucks.

Delta expect nearly nine million customers during the key [holiday season](#) . The carrier is urging customers to get to airports early on Dec. 21-22 and in the Dec. 26-30 period due to heavy volumes those days.

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