If new technologies snarl your airline experience, here are old-school strategies to cope

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Ten years ago I wrote a book titled "The End of Airports" about how digital technologies and commercial air travel were on a collision course.

Earlier this summer, I was proved right.

In July, a cybersecurity software outage snarled airports around the world. Airlines took weeks to get back to normal. Delta was particularly hard hit, with some 7,000 flights canceled and delays lasting well into August.

As an expert on air travel who contemplates flight from a humanistic and cultural studies perspective, I think the new technologies woven into air-travel management are a double-edged sword. While they enhance elements of safety and efficiency, they can also make the entire system more fragile and vulnerable.

The downsides of digital technology

To be fair, aviation depends on technology. Humans would never have gotten off the ground without it. But new technology can create new problems even as it solves old ones. The latest digital tech offers necessarily imperfect ways to manage a vast, intricate network of places, machines and people.

And as the computer systems get more fine-tuned and integrated, they can also result in catastrophic failures, precisely because of the connective nature of tech. And let's not even talk about the weather.

The past summer's software glitch event won't be the last time some unforeseen variable brings air travel to a halt. Fortunately, travelers don't have to depend solely on airport technology systems or our own smart devices for seamless travel. Here are six analog strategies that travelers can use to cope with air travel debacles:

Old-school flying suggestions

1. Pack smart for potential delays. Make sure you have a carry-on that includes whatever you'd need for an unplanned overnight stay at a hotel—or worse, on an airport floor. Take [Transportation Security Administration-approved toiletries](#) and enough clothes so you can deal with a layover somewhere you didn't expect. And wear comfortable shoes.

2. Be kind to airline employees and airport staff, who can't control delays or cancellations. Remember that no one airline employee can automatically fix the problem when a software malfunction happens or a freak storm grounds planes. But if you are kind and patient, an airline employee may just comp you a hotel room or give you a more generous rebooking arrangement. Also: It's just the humane thing to do.

3. Purchase your tickets directly from [airlines](#). It's not worth saving $20 or $50 on a ticket deal from a third-party vendor. When delays and cancellations happen, if you have such a ticket, the airline will have less interest in aiding you. Buying tickets directly from the airline will help you get back in the air quicker.

4. Have a plan B. In the event that your connecting flight is canceled mid-trip, have you contacted someone you know in that city? Or have you researched hotels easily accessible from the airport? What would it take to get a comfortable spot for a night? A little homework can go a long way if you end up stranded.

5. Bring healthy snacks and other supplies. It's smart to pack vitamins, zinc, hydration packets, a reusable water bottle, medications, hand sanitizer, or whatever helps bolster your health during a travel stint. If you get waylaid for a few hours or overnight, preplanning some self-care items can help you avoid contagious illnesses and general fatigue.

6. Enjoy the airport. It's a fascinating place where so many people converge. If you're [stuck at the airport](#) for several hours, use that time to find interesting things in the concourses. You might discover art shows, a great bookstore, a yoga room or a movie

theater. It can be tempting to just stand around the gate area and seethe. But it's more fun to move around the airport and explore what's there.

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