

Space-A Travel FAQ

Q) What is Space-A?

A) Space-A is short for "Space-Available air transportation on government owned or controlled aircraft." When mission and cargo loads allow, there are often seats made available to eligible passengers. With a little patience and flexibility, you can travel all over the world for almost nothing.

Q) Will Space-A travel cost much?

A) In general, no. Meals may be purchased at a nominal fee (usually \$5.55) at most air terminals. And you might spend a bit on phone calls to find out about flights, a room for the night along the way, or a bus fare to get from one base to another. It will also depend on how frugal you are (e.g. take a bus vs. rent a car) and how lucky you are (e.g. get a room on base vs. pay for an off-base hotel room).

Q) Who is eligible for Space-A?

A) People identified in the following list are eligible for Space-A under some circumstances. The specific eligibility details are quite complex, so check with a passenger terminal for details.

- Members of the Uniformed Services and their family members.
- Retired members of the Uniformed Services and their family members.
- Civilian employees of the DoD stationed overseas and their families.
- DoD Dependent School (DoDDS) teachers and their family members.

Uniformed Services include Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. The term is understood to mean people serving on Active Duty in any of those services, and includes officer candidates attending West Point, Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy.

Q) When can family members fly Space-A?

A) The general guidelines are pretty simple. Family members may travel within the Continental United States (often referred to as CONUS) when traveling with their sponsor on domestic segments of overseas flights, and on any flight when their sponsor is traveling on emergency leave or (under limited circumstances) when house-hunting. For example, if a flight originates in Texas, stops in California as part of the mission, and then continues overseas, family members may fly from Texas to the overseas area on the flight. Except when accompanying a sponsor on emergency leave or for house-hunting, however, they cannot travel on a flight going only from Texas to California (or get off in California from a flight that is going further). There are two exceptions to the rules allowing family members to travel. First, although members of the reserve components may fly to some overseas destinations, their family members may not accompany them. Second, some tactical aircraft which carry Space-A passengers will not carry family members. Family members may generally travel to, from, and between overseas destinations with or without their sponsor (when traveling unaccompanied they must have proper documentation, see next question). Alaska, Hawaii and all territories and possessions are considered "Overseas" in the Space-A vernacular. Finally, the definition of a "family member" is quite specific (and again, quite complex). But the basic rule of thumb is that if they have a current ID card, they are a family member.

Q) Can my family members travel without me?

A) Only in limited circumstances. Command sponsored family members of members of the Uniformed Services may travel to, from and between overseas areas if they present a letter certifying command sponsorship or if they have EML or emergency leave orders. When traveling Space-A with young children, prepare for possible delays along the way where baby supplies may not be readily available.

Q) Can disabled people travel Space-A?

A) Every effort is made to transport passengers with disabilities who are otherwise eligible for Space-A travel. Passenger service personnel and crew members will generally provide all practical assistance in boarding, seating and deplaning passengers with special needs, although travel on some types of tactical aircraft may be precluded. If you need to travel with a personal assistant, the only people permitted to accompany you are other persons who are eligible for Space-A travel.

Q) Where can I fly Space-A?

A) Almost anywhere in the world. Examples include Europe, Japan, Alaska, Hawaii, South America, Australia and Africa. Of course, travel to some destinations, such as isolated islands with no civilian population, can be restricted by theater commanders. Retired members with a DD Form 2 (Blue) identification card may fly anywhere, subject only to the same theater and international restrictions that affect all travelers.

Q) What restrictions are there on Space-A?

A) You can not use Space-A privileges for personal gain or in connection with business enterprises or employment. You also can't use Space-A travel to establish a home, to transport dependents to an duty station where you are or will be serving an unaccompanied tour, to transport dependents to a TDY duty station, or when international or theater restrictions prohibit such travel.

Q) When should I call for flight information?

A) If you've never traveled on a particular route before, you might want to call the passenger terminal you plan on traveling through a month or so before you plan to travel. At that point they will be able to discuss their typical flight schedules, Space-A backlog, any movement forecast they know of for your desired travel period, and how far in advance they will know their schedule. This is also a good time to sign up for a flight, which you can often do by fax. Then call again a day or two before you are ready to travel to see how the schedule is shaping up. Most passenger terminals will have a schedule for the next day's flights, and some will know further in advance. But these schedules are subject to change, and often they change a lot. So once you're ready to travel, you should stay in close touch with the terminal in case something comes up on short notice.

Q) Where do I get the phone numbers?

A) The phone numbers can be found in guidebooks, on information sheets provided by the passenger terminals, and through the World Wide Web on the Internet. Several passenger terminals now have their own World Wide Web pages, and many of them also list phone numbers.

Q) How do I sign up?

A) Passengers may register for travel at the passenger terminal in person or "remote sign-up" by fax, mail, or email. Sign-up by phone is not authorized. Sponsors who register in person for family members traveling with them will need all the required documents for everyone in their family. Remote sign-up allows passengers to enter the backlog by faxing copies of proper documentation along with family members' names and SSN/passport numbers to the passenger terminal from which they plan to depart. The fax data header will establish date and time of sign-up. Active duty personnel must ensure that the fax is sent no earlier than the effective date of their leave, pass or liberty. Submission by email is also permitted. Travelers remain on the register for 60 days or the duration of their travel orders or authorization, whichever occurs first. For Active Duty members, the expiration of their leave, pass, or liberty status is almost always the limiting factor. If your travel will take you to a foreign country, it is your responsibility to ensure that all border clearance documentation is up to date. If you are unsure, you should check with a passenger service representative.

Q) What documentation will I need?

A) The answer depends on many things, so this is something you should discuss with the passenger terminal. For example, family members traveling alone must have a letter (or "leave" orders in the case of EML or emergency leave) from their sponsor's commander. Reservists must have certification that they are in an active status or eligible for retired pay at age 60. People traveling overseas will need passports and possibly visas. Children aged 10 and over are required to have an ID card. Checking with a passenger terminal is usually the best idea.

Q) If there aren't enough seats, who gets to go?

A) Passengers are selected for movement by category, and by the date and time of their sign-up. The following list describes the largest groups of eligible individuals in each category:

- Category I: Emergency leave
- Category II: Environmental and morale leave (EML)
- Category III: Ordinary leave, pass, and liberty
- Category IV: Unaccompanied family members on EML
- Category V: Permissive (no-cost) TDY orders
- Category VI: Retirees and Reservists

Q) When will I know if I'm on a flight?

A) Space-A seats are often identified as early as 2-3 hours prior to departure, but sometimes seat availability is not known until the plane arrives, which might be only 30 minutes prior to its departure! Since planes often are early or late, it is difficult to predict when seat availability will actually be known. Almost all passenger terminals will establish a "show time" for passengers interested in a given flight, and then assign the seats to people who present themselves for processing at that time. People who show up after the show time are usually only accommodated after everyone that was there on time is taken care of, regardless of their category or date and time of sign up. Of course, if the plane runs very early, they'll just process whoever is there when it's ready to go. But usually, being there at the show time is good enough. If you choose to leave the terminal before the show time, you should make sure you have the latest information before you do. You should, of course, be ready for immediate processing and boarding at the show time.

Q) Can I get bumped from a flight I'm already on?

A) Yes, although it's relatively rare. Space required passengers or cargo may require the removal of Space-A passengers at any point. But mission details are usually known before departure, so the crew won't release seats that they expect to become unavailable part of the way there. Some types of flights, notably Areomedical Evacuation (Medevac) missions do experience frequent changes, though, so you might want to ask about this before accepting a specific flight if you are the last person to get a seat because you would be the first to be removed. If you are removed en route, you may re-register with your original date and time of registration. And, you should always be prepared to purchase onward or return commercial transportation, meals and lodging.

Q) What if I don't get on any flight before I need to be at my destination?

A) While you are not guaranteed a flight in the time frame you may wish, passenger terminals generally do their best to make available every possible seat. In case you must get to a final destination before they can get you there, you will need funds to complete your journey or return home.

Q) How much baggage can I bring?

A) On the larger aircraft, each passenger may check two pieces of checked baggage, 70 pounds each, up to 62 linear inches in size. Family members may pool their baggage allowances, but Space-A passengers may not pay for excess baggage. Hand-carried baggage must fit under the seat or in the overhead compartment, if one is available. Smaller aircraft may limit you to as little as 30 pounds of baggage, and hand-carried baggage may be included in this limit. Since many of the available flights are on these smaller aircraft (C-21 or C-12, for example) you should limit your baggage to 30 pounds if at all possible. You'll thank me for this advice when you discover that it's a 2 mile walk from the terminal to the billeting office. Of course, you should not place valuables, medicine, or important documents in checked baggage, and you should be sure your name and current address are on both the outside and inside of your bags. Passenger terminals usually have baggage ID tags available if you need them.

Q) Can I bring my pet on a Space-A flight?

A) No.

Q) What facilities are available at passenger terminals?

A) Facilities at most military terminals are similar to those that you would find at smaller commercial terminals. Examples include televisions, snack bars/vending machines, exchange mini-marts, barber shops, travelers' assistance, United Services Organization (USO) lounges and nurseries. The facilities vary according to the terminal size and location, and it may be as simple as a couple of chairs near the pilots' flight planning room!

Q) Can I sleep in the terminal?

A) Almost certainly not. Most passenger terminals close at night, and most of the rest have rules against sleeping in the terminal. So you should be prepared to pay lodging expenses at any overnight stops. The relatively low price of on-base billeting (\$8 to \$50 per night) makes this less of a burden than it might first appear, though. At some bases you can reserve rooms the day before (if you know where you will be), but at other bases billeting offices often won't release their available rooms to travelers who are not on orders until a specified "Space-A show time." Some billeting offices will put you on a standby list by phone, though, so it's wise to call ahead to learn the rules at any bases you plan to visit.

Q) What is the best time of the year to travel Space-A?

A) In general it is wise to avoid peak travel periods when traveling overseas because the number of dependents traveling. The peak travel periods are December-January and June-July, which roughly correspond to school holidays when there are a lot of travelers on leave. There are also more PCS travelers on the AMC passenger channel missions during the summer because people prefer to move when their children are between school years. Domestic routes see less fluctuation in volume, but it is usually more difficult to travel during three day weekends and near holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas because there are fewer missions scheduled then but more people with some time off who might want to catch a flight.

Q) Is it easier to go to some destinations?

A) Yes. Places where large numbers of U.S. military forces are stationed are much easier to get to than rarely visited areas. Travel to Europe or Japan is relatively easy, for example, while travel to South America or Africa is much more difficult. Infrequent flights to remote areas are often cargo missions, which may have few seats available for passenger movement. But with persistence it is amazing where you can get to.

Q) Do you have any other tips for Traveling Space-A?

A) Of course! Plan your trip, be flexible and be patient. As a rule of thumb, military bases offer more Space-A flights than commercial gateways or Reserve Component squadrons at civilian airfields. Be as flexible as possible in choosing a destination. For example, if you want to get to the United Kingdom, consider a flight into Germany as an alternative. Once there, try for another flight bound for the UK.