

TRAVEL INTEL • AIR TRAVEL



The Layover Is Now a Key Part of the Vacation

by Lilit Marcus • November 21, 2016



Illustration by Peter Oumanski

Another day, another city, another item to cross off your travel bucket list.

Now, you'll want to book a layover rather than desperately try to avoid one.

If it seems like everybody's still talking about Iceland, you're right. Last year, more than 1.2 million tourists made the trip, many of them on a free [stopover courtesy of Icelandair](#), which invented the idea of layover-as-vacation back in the 1960s as a way to boost tourism. It only took other airlines 50-plus years to jump on the bandwagon. Air Canada added [Toronto stopovers in 2015](#), and TAP and Copa started programs for Lisbon and Panama City, respectively, this year. Qatar Airways will give you a free guided tour of Doha, including the I. M. Pei-designed Museum of Islamic Art, if your connection is longer than eight hours. And if you book a Helsinki stopover with Finnair, you can tack on a city tour and a hotel room for the night for \$150. Layover-friendly carriers also serve Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Taipei. The one thing all of these destinations have in common is healthy tourist infrastructure: quality hotels, buzzy restaurants, solid public transportation options (or Uber). So while these cities may not have been on your list, they could soon be—like Iceland—the next hot spots.



Photo by Felix Odell

Stockholm's Gamla Stan.

Permission to Leave the Airport

You may not have flexibility to add days on to your travels as a stopover but even if you have a layover of four or more hours, you're basically getting a one-day bonus excursion. Here, our editors make the case for opting out of a direct flight.

Do a Gamla Stan Drive-By

"Flying from London to Oakland, I had six hours to kill in [Stockholm](#). I stored my luggage in the airport lockers and went to Gamla Stan, the city's beautiful Old Town (the airport bus leaves every 15 minutes for the 30-minute ride). I went to the Royal Palace, took a *fika* at the centuries-old Kaffekoppen, and only used my credit card, so I didn't need to get any kronor." —*Erin Florio, senior associate editor*

Hit a Fancy Hotel Bar

"Toronto Airport's year-old UP Express train gets to central Union Station in under half an hour. So on a recent four-hour layover en route to Zurich, I went to the pint-size York Station bar, hidden inside [The Fairmont Royal York](#). It's one of my favorites in the city for a gin and tonic." —*Lilit Marcus, contributing digital editor*

Buy Stocking Stuffers in Germany "I got into Frankfurt at 6 a.m., en route to Doha to see family last December. Facing a six-hour layover, I hopped the airport train straight to Römerberg, the Old Town, where vendors were unpacking pastries and handmade decorations and setting up for the Christmas Market. I browsed a bit and picked up ornaments for my parents to hang on the tree." —*Sebastian Modak, associate digital editor*