

How to board a plane without a boarding pass –...

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Travel



How to board a plane without a boarding pass

In spite of tough airport security, stowaways are surprisingly common



The Economist

Jan 31 · 2 min read ★



Earlier this month a woman arrived at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago without a ticket, boarding pass, or passport and flew to London. Prosecutors claim she did this by sneaking past officials from the Transportation Security Administration, a government agency responsible for airport security, while they were inspecting other travellers' boarding passes. She was briefly thwarted when she tried to do the same thing at the boarding gate for a flight to Connecticut. But the gate agent caught her and asked her to sit down. After spending the night in the airport, she took the shuttle to the international terminal—again without the required boarding pass and passport—and got on a British Airways flight to Heathrow, where she was arrested on arrival.

There are many ways to fool security agents

at the airport. In 2010, a young Chinese man flew from Hong Kong to Vancouver using an American passport with a date of birth in 1955 by wearing a silicone mask that made him look like an elderly man. Two years earlier, the American journalist Jeffrey Goldberg documented the extensive deception (in the name of reporting, naturally) he had undertaken to board flights improperly. Mr Goldberg, at various times, brought knives and boxcutters through security and packed Hezbollah and Al Qaeda merchandise in his carry-on. He also travelled with two cans' worth of beer in a polyurethane prosthetic called a "Beerbelly", all without being stopped. Most alarming was the ease with which Mr Goldberg, assisted by a security expert, counterfeited a boarding pass. He successfully used the fake pass to go through security without government-issued ID and, for good measure, wearing a t-shirt with Osama bin Laden printed on under his coat.

Experts have long acknowledged that airport security checks are vulnerable, particularly when faced with someone who is determined and not intimidated by the process. But it seems to be relatively easy to get on the wrong flight even when you do not intend to do so. Last year a French woman who wanted to fly from Newark to Paris ended up in San Francisco instead. The airline had announced a gate change in English, which the passenger did not speak, so she ended up boarding the wrong plane. And pity the baggage handler who found himself locked up with the luggage he had loaded in the cargo hold of a plane from Charlotte to Washington, DC—on New Year's Eve of all days.

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282 claps



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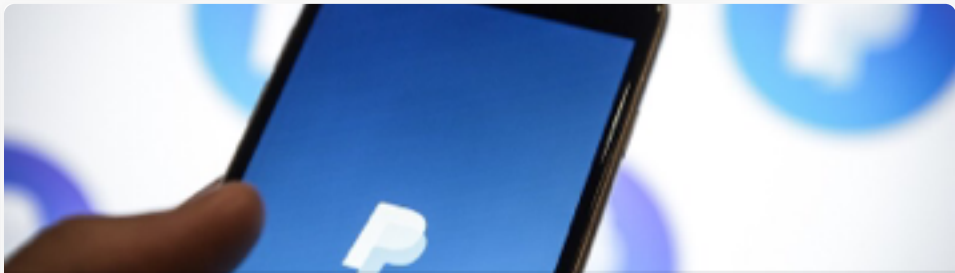
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