



# 7 Top Airports for Layovers in North America

by [Lori Zaino](#) on November 14, 2014

in [Airports](#)

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*Inevitably, you will have to have a layover while flying at some point, whether it be around North America or on your way to a far off land. International Contributor **Lori Zaino** offers up some of the best airports in the US and Canada to spend your layover. Stay tuned for a coming post on best international airports for layovers.*

If you're unable to fly nonstop and a dreaded layover is in the cards, you might as well spend it in a comfortable and relaxing place. Those aren't two words that usually come to mind when I think of airports, but the list I've compiled should be some of your best options when it comes to spending hours inside an airport or spending an afternoon getting a snapshot of a new city. These TPG picks are based on criteria such as proximity to the main attractions within the city, as well as airport features and facilities.

## 1. San Francisco International Airport (SFO)



Get your blood circulating during your layer in SFO's yoga room. Namaste.

[SFO](#) is the seventh busiest airport in the U.S. and home to United and Virgin America hubs. It's four Terminals (1,2,3 and International) all subscribe to [free WiFi](#) making it easy for passengers to connect from any point in the airport. Kids can let off steam in one of the designated kids play spots (Terminals 2 & 3) featuring crawling equipment and interactive weather and exploration exhibits.

The Aviation Museum & Library is located in the International Terminal Main Hall, which features special exhibits and programs that aviation geeks like us will love. Mediate in the Berman Reflection Room (International Terminal) or perfect that downward dog 24 hours a day in one of the yoga rooms (Terminals 2 & 3). Get a mani/pedi at Xpress Spa (Terminals 2, 3 & International), and purchase some earth-friendly gifts or souvenirs at Destination Green (Terminal 3). As you stroll to your gate, check out one of the 40 other cultural, historical or art exhibits (sponsored by the SFO Museum), which are located throughout the airport. When you are ready to chow, order the lobster mac 'n cheese at Iron Chef's [Cat Cora's Kitchen](#) in Terminal 2 or relax in the [Amex Centurion Lounge](#) (complimentary with your [Amex Platinum](#) card, Terminal 3). [The Airport Agency](#) offers showering facilities and business services. \$15 will get you a 30 minute shower including toiletries, a robe, and a plush towel (Departures Level of the International Terminal, 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily).

**Travel to the City Center:** The aforementioned Airport Travel Agency offers luggage storage for \$15 to \$35 per day depending on the size. [Bay Area Rapid Transit \(BART\)](#) will take you to the city center of San Francisco in just 30 minutes, departing every 15 minutes. Tickets are under \$8.25 each way.

**Nearby Attraction:** Just a 25 minute BART ride (exit on 16th or 24th St) will take you the historic Mission district. The "Mission" itself is the oldest building in San Francisco. Enjoy a stroll through this trendy area of town, taking in the Diego Rivera-inspired murals on walls and fences, stopping for a lunch break at La Taqueria or Rhea's Deli and Market. *Minimum layover required: 5+ hours.*

## 2. Miami International Airport (MIA)



**A photo by Alex Heria in the "Unfair" photo exhibit, North Terminal Gates D22-D25**

**With almost 40 million passengers a year, MIA is a hub to American Airlines and is the largest gateway between the United States and Latin America. It's an ideal airport for a longer layover, as it's an easy eight miles from the city center.**

For your daily dose of culture, check out [Alex Heria's photo exhibit "Unfair"](#) (North Terminal, Gates D22 – D25) or [Silver Springs by Bruce Mozert](#) (North Terminal, near Gate D31). If you're traveling with your pup, head over to one of the [Doggy Relief Areas](#) where your dogs can run around and play (located in North, South and Central Terminals).

For a quick spa treatment, try Jetsetter Spa (South Terminal H)—you can even get a spray tan there and fake as if you've left the airport for the sunny beaches of Miami. If you're pressed for time, 10 Minute Manicure (South Terminal J) will provide exactly that. If you're craving some Cuban food, order a "Calle Ocho" sandwich and Yuca croquettes at La Carreta (North Terminal D 37), a very Miami-appropriate meal.

**Travel to the City Center:** [Baggage storage](#) is available in Central Terminal E (\$4-\$17 per suitcase per day, depending on size). Take the MIA Mover to the the Miami Metrorail Orange line (\$2.25 each way, runs every 10-15 min) or the Airport Flyer Bus (\$2.65 each way, runs every 30 minutes) if you want to visit the Miami Beach area.

**Nearby Attraction:** South Beach is the perfect destination for a layover, whether you want to shop, eat, or simply suntan. Head to the trendy South of Fifth neighborhood, easily accessible from the I-395 and enjoy a quieter, more local side of South Beach—and if you're looking to party, [Nikki Beach](#) is right there. For a quick bite nearby, try [Lee & Marie's Cakery](#) for sandwiches and delicious baked goods or the [Local House](#) for a mix-and-match lunch of small plates (the goat cheese croquettes and crispy octopus with lentils are not to be missed). *Minimum layover required 5+ hours.*

### 3. John F. Kennedy Airport, New York (JFK)



Visit the High Line. Photo courtesy of [Shutterstock](#).

JFK's eight terminals host about 50 million passengers a year and the airport is a hub for JetBlue, American and Delta airlines. The JetBlue Terminal, T5, is best known for its "Live at T5" series of concerts, previously hosting artists such as Taylor Swift, James Blunt, Robyn, Jason Derulo, and Raphael Saadiq. To attend a show you actually have to have a boarding pass for a JetBlue flight. Terminal 4 is the best spot for shopping, with over 55 retailers including Hermes, Zegna, Jo Malone and five Xpress Spa locations. Get your jewels in Terminal 1 at Bulgari or Cartier. For a juicy burger and hearty shake, schlep over to Shake Shack (Terminal 4). It's worth it, I promise.

**Travel to the City Center:** Luggage storage is available in arrivals areas of Terminal 1 & 4 (\$4-16 per bag per day, depending on size). Take the AirTrain (\$5 each way) to the subway (\$2.50 each way) at Howard Beach and ride the A line subway into Manhattan.

**Nearby Attraction:** Hop off the A line train at 14th street and walk west until you hit the [High Line](#), a public park built on a historic freight rail line elevated above the streets on Manhattan's West Side. Walk up and back down (you can take a guided tour or just hang out on your own) and on your way back to the subway, stop at Chelsea Market for lunch, an indoor food hall with options galore. *Minimum layover required 7+ hours.*

#### 4. Seattle Sea-Tac International Airport (SEA)



Check out the Seattle Space Needle during your layover. Photo courtesy of [Shutterstock](#).

The Seattle airport, a hub for Alaska Airlines, serves about 35 million passengers a year. Sea-Tac is great for business travelers and techies due to its free WiFi access and grand number of charging ports and stations, and its large conference center. Points gurus will love that the airport itself is part of the [Thanks Again Rewards](#) program, which allows you to earn points for airport shopping, dining and parking, in addition to businesses outside the airport. Typically, you will earn between 1-10 points per dollar spent on eligible purchases once you've registered a Visa, MasterCard or Amex on the [Thanks Again website](#).

Art is strategically placed throughout the airport with over 100 pieces from the [Port of Seattle's Art Collection](#). If you need to get the knots out after a long flight, Massage Bar has two locations, C and N gates, and for a moment of silence, the Meditation Room is situated pre-security in the Main Terminal. If you're lucky, you may also catch some live music put on by the [Experience the City of Music Program](#). [Beecher's Cafe near Concourse C offers delicious cheese and Caffe Vita next to it offers some Seattle-roasted coffee.](#)

**Travel to the City Center:** Luggage storage is available at Ken's Baggage near the baggage claim carousels 12 & 13 (\$4-\$12 per day). Get on the [Sound Transit Link Light Rail](#) (\$2.75 one way) to the last stop at West Lake Station (about 35 minutes ride).

**Nearby Attraction:** From Westlake, grab the [monorail](#) to the Space Needle (\$2.25 each way). Ride up to the observation deck and view Seattle from 520 feet up above (\$19). Reserve online if possible before you come to avoid long waits in line. *Minimum Layover Required, 6 + hours.*

#### 5. Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)



Spend your layover at Manhattan Beach. Photo courtesy of [Shutterstock](#).

LAX is the only airport to serve as a hub for all three legacy airlines: American, Delta and United, as well as Alaska. This nine terminal airport is the fourth busiest airport in the world (determined by passenger traffic), and is located just 16 miles from downtown Los Angeles. The airport itself isn't the greatest to spend your time, but its proximity to the beach makes it perfect if you need a little fun in the sun before catching your next flight.

However, if you are stuck in the in the airport during a shorter layover, shop til you drop at trendy boutiques like Kitson (also in Terminal 7) and Fred Segal in the Great Hall, or visit the Xpress Spa in Terminal 5. Afterwards, have a signature flavored lemonades at aptly named [Lemonade Restaurant](#) (Terminal 5).

**Travel to the City Center:** LAX itself doesn't have luggage storage, but nearby facility LAX Storage will pick up and drop it off curbside for you (prices starting at \$5 per bag per day). Los Angeles doesn't really have a city center per say (more like 88 different neighborhoods), but there are [FlyAway buses](#) (\$8-\$10) available that can take you to a few of LA's different spots like Union Station, Hollywood or Santa Monica though expect lots of heavy traffic. Your best bet is to head to a nearby beach (see below) and avoid anything further than that.

**Nearby Attraction:** Although you can head to downtown during a layover, [Venice Beach](#) may be a better choice at a mere 10 miles from LAX. Hop in a taxi, Uber (\$25-\$30 one way) or the Ocean Express Bus and hope for no traffic. Cruise Ocean Front Walk, trendy Abbot Kinney or just hit the beach for some sun. Grab a gourmet bite to go at [GTA](#) and you'll be back at the airport in no time. *Minimum Layover Required (if hoping for a golden tan and no traffic), 5+ hours.*

## 6. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)



Grab a Southern bite at Paschal's (two locations at ATL)

This giant airport is a Delta hub and also happens to be the busiest airport in the world (for passenger traffic and take-off and landings). Being in the South, it's not surprising that ATL has

three InterFaith chapels (Terminal F, E & Atrium) if you're in the mood to worship. For those who aren't, WiFi is available throughout the entire airport free of charge.

The airport art program features 250 permanent pieces of art located throughout the airport including 20 sculptures from Zimbabwe. If you're lucky, you might catch one of the four concerts the airport sponsors annually in the Airport's Atrium. ATL is one of the few airports in the US that still offers smoking lounges, which can be found in each of the Terminals.

A 1,000-square-foot dog park is located in the Ground Transportation area on Domestic Terminal South outside of doors W1 and W2 and another in the International Terminal (Door A1). The airport also has an [interactive website dedicated to kids and teens](#), complete with airport history and activities to keep them entertained. For a traditional Southern bite, try some fried chicken or catfish at [Paschal's](#) (Concourse A food court & Atrium). Finally, if you'd prefer to catch up on work instead of a day out in Atlanta, visit [Minute Suites](#) (Concourse B). You can nap, work, shower or simply relax here (prices start at \$38 per hour).

**Travel To the City Center:** Store your luggage at [Wrap-a-Bag](#), starting at \$4 per day (in South and North Terminals). Using the MARTA transport system right off the baggage claim, you can be in the city center in about 20 minutes. Take the Red or Gold Line (also called the South Line) and get off at Five Points Station (\$2.50 one way).

**Nearby Attraction:** Instead of getting off the MARTA at Five Points, continue on a few more stops to Arts Center. From there, walk over to the [High Museum of Art](#) to enjoy the current special exhibition on [Cézanne and the Modern](#). *Minimum Layover Required, 5+ hours.*

## 7. Vancouver International Airport (YVR)



The Chinese Gardens, Chinatown, Vancouver. Photo courtesy of [Shutterstock](#).

This Air Canada hub is the second busiest airport in Canada and is one of the eight Canadian airports to offer US Border Pre-Clearance Facilities, making things a little easier for US citizens who have a layover there. The [airport](#) is located on Sea Island in Richmond, which is just about eight miles from Vancouver's city center, making the city an accessible destination for those on a long layover. Free WiFi is available throughout the entire airport, and both kids and adults can enjoy the airport [Aquarium](#), which features over 5,000 sea creatures, as well as a smaller jellyfish exhibit, both in the International Terminal. There are several children's areas with playground-style equipment, so they can get a little exercise before their next flight (Domestic Terminal Food Court, Gate 46, Gate 13 and International Terminal Gate 54).

Pay to chill out in one of the three [Plaza Premium Lounges](#) (starting at \$36 for two hours) where you can get healthy food and beverages, re-charge your electronics and/or get some work done in the business sections (Located in Domestic, International and USA Terminals).

[Absolute Spa](#) offers spa and hair services with four locations throughout the Vancouver Airport (Domestic Terminal Gate 44, 47 and Arrivals, USA Terminal Gate 85). If you have an extra long layover consider booking a night in the Fairmount Vancouver Hotel which is located above the USA Terminal. Don't worry—it's soundproof so you'll get a good nights rest.

**Travel to the City Center:** Store baggage with [CDS Ltd Baggage Services](#) (domestic and international terminal before security) starting at \$5 per bag, per day. The Canada Line trains (\$4) connects YVR to downtown Vancouver in 26 minutes.

**Nearby attraction:** Chinatown is about a 20 minute walk east of downtown Vancouver. Explore the shops and markets, eat some Chinese food and visit the [Chinese gardens](#). Beware, this area is best experienced during the day time, as it's rumored to be a bit seedy after dark. *Minimum Layover Required, 4.5+ hours.*

*Please note the minimum layover time required is just a suggestion and may vary depending on circumstances like whether or not your next flight is international or domestic, time of day, weather, etc., so make sure to allow enough time for you to make your flight if you plan on leaving the airport.*

*Have you survived any killer layovers recently? What did you discover at the airport or nearby?*

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