

New questions and searches greet travelers flying to the U.S.

(Aviation Enhanced Security Measures for All Commercial Flights to the United States)

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Some were asked their hobbies and packing habits. Others were queried about what they do for a living. There were lines for security interviews and searches of carry-on bags.

The first passengers to travel under new screening measures for U.S.-bound flights were greeted at airports around the world with a wide range of hurdles — some new, some familiar — to clear before boarding their planes.

The Trump administration is requiring that both U.S. and global air carriers adopt enhanced security screening for every flight to the U.S. All travelers — American citizens and foreigners — are subject to the new protocols, which went into effect Thursday.

The new procedures cover all 2,100 flights from around the world entering the U.S. on any given day. But how each airline implements the measures varies, and some of the procedures have been in place before in parts of the world.

While some passengers described tense moments and long lines, there were few reports of major disruptions to global travel Thursday. Confusion, however, remains about the new regulations, with airlines describing different methods of implementation and some saying they had been granted permission to delay putting them in place until next year.

Todd Gilliland, 40, arrived at O'Hare airport in Chicago from Uganda, where he and his wife run a school for underprivileged kids. He flew to the U.S. from

Brussels, where he said he noticed more questions and more security officers than before. He said he got no notice from airlines about the new measures and was taken aback by some of the questions before boarding.

“I got the question of what do you do for a living and I said, ‘What is your concern?’ and the guy goes, ‘You’re being difficult.’ And I just said, ‘Boy, you’re being awful rude.’ He said, ‘You’re not being cooperative.’ And I said, ‘Fine.’” Gilliland said.

But he said the security officer never insisted he answer, put him in another line or took any measures.

At Dubai International Airport, the world’s busiest for international travel, long-haul carrier Emirates began questioning passengers about their luggage, liquids they were carrying and where they were coming from. Passengers also had to have their carry-on bags searched, along with their electronics. Air France said it will provide questionnaires for all U.S.-bound passengers to fill out.

Singapore Airlines passengers may be required to “undergo enhanced security measures” including inspection of personal electronic devices “as well as security questioning during check-in and boarding,” the carrier said on its website.

Other carriers who announced the new regulations included Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd., the airlines of Germany’s Lufthansa Group and EgyptAir.

Korean Air Lines Co., Asiana Airlines Inc., and Royal Jordanian said they were given exemptions to implement the new measures early next year.

At Newark Liberty International Airport, in Newark, N.J., Alexander Wegner, a German tourist who flew in on a Lufthansa flight, said he was surprised by the nature of some of the questions he received before boarding his flight.

“From my point of view, it was just an inconvenience. It’s of no use. Anyone could respond to these kinds of questions. What are your hobbies? Jogging. Oh, OK. That’s interesting. What for?”

Chris McGinnis, an international travel consultant with Travel Skills Group, said the new measures were implemented during a traditionally slow period for international travel, making the transition easier. And in some countries where drug trafficking or terrorism is a concern, airlines have long subjected U.S.-bound passengers to security interviews, he noted.

“They are not looking for the right answers. They are looking for suspicious behavior, if you are sweating abnormally, you may be asked for a closer examination,” McGinnis said.

What’s new is that such measures are now being applied in every country.

“I think a lot of business travelers will be surprised because they are used to a quick pass through the airport,” McGinnis said. “My advice would be in the short term to get there a little bit early. But eventually we’ll become more accustomed to it.”

At Fort Lauderdale, Fla., travelers arriving from the Middle East and the Caribbean said they were accustomed to the security interviews, including whether they had packed their own bags or received gifts.

Swapna Chakrabortui said she was startled when she was told she would have to go through a security interview before boarding her flight in Calcutta, India, but relaxed when she realized it applied to everyone.

“First I was a little bit scared, but then I thought it’s OK because it’s for a good reason. It’s not a harassment,” she said.

In March, U.S. officials introduced the laptop ban in the cabins of some Mideast airlines over concerns Islamic State fighters and other extremists could hide bombs inside of them. The ban was lifted after those airlines began using devices like CT scanners to examine electronics before passengers boarded planes heading to the U.S. Some also increasingly swab passengers’ hands to check for explosive residue.

Associated Press journalists Joshua Replogle and Joseph B. Frederick in Newark, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

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