

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Holly, jolly travel

Port Columbus' Christmas Day fliers — many of them Florida-bound — enjoy relaxing perks of shorter lines, smaller crowds and even some lower fares

*By Marla Matzer Rose* THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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Christmas air travel for central Ohioans is all about family — and Florida. With business travel stopped for the holidays and kids off from school, many of those steadily streaming through Port Columbus yesterday were headed to the Sunshine State for relaxation.

Some travelers and airport workers wore festive garb, including Santa hats, while a few passengers dressed for their destination: shorts and sandals.

The bonus for those who fly on Christmas Day is smaller crowds, shorter waits and sometimes slightly lower fares. Christmastime is one of the busier travel periods, but Christmas Day travel tends to be relatively light. The majority of people traveling to be with relatives like to arrive before the holiday and depart after it.

“I like this much better,” said Alex Carmon, a Columbus resident who arrived early at the airport on his way to visit his brothers and their families in northern California. “I go out most years, but this is the first time I’ve flown on Christmas. It’s definitely quieter.”

Roberta Brown of Bellefontaine was seeing off teenage daughter Destiny and niece Victoria Brown to visit her ex-husband in Orlando for a week. Their trip is to include a second round of Christmas presents and trips to area theme parks.

“We do this every year on Christmas Day, because there’s less traffic and fewer crowds at the airport,” Brown said. “We open presents here at home on Christmas Eve morning.”

Compared with Port Columbus' busiest day of December, yesterday was quiet. Security-checkpoint lines were short or nonexistent. The electronic boards displaying arrival and departure times showed all flights running on time at midmorning on the chilly but clear day. Air traffic was light nationally.

According to airport spokeswoman Angie Tabor, 88 flights, totaling 7,597 seats, were scheduled at the airport, compared with 142 flights with 11,864 seats on the peak day

this month. Today, 133 flights totaling 11,098 seats are scheduled, as travelers do the more-typical practice of getting out of town and back to work the day after the holiday.

Still, most of the airport's concessions and retail stores were open yesterday.

The airport was one of the few places in the city where shoppers could buy things, such as Brooks Brothers shirts and Ohio State Buckeyes memorabilia.

Business appeared light at restaurants such as Max & Erma's and the Cup O'Joe coffee shop in the ticketing lobby, but those who patronized them lingered and chatted with family members over their food and drink.

Ric Shoemaker, who has worked for the Avis rental-car company at the airport for 14 years, said this Christmas seemed a little quieter than most in recent years.

Shoemaker typically volunteers to work on Christmas, he said, "because I'm single, and it's just me and my dogs at home." The holiday pay also makes the decision easier, he said.

Shoemaker expected his business to increase in the evening, as people started returning vehicles on their way out of town.

One couple leaving town was doing a typical holiday juggling act: with two children younger than 3 in tow, Chris and Trisha Seckles were leaving, presents in hand, after a visit with Trisha's family in Upper Arlington. They were on their way back to spend time with Chris' family in Baltimore.

Meanwhile, Helen Hilbert was moving at a more leisurely pace. The Powell grandmother was on her way to Walt Disney World to spend a few days with her son and eight other family members.

"I've been to Disney about 20 times before, but this is the first time with his whole family," Hilbert said.

Why travel on Christmas Day? "He made all the arrangements," Hilbert said with a laugh. "I'm just following directions."



**KYLE ROBERTSON DISPATCH PHOTOS**

AirTran Airways' Tabitha Clark checks in Helen Hilbert of Powell at Port Columbus. Hilbert was on her way to Florida to spend a few days with her son and eight other family members. The son planned her Christmas Day flight.

11:00A	On Time
2:28P	On Time
3:50P	On Time
4:20P	On Time
11:15A	On Time
4:20P	On Time
11:15A	On Time

Christmas Day's clear skies across much of the country helped keep Port Columbus arrivals on time. The day had 88 scheduled departures totaling 7,597 seats.



**KYLE ROBERTSON DISPATCH PHOTOS**

Bellefontaine cousins Victoria Brown, 17, left, and Destiny Brown, 16, head to their flight to Florida to visit Destiny's stepfather. It's an annual Christmas Day trip because the airports are less crowded, said Destiny's mother, Roberta.