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NEWS

How American, Delta and United are using tech to help you navigate the return to travel



[Zach Honig](#)

4d ago

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Never in the history of commercial aviation have airlines had to deal with so many constantly evolving travel restrictions. Is French Polynesia [accepting tourists this week](#)? Can U.S. flyers [transit Hong Kong](#) to get to [The Maldives](#)? Is [Abu Dhabi's COVID-19 test cutoff](#) 72 or 96 hours ?

With every single country adding [its own special touch](#) to entry restrictions and testing requirements, there's only one reasonable solution when it comes to sorting through all the muck: add technology to simplify (and speed up) the process.

[Vaccine passports](#) and global tools like [IATA's Travel Pass](#) will eventually improve the situation somewhat, but airlines are also going to need to continue evolving their own digital solutions to help reduce confusion among passengers and ease the burden on check-in agents.

In the U.S., the “[big 3](#)” have already begun rolling out tools aimed at making the international travel experience a bit more tolerable.

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United aims to simplify the process with its “Travel Ready Center.” (Image courtesy of United Airlines)

While restrictions have been in place since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, U.S. carriers first began a large-scale rollout of consumer-facing tools this January.

My last international trip was to the Caribbean island of Curacao in December, and United's check-in process at Newark Airport (EWR) left a lot to be desired. Poor signage and endless lines led to frustration among travelers – especially those required to have documents verified before a trip overseas.

Agents were clearly overwhelmed, and United's plea to arrive at least *four hours* before departure felt like a double-edged sword – having travelers check in many hours before departure likely led

to extra congestion, creating more stress for travelers who didn't take the airline's warning to heart.

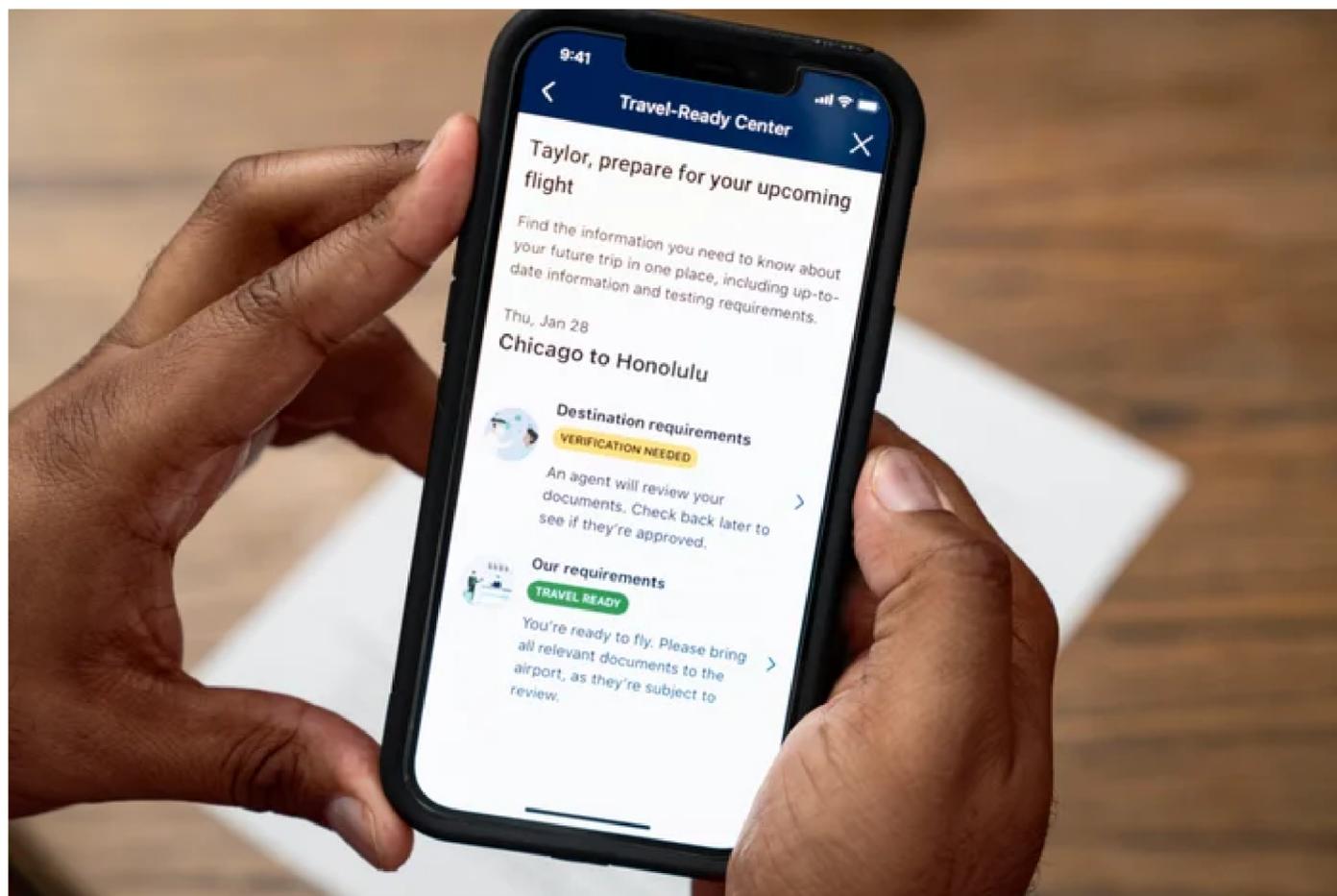
We look forward to welcoming you on board soon! As you make your way to the airport, please keep in mind that we're expecting the check-in process to take longer than usual due to an increase in holiday travel.

To help you avoid missing your flight, we recommend arriving at the airport no later than 4 hours ahead of your scheduled departure. You can save time by checking in on the United app, and if you're checking bags, prepay any fees online before dropping them off at our curbside skycap. Thank you for choosing United!

Screenshot courtesy of United

The message I received suggested "checking in on the United app," which wasn't an option for my trip to Curacao since an agent needed to verify my negative COVID-19 test.

Fortunately, that in-person check-in may no longer be necessary in some cases. United's new "[Travel-Ready Center](#)" makes it possible for travelers to upload necessary documents directly through the airline's app – in some cases, an agent will conduct a remote review, clearing you to board before you even arrive at the terminal.



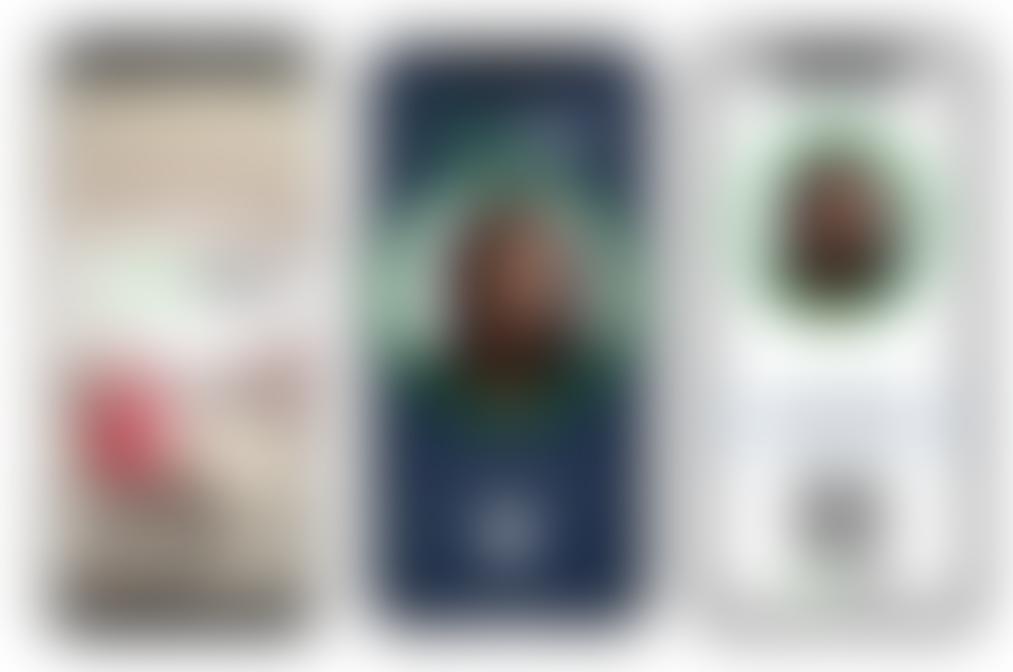
*United's Travel-Ready Center once again makes it possible to check in for flights online.
(Photo courtesy of United)*

Customers can easily view airline and destination requirements for all of their future bookings via United's website or mobile app, though some details may not appear until closer to the departure date, as requirements constantly evolve.

Related: [Your guide to vaccine passports](#)

While I only have firsthand experience with United's offering so far, American and Delta have both rolled out similar solutions, too.

American Airlines [uses a platform called VeriFLY](#), which is also in use at fellow Oneworld carriers British Airways and Iberia. Customers download the third-party [VeriFLY app](#), create a profile and enter their flight details. If a test is required, flyers can upload their results through the app and receive a QR code that can be scanned along with their boarding pass.



(Screenshot courtesy of American Airlines)

Delta, meanwhile, is currently working to develop its own solution for pre-clearing passengers, including an option to upload test results before travel. In the meantime, the carrier has partnered with [Clear](#) to authenticate customers traveling from Los Angeles (LAX) to Honolulu (HNL), making it easy for the airline to verify test results before travelers board their flight so they can avoid a quarantine upon landing in Hawaii.

You can learn more about individual airline programs and industry-wide solutions in [our detailed guide to vaccine passports](#).

Also on the tech front, all three carriers offer simple map tools that make it easy to see where you're able to travel and what restrictions may apply – you can access [American's here](#), [Delta's here](#) and [United's here](#). Delta's even mixes in real-time fares, making it easier to plan a trip based on accessibility and price.

(Screenshot courtesy of Delta)

While some customers may be hesitant to share health-related data, airlines don't have any incentive to store test results any longer than they have to. United, for example, confirmed that it deletes results five days after departure – soon, customers will be able to schedule a test directly through the airline, in which case the testing partner will simply declare a passenger as “travel-ready,” without passing along any additional information.

Bottom line

Ultimately, these digital solutions will help speed up the process for everyone – customers choosing to complete the process virtually will free up agents at the airport, who can then assist

passengers who prefer to have their documents verified in person.

This isn't a one-size-fits-all solution – smartphones are generally required, but if you don't have one of your own, or prefer not to install another app, you can approach a check-in agent to have your documents checked at the airport.

If you do choose not to use one of these app-based services, just make sure you arrive with plenty of extra time – during peak periods, check-in lines can snake throughout the terminal, especially as agents and travelers learn to navigate entry requirements, document verification and more.

Featured photo by Zach Honig/The Points Guy

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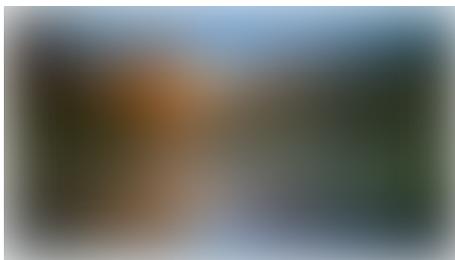
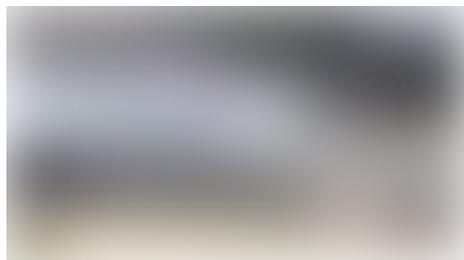
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[Zach Honig](#) is Editor-at-Large at TPG, with contributions ranging from articles digging deep on loyalty programs and credit cards to delivery flight coverage to drone photography and much more.



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