

[Sleeping on the Fly](#)

By: Jessica Hill

At 3 a.m. I awoke to a strange man cuddling my feet. In my dreary state, I checked to make sure I was still hugging the oversized hiking backpack that held my only possessions for the next four months, then glanced around the large, empty waiting area at the Milan Malpensa Airport. 'Why did he choose to sleep on this area of cold, hard, marble flooring?' I wondered, but my voice failed me. I looked to my quietly snoring traveling companion, then forfeited the battle with my eyelids and let my head fall back on my purse.

Last year Nicole Stinnett, a fellow University student, and I traveled through Europe for four months on a budget of \$2,000 each. When money ran low, the airport became a convenient hotel between flights. The beds are hard, the floors even harder, but when you're low on time and money, why not compromise a comfortable night of sleep for a guaranteed adventure? Sleeping at the airport saves the hassle of traveling to and from a motel, along with the \$150 it would cost you to stay there.

A list of best and worst airports to sleep in as voted by visitors on [Sleepinginairports.com](#).

BEST:

1. Singapore Changi International Airport
2. Seoul Incheon Airport, South Korea
3. Hong Kong International Airport, China
4. Dubai International
5. Johannesburg International

WORST:

1. Paris Charles de Gaulle International
2. (Moscow) Sheremetyevo International, Russia
3. Paris Beauvais Tille, France
4. Los Angeles International
5. John F. Kennedy International, New York

"I think people are leveraging the Internet to find inventive new ways to save money ... [that] tend to result in a more interesting, engaging and memorable experience," says Reid Bramblett, self-proclaimed travel expert and editor of [Reidsguides.com](#). "Among those lodging alternatives are ways to sleep for free -- sleeping in [the] airport among them." Bramblett has spent many nights in airport terminals, including the Madrid Barajas International Airport, where he managed to fall asleep across an armless bench of chairs in an empty waiting area and woke up to a bustling departure gate.

"It's a chance to be a homeless person for the night, trying to fend for yourself," says Donna McSherry, travel agent and editor of [SleepingInAirports.com](#). "Granted, an airport is a lot more comfortable than a downtown street, but there are elements of the experience -- trying to sleep in public with people walking around you -- that make for an interesting tale when you get home."

Top five lightweight sleeping bags under \$100

1. Slumberjack Super Guide 30 F Thermolite Extreme Sleeping Bag - \$49.97, www.campmor.com
2. The North Face Aleutian Sleeping Bag - \$79.99 to \$84.99, depending on size, www.sportsauthority.com
3. Eureka Casper Sleeping Bag - \$89.99 to \$99.99, depending on size, www.cabelas.com
4. The North Face Bighorn +20 Sleeping Bag - \$99.00, www.rei.com
5. Marmot Trestles +15 Sleeping Bag - \$99.00, www.rei.com

Every airport adds something different to the experience. Voted the "2008 Best Airport" on SleepingInAirports.com, the Singapore Changi International Airport is far from a downtown street. This luxurious landing area offers overnighters the comfort of leather "snooze chairs" with head and leg rests, and 24-hour shower, fitness and spa services.

Recalling her first overnight experience in a Dublin airport, McSherry said, "The announcements about not smoking ... that repeated every 10 minutes nearly drove me insane." She recommends using earplugs instead of an iPod to block the noise because the extra sound of music "could also block out the sound of someone opening your bag." To prevent theft, she suggests tying your bags to your body with a scarf or something similar so you feel if someone tries to open or move it. Depending on whether you're spending the night before or after your flight, you could have all of your luggage or just your carry-on. Try building "a luggage-cart fence around yourself" if you have a lot of belongings, or at least make sure to keep valuables under your head or on your body, McSherry says, though theft hasn't been an issue for most of the visitors on her Web site.

Stinnett recommends bringing along a sleeping bag and putting your most valuable belongings inside with you. In airports such as Paris Charles de Gaulle International, Los Angeles International and New York's John F. Kennedy International, it might be hard to get a good night's sleep without traveling prepared. The choice for a bed is between bucket seats with armrests and long metal benches, both seemingly more uncomfortable than the cold, dirty floors, according to visitors on SleepingInAirports.com who voted them three of 2008's worst airports.

Martha Richmond, media relations manager for Portland International Airport, says most airports don't mind if passengers camp out for the night, but warns that unless all of your gear can fit into one carry-on bag, "people need to think about how they would get all that stuff on the plane." However, PDX is a public facility, she says. "It's open 24 hours a day; we don't have a problem with folks who are waiting for a flight." But, she admits, the best seats are inside the security gates, requiring a ticket to get through.

"Having a sleeping bag was awesome," says Stinnett, who used hers everywhere we slept, adding that most airport floors are probably cleaner than some hostel beds. The sleeping bag provided warmth and padding on the cold, hard surfaces and spared us from lying directly on dirty ones. It's a good asset when traveling this way, and you can purchase a lightweight sleeping bag for less than the price of one night in some hotels.

Though we don't always get to choose our layover destinations, we can plan an early morning departure or late-night arrival to maximize the use of airport lounges. Stinnett says, "With the time it takes to go find your hostel in a foreign country, having to pay for it, take a taxi, take a train, all those extra costs, it's worth staying in the airport, especially if it saves time and money."