

Getting to Maybe

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Flights rarely leave on time. In fact, punctual departure is cause for celebration in a travel world plagued by tedious security checks, inept baggage handling, and an infectious laissez faire attitude. But when the delay stretches beyond the reasonably excusable, restless travelers demand an explanation. It is invariably offered: "Snowstorm in Chicago."

This explanation is offered matter-of-factly as though its mere utterance suffices to explain why passengers in Los Angeles waiting to board flights for anywhere but Chicago must now wait patiently. Experienced peripatetics have come to understand the airlines' hub-and-spoke operations, knowing that the flight from Los Angeles to Seattle originated in Denver, which in turn came from Atlanta after it stopped-over in Boston on its journey from Providence to Chicago.

It all makes sense in a circuitous sort of way. But the blanket excuse is over-used and misapplied where beleaguered ground crews lack the creativity, let alone the honesty to provide sensible explanations. And so I sat in Phoenix awaiting a flight to Las Vegas on a brilliantly sunny and excruciatingly hot mid-summer's day. The commuter airline that only makes local trips was delayed and was called upon to pacify impatient travelers. The loud-speaker crackled and soon the announcement was made, "Snowstorm in Chicago."

Of course!

Getting ready to embark on my latest odyssey, I can only imagine that this perennial Midwestern blizzard will again waylay my travel plans. Scheduled to depart Los Angeles at the crack of dawn, I am booked aboard American Airlines into Miami and then Iberian Air into Madrid. After a quick look at the Goyas and El Grecos in the Prado, I'll fly into Zurich and then head on to Strasbourg by train. Next, it's Venice via Budapest [look at the map—it sort of makes sense] on Malev and Carpatair. Ten days later, I'll fly British Midlands from Venice to London; then Manchester for a side-trip through Wales. Eventually, British Air will take me into Chicago [to check out "the snowstorm"] for a connecting flight aboard American back to LA.

This, of course, is just a big travel disaster waiting to happen. And it's winter. Surely, that "snowstorm in Chicago" will backlog flights on the European continent. Besides, it's time for the French and the Italians to go on strike...