

# Foreign airports offer lots of options for relaxing

Spas, showers, 'quiet zones' cater to fliers

By Roger Yu  
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For the most part, airports in the USA are workaday places, serving merely as points of transit for people in a hurry.

By contrast, many large airports in Europe and Asia are designed to encourage lingering, providing unique services Americans can't commonly find inside airport terminals at home: spas, showers, hotels, dry cleaners, massage centers, casinos, swimming pools and movie theaters.

"U.S. airports now lag far behind," says Tom Ferrari, a sales executive in Fox Island, Wash., who has extensive foreign travel experience. "We have been doing lots of construction but nothing new and bold."

So why the difference? Geography, culture and finance, says Dick Marchi of Airports Council International-North America.

Many European and Asian airports are major international hubs where travelers wait longer for connecting flights.

Airports design services to accommodate passengers' longer waits, he says. Other countries also take great pride in the capital airport as a showcase for their economic development and tourism opportunities, giving them an extra incentive to spruce up.

Foreign airports, which commonly are run by national governments, aren't as beholden to airlines for revenue as their U.S. counterparts, Marchi says. They can design facilities and amenities without having to consult extensively with carriers, which often insist on low-cost operations at U.S. airports to keep rents and fees low.

Another big edge for Asian airports is that they are relatively new, and they had more room to build, Marchi says.

Some airport services, such as showers and massages, also may not be culturally appealing to Americans.

Some airports with cutting-edge services:

•**Singapore Changi.** It's one of the best airports in amenities, says Matt Holdrege, a telecommunications executive from Los Angeles.

It features a lounge, which, for a fee, offers showers, massages, private jacuzzis, manicures and facials. The airport also has rent-by-the-hour hotel rooms, a gym, private TV monitors for rent, a movie theater and an indoor swimming pool. There's a flower garden and an outdoor swimming pool on the terminal's roof. Connecting passengers with a few hours to kill can opt for free city tours.

Doreen Huro Michelini, president of China Mexico Solutions, a consulting company in Chicago, is a big fan of Changi's hourly rental rooms. Flying in from Chicago, she usually arrives around midnight and often must wait until 6:30 a.m. for a connecting flight. "By being able to rent a room right at the airport, you can take a quick shower and get more hours of rest before you board your next flight," she says.

•**Amsterdam Schiphol.** A kid-friendly airport, it has a children's playground with video games, Lego pieces and TVs playing Disney shows. It's also celebrating Rembrandt's 400th birthday this year with an exhibition of his work. Travelers heading to tropical destinations can get various vaccines.

For the spiritually inclined, it has a meditation center, with worship services in English. For gamblers, it has a casino.

"It was small, but it was a nice diversion," says Gary Bellaire, a technology consultant from Richmond, Va., who's visited the casino.

•**Hong Kong International.** It stands out for its upscale mall that “is a shopping mecca with great stores,” says Timothy Burke, a marketing director in Denver, who buys business and personal gifts there. Its tenants include Bulgari, Cartier, Tiffany, an Oriental medicine pharmacy, a Chinese bakery and a tea shop.

•**Frankfurt Airport City.** The German airport features rows of counters for more than 35 tour companies that sell last-minute seats on flights and European tour deals with deep discounts.

“This is cool if one is flexible, has time off and is open to various locations,” says Tom Morgan, a Hoosier living in Germany for his job with drugmaker Abbott. He once got a good deal on a family vacation package in Crete.

For a fee, the airport also offers behind-the-scenes tours of its operations, including its cargo facilities, runways and fire department. It also has a casino with blackjack and roulette tables.

Frankfurt-Hahn, a smaller airport outside the city, has an “erotic shop” where you can find “erotic inspirations for adults,” says Nuray Güler, an airport spokeswoman.

•**Vancouver (British Columbia) International.** Its services include medical and dental offices; a flower shop; full-service banks; pay-per-use lounges with food, showers and business services; pods for napping; a gym; and a spa. It also has 19 sound-proofed rooms designated as “quiet zones,” where travelers can nap with free earplugs and eye masks.

Claudio de los Rios, an audit director from San Francisco, says he often plans his trips to Vancouver to leave time for a session in the spa.

•**Tokyo Narita.** It has a dentist office, beauty salon, dry cleaner, locksmith and pet hotel. You can also rent “day rooms” for naps and showers and “video/audio rooms” that come with a sofa and a surround-sound TV for watching movies. It also provides kids' parks and 10 nursery rooms.

•**Seoul Incheon.** The airport operates several tours to connecting passengers that last only a few hours. One is a longer \$80 tour that takes you to Panmunjom, the heavily fortified region north of Seoul that borders North Korea.

Among the highlights of the seven-hour tour: an infiltration tunnel dug by North Koreans in the late 1970s and Freedom Bridge, which formally divides the two Koreas.

The airport also has the usual array of services found in other Asian airports: spas, massage centers, hospitals, pharmacies and upscale shops. It also runs a golf course several miles away.