

Rebecca Makkai

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Dear People:

How are you? Where are you?
I'm in O'Hare, in the American
Airlines terminal, waiting for a
flight to Denver.

Can I defend O'Hare for a minute?
First of all, it's my hometown airport,
& if I can deal with long-term parking,
in addition to everything else,
certainly you can deal with changing
planes here. But listen: In terminals
1, 3, & 5, there are Rich Barfess
restaurants (Texas Frontera). If you
wanted the same food out in
the actual city, you'd have to wait
in line half an hour. If you
wanted it outside Chicago, you'd
have to watch him on TV and drool.
I usually fly out in the morning.

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so I order the "eggs + rajas" +, during my 10-minute wait, get a coffee + shop at the indie bookstore (seriously) that's adjacent to each of the Bayless joints.

There's also an excellent sushi place, + there's a rotunda with a hydroponic garden + a yoga room + quiet places to sit. Somewhere by terminal 2, there's a great airplane-themed playground.

If you hate O'Hare, it's probably because you limited your experience to your own gate + the McDonalds across from it. "Yes," you say, "but once I was stuck there five hours." To which I respond: "If you're complaining, that's clearly because you did not spend those 5 hours

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missing the moving sidewalk under the 80s-tastic neon light display in the tunnel to the C gates. (It has a name, BTW, and ~~that~~ name is "Skip the Limit." Because it's art.)

Second best airport, for totally different reasons: the Maine Air Terminal at LaGuardia. A tiny, gorgeous deco building a bus ride away from the main airport. If only you could get everyone to dress in period costume, it would look entirely like 1935. Beautiful. BUT, after security you're limited to pre-wrapped turkey sandwiches & tic-tacs. So is it as great as O'Hare? No.

Best shopping = Philly, which also has decent sushi. (And in defense of good airport sushi — not bish was freshly flown in.)

Austin, Texas would get best food, but only if you eat pork & beef. Mostly I feel left out at the Austin airport.

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Best individual store in an airport is the used bookstore at Milwaukee. It's before security, & they will (or at least did in 2000, when I lived there) validate your parking. I used to actually drive to the airport, park, shop for books, leave. I think you can still do this. It's not one of those pre-9/11 things, like chasing you for Thru security to tell her not to move to Prague.

I once spent 30 hours in the Pittsburgh airport. I was trying to get back to college in a snowstorm & got stuck. There was a party atmosphere in the areas where those of us w/out hotel money were camped out. I made friends. We shared tips like how to get handfuls of shampoo from the sample bottles at The Body Shop & wash your hair in the sink.

My sister was the host of a morning radio show in Minneapolis at the

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time, & she got me on air from a payphone, reporting on the scene. I told all her listeners how I was living on pretzels. Then I passed the phone to some of my new friends: the French-Canadian grad student who'd been there twice as long as me, the woman who'd made her own little room by blockading a corner w/ her yoga mat & bass.

I grew up a lot in the Pittsburgh airport. Which sounds silly, but I was 19 & hadn't spent time being completely self-reliant. This was my 5th & little Outward Bound.

- * Celebrities I've seen at airports:
- * - OJ Simpson (before 2nd arrest)
- Peach Carr (a Project Runway contestant)
- Spike Lee (it would take 2.5 Spike Lees to construct one OJ Simpson.)

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Games to play in airports:

"Can You Tell Who's European
from their Shoes?"

"Who Would You Do?"

"Sneak Into Hudson Boats + Turn
The Good Literature Face Out"

"How Long Do I Have to Wait in The
Bathroom for my Curling Iron
to Cool Down Before I Put it Back
in My Suitcase?"

Best airport scene in a movie:
The Security scene in
The Spanish Prisoner

OKAY, here's what I would love.
I fly a lot these days — and I'm
going to assume you all live in
diverse places. If you want to

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write me back, can you tell me
the secrets of your local airport?
The hiding place or decent
restaurant or even places to avoid?
I'll send you back a postcard
if you do. It won't be witty,
but it'll be a cool postcard.

Since I don't know you, I guess
I can sign off however I want,
without worrying about formality/
appropriateness. So:

Smooches, I adore you,
let's fly to Paris together
some day,

Rebecca