

Will the Shutdown Affect Your Travel Plans?

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With the federal government shutting down for the first time in 17 years, travelers are wondering: What does it mean for me?

The short answer is that you will still be able to get around, although some places you may wish to visit, like national parks and monuments, will be closed.

Amtrak, the passenger rail service that transported 31.2 million passengers in fiscal year 2012, said in a statement that it will continue normal operations.

“Passengers planning to travel on Amtrak trains in the Northeast Corridor and across the country in the coming days and weeks can be assured that Amtrak will remain open for business,” the company said in an e-mail message. (In other words: the government shutdown should not affect your train travel, though no one is promising there won’t be problems of a different sort, like the recent power failure north of New York City that has affected Acela Express and Metro-North service.)

Airports will also stay open. Dulles International and Reagan National airports, for instance, will operate normally. As the Web site for those airports puts it: “Agencies providing passenger screening, customs processing and air traffic control will not be adversely impacted by a government shutdown.”

What about passports and visas?

The Department of State said that it will continue its passport and visa operations. Processing time for passport applications is not expected to change (up to four weeks for routine service; two weeks for expedited service). For updates, check the Department’s Web site at Travel.state.gov/passport.

The same cannot be said, however, for the Transportation Security Administration’s Web site, which has a pale yellow bar across the top and a note: “Due to the lapse in federal funding, this website will not be actively managed.”

The site was last updated on Sept. 30 and will not be updated again until funding returns.

Speaking of Web sites, Smithsonian National Zoo’s “giant panda cam,” beloved by scores of animal-loving procrastinators, has also been shut down (National Parks, along with Smithsonian museums, are closed, and so are National Park Service Web sites). Don’t bother clicking the “Start the Panda Cam” button; you will only be disappointed.

On the bright side, EarthCam — which has cameras live-streaming from National Park sites, including the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument and the Gettysburg Battle Field — will allow you to see inside even though you cannot go inside.

