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Getting there is half the fun, so the saying goes. Msnbc.com's travel team examines the issues of the day and, of course, the joy and hassle of traveling.

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# Air-travel fatality rate hits all-time low



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The last 10 years have been the safest decade ever for travel on U.S. airliners with only 153 aviation fatalities. NBC's Kate Snow reports.

**By Rob Lovitt, msnbc.com contributor**

Travelers fretting about the hazards of air travel — missed connections, lost bags, etc. — can rest easy on at least one front. According to a just-released analysis from Ascend, a London-based aviation consulting company, flying is safer than ever.

“We still have a few days left but, provisionally speaking, 2011 is going to be the best year ever for safety,” said Paul Hayes, the company’s director of safety. “The number of passengers killed was down considerably.”

On a global basis, there have been 401 fatalities on commercial and charter aircraft so far this year, down from 726 in 2010. With the world’s airlines carrying almost 2.9 billion passengers this year, that works out to one fatality for every 7.1 million passengers flown, the lowest rate since the company began tracking the data in 1990.

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“There are a couple of things in play,” said aviation consultant Peter Goeltz, senior vice president with O’Neill and Associates and former director of the National Transportation Safety Board. “Aircraft and avionics are better than ever, training is better and we’re getting more information on potential danger points because pilots can report mistakes without being punished.”

Not surprisingly, such developments are more prevalent among larger carriers and those servicing the developed nations of the Europe, Asia and North America. “I wouldn’t fly Kyrgyzstan Airways or any other ‘Stan Airways for that matter,” said Goeltz, “and Africa is still a terrible place to fly due to the lack of infrastructure and civil aviation oversight.”

As a result, said Hayes, “The major carriers in the U.S. and Western Europe are probably considerably better than the average.”

Such numbers also bode well for the future, at least for the majority of travelers who fly those carriers, said aviation safety consultant and former commercial pilot Steve Cowell of SRC Aviation LLC.

“People should not only be happy about the [current] improvements; they should also expect continued improvement,” he told msnbc.com, especially as the next generation of technically advanced aircraft take to the skies.

“Those airplanes are going to improve people’s experience as passengers and consequently improve



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*Rob Lovitt is a longtime travel writer who still believes the journey is as important as the destination. Follow him at [Twitter](#).*

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