

Harrisburg International Airport Self-Guided Tour

Welcome to Harrisburg International Airport (HIA)! Our actual airport code, which every airport in the world has, is MDT, for Middletown, but most locals call us HIA.

HIA is owned by the Susquehanna Area Regional Airport Authority (SARAA), who also owns 3 smaller regional airports. SARAA has a little over 100 employees, however more than 1400 people work at HIA between the airlines, restaurants, shops, car rentals and other businesses located on the airport property.

Enter the airport from the parking garage by walking across the SkyBridge (level 2) and into the terminal, where the star mosaic is located. The mosaic was designed by Pennsylvania artist, Charles Madden, and has 63,000 Venetian glass mosaic chips depicting Pennsylvania's history.

Straight ahead is the security checkpoint where outbound passengers who have boarding passes get screened before they enter the secure or sterile area of the airport. This ensures they are not taking any dangerous items onto the airplane. The checkpoint is managed and staffed by the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA.

From the 2nd floor, proceed right and down to the ticketing area using the steps, escalator or elevator. HIA has 5 airlines and typically serves around 1.5 million passengers each year. Ticketing is where passengers go to get their boarding passes to get through security and onto the airplane. It is also where they check any suitcases that will go underneath the plane during their flight.

When you check a suitcase, it goes on a conveyer belt behind the ticket counter and takes a ride on nearly one mile of track through the basement, where it is screened to make sure there is nothing dangerous in the suitcase. The system can process up to 840 suitcases per hour and it takes about 4 minutes to get to the baggage makeup room, where airlines collect the suitcases and load them on the plane. Every suitcase has a barcode, which allows for easy tracking and helps make sure it gets on the right airplane.

Walk to the end of the ticketing to the big windows and you will see an antique car that is on display from the Antique Automotive Museum in Hershey. More information about the car and museum are located with the display.

As you look out the windows, you will see some smaller airplanes parked at our Fixed Base Operator (FBO), AvFlight. They handle private aircraft that come to the airport, as well as refueling the larger commercial planes. From this window you can also see the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) control tower and a large blue water tower.

The control tower is just over 100 feet tall and provides the air traffic controllers a clear view of the airport so they can direct the pilots to land and take off safely. Additional controllers monitor the radar in a lower part of the tower and work with pilots on their flight plans. (Please note, unfortunately tours of the tower are not available.)

The water tower is one of two at the airport and holds 400,000 gallons of water. (The other tower holds 1 million gallons!) HIA also has its own wastewater and sewer facility, like a town or municipality.

From the end of ticketing, turn around and walk toward baggage claim, staying on the 1st floor. As you walk through the airport, notice the different overhead signs giving you directions. When you are flying, it is important to pay attention to the signs at the airport, as they will help direct you to where you need to go. You will also see some electronic signs that have flight information on them – we call them FIDS – Flight Information Displays. These will let you know what gate your plane will be or which bag claim will have your suitcase.

You will pass the police station on your right. HIA has their own police force who help make sure passengers and employees are safe and following the rules. HIA also has its own Fire Department which is located at the west end of the airport. (Please note, unfortunately tours are not available).

Proceed straight toward bag claim. HIA has 4 baggage claims. There are signs at each one noting what airline uses the claim belt and digital signs that show your flight number. Once your bags are unloaded from the plane, they are driven around to a tunnel that runs behind the bag claim area and unloaded onto the bag claim belt.

Also in bag claim are displays from the Whitaker Center, Landis Valley Museum, the National Civil war museum, and a tractor that belonged to President Eisenhower from the National Park Service in Gettysburg.

From bag claim, you will now head to the observation deck. Using the elevator located beside Bag Claim 1 and the vending machines, take the elevator to the 3rd floor. Go to the far corner and you will find the observation deck. Here you can see the runway and planes parked at Concourse A and B gates (usually Delta and United). There are also historic pictures from when the airport was a military base.

The runway at HIA is 10,001 feet long (almost 2 miles!) and 200 feet wide, and can handle any size aircraft, including the world's largest military cargo planes. It is also not uncommon to see some of the planes from the Presidential fleet such as "Air Force One" performing touch and goes at HIA, which is when pilots practice taking off and landing the planes.

At the east end of the airport, there is a large cargo facility where UPS and FedEx operate.

Also at the east end is the 193rd Special Operations Wing of the Air National Guard and their C-130 air craft. The ground HIA sits on was once an active military base called Olmsted Air Force Base. More information on the history of HIA is available on our website www.flyhia.com

As you look out the observation deck windows, you may see commercial planes, cargo airplanes, or smaller private planes. You may also see the tugs that move suitcases around, refueling trucks, or other general airport vehicles working on maintenance items or patrolling the airfield. You will also see a variety of painted lines that tell the pilots where the planes should go on the taxiways, and lead-in lines at the gates that show the pilot where to park the planes.

Every day is unique at HIA and you never know what you might spot!

Thank you for visiting HIA! If you have any additional questions, please stop by the airport administration office on the 3rd floor beside the observation deck, or the information desk located in bag claim.