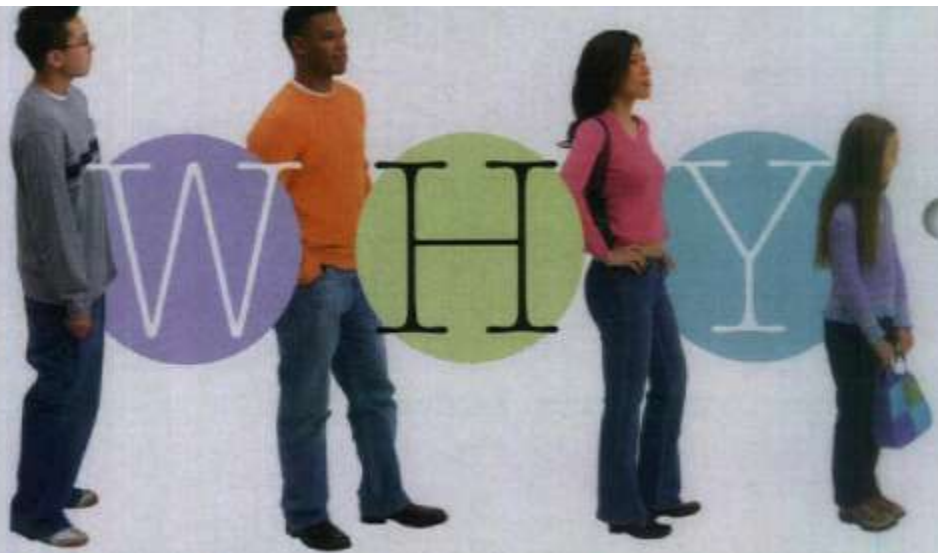


We spend a whopping six months of our lives queuing. Here's how to avoid a queue without incurring the wrath of others!



SHOPPING

Supermarkets

This is the biggest queue trigger – costing us almost an hour each month. 'Saturday is still the busiest day overall – but shorter operating hours make Sunday more intense hour by hour,' says Richard Dodds of the British Retail Consortium.

The best day to do a big shop is Wednesday afternoon between 2pm and 4pm. 'Shoppers stock up on Thursdays and Fridays, then restock on Mondays and Tuesdays,' Richard explains.

Shopping for something specific? 'Phone ahead to check the item's in stock – then ask if you can pay and collect at customer service – cutting the checkout queue,' advises organisational expert Jamie Novak (www.jamienovak.com). 'Remember to always take the assistant's name to save time in store.'

Adopt 'me-first' body language

You're heading for the checkout at exactly the same time as another person – and you're fed up with being polite. 'Establish and maintain the attitude that it's your turn to go first,' says body language expert Elizabeth Kuhnke (www.kuhnkecommunication.com). 'Walk with purpose, claim your space, and don't make eye contact, unless, of course, the other person is a struggling mum, elderly or disabled.'

The cashpoint

Avoid Fridays – when cashpoint use peaks (particularly between 12pm and 1pm) says Sandra Quinn from Link. Instead, get your dosh on a Sunday (the quietest day of the week) or request cashback at the supermarket checkout. 'Studies show we're not using the service any more than we were 11 years ago when it was first introduced,' she says.

SOCIALISING

At the bar

'A smile always helps,' says Daniel Crebese, president of the UK Bartenders' Guild. 'And a tip in the previous round might refresh the bartender's memory and disposition. Being stroppy will probably lead to a longer wait.' Wetherspoon's Eddie Gershon agrees: 'Give a big confident smile and try to catch the bartender's eye,' he says. 'Waving money around is a big no-no.'

Restaurants

'Beat the queues and save money by eating slightly earlier,' says bargain queen Jasmine Birtles (www.moneymaggie.com). 'So book a lunchtime table for 12pm rather than 1pm – and dinner straight from work rather than at 7.30pm. Lots of restaurants offer special deals if you eat before 6pm.' There are also ways to avoid a kitchen backlog. 'Skip the chat and browse the menu as soon as you sit down – so you can order food with your drinks,' says lifestyle manager Sue Reeve (www.consider-it-done.co.uk).

Coffee shop

'The trick is to know which, and when, stores are quieter,' says Costa's Melissa Mace. 'Between 7am and 9am, retail-park coffee shops are relatively quiet whereas station branches will be busy with commuters – yet at lunchtime, it works the opposite way.' Shopping-centre coffee break? After 5.30pm is the quietest time to nab a queue-free latte.

Cinema

'Bypass the queues at the box office by booking tickets online, then collecting from the cinema's ticket machine,' says Sue. Visit www.uk-click.co.uk/cinema/tixon.html for online booking websites.





ERRANDS

Doctor and dentist

'Nab the first appointment of the morning or afternoon before schedules start over-running,' says Jamie. 'Ask for any forms to be sent to you in advance, and phone before setting off to check appointments are running on time.'

Banks

We all know that banks are busiest at lunchtime – but there's also a flurry just before weekday closing times, when small businesses deposit takings, according to the British Bankers' Association. The quietest time? Wednesday afternoon – a leftover habit from the tradition of half-day closing. Metro (www.metrobankonline.co.uk) aims to banish customer queues by opening seven days a week for longer hours and doubling lunchtime bank staff.

Post Office

Don't stand in line unnecessarily. If you only need stamps, use the post office machine or buy from stores such as Superdrug. And if you need to post an item, find a branch with a self-service Post and Go machine (which weighs your parcel and prints the correct stamps). 'Seek out sub post offices tucked away in the back of shops,' says Jasmine. 'They're usually much quieter, but people forget they exist.' Some branches offer extended opening – visit www.postoffice.co.uk for details.

Call centres

'Avoid automated queues by not pressing any telephone buttons when prompted,' says Jasmine. 'That way, you get to speak to a real person.'

Customers follow the same patterns, says First Direct customer services manager Moira Neil. 'Our busiest times over 24 hours are 8am to 10am on summer weekdays.' At weekends, times to avoid are Saturday and Sunday mornings from 10am till early afternoon, late afternoon on Saturday, and from 7pm on Sunday.

TRAVELLING

Pulling out into a slow-moving queue of traffic

'You can't speak – so you have to rely on body language,' says etiquette expert William Hanson (www.williamhanson.co.uk). 'Make eye contact and over-exaggerate an apologetic expression. Always say 'thank you' and repay that kindness to another driver.'

Traffic jams

New technology is your friend. Many car radios are now fitted with RDS (Radio Data System) alerts, which transmit traffic reports from local radio stations. For live traffic news, call RAC's helpline on 64644; or the AA's 84322 (from mobile phones), or visit www.bbc.co.uk/travelnews/ to check your route is clear. You can also receive text alerts of jams with AA Roadwatch (visit www.theaa.com). Beware extended bank holiday traffic jams. Roads are busier from the Thursday before and until the Tuesday afterwards, says Vicki Burn from the RAC. Knock ten minutes off your journey by carrying a passenger and accessing car-sharing lanes in busy areas. Google '2carshare' for local car sharing.



How much time we spend in queues...

Bank 27 minutes a month

At the cash point
25 minutes a month

Post Office
27 minutes a month

Buying a drink at the bar
35 minutes a month