Are We Airborne Yet?

Airport delays are getting worse. Don’t forget to pack your patience.

It’s not your imagination: Air travel has never sucked more. The year 2007 was the worst for flight delays since the government began keeping stats more than a decade ago. In 2002, 17 percent of flights arrived late (defined by the FAA as delayed 15 minutes or more). Last summer it was nearly a third, and travel in 2008 won’t be much better. Blame congestion, in part: More passengers on more planes means that a minor hitch at JFK can ripple across the entire northeast. But most of the trouble can be traced to antiquated air traffic control technology. Until a new $22 billion satellite-based system comes online—look for it in 2025 at the earliest—try to fly out of Oakland. —MATTHEW SIJALK