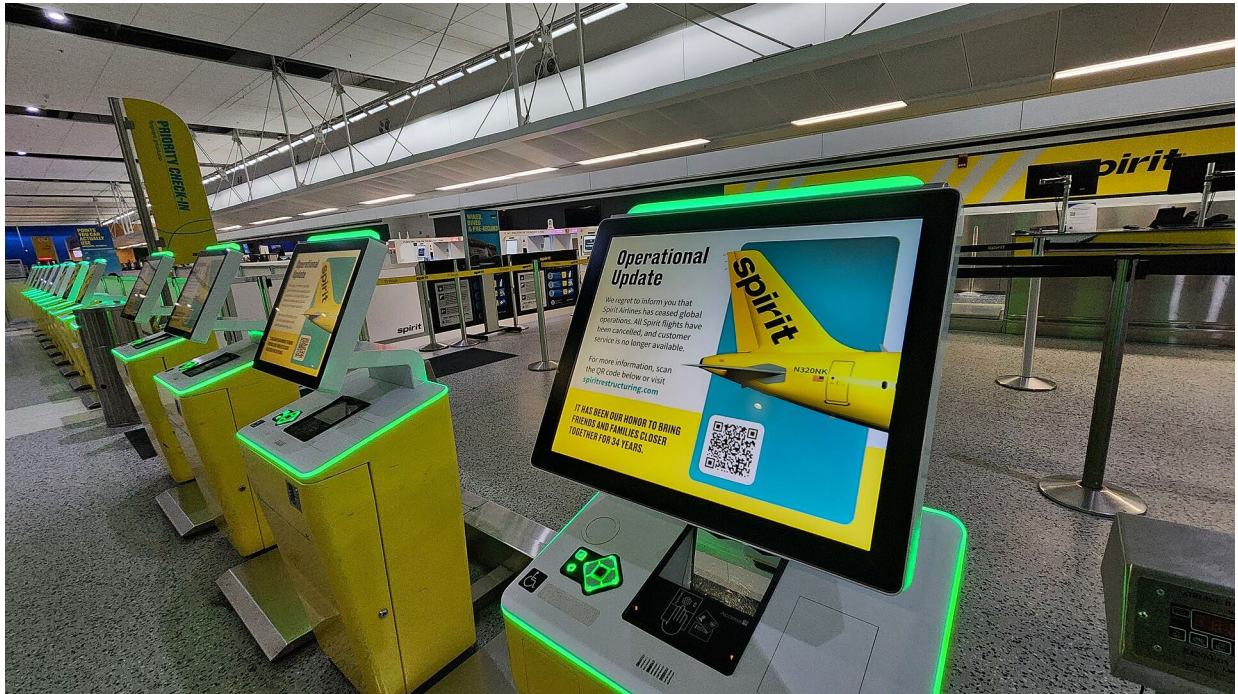


What Spirit's Collapse Means for Atlantic City's Future

by Katie Avagliano

Flying back home out of Orlando International Airport, my sisters and I were greeted with yellow Spirit signs still flashing behind empty ticket counters. At Orlando International Airport, which averages over 500 departures on dozens of airlines, Spirit Airlines' overnight collapse meant rebookings and cordoning off a section of the airport.



(Disused check out counter)

We were some of the passengers rebooked, because after decades of non-stop service there are currently no flights from Orlando to Atlantic City. In fact, in May and June of 2026 there are almost no flights in or out Atlantic City International Airport in the scramble after the collapse of the dominant airline.

Atlantic City Airport began expanding into commercial air service in 1992, and while other airlines have been in and out of the area, Spirit, the budget airline, would serve South Jersey for 34 years. For those of us who have spread from South Jersey to one of Spirit's non-stop routes, alarm bells began sounding in April 2024 when the airline announced the closure of its Atlantic City crew base. Following bankruptcies, unsuccessful mergers, and facing sharply rising fuel prices, Spirit left a gap in Atlantic City when it closed overnight in May 2026.

[Accounting for 72% of Atlantic City Airport's passengers](#), airport officials predict that regular travel won't resume until 2027 at the earliest. Even with competitors Breeze and Allegiant picking up the mostly-Florida routes abandoned by the loss of Spirit, demand is expected to outstrip supply for several months until routes become reestablished. Passengers

used to paying as low as \$30 for a Spirit ticket to Disney World will be shelling out \$150 or more for the same one-way flight on Breeze.

The situation could be worse. Breeze announced plans to move into Atlantic City on May 2nd, the same day Spirit stopped all service. For Arnold Palmer International Airport in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, commercial flights have stopped completely. Spirit accounted for 100% of Latrobe's commercial service, and there are no new airlines stepping in to replace their routes. With [charter flights also in jeopardy at Latrobe](#), it has become a case study in how the ripple effect of one company's collapse can cut a whole region off from air travel.



(Atlantic City International Airport entrance)

"It's always been about tourism," says Tim Kroll, director of Atlantic City International Airport. South Jersey's economy has always been tied up around its Shore towns and linked to Atlantic City, which has struggled to stay relevant as gambling has moved from in-person to iPhones. Losing a direct link to customers would be a death knell for the struggling shore town.

Yet 85% of Atlantic City International's customers were locals, using it for convenient vacations. Atlantic City, through Spirit, has always prioritized Florida travel, with rare routes to Montreal or Atlanta or Austin popping up seasonally.

For many, Atlantic City's rocky immediate future is an inconvenience, the difference between driving down the road to travel and finding a ride to Philadelphia, Trenton, or Newark. But for others the loss of Spirit airlines means not taking the vacation at all, not visiting Grandma in Florida, not going much of anywhere until things all shake out.