

Flying Tales

By: Robin Pascoe

A customer agent for a major international airline based in Asia went undercover recently to determine how his company's service stacked up against the competition in the lucrative, long-haul flying, multi-vacation expatriate market.

He knew the quickest access to his customers' opinions was to crash a dinner party. It was common knowledge among colleagues that flying tales – one more terrifying the next – were considered de rigeur expat conversation.

As a result of research gathered, the agent was able to compose a comprehensive memo to his superiors which was inadvertently leaked to this newspaper.

TO: YOW

FROM: WOW

SUBJECT: Frequent Flyers

Following instructions, I infiltrated an expatriate entertainment to ascertain the current ranking of our company among foreign residents using our airline.

Key information obtained: ABSOLUTELY NOBODY WILL FLY ON OUR AIRLINE BECAUSE IT IS SO BAD. There was general agreement, endorsed by the evening's hostess to quote AVOID IT AT ALL COSTS end quote. The bad news, however, is balanced out by a piece of good news: expatriates are apparently dissatisfied with every other airline too.

I am not in a position to describe faults found with our airline since other than mention of widespread boycott our name did not come up. I am able to relay useful intelligence gathered pertaining to non-safety issues.

Business Class Amenities: Male Expat A (middle-aged business manager, ate a lot at dinner, ignored wife's opinions on all subjects and therefore qualifies as average sample) had just returned from _____ using that upstart airline which was target of our last covert intelligence gathering. He reported to the other dinner guests that in order to cut costs, _____ had eliminated all business class amenities except for in-flight socks.

Expat A said quote DO THEY THINK WE CAN'T AFFORD OUR OWN SOCKS? end quote. Short-lived debate followed on merits of socks versus complimentary toothbrushes. Unanimous agreement that breath take priority over feet, especially on flights where sleeping occurs. This, I believe, is of value to our own discussions last month on subject of mouthwash. I told you so.

Mothers Traveling with Children: Conversation initiated by Female Expat B (thirty-something mother who recently crossed Pacific traveling solo with young child and therefore also an average sample), confirms flight attendants on _____ continue to be vilified as child-hating, anti-family, hostile shrews. Quote THEY WOKE MY SON UP IN THE MIDDLE OF A TEN HOUR FLIGHT TO GIVE HIM

THE COLOURING BOOK THEY FORGOT TO GIVE HIM WHEN WE PRE-BOARDED! end quote. Expat B's comments drew much sympathy and outrage from other women at the party who were unanimous in reporting industry-wide family unfriendly acts aimed at mothers traveling without fathers are still being carried out.

The good news is that fathers traveling without mothers continue to receive special status and considerations. This unwritten industry regulation is still being unofficially enforced by all carriers.

Point 5, I believe, does impact directly on our company in two strategic policy areas. The first is the request from the Western Chamber of Commerce (currently under review), to eliminate reservations for all children under age of 12 unless verifiable proof of in-flight good behavior can be offered with credit card payment. The second area is the upcoming sexual discrimination hearing instigated by single mother passenger who claims she is not only systematically ignored by flight attendants but deemed unsuitable for first class upgrades due to her sex.

As you had indicated in our meeting prior to my field study, expatriates cannot shut up about past flights. Can it be possible that every expatriate has almost died in an harrowing in-flight experience? Suspect some flying tales border on outright lies. To wit: One dinner guest actually claimed quote I HAD A HEART ATTACK SOMEWHERE OVER RUSSIA AND WAS REVIVED BY MY SEAT MATE BEFORE THE MOVIE CAME ON end quote.

I hope these observations are of some value to the company. For the record, I am formally requesting attendance at forthcoming fear of flying seminar.

Signed, your faithful customer agent.

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