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Saturday Espresso Break

By Bree Shirvell | Email the author | March 12, 2011

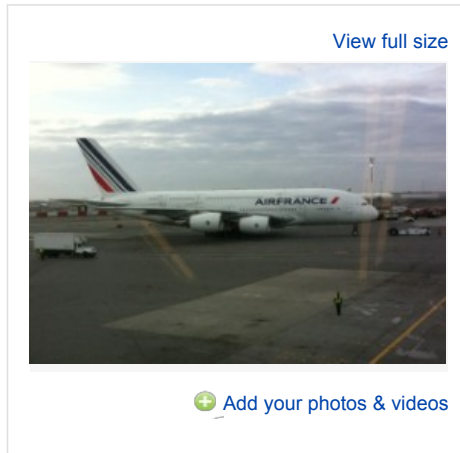
Opinion

On Board And Off The Airbus A380

A Message For Airplane Companies, Employees And Passengers

4 Comments

Airline travel. Those may be two of the most hated words put together. But honestly, I don't mind airline travel. I love airports. Where else do you get see businessmen in three-piece suits eating ice cream at 7 a.m., pay in dollars and get change in Euros, and watch people of every nationality, shape and size take off the shoes and stand in line? I love the bizarreness of it, the equality, and the potential. Still even my love of airports was tested last Saturday when my flight sat on the tarmac for hours and was then cancelled. Throughout the experience I learned several things.



International flights can sit on the tarmac for as long as they like. You know that rule that gives airlines hefty fines if they keep passengers sitting in the plane on the tarmac for more than three hours? It only applies to domestic flights. This I did not know until I sat on the tarmac at JFK International Airport for close to four hours.

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There is such a thing as too much honesty. With travel delays, timely and honest communication is key. Still, there are some things I don't need to know. And on international flights, where technical details are being translated into multiple languages, the information comes in its most straightforward and raw form. Instead of "we are experiencing technical difficulties," I got "the ground crew was studying the procedure for how to check to see if the engine is okay." Deep breathe.

Parents make wonderful travel companions. They don't have to be your own. But parents, especially sleep-deprived ones of young children, are the best friends you can have when it comes to air travel delays. They're more likely to throw the type of fit in public that I will always be too embarrassed to throw, demanding that not just their family but also everyone on board receives free food. And really isn't everything a little better with free food?

Airline employees are people too. This is important to remember, especially when it's 11 p.m., and the airline cancels a flight full of over 400 people. It wasn't the decision of the person who got stuck handing out hotel vouchers explaining that the next available flight might not be for four days. The airline just called some of those employees into work, and dealing with 400 angry people isn't exactly the dream job. Treating them with respect will get you far—possibly as far as two of the last eight remaining seats on the next flight.

Airline employees may be people too, but the customer is always right. Or at least should be. It may not be their fault the airline cancelled your flight, but you still deserve to be treated with respect, sympathy, and kindness. And sometimes you have to politely remind them of that.

It's just a plane. *Still it must have been cool just to sit on it.* For the entire time we were on the phone trying to change our flights around with Air France and Delta the guy keep saying that. I know

it's a relatively new plane, seats over 500 passengers on two levels, but after the first 15 minutes, the novelty wears off and it's just a plane with the same small legroom and recycled air.

It's a first world problem. A few years ago at a book signing in New York the author was talking about how he called his dad to complain when the Hollywood writers turning his book into a movie wanted to make changes he didn't agree with. He said his dad's response was well that's a first-world problem. When your flight is delayed and then cancelled and you're stranded sleep-deprived and hungry, those might not be words that come to mind, but really it's good to keep it in perspective. My trip didn't start off the way I hoped, but I spent several lovely days in France eating way too much delicious food so really my cancelled flight wasn't anything more than a small headache.

What's your best/worst air travel experience? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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About this column: Musings over espresso and other thoughts on the happenings in Stonington, Pawcatuck and Mystic.