

## Jetiquette: Being Polite on a Flight

High-fliers may become heavy-sighers as soon as air travellers transgress with a mid-air faux pas

"Love thy neighbour" is a commonplace invocation for companionable co-existence, however, "loathe thy neighbour" would be a far more appropriate axiom for most of our day-to-day experiences with our nearest, but far from dearest.

Whether it is mooching, uninvited, into your parking space, paying for after-hours sax lessons for their transparently unmusical offspring or simply having a covetable convertible, frequently those most proximate to us prove the least palatable. And that is at ground level.

Inevitably every incremental increase in altitude does little to improve our attitude. At 40,000 feet above sea level, even the most trivial of trespasses by a selfish cabin-sharer may prove grounds for much grinding of teeth and a grudge that will not budge during your overnight flight.

With the number of virgin fliers flying now verging on the ridiculous, some US airlines have felt the need to ensure inter-passenger politeness with a guide to just what is right mid-flight.

Make of it what you will but Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific has yet to follow in the footsteps of these resourceful US airlines.

"Our customers do not need guidelines on flying etiquette," says assistant corporate communications manager Maria Yu.



However, observing a few basic etiquette rules for flying makes the jet setting lifestyle more pleasant for everyone. These include respecting other people's personal space and respecting your fellow passengers' desire for a quiet, stress-free flight. Not all passengers are willing to engage in long drawn out conversations with a stranger. Many would rather sleep, read or watch the in-flight movies. Even if you are an outgoing and sociable person, the person next to you might not be, and could be too polite to tell you to shut up.

"Do as you would be done by" is never a better maxim than when it is adopted mid-Pacific. If you do engage in

conversation there are certain topics it is generally deemed imprudent to dwell on. These include recent surgical operations, comments on racial or political issues and any speculation as to the likelihood of a mid-air collision.

While commercial airlines in the region might be reluctant to introduce etiquette guidelines, the dramatic increase in executive air travel means that some local private jet corporations readily acknowledge the importance of such strategies.

Compared to flying commercially, private aviation definitely affords its passengers more freedom, but that does



**“Every incremental increase in altitude does little to improve our tendency to love our neighbour”**

not mean passengers can do whatever they please, explains Justin Lee Firestone, CEO of the Hong Kong-based Asia Jet.

“Basic flying etiquette is to follow cruise instructions,” Firestone says. “If we encounter unruly passengers, the pilot will have to step in, just like on a commercial aircraft. If the flight attendant is not getting compliance, then the pilot will go and speak to them.”

One point worth noting is that higher altitudes increase the potency of alcoholic beverages and this, when coupled with the liberal attitude displayed by many airlines in administering the miniature Merlots, can all too easily result in a state of rapid inebriation and a tendency to get lippy with the flight crew.

But remember: if you do not want to get kicked off a plane, do not be rude to flight attendants.

Being rude to ground staff is also a major no-no. “Reservations staff work long hours. Delays happen; things happen in aviation that are out of their control. We have no patience for clients who become insulting or use profanity,” Firestone says.

Tidying up after yourself is another area of flying etiquette that Firestone believes needs stressing for private jet travel.

“Commercial airlines have many stewardesses to clean up after you, but with most private jets, there are less flight attendants to clean up after you. It’s a

common courtesy not to leave behind a mess. We have had passengers absolutely trash planes.”

There are also clients who will help themselves to anything on a private jet. “Anything that’s not fastened will be taken. I knew a client who would bring a duffel bag onto a flight and take things. The client was paying US\$10,000 an hour, so he thought he was entitled to it. Items included headsets, chips, liquor bottles, jelly beans, sprays and basic medicine,” Firestone adds.

While it’s true that one of the great advantages of flying privately is having some flexibility in your departure time, another basic courtesy that should be observed is punctuality. It is rude to leave your pilot and crew waiting for you on the tarmac.

“Most of the time, we’re just asking for basic courtesy, such as no smoking and be on time. Lateness is really looked down upon,” says Firestone.

If you are unavoidably detained it is good etiquette to let the airline know and give at least some idea of when they can expect you. “From the etiquette standpoint, giving us a heads up is a standard courtesy,” says Firestone. “If you’re late and don’t call ahead, it will create logistical problems.”

One fundamental difference between commercial flights and private ones is

that there is direct communication with the pilots, which means that passengers should refrain from creating any unnecessary disturbance.

“Ninety-eight per cent of our jets do not have a cabin door,” says Firestone. “Because there’s no cabin door, loud music, for instance, can affect the concentration of the pilots. With commercial flights, there are videos about flight safety. With private jets, it is the responsibility of the pilot. Because there is no cabin door, passengers can speak to pilots. But we ask that pilots not be disturbed during the first and last ten minutes of a flight.”

However, unlike commercial airlines where unruly children can make the flight seem an eternity, boisterous or annoying offspring tend not to be such a big problem on private jets. “Kids who fly private jets are used to flying and are experienced and responsible. They know how to carry themselves in the appropriate way,” observes Firestone.

Another flying etiquette that has been in the headlines in the Hong Kong papers are some passengers’ refusal to place their brand name handbags under the seat in front. This is a safety rule that everyone should follow, no matter how long the waiting list was for that particular clench. “Of course, it’s not acceptable on commercial flights, where there are hundreds of passengers flying with you,” he says. “But if you’re a guest on a private jet, it’s also best to pack light. Some large Louis Vuitton bags just don’t fit. If each passenger brings more than two bags on a flight, then the 20 big, hard suitcases simply aren’t going to fit.” ■