



TAILPIECES by Joel Chusid

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Snakes on a Plane, the Sequel

Once again something small has grounded something big. In this case, a few snakes took on a Boeing 737-800, grounding it. Four of the 12 pythons in the cargo compartment, juveniles at that, managed to get out of their "appropriate" container on a QANTAS flight enroute from Alice Springs to Melbourne, Australia. Baggage handlers were unable to locate the stray reptiles, and the plane was taken out of service for fumigation. The continuing flight to Sydney was cancelled.

Speaking of Critters...

Pet lovers, rejoice! Pets have had their own hotels and even spas, so why shouldn't they have their own airline? At press time, Pet Airways had announced service scheduled to begin in July for safely and comfortably transporting pets, dogs and cats only, between New York and Los Angeles, using a fleet of up to 20 planes from twin engine

props to Boeing 727s. Human passengers are not allowed. Pets travel in the main cabin in their container, and a pet attendant checks on them every 15 minutes. Service is planned coast to coast with stops in Denver, Chicago and Washington, DC. The website, www.petairways.com, is more functional than some passenger airlines, featuring online booking with a few personal questions like weight and height. The site offers flight status and tracking and a pet travel guide. Introductory fares are offered at \$149 each way, and there is a pet lounge and a Paws Club. But don't get visions of a really creative aircraft livery. Pet Airways is not exactly an airline, but an innovative service using Suburban Airfreight, a licensed carrier based in Omaha. The website boasts some prominent endorsements from veterinarians and former airline executives, and it has some impressive partners including Kimpton Hotels and 1-800-PetMeds. While announced close to April Fool's Day, Pet Airways is not a joke! With airlines scrambling for innovative ways to increase revenue in niche markets, JetBlue also has come up with its own program targeting passengers with pets. Called "Jet Paws", it features bonus points and has several partners as well. See www.jetblue.com/jetpaws.

No Hidden Extras

In a publicity stunt just before St. Patrick's Day to promote low fares published on new routes from Gatwick Airport with "no hidden extras," Aer Lingus offered free tickets to people who stripped down to a modest "shamrock" that the airline provided in central London. The airline expected 1,000 participants, but only about 400 showed up. Police had warned if anyone stripped totally, they'd be fined or arrested. A few did, however, to the delight of passersby. At least the story made the main news pages.

Online Uniform Museum

KLM Purser Cliff Muskiet began collecting flight attendant uniforms as a child and now boasts a collection of more than 827 sets from 354 airlines at last count. He has lovingly photographed the uniforms on mannequins and exhibits them on his website, www.uniformfreak.com. While some people collect timetables, menus or air sickness bags, Muskiet visits airline offices worldwide in search of uniforms to add to his stash. The collection is shown alphabetically, with years of use identified, from Adria Airways to XL Airways, and it even includes scarves, belt buckles and wings. While some are one of a kind, there are some nostalgic ones. I swear, I don't recall the yellow ones that were used by

Eastern Airlines from 1977-1980 or the blue and white plaid uniforms that American flight attendants wore from 1974-1977 even though I worked for the company part of that time. You can breeze through the uniforms quickly, and they tend to begin to look alike, almost mundane, even the ones from Hooters Air. But the Pucci-designed Braniff International uniforms from the 1960s and 1970s still stand out as the most original. In a previous column (AL102, Nov/Dec 2006), I reported how a former Braniff flight attendant had put her career uniform collection up for sale for \$250,000. Not sure what happened after that. (Thanks to Henry Hartevelt for the website tip.)

On Time or Pay Up

It's not only airlines that are under pressure to be on time, but passengers as well. Twenty-two year old student Samantha Hydes arrived at Calgary International Airport for her 8:00 a.m., flight on Northwest Airlines to Florida at 7:01 a.m. She was informed that she was one minute late and that check-in had closed one minute earlier. The tardiness cost her \$530 for a ticket re-issue when the airline refused to check her in and she had to rebook on Delta five hours later. One minute? Granted, airlines need time to deal with international formalities, but this is a little ridiculous! The incident spawned all sorts of comments online, pro and con. One needs only to google Ms. Hydes' name to read how people weighed in.

In Miami, a man running late for his flight to Los Angeles flashed a fake sky marshal's badge at the gate, and employees let him board although the flight was ready to push back. On board, real sky marshals kicked him off. While he avoided arrest, the disgruntled man then went to an airport bar and loudly began complaining about missing his flight. Bad move - that's when he was arrested for impersonating an officer.

Really a Premium Seat?

British travel website *Skyscanner* asked its users what they would pay extra for when traveling, and it was surprised with the results. Internet access was deemed worth paying for by 15% of the respondents, 14% said they would pay extra to be seated away from families and children, and extra legroom was deemed worth a premium by 13%. But the largest service these people would be willing to pay for? Sixteen percent said they would like to sit in the cockpit! In my early airline days, I rode jump seat several times. It's not that comfortable, folks! And in this 9/11 world, the chances of a cockpit ride are about as likely as airlines putting hot meals and free drinks back in economy class. ✈

