



## TAILPIECES by Joel Chusid

Joel Chusid is the General Manager, North America for Hainan Airlines, the People's Republic of China's fourth largest airline. An airline veteran and consultant, he has also contributed numerous feature articles to *Airliners*.

Contact him at [joel@airliners.tv](mailto:joel@airliners.tv). (Unusual and interesting news items are always welcome!)

### *Second Life for a Boeing 747*

Old airliners are like people who have retired. It used to be assumed when their working days were over, they were put out to pasture, or in the case of the airplane, sent to the desert. (Some people retire to the desert, too.) Most retirees nowadays, however, are not content to remain idle, and they do something else to keep busy. And so it is that many airplanes also find a useful life despite their clipped wings. Some become restaurants or homes, some serve as cabin safety trainers, some become artificial reefs, and some end up in aviation museums.

Now a Singapore Airlines Boeing 747-212B (tail number 9V-SQE cn 21162/283 now named "Liv") has a new life as a youth hostel in Sweden. The plane flew from March of 1976 to July of 2002. Entrepreneur Oscar Dios opened the hostel this past January just outside Stockholm's Arlanda International Airport. Hostels have been made out of a variety of structures including schools, jails, courthouses, lighthouses and even a large sailing ship (also in Stockholm), but this is the first time a 747 has been made into a 25 room hostel. And it is not your grandfather's hostel either, with rooms ranging from four bed dormitories and private rooms to the Cockpit Suite on the upper deck. All rooms feature Wi-Fi and flat screen televisions. There is a café, open even to those who are not staying overnight. The upper deck First Class lounge is still there with refurbished seats, and the

staff even wear cabin crew uniforms. The jumbo hostel received global publicity, and Dios is now hoping to franchise the idea for other airports – the ultimate in recycling of old airplanes!

This is particularly nostalgic for me since my first hostelling experience was in Sweden as a teenager. I served on the Board of Directors of Hostelling International-USA for nine years and was an airline buff from an early age. Find more information and photos or make a reservation on [www.jumbohostel.com](http://www.jumbohostel.com).

### *A Long Way to Go for a Big Mac*

Passengers on a six hour flight from Mexico City to Seattle one day in January were anxious to get to their destination, but the Sea-Tac Airport was fogged in, necessitating the Aeromexico Boeing 737 be diverted to Portland. The airline does not serve the airport, and reportedly customs and immigration officers were unavailable to clear the arrival, so the plane sat on the tarmac. Passengers became upset and demanded to be let off claiming they were being held hostage. They were threatened with arrest by law enforcement officials should they deplane. Paramedics were called to assist some ill passengers, and since all were hungry, they sent out for Big Macs for everyone. Then the door was closed and the flight returned to Mexico City where some people were stranded for ten hours before they could return to Seattle. Their story was told on both local and national news when they finally made it back. Aeromexico was apologetic.

Coincidentally, a similar situation took place a couple of months earlier when a TACA Boeing 737 flying from San Salvador to Los Angeles was diverted to Ontario Airport, also due to fog, and customs and immigration were not available. The fatigued crew deplaned, and the 192 passengers were forced to overnight on the airplane, under guard, but without food and water. Seventy-five outraged passengers have filed lawsuits.

There is no doubt we will be hearing more about these two cases.

### *No Smoking, Seriously*

I remember the days of smoking on airplanes, but that seems like a long time ago. Some international carriers were a little slower to adapt, but generally it is now taboo globally. "No Smoking" signs are no longer turned on or off – they are permanent. People who disregard the ban are usually arrested upon arrival, and punishment can be fines or in some cases, incarceration. Saudi Arabian Airlines banned smoking on its domestic flights nearly 20 years ago, and its

international flights went smoke free in 1999. Saudi Arabian Airlines takes it seriously. In February a Sudanese man lit up on a flight from Gurayat to Jeddah and refused to put the cigarette out. He was arrested upon landing and was sentenced by a judge to 30 lashes. It was a lighter sentence than another inflight smoker received in the country last year – 50 lashes. Ouch!

### *Pre-Flight Social Networking*

Passengers can chat from seat to seat on Virgin America flights and make new friends, but Air France-KLM claims to have launched the first airline social networking site, [www.bluenity.com](http://www.bluenity.com). The site lets their Flying Blue frequent flyer members network with passengers before they even get to the airport. In addition to exchanging restaurant and hotel intelligence, they can even arrange to share taxis to and from the airport. One can check if a fellow member is going to be on the same flight. With the rapid adoption of social networking sites, Air France-KLM projects to have 300,000 users within a year.

### *Innovative Charges that Didn't Fly*

The list of extra charges being bestowed on airline passengers these days goes well beyond fuel surcharges, checked baggage fees and inflight sales of inflight food and drink. Despite a short-lived Ryanair lavatory fee idea brouhaha, a few other innovative charges have recently made the press and were rescinded. Spirit Airlines, in its emulation of Ryanair and Easyjet, tried to impose a "natural occurrence interruption fee" and an "international service recovery fee." The U.S. Department of Transportation did not find those applications reasonable and fined the airline. British carrier Jet2 charged a double amputee passenger \$14 to take an extra set of prosthetic legs, causing a media outcry and forcing the airline to refund the fees. I am sure there will be plenty more innovative ways to "unbundle" fares. Seat cushions? Overhead lights? US Airways became the latest one to charge for blankets and pillows, following JetBlue's example, which actually I think is a good, hygienic idea.

### *And Now Flight Rationing*

And if the charges mentioned above didn't fly, here is an idea that one hopes does not get off the ground. In the United Kingdom, the so-called "environment czar" Adair Turner suggested that the government limit British citizens to just a few trips per year by air for their vacations to reduce carbon monoxide emissions. Needless to say, this sparked a torrent of negative press.