



TAILPIECES

by Joel Chusid

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

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

A Bear of a Charge

That innocuous term “ancillary revenues” is how some airlines have sought and been successful in making up for cost increases and yield declines. The idea of charging for virtually everything challenges the imagination sometimes with “excess” baggage charges being replaced by simple fees to check even just one bag, fees for specific seat selections, soft drinks, food, water, pillows, check-in, booking online or not booking online and “natural occurrences.” Now there is a new trend – fees on top of fees – as United and US Airways have added a \$5 fee for baggage if you do not prepay for it online. The list goes on. Hotels have not been left out of this trend, sometimes charging inflated resort fees equal to the cost of what the room rate was just a few years ago. Outrageous telephone charges used to serve this purpose, but with nearly everyone equipped with cellular phones, that bedside phone does not get much use anymore. This is the kind of stuff that the media and especially bloggers love to hate.

The now infamous Ryanair toilet charge appears to be headed for reality if regulators don't intervene. The airline is hoping to remove two of the three toilets on its Boeing 737s. Boeing is rumored to be looking for an alternative lavatory door that can be coin operated. Ryanair's next move may be to

offer pre-flight diapers. When Ryanair drastically reduced its check-in counters recently, thousands of passengers missed flights and police had to be called to “assist in customer service.” The next plan, being studied by both Ryanair and China's Spring Airlines, is to offer standing room space, sort of a stool to lean on with a harness. Stay tuned. One of the most outrageous charges that caught the public's eye was Easyjet's recent insistence on charging a passenger \$14 for an excess carry on – their child's teddy bear. Bah, humbug!

The “Hotelicopter”

Here is another innovative idea, and it flies – but will it be a success? The hotelicopter has 18 soundproof rooms with queen size beds, coffee makers, WiFi and all the comforts of a five star hotel room. At press time it was scheduled for itineraries in California, Europe and the Caribbean. You do not actually fly it across the ocean (although it has to get across somehow) with passengers, but instead use it as your home away from home. Like it? Well, sorry to say it is not taking off any time soon since it was done as an April Fool's prank/marketing stunt to attract attention to a hotel booking site. The pictures are quite realistic. It is amazing what some people can do with Photoshop and some pictures of the Yotel and the Soviet Mil V-12 helicopter. See it on www.snopes.com and various other sites.

Laviators Unite!

There's a new breed of aviation photographers, sort of. These are the people who make a hobby of taking pictures in airliner lavatories; hence the name. The small space and the double mirror reflections make this a natural aviation photo booth. While people have been doing this for years, it has finally become a recognized “art,” so to speak, with thousands of the results posted all over the internet. The word is not quite in the dictionary yet, but it is in common use online.

The Captain is in Command

It is common knowledge that the captain is in command of his or her crew on a ship whether it be on the sea or in the air. A United Airlines Boeing 767 Captain felt he had to make that point. During the early morning of July 14, he diverted his São Paulo to Chicago flight to Miami to deplane a purser who “did not respect his authority.” Details of the incident were not released. Many of the passengers were unhappily awakened in the wee hours and some may have missed their connections at Chicago, to boot. It was not a good PR week for

United. Read on.

United Breaks Guitars

No, early July was not a fun time to be working in United's PR department. A Canadian band released a video and very catchy song on *Twitter* that took the social media world by storm. Dave Carroll of Sons of Maxwell was unhappy with the way United handled his complaint, over the course of a year, about damaging his \$3,500 guitar on the ramp in full view of passengers. He wrote and filmed a video on *YouTube.com*. Within hours the video had been seen by thousands, and eventually millions, of people. At this point, Dave was not interested in a settlement but vowed to create three original songs and videos to illustrate the error of United's handling of the incident. United countered by offering to donate the sum to a charity, and a company spokeswoman suggested United planned to use the video for training. She even admitted she found it amusing.

A few weeks later, video #2 came out in the trilogy, and it was just as creative and catchy as the first. As of this writing, the third video was still being developed. The story went global, being featured on news reports from Argentina to China, complete with subtitles and news anchor editorials. One Chinese airline sent the video to its employees to show how poor customer service can backfire and to set an example of how not to treat a customer. Indeed, for a while the video was the third item listed when searching *Google* for “United Airlines.” Check out the videos by searching for “United Breaks Guitars” on www.youtube.com. There are even some imitations such as the guy who sings about Northwest breaking his expensive dulcimer and another by employees of Southwest bragging that they don't break guitars. The success of the songs has placed other service companies on high alert since this may be just the beginning of a whole new level for social media.

Doggie Goes First Class

Remember the story in my column of the pet airline in *Airliners'* July/August 2009 Issue? Well, it took off and is reportedly doing well, but Pet Airways does not fly every route. An Israeli woman bought out the entire Business Class cabin of an El Al flight from Paris to Tel Aviv for \$32,000 for the four hour flight. El Al was no doubt delighted to get a 100% full fare load factor on the segment, and the unidentified woman was able to enjoy her dog's company for the entire flight. The story, when published, elicited positive comments from people

who wished they could buy an adjacent seat for their pet. It must be nice...

Good News and Bad News

Last April *Reuters* published two news releases about Turkish Airlines. The good news: the airline quadrupled its profit for the previous year. That is actually great news in this day and age. On the same day, however, one of its flights flying from Istanbul to Tbilisi, Georgia, landed at the wrong airport, ten miles away, on a military base at that. Considering the recent wartime history in this part of the former Soviet Union, it could have been more serious, but the 69 passengers and crew were unharmed.

Coffee Emergency

No, Southwest Airlines' Flight 693, a Boeing 737 en route early one morning from Hartford/Springfield to Orlando, did not have to land at Long Island's MacArthur Airport because someone forgot to provision the coffee. A strange burning smell caused some tense moments that required some passengers to don oxygen masks, and the captain requested an emergency landing to check out the reports of fire and smoke. FAA inspected the aircraft and it departed two hours later. Passengers were evacuated but would have a story to tell at their next cocktail party. Indeed, no one would ever fault a crew for erring on the side of safety. Luckily the odor was from the coffee pot. The source? Coffee grinds!

Captain Behaving Badly

Here is an even better one to tell at your next cocktail party, but you would not have been laughing if your flight had been cancelled for this reason. The co-pilot of Japan Airlines' Flight 75, a Boeing 747, scheduled from Honolulu to Tokyo last July, was on a layover when he was arrested for urinating in a public park and detained for two nights. He had consumed a bottle of wine and five bottles of beer and needed a place to relieve himself. Nearly 300 passengers had to be rebooked, and clearly JAL took both a customer service and financial hit as the story hit the local papers. Needless to say, the co-pilot was no doubt counseled. We do not know whether or not he is still flying.

Flood on Board

Honolulu Airport got another unexpected surprise when QANTAS' Flight 25, a Boeing 747-400, was flying from Auckland to Los Angeles and water stored for the toilets began pouring into the cabin from above the overhead bins. (Who knew toilet water, how-

ever clean, was stored above your head?) The passengers got a two hour visit to Honolulu Airport while the plane was repaired, relatively quickly, and they were soon on their way. More cocktail party fodder!

Creative Recycling

I have done stories on how airplanes were recycled into homes in California, restaurants in Arkansas and in just the last issue, hotel rooms in Costa Rica. Now you can buy pieces of airplanes that have been made into exquisite furniture and sculptures from the people at MotoArt. Beautiful desks have been made from cowlings and conference tables from wings. A cowling from a GE CF6-50 engine from a KLM Boeing 747 has been crafted into a stunning 19 foot long reception desk. Check out the "Mile High Bed," the galley cart credenza, clocks, bookshelves and picture frames made from fuselage windows and the Boeing 707 and 737 room dividers, all originals. There are studios and galleries in Maryland, Los Angeles and Italy or you can browse the collection at www.motoart.com.

Pardonez-Moi

Early in September, some customers on an Aer Lingus flight from Dublin to Paris got a rude awakening. The joke, not funny at the time, was on the French-speaking passengers. As the aircraft entered some turbulence, the crew put on a pre-recorded English announcement advising passengers to be sure their seatbelts were fastened. As the flight was headed to France, the

announcement was repeated in French. It turns out, however, the French announcement advised passengers to prepare for an emergency landing, locate the nearest exit and await further instructions from the captain. Some of the passengers naturally became upset and began crying. After some anxious moments for those French speaking and bilingual passengers, the crew soon realized something was wrong,

This brings back memories from years ago when I was on a Delta Air Lines Douglas DC-8-61 (the really long one with three cabins) en route to San Juan. An announcement was made to fasten seatbelts – in English only. One person in the rear cabin misunderstood and put on their life jacket, and the rest of the passengers followed. The flight attendants finally noticed when one of them took a stroll down the aisle and discovered the passengers ready for a water evacuation!

My Galley, My Home

Flight attendants spend a lot of time in somewhat impersonal galleys on aircraft, so why not make it more like home? People personalize their offices, and a galley is nothing more than a work area. So what if most of the time it's at 35,000 feet? On my way to Los Angeles, I should not have been surprised when I went to the back of the Alaska Airlines Boeing 737-800 to find that the flight attendant, Kurt, had done just that – personalized the galley. It was completely covered with pictures of his family, particularly his sons at various ages. ✈



(Below) Flight attendant, Kurt, proudly displaying his personalized office. (Joel Chusid)