

Recreation and Travel

Airlines competing

By VINCENT EGAN
Travel Columnist

New fuel surcharges and increased taxes on airline tickets are making it generally more expensive to fly.

At least, however, competition in the travel industry is driving some major airlines to introduce welcome improvements in standards of passenger comfort and convenience.

For most people, long-haul flights can be tedious, boring and stressful, especially in economy class (which accounts for about three-quarters of all passengers).

But a few small touches can make a big difference to the passenger.

In the past two or three years, big carriers have been concentrating on improvements to their first-class sections, to try to gain a competitive edge in this high-profit sector of the travel market.

Air France recently renamed its business class Le Club, and installed wider and more adjustable seats, as well as introducing a broader choice of menu.

Finnair eliminated first class on most of its routes, in the process making its Executive class almost identical with the old first class.

COMPETITION KEEN

Business class has also been spruced up by Air Canada, Canadian Airlines, Swissair, Quantas and others. Air Canada has been extending the red-carpet treatment beyond the flight itself by offering free chauffeur service in London to premium-fare passengers flying to and from Canada on certain flights.

The Montreal-based carrier also became, three months ago, the first scheduled airline to offer only non-smoking flights between North America and London.

In 1988, British Airways totally revamped its business class, renaming it Club, and the following year carried out a similar upgrading of its already highly rated first class.

Then in an experiment 11 months ago, it introduced a service it called Economy Select on its DC-10 flights between London-Gatwick and Dallas-Fort Worth. Economy passengers paying a fare supplement were given more spacious seating, special check-in desk, special ticket wallets and baggage checks.

This month, British Airways is completing the worldwide upgrading of its economy class, which it now designates as World Traveller class on long-haul flights and Euro Traveller on its continental flights.

(The company has been "phasing in" the new service for five months. The first re-equipped airplane was the one that was seized in Kuwait last Aug. 2 when Iraq invaded that country.)

"We are experiencing a softening in First and Club traffic, but Economy remains buoyant," said British Airways chairman Lord King of Wartnaby.

Highlights of the new World Traveller (economy) service include presentation of a welcoming orange juice and "amenities pack" (slippers, eye-shade, toothbrush and tooth paste) before takeoff; broader choice of meals, served on a dark blue setting that replaces the indented meal tray; post-prandial coffee served, with mints, on a separate tray, and chair-side duty-free shopping.

Airlines tend to be fuzzy about passenger space. The British Airways announcement says that a new blue-and-white color scheme is designed to give "a feeling of greater space" and that the new Boeing 747-400 jumbos offer "extra inches of knee room."

(Most major carriers, when ordering airplanes from manufacturers, are now specifying a new type of seat - lighter, an inch higher off the deck, about an inch thinner in back, and an extra inch under the seat in front.)

Other improvements in World

Traveller, as compared with the old economy class, include electro-magnetic headsets and digital-display controls for in-flight entertainment; new videos with travel hints about the flight's destination, and a "Skyflyers" pack to entertain children during and after the flight.

In the highly competitive travel industry, it won't take long for other carriers to be trumpeting their own new service features. Rising costs may preclude any significant fare reductions, leaving service as the principal point of differentiation.

TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Here are notes on news of current interest to travellers:

- Princess Cruises of Los Angeles is offering discounts of \$250 (U.S.) per person to passengers who book before July 4 for many of its fall sailings, or by Oct. 31 for cruises next winter and the following spring.

- Until May 6, the Museum of London (England) is presenting a special exhibition of photographs from the 1941 blitz, some of which have not been shown before. Admission is free; the museum is closed Mondays.

Recreation Report

AQUATIC REGISTRATION EXTENDED

There are still openings at both the Acton and Georgetown Pools in the Learn to Swim program. Acton registrants register at the Acton Pool, Georgetown registrants register at the Georgetown Pool during office hours, Monday to Thursday, 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. For more information call 873-2600, ext. 266.

YOUTH ACTIVITY NIGHT

Every Wednesday starting today for 10 weeks, the Halton Hills Recreation and Parks Department offers an evening of fun and entertainment for youth in Grades 6, 7 and 8. Play basketball, volleyball, floor hockey, go to the movies, watch your favorite videos, go on trips and share in some Special Events with other kids your own age. For more information call 873-2600, ext. 268.

ARTS GALORE

Have fun with art. Learn print-making, drawing and colour. During this 6 week program, participants will develop their first very own portfolio. This Recreation Department program will be held at Sacre Coeur School,

Saturdays, commencing January 12, 2 to 3:30 p.m. Call 873-2600, ext. 268 today.

STRETCH AND SWIM

Susanne Euteneier will help you get fit the fun way. Start with a one hour workout in the gym then afterwards head for the swimming pool and sauna to relax those tired muscles. You can choose from Tuesday and/or Thursday from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m. starting January 15 and 17 for 10 weeks at McKenzie Smith M.S., Acton. For more information call 873-2600, ext. 268.

WATER EXERCISES

Exercise is so much easier when it is done in water. Best of all, no swimming ability is necessary.

Acton Pool - Sandra Roberts will be instructing this nine week program starting January 7 and 9 from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. Mondays and/or Wednesdays.

Georgetown Pool - Sandra Cousins is the instructor of this nine week program starting Jan. 8 and 10 from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. Tuesdays and/or Thursdays.

For more information call 873-2600, ext. 268.

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