

<u>Budget Flight Blues</u>	Spec Article. 1241 words.
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STARTS

Look, let's face it, the arrival of 'budget travel' has, in the balance, been a good thing. We can all get up these days at an ungodly hour, when no-one should be in charge of a lawn-mower never mind a plane, get into some gaudy, flying cigar tube and, before we've even got rid of the early morning horn, be in another city ready to Rock and Roll.

Hells teeth! Look at that sentence. You can only write sentences like that on a budget plane ride. Why? Because the nasty peroxide lady in front of you, who's catching the last leg of some nightmare run out of god-knows-where via Doha to Cape Town, has flung her chair so far back that you have to fold the laptop nearly in half, balance it on the residual morning erection, and contort into the brace position just to reach the keyboard. And that means you can only reach the full stop button once in a blue moon because of the stabbing pain in your spine when you attempt to do so. To hell with it, I'll have to put them in later. After I've landed and seen a chiropractor.

I've done these flights too many times. To be honest once is too many. But I know I'll take them again. At the

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----------------------------	------------------------------

end of this week even. And then again in a couple of weeks time. There and back.

The trouble is that they are just so damn convenient. In the old days you'd have to have been the head of Anglo American to be seen hopping on the once a day Suid Afrikaanse Lugdiens jump from Cape Town to Jozi and back. And even he only did that once a month and had to lay off a thousand workers in order to afford it.

And when you did fly, you approached the aircraft with reverence; the concept of being in Cape Town in two hours was almost magical. It took more time to get ready to go to the airport and get on the plane. Dad would check the tickets at least ten times, Mom would fret about being exactly twenty kilograms in each bag, the kids would carefully select which stuffed toy would spend two weeks on the coast, the dogs would have to be put down, supper the night before would be eaten in solemn anticipation and ten years of favours would have to be called in to get Uncle Gert to give everyone a lift to the airport. It was a sacred ritual employed to ensure that 'all would go well'.

Indeed, those flights had an air of the divine about them; pilots were supreme beings and air-hostesses were

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----------------------------	------------------------------

demi-goddesses. Spawned from the union of a previous Miss South Africa and the honest, sober loins of the pilot, they would greet you at the top of the heavenly stairway with the sound of the angelic host filling the air around them. Now that I think about it, I might have had my first loss-of-innocence erection at the sight of an air hostess.

These days I'm always suspicious that the pilot is a drunk and the... the... what does one call them these days? Air Waitrons? Airborne Service Delivery Managers? Bastards? Whatever. The people that serve you coffee if you've got spare change. Them I always suspect of being high. I mean what the f*** am I supposed to think when the person in charge of my safety on board comes on the intercom and says 'Welcome to Mauritius' as we land at OR Tambo? I mean come on! I don't want a comedian wannabe to be the person who is also going to tell me to 'Brace, Brace, Brace' after the duct-tape has failed, the engine's come off and the co-pilot has run through the cabin screaming 'I'm coming to you Jesus!'

What if I think it's another gag?

Haha! How we all laughed as the witty little chap from Durban in the green uniform cracked another side-splitter

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----------------------------	------------------------------

about what to do in the event of a water-landing! What chuckles rippled through the plane as those comical little masks dropped with a pop from above our heads, chuckles turning to laughter at how funny we all looked with them on! What a festive mood there is with the emergency strip lights twinkling along the cabin floor! Hahaha!

And then we all drowned.

Ok. Ok. That's it. I'm going to have to kill this woman in front of me. Lady! LADY! Your chair does not go back any further. You haven't paid enough money for the chair to go any further. You also haven't paid enough to be as totally f***ing annoying as you currently are being. So stop it. Otherwise I'm going to dangle my legs over the back of the chair and rest my weary feet-in-boots on your annoying little head!

Stay calm, stay calm... The pilot has indicated that we are starting our descent.

Couldn't be better timed either. I'm beginning to dehydrate badly. I smacked up a half litre of strong Rwandan coffee before leaving the house so that I wouldn't fall asleep at the wheel on the way to the airport and it's gone through me like a dose of salts. Thank the seat booking

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----------------------------	------------------------------

gods I was allocated on the aisle. But now, after two hours at 30 000 feet with the aircon blizzarding, my tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth and my brain is starting to convulse in my skull.

Why didn't you save some coffee for the flight I hear you ask? Well I did actually. I especially made a nice little flask with milk and sugar to take on board with me. But of course when I tried to get it through the check in, they nearly arrested me. One bastard started putting on rubber gloves when the x-ray spotted the silver canister in my carry-on.

Well why not get a refreshing can of sparkling mineral water bottled in the Albion fields of Epping Industria, I also hear you ask? Well I didn't anticipate having to down my coffee so I didn't draw any money and anyway I don't feel that it's justified to pay fifty Rand for the 'on-board special' of a cup of Nescafe and a soggy muffin is why! Furthermore I couldn't reach my wallet from this position without starting a carnal relationship with the former front-row rugby forward in the seat next to me. Maybe in my misspent youth, bubba, but those days are over.

Right, here we go; wheels are out, flaps are down,

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----------------------------	------------------------------

ground's coming up to meet us. A slight lift and tighten of the buttocks to prepare and psychologically help us in and... we're down. No! NO! No clapping you buffoon in row fifteen. Landing is what the pilot is supposed to do. It's his job to get us down safely no matter how many early morning martinis he's had. What if people came to your office and applauded every time you finished a sales call? Don't answer that; you look like the kind of freak that might go for that.

Ok, nearly at a stop. Get up! Get out! Trample the mothers with babes in arms! I must have fresh air! Down the steps and... Ah! Freedom! Freedom! I'm ALIVE!

Now we just have to wait an hour or so for the bus to come and take us to the terminal...

ENDS

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