Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel: Questions, Answers, and Reflections

Patrick Smith
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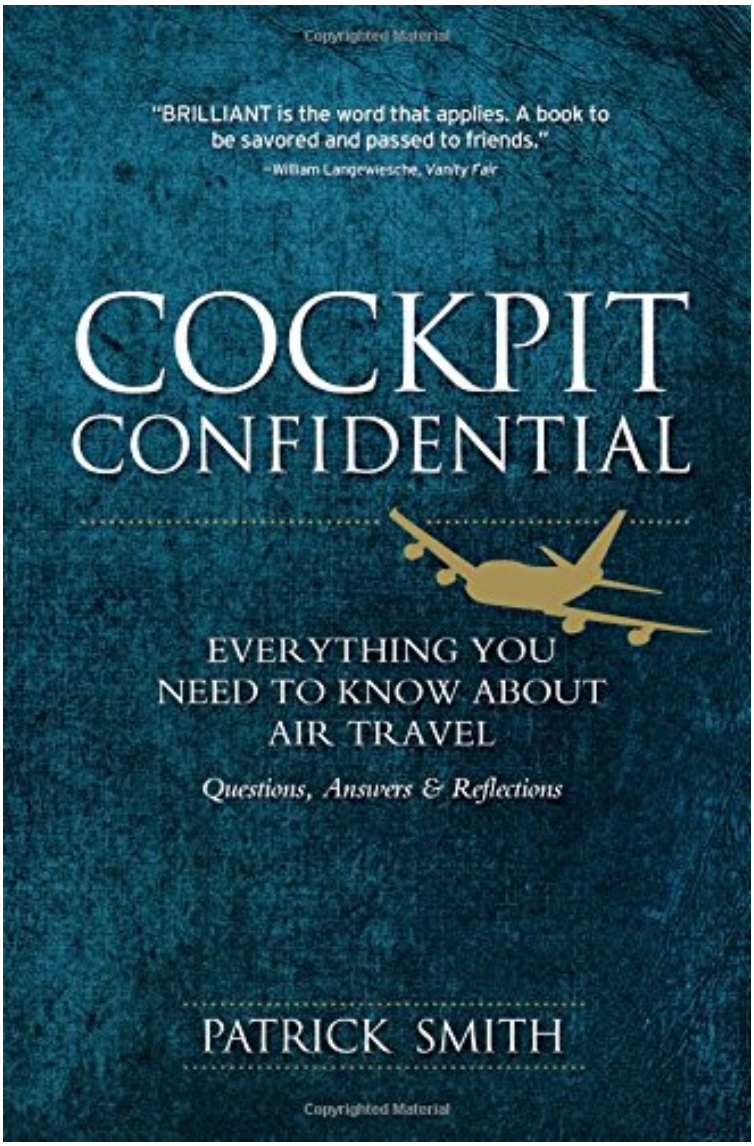

#45703 in Books Patrick Smith 2013-05-07 2013-05-07Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.40 x 1.00 x 5.50l, .80 #File Name: 1402280912320 pagesCockpit Confidential Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel Questions Answers and Reflections | File size: 37.Mb

Patrick Smith : Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel: Questions, Answers, and Reflections before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel: Questions, Answers, and Reflections:

47 of 49 people found the following review helpful. For the real airplane lovers...By Jill MeyerAre you a nervous flyer? Are you someone who'd rather drive than fly? Are you someone who doesn't get excited looking at the lights of planes as they line up in the night sky outside a busy airport, coming in for a landing, one after the other? On the other hand, do you know what the terms "OAG", "triple 7", and "Runway Two-niner" refer to? If you're the latter and not the former, you'll enjoy Patrick Smith's new book, "Cockpit Confidential".Patrick Smith - the name "Smith" is a nom-de-plume - is an airline pilot and blogger, who operates out of Boston. He used to blog for SALON magazine but I'm not sure he still writes for them. In any case, he has his own website, askthepilot.com, and this new book. His previous one, "Ask the Pilot: Everything You Need to Know About Flying", was published in 2004. Smith has been been a pilot and in love with all forms of air travel since, as a child living in Boston, he'd sit on the Revere beach and watch in awe as planes landed at nearby Logan Airport. He grew up to make a living as first a pilot for a commuter carrier - flying up and down the Atlantic seaboard and all around New England - and then he "graduated" to flying cargo jets for a freight airline. Finally, he's now flying for an international passenger airline. (I think it might be Delta, from what I've been able to glean from his writing. Or, if not, American.) He has been subjected to layoffs during his career and is quite honest about how he - and other pilots - struggle with the on-going airline politics and economic ups-and-down that make a pilot's career somewhat haphazard.Okay, Patrick Smith and I are airline fanatics. And, probably so are most people reading this review. Most of us fly a lot - Smith is lucky that he gets paid to do so - and we like to see new places. We're also fascinated by the arcane of the airline industry - old tickets from the 1940's and clips from newsreels of passengers boarding a plane in the 1950's outfitted in suits and ties and hats. We know what local airlines were swallowed up by what larger airlines, and we know airport codes. Patrick Smith is talking to US in his book. We "get" him, and he "gets" us.His new book talks about his own, long love of flying. He writes about how difficult it is to "catch on" in the airline industry, and how that industry has weathered crashes - both physical and economic - and the changing requirements of the TSA. Smith doesn't like the TSA - who does? - and is not shy in giving some recommendations which might not please the politically-correct among us. Looking at the September 11th terrorist attacks in particular, he talks about how the TSA and other government groups reacted by imposing the wrong "rules" in the hopes of making airplane travel "safer". "Safer" than what? Smith recounts the many terror attacks and hijackings of airplanes and airports in the 1970's and 1980's that we've seem to have forgotten. Is the taking away of a butter knife from the flight bag of pilot Patrick Smith by over-zealous TSA officials going to make the plane and the passengers Smith is going to fly be any "safer"? Hell, no. And what about those stupid restrictions on 4oz of toothpaste and mouthwash? Good lord, it's half the battle of flying today just getting through TSA security.Author/pilot Patrick Smith covers Sept 11th and many other subjects in his new book. It's not a book most readers will be particularly interested in, but for those of us who read his blog, look-in-awe at his YouTube videos of night-landings at JFK taken from the cockpit, and enjoy flying and the history of flying, this book's for us.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A very good book for people that are afraid of flying or want to know more about flying.By Daisy SFor me, I purchased this bok for two reasons:***** I have a huge fear of flying....yes, I have taken over 20 flights before, but 5 of them had slight turbulence and 2 had moderate to almost severe turbulence. This scared me so much that I have not been on a plane in the last couple of years!Since I read this book during stressful circumstances, I did find this book helpful. It is overall a very good book that was written by an airline pilot. What I really like about this book is the fact that it is in Question and Answer form. And also that is is in a conversational manner. I felt like I was sitting across the table from Patrick Smith asking him questions.There were many of my questions answered in the book...about lightening'so effects on a plane, wind shear, take-offs and landings and more!The reason that I rate this book 4 stars is because I would have liked to see more details, especially about flying in bad weather, while this was covered, it could have used more details.So 4 stars it is. Good read!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful companion for those that love to fly commercial airlinersBy Robert C RossPatrick Smith is a co-pilot, one of the two people in the cockpit of passenger airliners, a very erudite writer, with a passion for flying, for explaining and for traveling in interesting places around the world. I've greatly enjoyed his first book, and receive the updates to his website -- a continuing source of fascination and a very welcome source of information when the media is discussing something new. He often re-sets the facts and best of all explains why.Other reviews here have done a great job of describing what is in this superb book. Instead of adding to the praise, I would like to give you an update, right from his computer. Judge for yourself whether you can resist his prose in the books or online.I can't.Robert C. RossJuly 2015***QA With the Pilot (Part 2)July 9, 2015ANOTHER OLD-TIMEY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION.Eons ago, back in 2002, a column called Ask the Pilot, hosted by yours truly, debuted in the website Salon, in which I fielded reader-submitted questions about air travel. (United Airlines later stole my name and began running a stripped-down version of the same thing in its magazine.) Its helpful, I think, to touch back now and then on the format that got this venerable enterprise started. Its Ask the Pilot classic, if you will. Expect more of theseOn a flight from London to New York, I noticed that our 747 was flying almost parallel with, and very close to, a Lufthansa plane. It remained next to us for at least a couple of hours as we crossed the Atlantic. We were close enough that I could clearly see the blue and gold tail emblem and the Lufthansa name on the fuselage. I assume our pilots were aware of it, and vice versa?What you describe is common when flying between Europe and North America. The east-

west routes across the North Atlantic consist of a series of one-way parallel tracks, as we call them, made up of sequential points of latitude and longitude. Flights along the same track are sequenced by time, one behind the other. Or, they are stacked vertically, with a minimum of 1,000 feet between each plane. The tracks are 60 miles apart, however, so you were likely on the same track as the Lufthansa jet, a thousand feet higher or lower, and slightly offset horizontally. Offsetting horizontally reduces collision hazards, unlikely as they are, and helps avoid wake turbulence. Standard offsets are 1 mile or 2 miles (pilots choice) to the right. A plane one or two miles away horizontally and only a thousand feet lower or higher will basically appear parallel to you.The tracks go west-to-east in the evening, when the vast majority of planes depart North America for Europe, and east-to-west in the mornings and afternoons, when most flights are headed the other way. Those going against the flow a morning flight from New York to London, for example will be assigned a random route, clear of the organized tracks. Each track is assigned a letter designation. The locations of the tracks are different every day, varying with weather and winds aloft. Track A on Tuesday might consist of a totally different string of latitude/longitude fixes than Wednesdays track A.Separate from ATC communications, theres an open radio frequency (VHF 123.45) used on the track system that allows crews to talk to each other. While this is useful for passing on information about turbulence and whatnot, a lot of the conversation is casual. The likes of Whats up? Where are you guys headed? is heard all the time. Its quite possible that your crew and the Lufthansa crew were chatting at some point.[Illustration of North Atlantic tracks not shown in this extract.] At what speed or altitude is the landing gear extended?Normally the gear is extended just prior to the final approach fix, the position of which itself depends on the approach youre flying, but is typically around four or five miles from touchdown. The landing gear produces quite a bit of drag and occasionally well lower it sooner, as a way of increasing the rate of descent or helping us slow down, when necessary. Its not the preferred method (its noisy and uses more fuel), but its helpful when air traffic control is hurrying you down or requesting troublesome speed adjustments. The captain said wed be following a more direct route than originally planned. Then, as we began our descent, he indicated that the landing gear would be lowered earlier than usual in order to use up excess fuel. I fly all the time but Id never experienced this before.This kind of thing happens very rarely. It sounds as though your shortcut left the plane with so much fuel that it would have been above its maximum landing weight for the runway (perhaps, because of wind or weather-related reasons, the only available runway was a short one?). The increase in drag produced by the landing gear would result in considerably more fuel burn, helping get the plane within limits. Its a wasteful, loud, and frankly unprofessional technique, but it works. One time I was flying from South America to New York. Because of a pressurization malfunction we had to divert to Puerto Rico. We were above landing weight, however, and the dispatchers recommended that instead of landing heavy, which would entail a time-consuming inspection, that we should descend to a lower altitude and deploy the gear for the last half-hour or so of flight.Some planes mainly the bigger ones have fuel jettison capabilities, but thats more for emergency returns, medical or mechanical diverts, and that sort of thing. Planes never jettison fuel in normal operations. I recently flew on a new 737-900, in seat 13A. I was surprised to find there was no window in this row, although there was ample space for one. Why?You see this on a lot of planes. Usually its because theres some sort of internal component ducting, framing, or some structural thing that doesnt allow space for a window. Some turboprops are missing a window directly adjacent to the propeller blades, and youll find a strip of reinforced plating there instead. This is to prevent damage when, during certain conditions, the blades shed off chunks off ice. How come there are no direct flights from Europe to Hawaii? The distance is somewhere around 6,000 nautical miles from the bigger Western European capitals, but thats well within the reach of long-haul aircraft.I cant imagine such a route would be profitable. It has two critical factors working against it. First, its a very long distance. Second, its a leisure destination with little premium-fare traffic, meaning that yields would be low. Cheap tickets, limited first or business class traffic, and long distances: thats a terrible economies-of-scale combo that will only work if you can consistently fill a jumbo jet to the gills. And even thats no guarantee of turning a profit. And how many Europeans are interested in vacationing in Hawaii in the first place? There are many closer sun-and-sea options: Turkey and the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean resort islands, Thailand, etc. Heck, there wasnt even a Hawaii to New York nonstop until just a couple of years ago when Hawaiian Airlines came in to give it a try (the route continues, though Ive been told it only makes money in the winter high season). Most people headed to Hawaii will connect through one of the bigger West Coast cities. I love watching airplanes in the night sky, but what do all the different lights mean? Youve got green lights, red lights, white lights; steady lights and flashing lights. What does it all mean?Wow, youre really going to make me do this? If you insist. Mind you there are variations, but heres a generic rundown:Navigation lights (wingtips and tail): Colored lights that show a planes orientation: red on the left, green on the right, white in the back. Always turned on.Anti-collision lights (on the wingtips and sometimes the upper or lower fuselage as well): Very bright, white flashing lights that basically mean look out, here we are! Used night and day. Turned on just prior to the takeoff roll; turned off again just after landing.Rotating beacon (upper or lower fuselage): A red flashing light used any time aircraft is moving. Turned on just prior to taxiing or towing; turned off again after engine shut-down. Means, stay clear!Landing lights (most commonly wing-mounted and/or mounted on the nose gear strut): Very bright, white, forward facing beams. Used during takeoff, approach and landing. Always off for taxi and cruise flight.Taxi lights (normally on nose gear strut): White, forward facing beams. Assist with ground visibility

during taxi. Usually left on for takeoff and landing as well. Runway turnoff lights (if installed, wing-mounted): Bright white lights aimed slightly askew, to aid in high-speed turns when exiting the runway.Logo lights (if installed): Spotlights mounted in the top of the horizontal stabilizer and aimed at the tail. Shows off your carriers ugly logo and helps pilots and ground controllers identify traffic. On for taxi, takeoff and landing; optional during cruise.

A New York Times bestsellerFor millions of people, travel by air is a confounding, uncomfortable, and even fearful experience. Patrick Smith, airline pilot and author of the web's popular Ask the Pilot feature, separates the fact from fallacy and tells you everything you need to know...How planes fly, and a revealing look at the men and women who fly themStraight talk on turbulence, pilot training, and safetyThe real story on congestion, delays, and the dysfunction of the modern airportThe myths and misconceptions of cabin air and cockpit automationTerrorism in perspective, and a provocative look at securityAirfares, seating woes, and the pitfalls of airline customer serviceThe colors and cultures of the airlines we love to hateCockpit Confidential covers not only the nuts and bolts of flying, but also the grand theater of air travel, from airport architecture to inflight service to the excitement of travel abroad. It's a thoughtful, funny, at times deeply personal look into the strange and misunderstood world of commercial flying.It's the ideal book for frequent flyers, nervous passengers, and global travelers.Refreshed and vastly expanded from the original Ask the Pilot, with approximately 75 percent new material.

"Brilliant...A book to be savored and passed to friends."-- William Langewiesche, Vanity Fair Nobody covers the airline experience like Patrick Smith. He brings balance and clarity to a subject all too often over-hyped. And, he's a damned good writer.-- Clive Irving, Conde Nast Traveler I wish I could fold up Patrick Smith and put him in my suitcase. He seems to know everything worth knowing about flying.-- Stephen Dubner, coauthor of FreakonomicsPatrick Smith is extraordinarily knowledgeable about modern aviation, and communicates beautifully in English, not in pilot-ese. Th ideal seatmate, companion, writer and explainer.-- Alex Beam, Boston GlobeA brilliant writer, Patrick Smith provides a laugh-a-page tour of a misunderstood industry -- a journey into the world of aviation, stripped of the mumbo-jumbo and filled with humor and insight.-- Christine Negroni, aviation correspondent and author of Flying Lessons"Patrick Smith doesnt just know everything about air travel, he possesses a rare knack for explaining it in lucid and witty prose."-- Barbara Peterson, Cond Nast TravelerPatrick Smith is one of the best writers around, period, which certainly makes him by far the best writer ever to have earned a commercial pilot's license. A soaring accomplishment, indispensable for anyone who travels by air, which means everyone.-- James Kaplan"Wonderful"-- Rudy MaxaPatrick Smith manages to demystify the experience and remind us of the magic of aviation. Also he has a great sense of humor which is critical when you are wedged into seat 14D on a regional jet.-- Chris BohjalianBrilliantly down to earth and reassuring-- Cath Urquhart, The Times (London) "What a pleasure it is reading Patrick Smith's surprisingly elegant explanations and commentary. The world needs somebody writing E.B. White simple and sensible about a topic everyone has a question about." -- Berke BreathedPatrick Smith doesnt just know everything about air travel, he possesses a rare knack for explaining it in lucid and witty prose.-- Barbara Peterson, Cond Nast Travele"Cockpit Confidential is the document that belongs in the seat-back pocket in front of you." -- David Pogue, New York Times correspondent and PBS television hostAbout the AuthorPatrick Smith is an airline pilot, air travel writer, and the host of www.askthepilot.com. He has visited more than seventy countries and always asks for a window seat. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Introduction The Painters Brush More than ever, air travel is a focus of curiosity, intrigue, anxiety, and anger. In the chapters that follow I will do my best to provide answers for the curious, reassurance for the anxious, and unexpected facts for the deceived. It wont be easy, and I begin with a simple premise: everything you think you know about flying is wrong. Thats an exaggeration, I hope, but not an outrageous starting point in light of what Im up against. Commercial aviation is a breeding ground for bad information, and the extent to which different myths, fallacies, and conspiracy theories have become embedded in the prevailing wisdom is startling. Even the savviest frequent flyers are prone to misconstruing much of what actually goes on. It isnt surprising. Air travel is a complicated, inconvenient, and often scary affair for millions of people, and at the same time its cloaked in secrecy. Its mysteries are concealed behind a wall of specialized jargon, corporate reticence, and an irresponsible media. Airlines, it hardly needs saying, arent the most forthcoming of entities, while journalists and broadcasters like to keep it simple and sensational. Its hard to know who to trust or what to believe. Ill give it my best shot. And in doing so, I will tell you how a plane stays in the air, yes. Ill address your nuts-and-bolts concerns and tackle those insufferable myths. However, this is not a book about flying, per se. I will not burden readers with gee-whiz specifications about airplanes. I am not writing for gearheads or those with a predisposed interest in planes; my readers dont want to see an aerospace engineers schematic of a jet engine, and a technical discussion about cockpit instruments or aircraft hydraulics is guaranteed to be tedious and uninterestingespecially to me. Sure, were all curious how fast a plane goes, how high it flies, how many statistical bullet points can be made of its wires and plumbing. But as both author and pilot, my infatuation with flight goes beyond the airplane itself, encompassing the fuller, richer drama of getting from here to therethe theater of air travel, as I like to call it. For most of us who grow up to become airline pilots, flying isnt just

something we fell into after college. Ask any pilot where his love of aviation comes from, and the answer almost always goes back to early childhoodto some ineffable, hard-wired affinity. Mine certainly did. My earliest crayon drawings were of planes, and I took flying lessons before I could drive. Just the same, I have never met another pilot whose formative obsessions were quite like mine. I have limited fascination with the sky or with the seat-of-the-pants thrills of flight itself. As a youngster, the sight of a Piper Cub meant nothing to me. Five minutes at an air show watching the Blue Angels do barrel rolls, and I was bored to tears. What enthralled me instead were the workings of the airlines: the planes they flew and the places they went. In the fifth grade I could recognize a Boeing 727-100 from a 727-200 by the shape of the intake of its center engine (oval, not round). I could spend hours cloistered in my bedroom or at the dining room table, poring over the route maps and timetables of Pan Am, Aeroflot, Lufthansa, and British Airways, memorizing the names of the foreign capitals they flew to. Next time youre wedged in economy, flip to the route maps in the back of the inflight magazine. I could spend hours studying those three-panel foldouts and their crazy nests of city-pairs, immersed in a kind of junior pilot porno. I knew the logos and liveries of all the prominent airlines (and many of the nonprominent ones) and could replicate them freehand with a set of colored pencils. Thus I learned geography as thoroughly as I learned aviation. For most pilots, the world beneath those lines of the route map remains a permanent abstraction, countries and cultures of little or no interest beyond the airport fence or the perimeter of the layover hotel. For others, as happened to me, theres a point when those places become meaningful. One feels an excitement not merely from the act of moving through the air, but from the idea of going somewhere. Youre not just flying, youre traveling. The full, beautiful integration of flight and travel, travel and flight. Are they not the same thing? To me they are. One can inspire the other, sure, but I never would have traipsed off to so many countries in my free timefrom Cambodia to Botswana, Sri Lanka to Bruneiif I hadnt fallen in love with aviation first. If ever this connection struck me in a moment of clarity, it was a night several years ago during a vacation to Mali, in West Africa. Though I could write pages about the wonders and strangeness of West Africa, one of the trips most vivid moments took place at the airport in Bamako, moments after our plane touched down from Paris. Two hundred of us descended the drive-up stairs into a sinister midnight murk. The air was misty and smelled of woodsmoke. Yellow beams from military-style spotlights crisscrossed the tarmac. We were paraded solemnly around the exterior of the aircraft, moving aft in a wide semicircle toward the arrivals lounge. There was something ceremonial and ritualistic about it. I remember walking beneath the soaring, blue-and-white tail of Air France, the planes auxiliary turbine screaming into the darkness. It was all so exciting and, to use a politically incorrect word, exotic. And that incredible airplane is what brought us there. In a matter of hours, no lessa voyage that once would have taken weeks by ship and desert caravan. The disconnect between air travel and culture seems to me wholly unnatural, yet weve seen a virtually clean break. Nobody gives a damn anymore how you get therethe means coldly separated from the ends. For most people, whether bound for Kansas or Kathmandu, the airplane is a necessary evil, incidental to the journey but no longer part of it. An old girlfriend of mine, an artist who would have no trouble appreciating the play of light in a seventeenth-century painting by Vermeer, found my opinions utterly perplexing. Like most people, she analogized airplanes merely as tools. The sky was the canvas, she believed; the jetliner as discardable as the painters brush. I disagree, for as a brushs stroke represents the moment of artistic inspiration, what is travel without the journey? Weve come to view flying as yet another impressive but ultimately uninspiring technological realm. There I am, sitting in a Boeing 747, a plane that if tipped onto its nose would rise as tall as a 20-story office tower. Im at 33,000 feet over the Pacific Ocean, traveling at 600 miles per hour, bound for the Far East. And what are the passengers doing? Complaining, sulking, tapping glumly into their laptops. A man next to me is upset over a dent in his can of ginger ale. This is the realization, perhaps, of a fully evolved technology. Progress, one way or the other, mandates that the extraordinary become the ordinary. But dont we lose valuable perspective when we begin to equate the commonplace, more or less by definition, with the tedious? Arent we forfeiting something important when we sneer indifferently at the sight of an airplaneat the sheer impressiveness of being able to throw down a few hundred dollars and travel halfway around the world at nearly the speed of sound? Its a tough sell, I know, in this age of long lines, grinding delays, overbooked planes, and inconsolable babies. To be clear, I am not extolling the virtues of tiny seats or the culinary subtlety of half-ounce bags of snack mix. The indignities and hassles of modern air travel require little elaboration and are duly noted. But believe it or not, there is still plenty about flying for the traveler to savor and appreciate. Im hesitant to say that weve developed a sense of entitlement, but its something like that. Our technological triumphs aside, consider also the industrys remarkable safety record and the fact that fares have remained startlingly cheap, even with tremendous surges in the price of fuel. Sure, years ago, passengers could enjoy a five-course meal served by a tuxedoed flight attendant before retiring to a private sleeping berth. My first airplane ride was in 1974: I remember my father in a suit and tie and double helpings of fresh cheesecake on a ninety-minute domestic flight. The thing was, getting on a plane was expensive. This will be lost on many people today, young people especially, but once upon a time, college kids didnt zip home for a few days over Christmas. You didnt grab a last minute seat for $99 and pop over to Las Vegasor to Mallorca or Phuketfor a long weekend. Flying was a luxury, and people indulged sporadically, if at all. In 1939, aboard Pan Ams Dixie Clipper, it cost $750 to fly round-trip between New York and France. Thats equal to well over $11,000 in todays money. In 1970, it cost the equivalent of

$2,700 to fly from New York to Hawaii. Things changed. Planes, for one, became more efficient. Aircraft like the 707 and the 747 made long-haul travel affordable to the masses. Then the effects of deregulation kicked in, changing forever the way airlines competed. Fares plummeted, and passengers poured in. Yes, flying became more aggravating and less comfortable. It also became affordable for almost everybody. I have learned never to underestimate the contempt people hold for airlines and the degree to which they hate to fly. While some of this contempt is well deserved, much of it is unfair. Today a passenger can, in a backpack and flip-flops, traverse the oceans for the equivalent of a few pennies per mile, in near-perfect safety and with an 85 percent chance of arriving on time. Is that really such an awful way to travel? Meanwhile, if youre that insatiably eager to revisit those luxurious indulgences of aviations golden years, well, you can do that too, by purchasing a first or business class ticketfor less than what it cost fifty years ago.