



## **FLYING LARGE™:** **Air Travel Tips for Larger Passengers**

Airline travel these days is not much fun for anybody but it can be a genuine nightmare for larger travelers. Narrow aisles, small seats, long walks to the gate - all take their toll and then there is having to deal with the all too common occurrences of rudeness and insensitivity from fellow passengers and flight crew. But with a good combination of strategy and tactics you can maximize your comfort and convenience.

### **STRATEGY - PLAN YOUR TRIP**

- **FLY NON-PRIME TIME** - Avoid traveling at peak hours if at all possible. Monday mornings, Friday and Sunday evenings are notoriously busy. For holiday travel, try to arrange to go a day early and/or come back a day late. Late night "red-eye" flights are rarely full. Fewer fliers = more comfort.
- **EMPTY SEAT** - When booking, tell the agent that you are a larger person and ask them to hold the seat next to you empty if possible. Most airlines will at least try to accommodate you. **TRICK:** This is generally only possible if you book via telephone directly with the airline.
- **SECOND SEAT** - Most airlines try to accommodate larger flyers but on full flights you may be required to buy a second seat (typically at a reduced rate.) Southwest has become notorious for this but their enforcement is very inconsistent. Check with the airline for their rules to avoid surprises at the gate - if you need an extra seat and none are available they may not board you. **TRICK:** It may be cheaper to buy 2 coach seats using the reduced rate than one business or first class seat. **STUPID AGENT TRAP:** make sure the booking agent actually books you two adjacent seats! There are cases where they put the two seats in separate rows or aisles!!
- **UPGRADE** - If available and if you can afford it, upgrade to business or first class. Normally, the worst seat in the front cabin is better than the best seat in coach. Better food, too. **TRAP:** Only accept an upgrade with a confirmed seat assignment – avoid the "waiting list". Competition for upgrades is fierce and preference goes to frequent fliers. Without a confirmed seat you have to wait and if you don't get upgraded it's a worst case boarding situation with the plane now full.
- **SEAT SIZE** - Before booking, check the seat measurements of the planes different airlines use for the flights to your destination. They do vary. Even one inch makes a big difference. (See table below; more info available from airlines or on the Internet.)
- **AISLE OR WINDOW** - Request an aisle or window seat. Aisle seats have a little more room but window seats don't require you to get up and down for other passengers in the row. **TRAP:** Avoid bulkhead and exit row seats. They have more leg-room but the seats are narrower, the armrests do not raise and the tray tables unfold from in the armrest across your lap.
- **ARRANGE GATE SUPPORT IN ADVANCE** - At many airports it's a long walk between stops. Parking to check in. Check in to security. Security to gate. Gate to gate for connecting flights. Most special arrangements are made via the individual airlines so when you make your reservations be sure to tell the agent if you require any special support services like a wheelchair and attendant.
- **FREQUENT TRAVELER PROGRAM** - All of these suggestions work better if you are a frequent traveler on the airline you are travelling on. They have special reservation lines for their frequent travelers and they try harder to help. You also get to board first and have a better chance for upgrades.

## TACTICS - IMPROVE YOUR FLIGHT

- **CHECK IN EARLY** - If you were unsuccessful in getting what you wanted via reservation, get to the gate early and make your request again. Ask to be seated next to an empty seat, buy an upgrade, etc. People change travel plans all the time and things may have changed since you booked your flight. **TRAP:** Gate agents often only know how many upgrades are available at the end of the boarding process. You have to wait and if you don't get upgraded it's a worst case boarding situation with the plane now full. Competition for upgrades is fierce and preference goes to frequent fliers. If you have a good seat confirmed, unless you can get a confirmed upgrade you may be better off boarding early and optimizing your space than gambling on getting an upgrade.
- **LEAVE PLENTY OF TIME** - Everything gets worse when you are rushed. With current security alerts, long walks and busy airports there are lots of delays. Give yourself some extra time.
- **SEAT BELT EXTENDERS** - Request a seat-belt extender as you board the plane. Don't wait because if they run out you may not be allowed to fly. You may want to purchase a personal seat belt extender. See us at **Extend-IT™** ([www.extend-its.com](http://www.extend-its.com)).
- **SECOND SEAT** - If you do purchase a second seat, be sure to inform a flight attendant as you board the plane. On a full flight this will avoid the embarrassment of them trying to seat someone in your second seat.
- **CHECK YOUR BAG** - Unless you're in a huge hurry, why schlep your bags around terminals? On non-stop flights or flights with no plane changes lost luggage is not that common. Carry on the minimum you need for the flight.
- **OPEN SEATING** - On flights with open seating (notably Southwest) there are no assigned seats - it's first come, first served. **TRICK:** Here's how to maximize your odds of an empty middle seat on Southwest. Check in early so you'll be in the first boarding group - pre-board if possible. Once on board, go to the back rows in the cabin. Take an aisle seat. Toss your computer or purse in the middle seat. Raise the armrest. As other passengers board, encourage another single passenger to take the window seat then avoid eye contact with other boarding passengers as they come down the aisle. Unless the flight is very full the middle seat should remain empty.
- **PRE-BOARD** - If you have trouble walking down the aisle comfortably, board with the pre-boarding passengers who need extra time in boarding. Most gate agents won't bother you, but if they ask, just say that you need a little extra time to get settled in.
- **REQUEST RE-SEATING** - If you are uncomfortably wedged in a middle seat, wait until boarding is complete and look around. There may be better seating in other rows. Most flight attendants will let you move if a more comfortable spot is available.
- **ARMREST UP** - When you get to your seat immediately raise the armrest between the seats. This gives you some extra space. If no one sits in the middle seat you're home free. Even if someone does sit there they probably won't object to leaving it raised.
- **CARRY WATER** - On long flights you can become dehydrated; flight attendants rarely serve enough to drink. Besides, they may not be serving when you're thirsty. Bring along a couple bottles of water and slip them into the seat pocket in front of you.
- **MOVE AROUND** - Sitting for hours on long flights you run the risk of deep vein thrombosis as blood pools in your lower body. Not a good thing. Avoid alcohol. Use the footrest if you have one. Get up at least every hour or so and walk around. If you can't get up, stretch your legs in place.
- **RESTROOMS** - Big issue - even for most normal sized passengers. Forget sex - most people can't even turn around. Use the airport restroom just before boarding your flight. Don't drink too much. Larger planes may have a handicapped restroom available.
- **TRAY TABLE** - If you can't lower your tray table for meals, ask the passenger in front of you to put their seat in the full upright position. If the seat next to you is empty use that tray table. You can also set a pillow on your lap and balance your meal tray on the pillow.

Well, that's about it. Get a good night's sleep the night before your flight and come rested. Expect some minor irritations. Go with it. Relax knowing you planned your trip as well as possible. Be assertive. You have as much right to safety, comfort and enjoyment as any other flier. If you experience problems or rude treatment despite your planning and preparation, write a letter of complaint to the president of the airline.

## Airline Coach Seat Sizes

Seat sizes shown as:

**WIDTH x PITCH**

**WIDTH** = Seat width between the armrests (in inches)

**PITCH** = Distance between seat rows (in inches)

**Example:** 17 x 31 would be a 17 inch wide seat with 31 inch row spacing

<b>Alaska Airlines</b> 737: 17 x 32 MD-80: 17.7 x 32	<b>America West</b> 757: 17 x 31 A-319/320: 18 x 31
<b>American Airlines</b> 727, 757, 767: 17 x 33-35* A-300: 18 x 33-35* MD-80, MD-11: 18 x 33-35* 777: 18.5 x 31-35* *35 in "premium economy"	<b>Continental</b> 767, 777: 17.9 X 31 727, 737, 757, MD-80: 17 x 31
<b>Delta</b> 757, 767, 727: 17.7 x 32 MD-80, 737-200: 17 x 32 MD-11: 18 x 32	<b>Northwest</b> All: 17 x 31
<b>Southwest</b> 737-200: 17 x 32 737-300: 17 x 32 737-700: 17 x 33	<b>United</b> 767, 777: 18 x 31-35* A319/A320: 18 x 31-35* All other: 17 x 31-35* *35 in "premium economy"
<b>US Airway</b> 737: 17 x 31 A-330: 17 x 33 MD-80: 17.7 x 31	

Generally speaking, newer, larger airplanes (MD-11, 747, 767, 777, etc.) have wider seats and more leg room. There is some variance between how the airlines report the seat measurements - for example, one trick is to measure from the center of the armrests instead of measuring from between the arm rests to make the seats seem wider. Also, the airlines redecorate from time to time so check to make sure.

**Important note:** All seat size information is believed to be accurate but provided for estimate information only. Subject to change without notice by airlines. Verify any information with your chosen airline before booking travel.

### **Extend-IT™ Personal Airline Seat Belt Extenders**

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