

Rules for fools

Jeremy Clark follows the California highway and discovers some crazy rules



What with all the current resurgent broo-ha-ha over Heathrow's inevitable Third Runway (as with T4 and T5, it's merely a matter of time),

I was all ready to have yet another go at the tree-huggers and Barmy Boris's idea for a new airport somewhere out near Holland. But then I got diverted to a new and far weirder aspect of current airline operations.

At the time of writing, Mrs C and I find ourselves on a driving holiday along California's amazing Pacific Coast line. If you haven't yet done it, do so. It's wonderful. One of this State's lesser known attributes are some of its more bizarre regulations which include a strict ban on riding a bicycle in a swimming pool and if you are in Fresno and fancy a quick game of Bingo with your friends at home, forget it. You'll be a guest at Club Fed for a minimum 5 to 10 before you can say "Full House!"

My interest in oddball rules was re-kindled when chatting to the crew on the flight over. I am not sure how true this is, but I was informed that new current US regulations relating to larger passengers (of which the US has more than its fair share) state that on a full flight, a thin passenger must be offloaded to accommodate the larger one who may be encroaching on others' space. Is it something to do with avoiding litigation by the largies? Frankly I can't quite believe that and will appreciate anyone who can twitter me straight (@trayset).

Now, if I were to go on about daft rules in ticketing and changing flights I would need the rest of this magazine to list them. Nightmare stories of passengers who have to pay \$500 to change a \$150 flight and of the plain bone-headed intransigence of airlines which just 'follow the rules' instead of applying common sense are just too many to report. I am sure every one of you



reading this has at least three. And let's not forget those clever airlines which seem to deliberately create insane rules like charging folks for issuing a boarding pass at check-in (as all sane airlines do) and then calling them 'idiots' if they complain (no guesses who)*. Frankly, he may have a point, you'd have to be half mad to book with them in the first place. However I digress.

We do have to have rules to protect those who need it. Did you know that moose, for example, are under the threat of wholesale slaughter by the airline industry?

I don't mean the foamy sweet stuff, but the bulky animals which roam the forests of Alaska and Northern Europe. Alaska is so concerned that it has rules which firmly state that a moose may not be viewed from an airplane and, in case you were tempted, it

is an offence to push a live moose out of a moving airplane.

In Walnut CA they are concerned for the safety of low flying aircraft as it is illegal to fly a kite more than 10ft (3.2m) from the ground. Further applications of air safety are found in Bellevue Kentucky where pigeons are not permitted to fly over the town, although there are no details on how this is explained to them.

I think I will move to New Jersey. A sensible place where the slurping of soup, the knitting of woollen sweaters during the fishing season, and frowning at policemen, are all punishable offenses.

* *Daily Telegraph*, 5/9/12

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