

A call to arms on plane travel etiquette

Unspoken rules on whose armrest it is, and lots more

By **CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT**
The Washington Post

Jacy Reese was just being polite when he offered to switch airline seats with a mother and her young son on a recent flight from Copenhagen to Toronto. But as the old saying goes, no good deed goes unpunished.

"I had preordered a vegan entree," remembers Reese, who works for a nonprofit organization in Berlin. "It went to my original seat. By the time I found out, the mother had already eaten my meal."

Lesson learned: Let a flight attendant know when you switch seats, particularly if you need a special meal.

Seat etiquette isn't as easy as it looks. Consider, for example, the recent passengers on a United Airlines flight from Sydney to San Francisco who had a conversation over a passenger seated in the same aisle.

The passenger in the middle seat didn't take kindly to it, reportedly delivered a racist rant and ultimately forced the airline to divert the flight to New Zealand.

The incident raises the question: Is it acceptable to hold a conversation over someone in a middle seat?

"Yes and no," says Maggie Oldham, a New York-based etiquette coach. The conversation must be brief. But if it's anything longer than "a quick exchange," then no.

"The polite thing to do is for one of those passengers to offer to trade seats with the passenger in the middle seat," Oldham says. "Even better if you ask the middle-seater if they prefer the window or the aisle and then abdicate accordingly."



JODI JACOBSON/GETTY

As airlines pack more customers into tighter spaces, it's more important than ever to have good manners, including asking before leaning your seat back.

Q: Should I lean back my seat in economy class?

A: No. Seriously, no. Even though you can theoretically lean your seat back, most airlines have removed so much room between the seats that you're almost certain to collide with a passenger's knee, laptop computer or lap child. And that's likely to provoke a confrontation.

Q: Sorry, I paid for the seat, and it's mine to recline whenever I want. Should I ask the passenger behind me before I do?

A: Yes, that's the least you can do. If you're going to lean, ask the passenger behind you if it's OK. "If you're shy about talking to your aft seatmate, at least

do them the courtesy of slowly reclining your seat, lest you upset their laptop and land that complimentary soft drink all over their pants," suggests Kathleen Starmer, a former research scientist and frequent traveler who lives in San Jose, Calif.

Q: What is seat sprawl, and how much is acceptable?

A: Seat sprawl happens when a passenger stretches, extends or invades your personal space with his or her legs, arms or head. How much is acceptable? None. "Don't sprawl onto your seatmate's territory," says relationship expert April Masini. "Bring a neck pillow so you can be comfortable and avoid falling onto their shoulders when

you fall asleep, as the pillows tend to brace you away from neighbors." If you're a large passenger, buy a second seat.

Q: Whose armrest is it, anyway?

A: Obviously, the passenger in the window seat controls the window armrest, and the aisle seat controls the outermost armrest. But the middle two armrests? Ah, that's not an easy one! The consensus is that it's a shared space, but that the middle-seat passenger has something close to the right of way. In other words, if you're sitting in a window or aisle seat, the middle-seat passenger gets to put his arms down first. If there's room left over, great. If not, it belongs to the middle-seat passenger.

Q: Shoes on or off?

A: Only you know the answer to this one. "We all know if our feet smell or not, and need to base our decision on that fact alone," says Bill Sechter, a Seattle-based frequent traveler who founded a company that designs workspaces. "If you know you have foot odor, by all means, leave your shoes on. If not, feel free to take them off, but remember to place them out of the way of others getting in and out of your row." One more thing: Always wear socks. It's just better for everyone. And you don't want to end up on one of those passenger-shaming websites.

As for Reese, the passenger who lost his in-flight meal, it turns out there was

one final lesson to be learned.

"I didn't confront the mother," he says, "but mentioned it to the flight attendant. I doubted that the mother would be in a similar situation again, so it didn't seem worth bothering her about it, but the flight attendant might."

The flight attendant was appreciative and offered him an extra snack, as the flight was out of vegan meals. And now, Reese will always remember the value of avoiding a confrontation and being discreet when one of these unwritten rules is violated.

Christopher Elliott is a consumer advocate, journalist and co-founder of the advocacy group Travelers United.



PHIL MARTY/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Inflatable Zodiac boats let visitors get up close with Greenland's massive icebergs.

TRIPS, TIPS & DEALS

Exploring the Arctic by land

By **PHIL MARTY** | Chicago Tribune

An Arctic vacation may not seem too appealing in the winter, but summer will be here before you know it, and it's a perfect time to get around or above the Arctic Circle and visit places like Greenland, Iceland or the polar bear capital of Churchill, Manitoba. AdventureSmith Explorations, which offers more than a dozen ship-based Arctic trips, recently added four land-based adventures. Two of the trips concentrate on the Churchill area, one is in Canada's Nunavut territory and one is in East Greenland. A highlight of the latter is staying in the remote Base Camp Greenland, a seasonal collection of eight safari-style tent cabins. This nine-day/eight-night tour offers the opportunity to visit Inuit settlements, kayak among massive icebergs, view wildlife like whales and Arctic foxes and possibly see the Northern Lights, depending on the season. The trip is priced from \$9,995 per person, double occupancy, with international air extra. Info on all of the Arctic trips is at tinyurl.com/znwrear.

It's good to look old

Anyone ever tell you that you have that classic Roman look? Or maybe you look like one of those ancient Greek sculptures? You can find out with a fun contest of sorts that will lead to a special exhibit at the Musee de la Civilisation in Quebec City. The project, called "My 2000-Year-Old Double," invites you to submit a photo of yourself. Face-recognition software will compare photos submitted with roughly 60 sculptures that were created 2,000 years ago. Thirty faces will be selected, and those 30 people will be invited to Quebec City to be photographed by Quebec art photographer Francois Brunelle. Those photos will be paired with look-alike sculptures for the exhibition, which will be displayed Oct. 24, 2018, to Oct. 27, 2019. Those selected to be photographed will receive payment to cover all or part of the cost of getting to Quebec City. You have until April 30 to submit your photo at tinyurl.com/hwjtqsxq.

Luther's Germany

This is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and luxury travel specialist Zicasso is offering a customizable 10-day tour that visits sites in Germany important in the life of Martin Luther. Among the highlights of the tour are the town where Luther was born and baptized, the monastery where he became a monk, the Schlosskirche (Castle Church) where he posted his 95 Theses that marked the beginning of the Reformation, and Lutherhaus, where he spent most of his adult life. There are also guided tours and visits in Berlin, Wittenberg, Erfurt, Eisenach, Rothenburg, Augsburg and Munich. The trip is priced from \$3,249 per person, double occupancy, which does not include international airfare. Info: tinyurl.com/jjf4y8l

Phil Marty is a freelancer.

GEAR BOX

Harness protects dogs in the car

By **JUDI DASH**
Los Angeles Times

Without protective restraints, canine passengers are as much at risk in a car crash or sudden stop as human riders.

Now you can buckle your buddy into a Ruffwear Load Up Harness. This crash-tested vehicle-restraint travel harness attaches easily but firmly to any seat belt by way of one sturdy rear-end loop. It has a heavily padded top and bottom, with wide, adjustable straps and strong but unobtrusive all-metal hardware.

Your dog can sit or lie down, but won't go flying



RUFFWEAR

forward if you slam on the brakes or worse. You must adjust the straps to fit perfectly, but Ruffwear's website has a video that guides you through the process.

Five sizes accommodate girths from 13 to 42 inches.

(Sorry, teacups, it's the crate for you.)

Ruffwear Load Up Harness, in size XXS to XL, costs \$79.95; www.ruffwear.com.

Judi Dash is a freelancer.

NEED TO KNOW

Vail Resorts to acquire Stowe in Vermont

Associated Press

STOWE, Vt. — Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont is being purchased by the Colorado-based Vail Resorts for \$50 million.

Vail said in a statement that it had reached an agreement to acquire the Stowe resort from the Mount Mansfield Co. If the deal goes through, it would be Vail's first East Coast resort.

Vail owns 10 mountain resorts and three urban ski areas, including Wilnot Mountain, roughly 65 miles north of Chicago.



GETTY

Colorado-based Vail Resorts has reached an agreement purchase Stowe Mountain Resort, above, for \$50 million.

Vail bought the Wisconsin ski resort last year and made \$13 million in improvements.

At Stowe, Vail would acquire all the assets related to the mountain operations at Mount

Mansfield and Spruce Peak. Other facilities such as the Stowe Mountain Lodge, Stowe Mountain Club and the Stowe Country Club would be retained by the Mount Mansfield Co.