American 'Stuff 'em in' Airlines' Big COVID Adventure

By Josh Bloom — April 28, 2020

What's worse, flying American Airlines or camping out in a Greyhound's bus bathroom during "National Projectile Vomiting Day?" Ask Erin Strine. American stuffed her and a whole bunch of other people into a flying incubator a few days ago. It wasn't pretty.

When I saw the headline about a flight packed with terrified passengers I didn't even need to read much further to find out which airline was the culprit. After all, it almost certainly had to be one of two: 1) American Airlines or 2) American Airlines.

THE GOOD

When making travel plans (back when one could do this) I usually looked first for Delta or Jet Blue, both of which have provided me with good service most of the time. After that, it's a crapshoot.

THE BAD

The next tier of airlines (IMO) is long and also subjective. Airline hatred is a deeply personal choice. You can decide this for yourself. Or let the Wall Street Journal do it for you:

THE WORST

Once you get past the second-tier airlines, things get a bit dicey. What's the worst way to get around? So many choices. Here are a few that came to mind. Feel free to suggest your own.

- A seat in a Greyhound bus bathroom on "National Projectile Vomiting Day."
- Being dragged by your scrotum over volcanic rock.
- American Airlines.

During these times, where people on the beach (1) are required to wear masks, it is mind-boggling that the CDC does not require masks on flights, where if some guy in seat 1A toots one out, the people in 23B and C are going to be glaring accusingly at each other. No masks required? I just don’t get it. Nor did American hand them out, which is especially galling, but not surprising, since my prior experiences on American flights consist of:

- Seats with plenty of legroom (provided that your legs have been amputated).
- At least 10 microns of space between you and the slob in the seat next to you.
- Getting from the window seat to the bathroom involves maneuvers that could probably get you on a sex offender list.
An "artist's" rendering of an American Airlines jet. The brown thing in the middle, representing row 22, is a sardine can. I've drawn some pretty terrible looking s### in my career. This may be the worst. Note the ghastly proportionality of the wings to the rest of the plane. My waffle iron has a better chance of getting off the ground.

The incident in question occurred on American flight #388 from JFK to Charlotte (April 26th). One of the unfortunate passengers was Erin Strine (@ErinStrine), who had quarantined herself for one month in Brooklyn, but decided to fly to North Carolina because her grandmother died. She was not pleased:

“I had people on both sides of me...Every row around me, next to me, behind me, were [sic] completely full...I really felt like my life and the life of everyone around me was at risk...I just sat there silently crying into my mask because I was really overwhelmed by how unsafe I felt.”

Erin Strine speaking with WBTV, Charlotte

Here's part of American's statement following the incident. It would seem that they have failed miserably.

“The safety of our customers and team members remains our top priority. We are in close contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health officials and will continue to coordinate with them on any required health and safety-related measures.”
Then there's this (emphasis mine):

We allow all employees to wear gloves or masks if they wish, and in the wake of recently-updated CDC guidelines are working to provide masks to all front-line employees as quickly as we can obtain supplies without taking any actions that would deprive such necessary supplies from first responders and health care providers."

Speechless. That's some mighty tough love – allowing employees to wear masks?? Please explain how this is going to help a single person on that flight. If one asymptomatic carrier without a mask sneezes, it is possible that sneeze could infect ten nearby rows (or maybe more [2]). Do they allow their pilots to fly sober?

We have locked down tens of millions of Americans trying to contain the spread of the virus but allow American Airlines to stuff them into a flying incubator?

So, poor Erin, who probably now harbors more microorganisms than Plum Island, is going to drive back to Brooklyn, which is about germ-free 550 miles (7+ hours) away, rather than take her chances with American. A wise choice.

NOTE:

(1) Regulations vary widely from state to state. In California, you can exercise or swim, but not sunbathe. The state makes no mention of what the rules are on a cloudy day.

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