

# "Travel Companions"

You can pick where you live, where you work, and you can pick your friends, but when it comes to traveling on an airplane, you generally have no choice over your neighbor in the adjoining seat.

Unless you are traveling with a family member, friend or coworker, you are at the mercy of the airline. Statistically, it is possible to find a witty and charming passenger seated along side, and to be momentarily distracted from the unrelenting boredom of flight, or the fear that you are more than 7 miles above the ground in an aging airliner and will soon be served a meal that has to be cut with something purchased from Home Depot.

But often, you'll be too busy or too tired to tolerate a seat mate who is rude, inconsiderate or annoying or those chatty people who are willing to tell you far more about themselves than is practical...or probably safe...for you to know.

So, here are the people to avoid:

## **First.... Families of 4 or more returning from vacation.**

The airline will not hesitate in placing you, a full fare passenger, in the middle of them. Because you are the only non- family member, they treated as an unwelcome guest... and will conduct their domestic business as if you do not exist.. reliving every moment of their vacation in tedious detail and passing pillows, items of clothing and hot liquids directly over you...expecting you to be the courier if another family member is out of reach.

## **2. Avoid any child**

While they're adorable on the ground, children take on the persona of evil once in the air... exhibiting antisocial behaviors that will be unmistakably conspicuous to you... but invisible to its parents, such as the child's disposal of partiality chewed vegetables from its kiddy meal, directly into your seat pocket.

Worse though is an abutting child traveling alone to grandmas. In that case, the airline will make you its legal guardian for duration of the flight, asking you to amuse it until it gets bored or goes to sleep. One sure fire child pleaser is to pry open the plate that holds the oxygen masks in place overhead, and use the elastic strap under your chin to hold the mask on your head like tiny yellow fez. The child will assume you are hosting a birthday party and can be convinced to hide somewhere on the plane, and not come out, until you find him.

Finally, .avoid taking a seat next to someone who is sneezing, coughing or generally making unhealthy noises that you thought could only be made by a basement sump pump. It's not bad enough that you will be 4 inches away and in a direct the respiratory path. Feel confident that your neighbor's germ laden breath will be sucked up an air vent, re-circulated, and directed under back at you under pressure through the air nozzle above

your face. For the same reason, you probably also want to avoid people wearing perfume so intense it produces an aura visible with the naked eye, or anyone whose cologne is reminiscent of Pine Sol.

If assigned a neighbor, there are ways to limit interaction if you just don't feel like chatting.

One, Pretend you are asleep, quite easy on a flight of 1-2 hours, but much more difficult on lengthy Transpacific flights, where over Hawaii, you might awaken with a crowd standing around you thinking you are dead.

Or Two, Appear to be very busy, preferably using your laptop. If you do not have a laptop....Bring along your child's Magna Doodle. Passengers who mistake it for a real computer will not bother you. Those who recognize it as a Magna Doodle will probably not want to disturb you either.

As a last resort, you can always take out a second mortgage to buy a seat in first-class... If you have to chat, it might as well be with celebrities, prime ministers or 17 year old CEOs of software companies. Some in fact will be delighted to meet you, while others seeing you approaching will open their laptops and pretend to be asleep.