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## **Make Flying More Tolerable — and Do It Cheaper: Cameron on Transportation**

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I'll admit it. I hate to fly. It's not just the airports, the TSA, the mobs of people and the delays. It's the seats, the crowding and the feel of being on a cattle car. I'm not claustrophobic, just uncomfortable.

But there is something that makes travel more tolerable: flying first class (or at least business class). Sure, it's more expensive, but would you rather arrive at your destination a tortured, starved, contorted pretzel, or relaxed, nourished and refreshed?

First off, you check in faster. No standing in Disneyland-like queues just to drop off your bags. And in first class, baggage is free, not \$25 per item.

Sometimes you get to enjoy the faster TSA Pre-Check security line, bypassing the metal-strewn families with screaming kids. And at boarding time, you get on first. Well, right after the families with screaming kids, the elderly, the Platinum frequent fliers, veterans, and more.

On board the plane, you get to sit in a real seat — wide and roomy, with leg-room! And when you tilt back, you're not smashing some poor guy behind you. Oh, the seats! Sometimes they have undulating lumbar supports, electronic foot rests and all manner of ergonomic indulgences. But they're always comfortable, not cramped like in steerage class.

Even on Amtrak, the first-class seats are better: a bit wider, with greater “pitch” between the rows. And first-class passengers on Amtrak even get to enjoy free access to the railroad's “[Metropolitan Lounge](#)” (or “Club Acela”) before departure. You've got to be flying first-class international to score free access to most airline lounges and their posh lounges and free treats.

I have always believed you get what you pay for. But also being a thrifty Scot, I don't like to over-pay. So I'm always looking for a first-class bargain. There are any number of sites on the internet offering discounts on first class and even firms like Kayak and Priceline have the occasional money-saving offer.

An even better alternative is JetBlue, now competing on transcon flights with an amazing first-class product they call “[Mint](#).” There are 16 seats per plane and it's only available on non-stops to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and on weekends, to a few Caribbean destinations.

### **More Cameron Tips on Air Travel**

*Air travel situations reported in these articles may have changed since an article was posted — always check:*

- [Check Out This Airline If You're Going to France](#) (July 28, 2017)
- [Summer Travel: What to Consider in Deciding Whether to Fly, Drive or Take the Train There](#) (July 5, 2019)
- [By 2020 You'll Need a 'Verified' Drivers License If You Want It for ID Before a Flight](#) (Dec. 17, 2017)
- [Hot Weather Can Stifle Airplane Takeoffs](#) (July 15, 2018)
- [Strategies for Getting the Right Airline Seat, or Any Seat on Metro-North](#) (April 19, 2018)

But the experience is truly first class, from the seats to the food to the in-flight entertainment, and a bargain compared to the major carriers: JFK-SFO for \$899 vs. \$2,000-plus on American Airlines.

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There once was a time we even had first-class seating on Metro-North. Back in the good ol' days when commuter rail was run by the New Haven Railroad there were private parlor cars on some trains. With big swivel chairs and a white-coated private attendant serving beverages, the cars cost just twice the regular train fare (plus a membership fee).

There was actually some talk about bringing back first-class seats when the new M8 cars were being designed. And I have no doubt that some commuters would gladly pay for a better seat and service. But being the state government, our state Department of Transportation couldn't stand the heat for developing anything but a one-class railcar for the proletariat.

So the next time you're traveling and thinking about that upgrade, don't cheap out. You deserve it. As the sign I saw once in a TWA ticket office read: "Fly First Class. Your Heirs Will!"

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*Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at [CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*