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## **Think Air Travel's Crazy? You Don't Know the Half of It: Cameron on Transportation**

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Have you ever wondered if airlines are telling you the truth about the safety of air travel? I have.

Here's a look at some areas that you might think twice about the next time you board a plane:

### **Seating**

Why do seats face forward in the plane? Is it because we like to watch what's going on in first class? Actually, research shows rear-facing seats are much safer in an emergency. Just ask the military, which fits seats on its transport planes facing the rear.

### **Seat belts**

We're asked to keep belts fastened whenever we're seated in case of "bumpy air." The better term to use would be "clear air turbulence" when, unexpectedly, the plane plummets hundreds of feet sending everything — including untethered passengers, food service carts and laptops — hurling upward. It happens with some frequency. So you better give that belt an extra tug.

### **Life jackets**

Yes, we know they're under the seat and they're only for use in a "water landing." Mind you, the 2009 "Miracle on the Hudson" landing of an A-320 was just that: a miracle. Planes don't float. So don't sweat the life jacket or the detachable slides, which supposedly double as rafts. Bring a snorkel.

### **Evacuations**

To be certified by the Federal Aviation Administration, manufacturers must prove their airplanes can be completely evacuated in 90 seconds with half of the exits not operating. The aircraft manufacturers cheat a bit on this test, using employees' families and friends in evacuation trials where everyone knows what will happen and have an obvious interest in getting the plane certified.

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*See also these articles on air transportation by Jim Cameron:*

- [Check Out This Airline If You're Going to France: Cameron on Transportation](#) (July 28)
- [Cramming Passengers on Planes Is Not Just Uncomfortable, It's Also Unsafe: Cameron on Transportation](#) (May 19)
- [Predictions for Planes, Trains & Automobile Traffic in 2017: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 14)

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You know how long it takes to board an aircraft. Can you imagine 900 people racing for the exits on the new double-decked A-380 and getting off the craft in a minute and a half? Next time they do the pre-flight check, pay attention. Know where the emergency exits are. You may need to get off that plane fast.

### **In-flight snacks**

Though meals are a rarity these days on anything but long-haul flights, beverages and snacks are still available. Not for nutrition, but mostly for amusement. The airlines actually push the booze to keep passengers somewhat sedated. Cynics even suggest airlines turn down the cabin air recirculation a notch or

two to make passengers drowsy and keep them in their seats, out of the way of flight crews.

## **Security**

Yes, your checked luggage is screened before being loaded. But 99 percent of the cargo carried in the plane's belly is not checked. The Transportation Security Administration relies on the air carriers, not the agency's own screenings, to be sure bombs stay off planes. So a terrorist can't travel with a bomb, but the person can easily ship one instead. Feel safer?

## **Liquids**

The 2006 terror scare left millions of us dehydrated as we were forced to leave our water bottles behind. Those rules were eventually relaxed a bit. We can buy beverages after clearing security. But the real explosives — perfumes and duty-free booze — are still allowed. Go figure.

I hate to sound like a grouch, but flying is no longer fun. It's neither glamorous nor safe. And having the airlines (and their government watchdogs) be less than honest with us doesn't help.

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