

The Federal Lawyer In Cyberia

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Many Frequent High Fliers Are Now High Tech Fliers

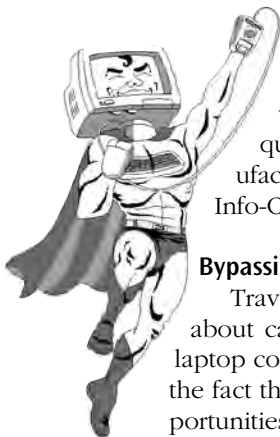
This column, dear Cyberians, focuses on a few nifty things that might help reinforce your “road warrior” image, even in a world where travel—especially air travel—is getting more dicey by the hour and business trips longer than a few blocks may need two supervisors to co-sign approval.

Batteries and You

For those of you still flying—and using laptop computers on planes—battery power is becoming more of an issue. I assume most of you know by now that, since Jan. 1, 2008, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has used the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to prohibit travelers from packing loose lithium batteries in their checked baggage. So you need to keep batteries and equipment with you or in your carry-on luggage. Each passenger is allowed to carry on one larger lithium ion battery installed in a device like a laptop computer and up to two spare larger lithium ion batteries. But keep in mind that larger doesn't always mean, well, larger; it means really *large*. In any event, there are restrictions on what DOT calls “larger” re-



chargeable batteries; for example, very large lithium ion batteries rated at more than 300 watt-hours (25 grams equivalent lithium content (ELC)) are forbidden (although few of us would be carting around a battery that large anyway). However, if you have doubts about the boundaries for largeness and are concerned about the idea of the Transportation Security Administration scouring through your luggage, check out the DOT's site covering the subject (safetravel.dot.gov/larger_batt.html). If you still are not sure whether your battery qualifies as “larger,” contact the battery's manufacturer, or call the PHMSA Hazardous Materials Info-Center (1-800-467-4922).



Bypassing Battery Issues

Travelers should have decreasing concerns about carrying enough battery power to keep that laptop computer humming during a long flight, given the fact that more and more aircraft are providing opportunities for passengers to tie into the airliner's own power supply. Travelers can plug into the plane's power supply either with a purchased adapter or by simply connecting through what looks like a standard plug.

How can you select the right airline, the right flight,

or the right aircraft to ensure that you get the amenities (like a power outlet for your laptop computer) that you will want or need? It is very easy: just go to SeatGuru™ (www.seatguru.com). This site is an amazingly thorough source of information about such things. Every “plane page” on the site has an “In-Flight Amenity” box that contains “amenity icons” representing the services that are available on a particular aircraft. Click on the individual icons for more details and links to additional information. If an icon is not pictured, you are out of luck, because that indicates that the service is not offered on that aircraft and it may be time to consider changing your seat, class, flight, or airline. For example, if you are considering flying on a US Airways Airbus A330-300 (333) to Germany, SeatGuru provides the following intelligence:

This large twin aisle plane is the flagship of US Airways and are [sic] used almost exclusively for US-Europe travel. Beware underseat storage and legroom is limited for all economy seats, but especially the A, C, F, H seats, because of the presence of equipment boxes. Choice Seat assignments on the aisle or window in the first several rows of the coach cabin are available for a fee (starting at \$5 each way). Passengers can select a Choice Seat during Web Check-in (from 24 hours and up to 90 minutes before departure). Choice Seats will be available to Dividend Miles Preferred members any time after booking at no charge. See usairways.com for more information.

The site also informs you that seats in economy

An example from SeatGuru (www.seatguru.com)

class are 17 inches wide, whereas seats in higher-priced classes are a more cushy 19½ inches wide. In addition, a very easy to understand diagram of the fuselage shows (via a distinctive icon) that every seat on this aircraft has a power port available. The power port icon is explained like this:

A power port, usually located in the seat armrest, enables you to plug in electronic devices such as laptops and portable DVD players while on the plane. If there is a power port location at your seat it will be noted by a black dot on the SeatGuru seating map; the Seat Map Key provides an illustration. The three widely used types of power ports are AC, Cigarette, and Empower. Both the Cigarette and Empower ports require special adapters that can be purchased from a number of retailers. If power ports are available on an aircraft there will be a laptop icon on that plane's web page on the SeatGuru site. If you click on the icon, detailed power information will appear.

How's that for detail? And, as if that were not enough, those who have previously occupied seats can comment on them. In these Web 2.0 days, you can read the reviews, which can have the effect of changing the color of a particular seat on a particular plane from green (a good seat) to red (a bad seat). In the best Web 2.0 tradition, SeatGuru thinks of itself as a "community" that includes its users:

At SeatGuru, we love travel, but we can't fly on every single plane. So we turn to you, our users, for the real truth on seat width, pitch [the actual degrees that each seat will recline], and comfort. Through the "Submit Comments" button on each aircraft page, thousands of reviews have been added to the SeatGuru database by flyers who know a great seat when they sit in one. The SeatGuru staff utilizes these comments to maintain the accuracy of our airplane seat information and updates the site with both user-submitted reviews and independent research. Thank you—we smile every time we sit in a "green" seat.

More Travel Information from a Maven Mom

If you're looking for even more good information for harried techie travelers than I could pack into this little column, you might want to take a look at HiTechMommy.com, written by a frequent flier from an entirely different perspective. Her site, which is subtitled "Cool gadgets and how to use them," includes travel information but also much more. If you're traveling with kids, HiTech Mommy is the one to go to. Like me, she's a gadget person and just loves finding new and cool things to share from the world of technology—especially if her discoveries meet the

needs of parents, too. Actually, not to sell her short, the HiTech Mommy, aka Catherine Schwartz, is one of the foremost technology experts in the country, but she is best known for her insightful and entertaining commentary on the hottest gadgets and how to use them and appears on national television shows with increasing regularity.

Conclusion

Cyberian travelers have resources at their disposal that can make the increasingly unpleasant and expensive experience of air travel less of a grind. See you next month in Cyberia. **TFL**

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