

David's Restful Airplane Travel Tips

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For many of us, flying is more of a means to an end than a pleasurable experience. When the flight crew suggests, "sit back, relax, and enjoy the flight," I'm not sure they realize how challenging it will be. Or if they do, they know deep down, that given the circumstances, they are as powerless as we are to make it truly comfortable. Though, to give them credit, they do their best.

Yet, we have more power than we realize to achieve some measure of personal comfort when flying. Here are some practical things I have learned over the years. Try them, adapt them, create your own list of essentials.

The first and most important tip I can offer for restful airplane travel is to cultivate a healthy, flexible attitude from the start. Go slow in the planning stages of your trip. Realize that even the best laid plans are subject to all kinds of unknowns. In fact, if everything *does* goes as planned, that will be the exception, not the rule! So, when planning your trip maintain an optimistic, yet flexible attitude, while making the best choices for yourself based on your needs and values.

Know Thyself

It's important to make flight selections in agreement with your temperament and daily rhythms. When possible, avoid flight times that require sleep deprivation in advance of the flight. Unless you are already accustomed to waking up at 3 or 4 in the morning, a 6am flight

is likely to be challenging. Yet, early flights are often necessary, so make the best of it by planning well, packing ahead of time, and go to bed early the night before.

When choosing flights, consider whether you want or need a layover. Paying more for a non-stop flight at an awkward time might actually be less stressful than a cheaper flight with a lengthy day of travel and a long layover.

My favorite website for flight research is [Matrix Airfare Search](#). This is an ad-free site by ITA Software (Google) for flight information only. Once you find the flight itinerary and price you want, go to your favorite airline or aggregate travel site to purchase the itinerary. Play around with the site's tools. I especially like the Time Bar view mode to easily compare the length of different flights.

Once you have your flights, proper seat selection is the next important choice. With your airline name and flight numbers in hand, visit [SeatGuru by TripAdvisor](#). View detailed information about each and every seat on the plane. Learn which seats are the best ones and be alerted to the seats to avoid.

Still in the planning stages, it's important to consider meal choices for the flight. Look carefully at the meal options offered and make the healthiest choice for your tastes. Consider healthy, substantial snacks to carry on board. You never know what delays might happen on travel day and having something healthy to eat will significantly help your body and mood. Throw some chewing gum in with your snacks just in case your ears need help adjusting to the air pressure change during take off and landing.

Plan your pre-flight meal. With your particular metabolism in mind, eat what you know will provide you with lasting energy and yet not send you to the restroom too often. A delicate balance of content and timing!

What to Bring

Depending on the length of your flight, you can decide which of the following are right for your comfort needs.

One size airplane seat definitely does not fit all. Adequate neck support is crucial for comfort. I usually travel with a neck pillow. A blow-up pillow is more adaptable and collapsible than one that is not. Before take off, blow it up only half way because the change in air pressure during take off will cause it to inflate more at higher altitudes. Also, throw a hat and scarf into your carry-on bag. You never know when it will be cold or drafty.

Maintaining healthy spinal alignment is also vital. Consider ahead of time what you can use if there happen to be no pillows on the plane to use for lumbar support. I rarely use the words “always” or “never,” but in this case I’ll venture to say always use some sort of lumbar support to maintain a slight inward curve of your lower back. I’ve never met an airplane seat that didn’t conspire to curl me down sending my lumbar spine back in the wrong direction. So, be prepared with an extra jacket or sweater that you know you won’t need for temperature comfort to roll up for this purpose. In a pinch, take a magazine out of the seat pocket in front of you and roll it up. If you do use a sweater or jacket, don’t forget it when exiting the aircraft!

I usually travel with an eye shade. Even on short flights, I find it restful to close out light, easing and comforting my eyes and maybe even achieving a short nap. If you are listening to the [Constructive Rest On Airplanes](#) audio, blocking out light will help you hear better the gentle guidance for the rest. Find a shade that fits or is adjustable and is soft and comfy.

For my ears, I always(!) travel with soft earplugs. Blocking out the constant background noise during flight has been one of the most significant contributors to arriving more rested. Experiment, find earplugs you like and make

them as important as your dental floss (*wink, wink!*).

You might be wondering, how does he listen to the [Constructive Rest On Airplanes](#) audio guide with earplugs in? Well, I now travel with over-the-ear headphones. Adjust the volume appropriately and you are good to go.

If you want to avoid earplugs, consider noise canceling headphones. But know that airlines consider these electronic devices and they must be turned off and stowed for take off and landing. However, if you do want to use these, purchase a set that includes an audio-in jack. You can then plug your mp3 device directly into the headphone to listen to your audio.

Plainly, the air on an airplane is not healthy air. For long flights, I travel with a supply of face masks purchased from a drug store or pharmacy. The first time I went in search of masks, I told the pharmacist what I was looking for and why, and with a knowing nod, he directed me to the most heavy duty masks they sold. On the airplane I experienced only a moment of hesitation and self-consciousness after putting the mask on. Hearing all the coughing and sniffing going on around me confirmed my conviction to protect myself. We can further protect ourselves by inviting slow, nostril breathing. Breathing through the nose has many benefits. It regulates the temperature and speed of the air entering the body. Nose breathing warms the air, moistens it, filters it, and anti-bacterial agents in the mucus begin fighting germs. Slow nostril breathing also helps calm me down during take off, landing, and turbulence.

Yes, putting all the above suggestions together does create quite a picture with eye shade, earplugs/headphones, mouth and nose covering mask, neck pillow, and maybe a hat for head warmth! All in all, I find great comfort in managing the input of my major senses during a flight. Don’t care what people think, try it!

Arms and Legs

Unless you're a small person, there's rarely enough room for our arms and legs. If there happens to be no one sitting next to you and the arm rest is movable, put it up. If you do have someone next to you, consider asking them if they would mind putting the arm rest up. Yes, human contact is unavoidable, but perhaps both of you will find the arrangement more satisfactory.

Depending on your height, experiment with a variety of different leg positions. Perhaps you can arrange to sit cross-legged for a while or hug your knees to your chest with heels on the edge of the seat. Personally, I'm too tall for these unless I happen to be in a roomy exit row with no one sitting next to me. In most cases, I need to be content with small variations in leg positions. But what is most important is to vary slightly and frequently to keep your joints alive.

What to Bring: "The List"

- Attitude
 - A good one!
- Food
 - healthy snacks
 - gum
 - water
- Head & Neck
 - hat
 - scarf
 - blow up neck pillow
- Back
 - lumbar support
 - sweater or jacket to roll up
- Eyes
 - eye shade
- Ears
 - earplugs
 - headphones or noise canceling headphones
 - mp3 or other audio listening device
 - [Constructive Rest On Airplanes](https://constructiverest.com) audio guide - Listen while flying. It will help.
- Nose/Mouth

- filter masks
- Miscellaneous
 - chargers for electronic devices

Final Thoughts

All in all, flying doesn't have to be a horrible experience. But it does take some mindful advance planning and a deep knowledge of your own needs. Experiment. Try any or all of the above. By changing your mind about flying and seeking to meet as many of your needs during flight as possible, you'll have a better experience. I still think of flying as a means to an end, but I now know what I can do for myself and choose to do it.

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