



'MAD MEN' MEETS 'AIRPLANE!': VINTAGE PHOTOS SHOW AVIATION'S GOLDEN AGE

News / Airlines



Nowadays we can actually live tweet our own mid-air meltdowns, but how on earth did people entertain themselves on planes before the dawn of Wi-Fi and gadgets?

Movies have been shown in the air since 1921 -- yes, really -- but once upon a glamorous jet age we managed to get by without the in-flight entertainments we today take for granted.

The staff at AirlineRatings.com have gathered these vintage photos that recall a golden era of aviation, when to board a plane was to step into an exclusive world of luxury travel.

The images show that back in the 1950s and '60s, planes apparently resembled exclusive clubs where the cast of "Mad Men" -- or is it "Airplane!?" -- swilled cocktails, chain smoked cigarettes and played chess while waiting for the cake trolley to arrive.

Newspapers, books, playing cards, chess and, Lord help us, even interacting with the kids helped pass the time, according to the photographic evidence.

Comparing yesteryear's aviation experience with the often cramped and poorly catered conditions faced by many of today's long haul fliers, it makes us wonder where it all went wrong.

Happier days?



Flying on fumes: Planes used to be smokers' paradises.

Geoffrey Thomas, editor of AirlineRatings.com, points out that while the images may appear to show happier days, few got to experience them.

"With the advent of jets, travel was far quicker, vibration-free and typically above the worst of the weather," he points out.

"However, it wasn't always smooth sailing because not even commercial jets could get over the highest thunderstorms and weather radar was rudimentary."

Such luxury came at a price, not unlike today's first-class offerings.

"These images reflect the dress of the day for the well to do who could afford to travel by air," adds Thomas.

"London to Sydney and return cost 30 weeks' average salary in 1960, whereas today it costs one week's wage.

"Men wore suits and for ladies, pearls were mandatory."

And, of course, spoiled as we are by today's cigarette-free environments, no one wants to pay good money to passively smoke someone else's Dunhill's.

No matter how improbably engineered their brassiere is.

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