



EXECUTIVE TRAVEL: CHILD-FREE ZONES ARE INNOVATIVE, BUT MAY BE DISCRIMINATORY

News / Airlines



When Jennifer Aniston, in the recent Emirates TV advert, encounters a boy called Cooper in her A380 first class cabin and takes him back downstairs to economy, she is enchanted. She stays to play with him, swapping seats with his mother to allow her to sample the luxury of life upstairs.

But in the real world small children wandering around cabins, let alone sneaking upstairs to the first and business class sections, are not always welcome.

My memory of being kicked in the back on an A380 flight from Dubai to Toronto by a small boy is not a favourite. When after 12 hours I had finally had enough and turned to tell him off, his father – seated several rows away – stood up and asked me not to criticise his son.

I have always thought "quiet zones" on flights would be a popular innovation and a service for which many would be prepared to pay quite a lot extra.

For the business executive whose stringent corporate budget forces him or her into economy this

could be a matter of getting a report done or not. Excuses like "getting kicked in the back" always ring a bit hollow in the boardroom and those with families consider it bad form to complain about other people's kids.

Indian low-cost carrier IndiGo is the latest airline to introduce quiet zones, where the under-12s are not welcome.

This summer it announced: "Keeping in mind the comfort and convenience of all passengers, row numbers one to four and 11 to 14 are generally kept as a quiet zone on IndiGo flights.

"These zones have been created for business travellers who prefer to use the quiet time to do their work."

Singaporean budget airline Scoot unveiled its ScootinSilence upgrade three years ago in rows 21 to 25 where the under-12s are banned. AirAsiaX also has child-free zones and Malaysia Airlines has banned children from its First Class cabin and introduced a kids-free zone in economy.

The problem for business travellers is that families regard this innovation as discrimination. And it is.

q&a quiet zones are welcome

Peter Cooper also considers the merits of paid-for seat allocation:

What about getting passengers to pay for seat allocation?

In October, Emirates became the first Arabian Gulf airline to charge for designated seats in "special and saver" economy classes – Dh50 to Dh100 to reserve – although you still get free seat selection during the 48 hours of online check-in.

So why the controversy?

As one former Emirates executive told me: "Imagine a family with four children showing up and not being able to sit together. It will be a monster for the crew to move people around to accommodate them."

Other airlines manage it surely?

British Airways manages to charge for seats without causing pandemonium as do a few other airlines. Besides with the wide-bodied planes typical of the Gulf fleets there are plenty of seats to swap.

And is it a good deal?

For the travel budget-challenged executive being able to secure the quietest seats at the back of a Boeing 777-300ER could be a handsome bargain for Dh50 to Dh100.

So why not quiet zones for adults too?

If you travel on the TGVs in France or even modest UK commuter trains you will find quiet zones where the restrictions range from no mobile phones to no under-12s. Over the summer I travelled from Avignon to Cannes via the TGV in such tranquillity. While trains have more seats than aircraft, is allowing business executives some quiet too much to ask?

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