

# FEAR OF FLYING? WELCOME ABOARD!!

In-flight announcements are not entirely truthful. Here now, an example of an honest one.

\*A humorous essay adapted from an article in *The Economist*, Sept. 9, 2006 issue, pg. 15.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are delighted to welcome you aboard Vertias Airways, the air-line that Tells It Like It Is! Please ensure that your seat back is upright and your tray-table is stowed. At Vertias Airway, your safety is our first priority. Well, actually, that is not quite true: you see, it safety really was our first priority, our seats would all be rear-facing, like those in Military aircraft, since they are safer in the event of an emergency landing. But then, if we did that, hardly anybody would buy tickets to our Airline and we would go bust.”

“The flight attendants are now pointing out the emergency exits. This is the part of the announcement that you might actually want to pay attention to. So stop your sudoku for a minute and listen: knowing in advance where the exits are makes a dramatic difference to your chances of survival if we have to evacuate the aircraft. Also, please keep your seat belt fastened when seated, even if the seat-belt light is NOT illuminated. This is to protect you from the risk of clear-air turbulence, a rare but extremely nasty form of disturbance that can cause severe injury. Imagine the heavy food trolleys jumping into the air and bashing into the overhead lockers, and you will have some idea of how nasty it can be. We don't want to scare you. Still, keep that seat belt fastened all the same.”

“Your life-jacket can be found under your seat, but please do not remove it now. In fact, do not bother to even look for it at all. In the event of a landing on water, an unprecedented miracle will have occurred: because in the entire history of aviation, the number of wide-body aircraft that have made successful “ditches” or landings on water is zero. This aircraft is equipped with inflatable slides that detach to form life rafts, not that it makes any difference. Please remove your high-heeled shoes before using the slides. We might as well add that space helmets and anti-gravity boots should also be removed since even to mention the use of slides as rafts together with water landings is to enter the realm of pure science fiction.”

“Please switch off all mobile phones, since they can interfere with the aircraft's navigation systems. At least, that's what you're always been told. The real reason to switch them off is because they interfere with mobile networks on the ground, but somehow that doesn't sound quite as interesting. On most flights, a few mobile phones

are left on by mistake, so if they were really dangerous we would not allow them on board at all, if you really think about it. We will really have to come clean about this next year, when we introduce in-flight calling across the Veritas fleet. At that point the prospect of taking a cut of the scandalously high calling charges will miraculously cause our safety concerns about mobile phones to evaporate.”

“On channel 11 of our in-flight entertainment system you will find a video consisting of abstract imagery and a new-age soundtrack, with a voice-over explaining some exercises you can do to reduce the risk of deep vein thrombosis. We are aware that this video is boring as it is tedious, but hey, it was not meant to be fun. It is meant to be available and thus to limit our liability in the event some fool initiates a lawsuit.”

“Once we have reached cruising altitude you will be offered a light meal and a choice of beverages- a word that so much better than just saying ‘drinks’, don’t you think? The purpose of these refreshments is partly to keep you in your seats where you cannot do yourselves or anyone else any harm. Please consume alcohol in moderate quantities so that we can make a nice little profit from these overpriced, teeny-weeny little bottles of booze. Secondly, it also keeps most of you pleasantly sedated but not rowdy. That said, we can always turn the cabin air-quality down a notch, not that air quality is very good to start with on these flights, to help ensure that you are sufficiently drowsy.”

“After take off, the most dangerous part of the entire flight, the captain will say a few irrelevant words that will either be so quiet that you will not be able to hear them, or so friggin’ loud that they could wake up the dead. So please, sit back, relax and enjoy the flight. We appreciate that you have a choice of airlines and we thank you for choosing Veritas, a member of an incomprehensible alliance of obscure foreign outfits, most of which you have never heard of. Cabin crew, please make sure we have remembered to close the doors. Oops, I meant to say: doors to automatic and cross-check. Thank you for flying Vertias.”