

On my first long international layover for my new airline..... *and beyond.*

Well, here I am. Thousands of miles from home and many hours of flying yet before this trip is over and I am pacing the floor. I really don't want to, but I am. It has just been so long since I piloted a big bird that every new day brings a load of old and new challenges. On the good side I am happy to be back and the airplane flies like I knew it would.....fantastic! Further, I am learning the procedures (although they seem scattered to me and very hectic) before push begins. On the other side, there is a lot more to think about. Now just how can that be? After all, haven't I flown this same aircraft and even taught it for years? Yes. But this is a wholly different and unique world. The mainline support (I was used to) is not there and the Captain is much more autonomous than even I had envisioned. He has to have one eye open and focused on just about everything and each ear listening to different inputs. And of course that is but one of the many challenges to this kind of supplemental flying.

The old days are gone but at times like this one, I sure miss them. Flying repeatedly to familiar destinations in the states may seem a bit boring, but it has some huge advantages of which not the least is knowledge and safety. Flying infrequently to strange destinations with unique procedures, difficult dialects, and a lot of somewhat hidden hazards presents some real adventure. And yes, that is the word.....adventure! I call it Pee Wee Herman's great adventure and I am locked in it. Most guys who love this lifestyle (I have already found out), love the *adventure*. As for me, well, the jury is still out on that. Maybe I can give a better report next year as to how I am coping with the "adventure."

Since that first layover, I have learned a lot. I now have the right combination of electric wall plug adapters. I carry with me paraphernalia for sink laundry, and emergency k rations for food. I have a whole wad of weird international currency in my bag. And I have a couple of indispensable apps on my phone that help me cope, like a UTC time button and a Night Clock app (since most international hotel rooms don't have a clock or clock radio).

If I weren't in love with Barb and my family so much, then maybe the long 18-22 day scheduled trips wouldn't be so bad. Barb and I try to talk as often as we can through the computer by Skyping and using Magictalk. Even that is a challenge when we are on 12 hour out of sync timezones. Computer talking is very helpful, but the reality is that there is still many miles of separation. Since I never had a lot of exposure to these incredibly disruptive sleep rhythms of international travel, I really did not know how I would handle that. Believe it or not, that bio-rhythm flux has not been that big of a problem for me. Maybe after I do it for a while, and then look in the mirror, I will have a different conclusion, but for now I am managing.

What is the airplane and flying like after being away for a while? Well, that is what brought me back. The 767-300 from my perspective is simply fantastic. It is just as I knew it would be, a dependable, safe, and enjoyable machine to pilot. In fact, though I was away for a few years, it feels like home. I am very comfortable in the cockpit and can tell you that it *is* good to be back. Tempering all the good is, what I call the most hectic 1 ½ hours of chaos in the industry. That being the cockpit prep just prior to pushing back. Those few moments, I don't really care for. They are simply too chaotic and hassled. One may say, needlessly so. But once engines are started and from then on, I am back to simply flying the Boeing, and it feels good.

What about the mission? Well, flying for the government and transporting our troops is really an honor. I take it as such. In a way, as a good friend of mine says, it is a way to give back. I am enjoying the

mission and feel privileged to be doing it. There are times of great joy when re-unions occur and other times of extreme sobriety when deplaning a load of completely war-equipped warriors with their weapons and game face on. Those memories stick with you. I always say a prayer that they come back safe.

Just where have the travels taken me? I only have been on the line flying since June 23rd of this year and already have seemingly seen an incredible amount of our terra firma. Here is a short list of countries outside the US that I have visited: Bahrain, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Catania, Sicily, Chania, Crete, Qatar, Kuwait City, Ramstein & Frankfurt, Germany, London, England, Munich, Naples, Italy, Rota - Cadiz, Spain, Shannon & Dublin, Ireland, Amsterdam, Netherlands, Muscat, Oman, Athens, Greece, Madrid & Jerez, Spain.

These first few months have been full of learnings, laughs, intensity, some frustration, a lot of separation and new experiences. With a few more months under my belt, I will be able to give you a more thorough update. Until then, tailwinds, and have a great holiday season!