



## AAA CORPORATE TRAVEL NEWSLETTER

July 17, 2009

### Ultimate Jetcharters: an eyewitness account

On Wednesday, July 15<sup>th</sup> I was a passenger on the Ultimate Jetcharters shuttle from Cincinnati Lunken airport to Morristown, NJ. I was rather excited about spending the day in New York City, which made waking up before 5:00 am not as bad as it seemed. Once I arrived at Air10 at 6:00 am, I was able to park my car for free and walk 100 ft to the main entrance. I was greeted by the friendly pilot, Doug, and flight attendant, Carolyn, who checked my driver's license against their manifest. I then waited for the other passengers to arrive for our 6:30 am flight. Patience is not one of my virtues, so the best part about the morning for me was that I did not have to wait or ride on an airport parking shuttle, stand in line to check in myself or my luggage, pay to check my luggage, or go through security!

Upon boarding the plane at 6:20 am, my co-worker and I were able to choose our seats. I sat in the window seat, while she sat next to me in an aisle seat. The 30-passenger jet was very roomy and the leather seats were nice and plush. By 6:30 everyone was on-board and the plane took off at 6:35 am.

The breakfast served on the plane was excellent (and free!). I had a bowl of fresh fruit, a muffin, and orange juice. I was also offered a selection of newspapers to read. At promptly 8:00 am we arrived at the Morristown Airport, where the airport had complimentary Keurig coffee and cookies. We boarded the shuttle bus at 8:15 am and headed into Manhattan.

After an hour and 15 minute bus ride, we arrived at Grand Central station by 9:30 am. The driver informed us to be back in the same spot, ready to load the bus again at 4:00 pm that day. My co-worker and I walked approximately 2 blocks to the subway station to start our day. For those not familiar with Grand Central Station, it is in a great location in Manhattan. It is a walk or a short cab ride to Times Square and close to the subway to get to other areas of New York City.

After an event filled day in Manhattan, we made our way back to the meeting point. We loaded the bus and headed back to Morristown to catch our 5:15 pm flight. We left Grand Central Station at 4:05 pm, arriving in Morristown at 4:55 pm. The traffic going to Morristown at that time was not bad at all. We helped ourselves to more complimentary cookies and coffee, and boarded the plane at 5:10 pm.

We were delayed slightly because of air traffic control, but took off at 5:30 pm. On the hour and 45 minute flight back to Cincinnati, we were served light fare and drinks. We were given a cheese and crackers platter with nuts and grapes. I had water, while others enjoyed a glass of juice, soda, wine, beer, or mixed drink which were all complimentary.

We arrived back at Lunken at 7:10 pm. I gathered my things, got off the plane, and walked back to my car, all in a matter of five minutes. After a long day, it was definitely a perk not to have to wait for my luggage or take the parking shuttle back to my car.

Overall, my experience with Ultimate Jetcharters was terrific, and I would recommend it to anyone considering a trip to New York City or New Jersey. If anyone has any questions about my trip, I would be happy to answer them!

*Karly Ash, AAA Account Manager, 513-763-8848*

## Now disembarking: Delta convenience

When Delta Air Lines Inc. said it would eliminate local direct flights to London and Frankfurt it was, in a way, clipping the wings of all travelers.

The reduction in overseas flights among U.S. carriers, a pullback that began a year ago, is translating to fewer nonstop flights, longer layover times and in some cases added stops between home and destination. Capacity on overseas flights will be cut in five of the first nine months of this year, according to the International Air Transport Association. At the same time airlines are reducing fares to make such trips more tempting. The average price to fly one mile on U.S. airlines fell by 18 percent in May, compared with the same month a year ago, the Air Transport Association of America reports.

The result doesn't merely translate to less availability of direct flights. For some businesses it will mean a reduction in overseas travel, further feeding the cycle of declining fares and, in some cases, cutting the number of business travelers to the city.

### Inconvenienced by someone else

I don't think it's great for the profile of Cincinnati as a place to do business, said Simon Hay, CEO of DunhumblyUSA, based downtown. Hay said his employees use the direct flight from Cincinnati to Dunhumbly's main office in London hundreds of times a year, spending well more than seven figures. But the Delta platinum member said he has begun looking for alternate, less expensive airlines with which to travel. If we're going to be inconvenienced, we might as well be inconvenienced with someone else, he said.

Delta will discontinue its daily direct flights from Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport to London and Frankfurt at the end of August. It's just two daily flights, but the impact was enough to trigger a letter by the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, endorsed by dozens of local companies including Dunhumbly, asking the carrier to reduce the flights to three or four times per week, rather than cut them altogether.

Delta spokeswoman Susan Elliot said in an e-mail that the carrier is talking with the chamber and that CVG remains an integral part of Delta's network. But, she said, Delta is committed to reducing international capacity by 15 percent in September to ensure its long-term success.

When the global economy recovers, we have the assets to reinstate service in markets where demand warrants, she said.

Delta still flies daily direct routes from CVG to Paris and Amsterdam. It also will continue to offer several daily flights to London and Frankfurt, but they will require layovers. In September, a Delta traveler to London can risk a 45-minute layover in Atlanta or one that's more than four hours. Continental Airlines offers two flights to London from CVG with two-hour layovers. United Airlines offers about a half-dozen flights out of CVG with layovers of one to two hours.

## United move could cost consumers \$2 billion

United Airlines' move to force some agents to pay credit-card fees when their customers buy tickets with plastic is certainly a trial balloon but it raises a question for agents and consumers: will it catch on with other carriers?

Given the usual herd mentality in the industry starting way back when commissions were reduced and carrying forward to today's myriad of baggage, mileage redemption and call center fees, it would not be surprising to see this play out in a broader way, says PhoCusWright Connect.

Business travelers may be the ultimate losers in the latest scuffle between airlines and travel agents over credit card fees, writes David Grossman in USA Today.

If all airlines adopt this policy in the U.S. it could represent a cost shift in excess of \$2 billion from airlines to travel agencies, according to Paul Ruden, senior vice president for legal and industry affairs for the American Society of Travel Agents.

Agents are upset about the move and vehemently complain it is an effort to shift business costs onto their backs.

United, the nation's third largest airline, sent notices to some travel agents saying that as of July 20, they must pay the credit-card fee when leisure or corporate customers buy tickets with credit cards.

It's no surprise that United wants to cut costs since it lost \$382 million in this year's first quarter. Some airline analysts rank it behind only US Airways for the greatest risk of bankruptcy.

The fee proposal has drawn opposition from the American Society of Travel Agents and the Business Travel Coalition, whose leaders say they will ask federal and state officials to investigate for possible collusion if other airlines follow United's lead.

*TravelMole.com, July 16, 2009*

## **Delta, United hit with fines for misleading passengers**

The Transportation Department has levied fines of \$375,000 against Delta Air Lines and \$80,000 against United for failing to follow federal regulations about properly informing passengers. In Delta's case, DOT said a review of passenger complaints determined that in numerous cases of overbooking, Delta failed to tell passengers that instead of accepting a travel voucher or other non-cash compensation for being bumped, they have the option of taking a cash payment in accordance with government denied boarding regulations. The fine against United was levied for the airline's alleged failure to notify passengers when certain flights listed and booked as United segments were in fact operated by code-share partner airlines. DOT said members of its enforcement staff made several phone calls to United reservations agents and found that the agents frequently failed to tell the

But United may find that an \$80,000 federal fine is small change compared to the hit the airline started taking on YouTube last week from a disgruntled passenger. A Canadian singer/songwriter named Dave Carroll allegedly tried for months to win compensation from United after one of his guitars suffered \$1,200 in damage during a Chicago O'Hare connection on a flight from Halifax to Nebraska last year. After United repeatedly denied his claim, Carroll wrote a song titled "United Breaks Guitars," and combined it with a humorous video that recreates his bad experience on the airline. In the few days since it went online, the video has reportedly attracted hundreds of thousands of views - along with plenty of negative publicity for United.

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## **Two leading newspapers urge crackdown on carry-on bags**

Two of the nation's largest and most influential newspapers - The New York Times and USA Today - have published editorials that take the airlines to task for causing a new crisis in carry-on baggage. The Times editorial said that airlines' new fees for checked bags have spurred an explosion of carry-ons, causing the flying experience "to sink even further below the standards of bus travel in the developing world." The airlines do have regulations about the size and number of carry-ons, but these "fail ludicrously," the Times editorial said, and passengers are unlikely to show any common sense about packing efficiently. The newspaper endorsed legislation recently introduced in the House by Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D.-Ill.) that would set a uniform size standard for carry-on bags, and would require the Transportation Security Administration to enforce it when the bags come to the security checkpoint.

USA Today's editorial also blasted the airlines for failing to enforce their own limits on carry-on bag sizes and numbers. If they refuse to enforce their own rules, the newspaper said, the airlines should consider eliminating the fee on the first checked bag and raise fares instead. Or "if there must be fees," the newspaper continued, "why not charge for carry-ons and make checked baggage free?" Failing a solution from the airlines, the editorial said, Congress should step in and pass Lipinski's bill mandating a standard size for carry-ons and letting TSA enforce it. "Sure, there would be backups at security for a week or two while passengers figured out the rules," the editorial said. "But as the liquid ban showed, travelers adapt quickly. And, like kids, they'll do whatever they can get away with."

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