



New Trend in Aviation Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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With the closure of air space and land borders, the quarantine measures adopted by countries, and the fear of the lethal effect of the virus, global travel demand has dropped dramatically. The aviation industry has been going through the most turbulent period in its history for the last 9 months. All the stakeholders of the industry are trying to cope

with this 'slippery slope' for survival on one hand; they are also waiting for positive news about the vaccine and dreaming of an accelerated recovery on the other hand.

The pandemic that hit the entire aviation industry hard has created an acute awareness among people about the importance of traveling and flying in their lives. People, who have been obliged to

replace their instincts to explore the world with the discovery of their inner worlds for months, will not miss the opportunity when they have the chance to travel and fly again.

In order to achieve a slight contribution to their cash flows and to protect their staff, airlines have taken action to create an opportunity to satisfy people's desire to travel and fly: Flights to Nowhere.

The Flights to Nowhere trend, even though it does not have a great positive effect on the severe financial distress of airlines during the pandemic, it has potential ancillary revenue but is also attracting negative attention from the environmental organizations. Scientists are trying to comprehend such a huge demand of people. Some airlines call these 'scenic flights';

FLIGHTS TO NOWHERE

others are more direct, calling them “flights to nowhere.” Here are the details of the new trend that the pandemic has brought to the aviation industry, with its financial, environmental and scientific aspects.

It all started with the airport experience

In July, a travel experience project was launched at



Songshan Airport in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, where international flights were entirely suspended, for those who were stuck at home and missed flying for a long time. At the end of a draw attended by 7 thousand people on Facebook, 60 passengers per flight were chosen to have a fake flight experience. Arriving at the airport to pretend to travel, passing the security check, “passengers” having their boarding passes in hand boarded the plane. The passengers, who took their seats, spent some time onboard for a while and tasted the treats offered to them, then disembarked the plane and toured the airport before returning to their homes.

The great interest in this project has also inspired airline companies. Other countries in the region such as Brunei, Japan,

Hong Kong and Australia started to plan special flights where passengers go nowhere, with a similar approach. Japanese airline All Nippon Airways conducted a Hawaiian-themed 90-minute flight with 300 passengers.

Taiwan's biggest carrier Eva Air has also set out to take a three-hour country tour with its Hello Kitty livery A330 aircraft for its travel-starved passengers. As part of the project developed on the occasion of Father's Day celebrated in Taiwan on August 8, the plane took off from Taipei Taoyuan Airport and returned to the same airport after flying over Guishan Island, Huadong coast and nearby islands.

The cost of the flight operated under flight number BR5288, which sounds like “I love dad” in Taiwanese, was US\$180. Passengers were also

offered the opportunity to upgrade their seats to Business Class for an additional US\$ 34. Beef noodle prepared by Michelin-Star Chef Motokazu Nakamura was served to the passengers in-flight. As expected, this special flight attracted great attention from Taiwanese travelers. All 309 seats were booked.

Dining experience on Airbus A380

Singapore Airlines (SIA), which is one of the companies hit hard by the pandemic, has announced that it is planning special flights to nowhere. Passengers getting on the airplanes to take off from Changi Airport would again land at Changi Airport after a 3-hour tour.

It was even considered to add some special



options to these special flights to improve the "travel" experience of the passengers. Staycations at the best hotels in the country, shopping vouchers at Jewel Changi Terminal and limousine ferry rides...

However, following an outcry over the potential environmental impact of flights and the carbon footprint, Singapore Airlines dropped this idea after the review and made its way to another option. The airline, the flights of which reduced drastically due to the pandemic, decided to organize 3 separate events to interact with its customers.

SIA has started to offer dining service on one of the Airbus A380 aircraft grounded at Changi Airport. While having dinner on the Jumbo jet, customers, who had the chance to experience the in-flight entertainment system, were also offered souvenirs during the A380 tour after dinner. This project also attracted a great deal of attention from the customers who

had the chance to taste the most special dishes offered by the airline to their passengers on the world's largest passenger aircraft.

SIA also organized family tours to the training facilities of cabin attendants and pilots and gave visitors the chance to interact with the flight crew while giving details on the 70-year history of the airline. The tours are realized with complimentary craft activities for children such as shaping balloons into animals and making their own batik roses, while adults are offered the chance to experience real flight simulators. As part of the tour, which includes wine appreciation sessions and oratory workshops, the most popular dishes served to passengers on flights are also on sale.

Developing a project for customers who want to enjoy the world-renowned SIA in-flight taste from the comfort of their own homes, the Airline prepares home-dining packages and pairs them

with wine or champagne. Customers are able to choose from 10 menus including First Class and Business Class dishes and order them to their homes.

Tickets sold out in 10 minutes

Australian Qantas has also started similar practices like other airline companies. Tickets for a 7-hour special flight sold out in 10 minutes after going on sale. The ticket prices of the 7-hour flights operated with the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, including centers such as Queensland and the Gold Coast and covering the country, were set as US\$ 575 to US\$ 2,765. The company executives said that they knew this flight would be popular, but they didn't expect it to sell out in 10 minutes.

Matchmaking in the Air! - 'Love is in the Air'

Eva Air decided to take its flights to nowhere one step further after the flight conducted on Father's Day, which drew great attention. The airline

has launched a new flight model that will help singles find love in the sky.

Based on the idea that singles often travel the world in search of a new love, Eva Air will offer its single passengers the opportunity for a three-hour romantic date in the sky in its project called 'Love is in the air.' The flight will start from Taipei Taoyuan Airport and end at the same airport.

While single passengers are encouraged to meet and have in-depth conversations, meals prepared by Michelin-Star chef Motoke Nakamura will be served to passengers. Even though the number of COVID-19 cases in Taiwan is very low, passengers will be asked to keep their masks on when they are not eating or drinking. Passengers will be able to walk around and chat in the cabin.

'Love is in the air' flights will be conducted three times on Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year Day. Special surprises will be prepared for each flight.



Certain requirements will be sought for passengers to participate in matchmaking flights. There will be only 40 passengers on each flight, 20 women and 20 men, and all of them have to be university graduates. The age specification will be between 28 and 38 for men and 24 and 35 for women. Some preliminary surveys have been done to determine such criteria.

The ticket price was set at US\$ 294 per person, and all 40 seats for the first flight were sold out within a week.

Why do passengers show great interest?

How come people, who always seek ways to pay less to the airlines that fly them to the destinations they wish to go, are very keen to pay for it now, despite the annoyances (airport procedures, security check queues, mediocre in-flight meals, social distancing measures and the risk of COVID-19 infection), even knowing that they go nowhere?

Experts working on this issue think that 'nowhere flights' are not impractical efforts for the airlines to increase sales. The 'nowhere flights' projects manage to catch the attention of travel lovers. Because, according to experts, this new form of travel gives the frequent flyers the feeling of returning to normal life and a sense of escape from the gloomy atmosphere of the pandemic. In circumstances where air travel becomes impossible, the routine and sometimes even painful aspects of flying can become attractive.

Some people think flying means going from one place to another, yet others think it is a means rather than an end, in other words it is the exciting part of the travel experience. That's why many of the 'nowhere flights' passengers say that they realized how much they missed traveling, with the cabin crew greeting them at the gate, the captain's announcement and all other details about their experience. Thus, such flights at least satisfy the passengers' desire to travel. Under normal circumstances,

we often find the time we spend at airports boring. However, during travel restrictions, there is a longing for being even at ordinary places. Scientists agree that "we are starting to think that even ordinary places that we normally go have an exciting side."

Studies on the intersection of psychology and tourism at the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong reveal that an innate "desire to escape" helps drive the travel experience and pandemic-era lockdowns likely intensify that urge.

Although the destination itself is important for some travelers and for others, with whom they are going to that destination, it is a fact that travel makes us feel better, including relieving our stress and anxiety and improving our cardiovascular health, and in view of this, it's not difficult to understand why people show so much interest in 'flights to nowhere'.

Environmentalists are uncomfortable!

Climate and environmental activists do not agree with airlines regarding these flights, which are associated with boomerang. Environmentalists who blame airlines for damaging the environment advise them to seek more comprehensive solutions to recover, while believing that these 'air travel bubbles'

transporting passengers nowhere and leading to environmental pollution will not be fruitful. The study finds that continuation of travel restrictions due to the pandemic could possibly decrease this year's annual carbon emissions by 7-10 percent. That's why they are very annoyed with airlines conducting 'flights to nowhere', which they see as an obstacle to the realization of such a possibility.

Qantas executives announced that they have purchased carbon offsets to alleviate the environmental impact of the seven-hour flight, while Royal Brunei Airlines executives defend themselves by saying that they are using an Airbus A320neo, which has fewer emissions than many other planes. Singapore Airlines, on the other hand, manages to receive full marks from the activists by saying that they have given up such flights due to their environmental sensitivity.

There are a number of those who think that the popularity of 'nowhere flights' will usher in a new era for travel when the pandemic ends. I am one of those who believes that the COVID-19 vaccine will not only save the lives of people, but it will also pop this travel bubble and get passengers back up in the skies, truly ready to soak in the splendor of air travel once again... 🌍