

Sticky Buns and Other Hidden Dangers of Airplane Travel (496 words)

Airplane travel today has become a Darwinian exercise, where only those of Olympic fitness will survive. Frankly, given the psychological and physical fortitude required, I'm amazed that anybody will agree to fly anywhere anymore. Indignities abound, including the strip poker antics in the airport security line. First you lose your shoes, then your belt, then your hat, if you dared to wear one. You tirelessly whip out photo ID to officious TSA agents stationed every five feet all the way to the boarding gate, careful to refrain from making jokes about hidden bombs, even if the jokes are exceedingly clever. These are heavy sacrifices indeed.

Yet the most fatiguing thing of all is that direct flights have gone the way of complimentary airline meals, the difference being that nobody misses the airline meals. Let's say you live in Los Angeles and must fly to San Francisco for a meeting. Sounds easy, right? Wrong! Today, you can only fly from L.A. to San Francisco via a layover in Atlanta. Even when you die, you will not be able to catch a flight to Heaven without a lengthy layover in Atlanta first. (If you are going to Hell, your layover is in Dallas-Fort Worth.) You have two hours between connecting flights, which you think is plenty of time. But you will barely make it, having to sprint like a football player in a Hail Mary move, maneuvering around the billions of other travelers who are also stuck

with layovers (or hangovers) in Atlanta. Halfway through your dash from gate 14 in terminal B, where you landed, to gate 89F in terminal Z, where you will again depart, your carry-on will lose a wheel. You schlep it, seemingly for miles, as it thuds painfully against your right shin with every step.

Danger also lurks near the Food Court. The intoxicating aroma from Cinnabon makes you realize that those cheap airlines have starved you, nearly to death. Though they are boarding your flight, you must buy a sticky bun to ward off immediate famine. Risking all, you stop at Cinnabon to rest your bruised shin and buy the sticky bun. This presents a new problem, since the pastry is the size of your carry-on, and now you will have to check either your laptop computer, on which you planned to complete your report for the meeting in San Francisco, or the sticky bun. Reasonably, you check the laptop, since who can write a coherent report on an empty stomach?

Naturally, the flight is overbooked and under-oxygenated, although additional oxygen is available for only \$10.00 per passenger. You press the button to recline your seat, instantly breaking the nose of the passenger behind you. "Hey!" the bloodied little man in 29F shouts. You are mortified to have hurt him, yet you can't help but worry: Who will sue you first, the passenger or the airline? Your next worry, naturally, is how soon they'll serve coffee to go with your giant sticky bun.