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The New First Class: Flying Jump Seat

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Attila Szucs & Rachel E. Silverman

The New First Class: Flying Jump Seat

There is always that one thing at the top of everyone's list. Their bucket list, that is. Fulfilling that top item brings people happiness and a feeling of completion towards the good life. For me, the day Aegean Airlines generously allowed me up front with the pilots, was the day I realized flying jump seat was at the top of my bucket list.

Flying jump seat meant that I sat inside the cockpit, right behind the captain and first officer, of an Airbus A320 flight from Thessaloniki to Athens.

After four days of working with Aegean Airlines through a collaboration of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and Get Lost's study abroad program in Greece, our fifth day was a surprise. A surprise in the form of flying jump seat. An experience I will never forget.

From the moment I walked onto the aircraft, I knew something amazing was going to happen. Upon entering the flight deck, a flight attendant escorted a classmate and myself to our



seats in the cabin and the other two students into the cockpit. Initially I was concerned when I was sent to the back of the plane and my friends moved towards the front, worried I would miss out on what was happening. We flew from Athens to Thessaloniki wondering when it would be our chance. And it never happened.

But then, there was the return flight. It was finally my turn to take jump seat. I sat down on an uncomfortable chair, right behind the center pedestal of the cockpit, with a five-point harness seat belt strapping me in. Such a seat and seat belt are normally reserved for maintenance personnel and pilot examiners – it's rare that the average passenger ever gets the chance to access to the amazing 180-degree views.



As I settled in, I admired the interaction and preparation being done by the flight crew. From the pilots attending to their preflight checklists and the flight attendants boarding passengers onto the plane, to the cleaning crew making sure the aircraft is in a sanitary condition and the maintenance personnel ensuring that the aircraft is safe to fly, I saw firsthand the inter-workings of the predeparture process as the ramp agents finally made sure the aircraft was fueled, pushed back, and serviced. I was pleased to see there was quite a bit of friendly interaction between the crewmembers. The captain knew the first officer, the flight attendants, and even the ground personnel. I was in awe of how releasing an aircraft is so detailed and efficient.

Prior to the flight, I was notified about a “sterile cockpit” mentality. This means that the visitors in the cockpit are not to be a distraction, but to be another set of eyes, or two sets of eyes in our case. The only time we could legally ask questions from the flight crew was after we reached 30,000 feet. However, our captain was pretty relaxed and was happy to engage in

conversation almost immediately. Before even reaching our cruise altitude, we were in a full-blown debate about pirates in Somalia.

It was only during the final decent I realized, in less than 45 minutes we had arrived in Athens. I was busy observing all that went on in the cockpit, but because of the interaction between the captain and us, I forgot for a second that I was inside of an airliner's cockpit during a scheduled flight. After a seamless



landing, the flight crew said goodbye to us, and off we were with the rest of our day.

Flying jump seat isn't an opportunity most people get to enjoy. For most people, the airplane's cockpit is a sacred place. Years ago, the airplane's cockpit did not have a door and passengers could walk up almost anytime and enjoy the view and the experience. While I think we all know an open flight deck is impossible in today's work, if airlines today offered the jump seat experience at a cost, I'm convinced the ticket market would change.

If I had the chance, I would fly jump seat on all of my flights. As uncomfortable as that chair was, it's better than any premium economy, business class, or first class ticket. Aegean Airlines, voted Europe's best regional carrier, would undoubtedly become Europe's richest, and dare I say coolest regional carrier, if only they were able to implement this new way of flying for a mass market. I have no doubt flight enthusiasts would pay an extraordinary amount of money

to enjoy the experience I was privileged enough to enjoy through Get Lost, Embry Riddle's Study Abroad, and of course, Aegean Airlines.