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On Your Flight Today – Season 1, Episode 10 – Airlines and Families: Unveiling the Passenger Experience

Live Date: July 2023

Host: Corinne Streichert

Guest: Carmen Sognonvi, Travel Influencer and Founder of Top Flight Family

[Introduction]: On today's episode we'll dive into the world of luxury family travel with my guest Carmen Sognonvi. Carmen is a renowned travel influencer and the founder of Top Flight Family who travels the world with her husband and 2 children. With over a million followers on social media, they captivate audiences worldwide sharing their expertise and insights online and in popular publications like Travel + Leisure, Conde Nast Traveller, The Washington Post, and many more. Through her content, Carmen shares valuable tips on how parents can save time, reduce hassle, and maximize comfort when traveling with kids.

Today she will share the highlights of travelling with her children and provide us with some insights into the contrasting cabin environments that merely tolerate kids versus those that wholeheartedly welcome them.

We'll also delve into the inconsistencies in offerings of kids' amenities kits by airlines, shedding light on the need for an extensive inflight entertainment selection. Carmen will enlighten us on the airlines leading the way in this area and discuss the specific features of seatback inflight entertainment that truly enhance the overall travel experience.

Sharing her thoughts on the strengths of the airline industry and emphasizing the significance of design and aesthetics, we also discuss how expressing cultural identity in the onboard product can elevate the entire travel experience. We'll also talk about the differences between all-Business Class airlines such as La Compagnie and some of the world's leading full-service airlines with mixed cabins.

Above all, Carmen is a living testament that having kids shouldn't hinder your ability to travel. She firmly believes that even if your children may not remember every moment, you will cherish those memories forever. So, let's dive into this captivating conversation with Carmen Sognonvi. Let's go!



{Corinne}: Carmen, thank you so much for joining us. How are you today?

{Carmen}: I'm great. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here and talk about one of my favorite topics flying.

{Corinne}: I'm really familiar with Top Flight Family, a huge fan of your channel and watching your content, but could you tell our audience a bit about what you do and how you do it so well, in my opinion.

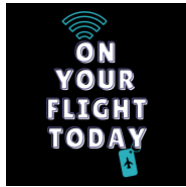
{Carmen}: Yeah, absolutely. So I am a travel content creator, so basically I travel the world with my husband and our two daughters. They're aged 10 and 13 and we share our travels through making content. So, we make videos for YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and, you know, we're big fans of aviation. I'm definitely not like as much of a technical av geek. I just want to put that out there. So if I mess up a couple aircraft names like you'll have to forgive me.

{Corinne}: No worries.

{Carmen}: But we just really as consumers, we really enjoy the experience. We have a lot of fun kind of, you know, trying out different products and, you know, comparing them. So, yeah, it's just something that we really enjoy.

{Corinne}: I really admire what you do and I encourage all our listeners to go and watch some of your content. It's fantastic. And hey, look, it's okay if you don't know all the technicals. I guess in my opinion, that's what makes your feedback even that much better because you don't know the ins and outs and the technicalities of everything. You're really looking at product and your experience from a passenger. So I think that's really valuable as well because let's face it, not everybody on an airplane knows what kind of aircraft is, the configuration. But I must admit I've been pretty impressed with some of your videos. You do get into some specifics with the configuration and some of the amenities. So, but obviously doing it for this long, you're probably learning as you go. But well done. But thank you for sharing that. One of the reasons why I was really interested to talk with you is obviously you've flown a lot of airlines and I know in 2022 you set a goal of 22 flights or trips in 2022. Now, I know a huge component of your products and services for Top Flight family goes beyond the aircraft cabin. You obviously look at destinations and things to do with kids and which I think is really fantastic for anyone traveling with a family. But, you know, this show, we're really focused on the inflight passenger experience. So, of those 22 trips in 2022, can you just kind of give us a brief overview of all the aircraft you flew and the cabins at?

{Carmen}: A Oh, yes. So we did a lot of interesting flights in the past year or so. I would say some of the highlights were definitely Emirates business class, Qatar, Qsuite That was great. We did the new JetBlue Mint Cabin to London, so we had previously done that, you know, the New York LA route. But then it was great to be able to experience it,



you know, kind of the transatlantic. We...oh one of our most interesting flights was on Fiji Airways business class. That was fantastic. Love that we flew KLM business class. Yeah, I think those are the main ones that come to mind. I may have missed a couple.

{Corinne}: Yeah, I have watched a lot of those videos and the experience so interesting that they kind of stood out. But from an inflight passenger experience industry wide, what do you feel are the strengths in the industry at the moment and what do you think are the areas for improvement? Noting that it can be different in different carriers and different regions, but across the industry, what do you think we're doing well and what do you think we could kind of work on?

{Carmen}: Yeah, I think in terms of doing well. I think that there is more and more attention being paid to design and aesthetics, which I think is really important because as much as comfort of course matters and space and these kinds of very tangible things, I do think that having sort of an aesthetically pleasing environment adds a lot to the experience. And it also just. I guess it feels like it more commands the value that you're paying for, if that makes sense.

{Corinne}: Yeah, it does.

{Carmen}: We definitely have flown a couple products that are obviously a bit older and therefore maybe not as up to date when it comes to aesthetics and you know it even if they're more spacious, and so, by that measure it's actually fine. But when they're like not as aesthetically pleasing, it does take away from the experience. So I would say, you know, attention to design is definitely one thing that I'm seeing across the board. You know, airlines really paying a lot of attention to, which is great. I would say that one area in which not that it's not being done well, but I would say it's more uneven is, you know, one of the things that we really enjoy about flying different products, especially like airlines from different countries, is I really like to see how airlines sort of express their cultural identity as a nation through the in-flight experience. And so that's one of the reasons, for example, why we really enjoy the Fiji Airways experience, because they brought so many elements of the culture in whether it was from a design perspective, you know, like using certain graphic design motifs that come from the culture that are used in, you know, in clothing and things like that, bringing that to the textiles that you find on board to some of the traditional ingredients that they cook with that are infused into the dishes, even if the dishes are sort of quite traditional, sort of, I don't know, European food, so to speak, like chicken breasts and mashed potatoes or whatever, but then they'll add some sort of indigenous ingredients into it, which makes it so much more interesting. So I love those kinds of touches, and I do think that there are some airlines that maybe are a little bit afraid to lean heavily into that. And so sometimes you end up with this fairly bland experience where it's like, you know, this could be any country like you step on board and you couldn't, you know, if you didn't know what flight you were on, you may not necessarily know, you know, what country this airline is



associated with because it's just sort of it's fine, but it's sort of not particularly unique in like a cultural aspect. So that's definitely an aspect that I enjoy a lot. You know, just speaking personally as a traveller. So I'd love to see more airlines kind of lean into that sort of culture and identity piece.

{*Corinne*}: You said that some airlines might be afraid to lean into that. We're not naming and shaming, I guess, any particular region or area or culture? And why do you think they're afraid?

{*Carmen*}: I don't know that I can narrow it down to any specific region even I think it's just specific airlines that sometimes just come across a bit bland. I think that maybe there are some, I mean, I guess it kind of has to do with globalization, right? Like there's the sense that what constitutes as a luxury experience, it just becomes a very much the same where I guess a bit cookie cutter and maybe there's a little bit of a concern that, well, we don't want to deviate too far from what's sort of seen as like the global version of luxury. And maybe we don't want to be too individualistic because we don't want to, like, turn off people that don't, you know, like this type of food or find this thing. Think that this thing smells weird or something. And then so you end up with this kind of bland experience. But I actually think those are the things that make the inflight experience that much more interesting, where through flying a country's airline, you get to learn a little bit about the culture. Yeah, it's not obviously the same as like being in the country and experiencing it, but you get to see how they express certain elements of their identity through that inflight experience. So I don't know, That's something I really enjoy and I would love to see more airlines just fully lean into that.

{*Corinne*}: So that's really fascinating, I think. Do you feel that airlines with a more global presence tend to be more bland to accommodate the diversity of passengers as opposed to those carriers that fly internationally but to just, you know, the smaller carriers that just fly to a few destinations, like, for example, Fiji Airways does fly, you know, I'm just going off memory here, they do fly to a few international destinations, but compared to some of the much larger airlines, not as many. So do you feel that that culture it's more obvious in airlines that do not possibly cater to so many different international travelers?

{*Carmen*}: Yeah, I think that is probably a factor. But on the other hand, I would argue that there are some airlines that do have a very global presence that I actually think do lean into their culture and identity in an interesting way. I mean, Emirates, its so funny because I feel like they've just almost developed like their own visual language, right? Like whether it's really whether it really has. Its roots in Emirati culture are not like the sort of like golden wood and the, you know, the sort of iconic hats with the scarf, of course, that the flight attendants wear. But I mean, I think there are nods to the home country in all of those design choices, and they're very distinctive. I mean, there's nothing sort of bland about the Emirates flight attendant uniform. Well, I think the outfit



itself could probably use a little more pizzazz. I'm not such a huge fan of the beige. Certainly the hat adds so much flair. So then you kind of overlook the beige. But yeah, I mean, I think I would imagine that that is a factor of, you know, the more global airlines maybe feeling like they got to tone it down a little bit. But again, I feel like there are ways to express that where it doesn't necessarily have to like turn anybody off. And then also, I feel like that that is part of the fun of flying, right? Like you go on an airline because you're hoping to experience something different as opposed to just another version of whatever your home country airline is like. So, yeah, it's an interesting point, though.

{Corinne}: Actually. You touched on crew uniforms. And from a fashion perspective, who do you think has got the best uniform? Not necessarily at present or has had the best uniform? I've got a two in mind.

{Carmen}: Oh man, it's going to be tough. I mean, Emirates, that hat is just very iconic. So you definitely need to give it to them for that. You know, Fiji Airways, I mentioned before, but I do really like how they bring sort of the cultural element into their dress. And yet it still looks seems quite comfortable for the job that they have to do. Actually, one airline that I thought had a very interesting sort of uniform was La Compagnie, which is kind of a boutique airline. I'm sure you know, up in case any of your listeners are not familiar, they fly an all-business class aircraft, primarily between Newark and a couple of cities in Europe. And female flight attendants actually wear Bermuda shorts instead of skirts, which it's just really different. And I think actually so much more practical when you think about how much, sort of like squatting down and bending, you know, that flight attendants have to do throughout a flight. And it's quite smart. So I think that's a pretty interesting choice. Qatar I do really like that color. It's just like such a rich, you know, it's.

{Corinne}: Burgundy and the cabin is that color as well. I think that was...And the blanket. Did you see the blanket? Yes. It's like, yes, I was allowed to bring one home.

{Carmen}: Oh, is that like your TV watching?

{Corinne}: Yeah, my prized possession. But, you know, I do love that color Burgundy that they use as well. Quite a fan of their uniform. The first time I saw them at the airport. It's, I think it's very chic.

{Carmen}: Yes. And oh, I just I realized we can't not give a shout out to Singapore Airlines. Of course, that's one of the most iconic uniforms. And that definitely, I think, captures very much like the cultural identity of the place.

{Double chime sound}

{Corinne}: Traveling with children. Now, I know you said you've got a 10 and a 13 year



old. I'm watching some of the videos. You see them like grow up in it, which I think is going to be a fantastic memory as they get older and then they start their families. So, I think that's an incredible kind of treasure that you're creating for your family. Can I ask, how old were they when you first started to travel with them?

{Carmen}: Yeah so we actually compared to some other family travel content creators, we actually started a little bit later than many other families do. And so when we first started traveling pretty regularly, my youngest was 3 1/2 and then my oldest was about 7. So that's when I would say we started definitely stepping it up in terms of frequency and depth and all of that. And now, yeah, they are 10 and 13, time flies, but it is really fun to revisit those older videos, especially when we kind of go back to a place that we've been before. So, for example, when we went to Dubai, the first time flew Emirates economy, which I mean they are known for having a good economy class, but it's still economy and it's a long flight. So that was like pretty rough. So, it was really great when we were able to fly Emirates again and kind of do it in business class. It's also really fun to see how the girls were back then, you know, when they were like 4 and 7 versus now. It's really it's really cute to kind of compare and contrast and see that they've also come such a long way to be, you know, little sophisticated travellers themselves.

{Corinne}: I bet as they get older and enter the workforce, if they have to travel for business and their company only has an economy policy, it's going to be a bit of an adjustment for them. But um..

{Carmen}: Oh yeah. Or their or their own trips with friends, you know, they're, they're going to have to Yeah. Get used to some, some economy seats now and then.

{Corinne}: You haven't travelled with an infant nursing under two years old so you feel in general traveling with children airlines have handled you know supported and offered amenities, products and services that have helped you as a parent traveling with two young children?

{Carmen}: Yeah. So I think our experience is, you know, as you alluded to, definitely colored by the fact that we're not traveling with infants and toddlers, because I do think that that age requires much more specific things than, you know, ages 4 and up. I would say that I feel like airlines are very inconsistent when it comes to offering kids amenities kits, for example. You know, I think most airlines have some type of like whether it's a full on amenity kit or some kind of a little activity kit for kids. I found that they're very inconsistent in terms of whether they offer it to you. Sometimes, you know, on the way out they'll give us one, but not on the way back. So even within one airline, you know, within one route, it can be really all over the place. And, you know, I don't think those are necessarily a make or break experience for a family. I think a lot of times we get on a flight and forget that that's even a thing. And then when we get one, it's like, Oh, this is



a pleasant surprise. A little bonus. I would say It's definitely very inconsistent whether kids get any little special goodies or not.

{Corinne}: Have you seen it, like I do know I won't name them. One airline used to offer it, then they took it away. Then they brought it back. Then they took it away. And just from my experiences, what I would, you know, if someone said, 'Why does that happen, Corinne?' Change in leadership, change in strategy. Someone new comes in and goes, 'Nah, let's not do this'. 'Let's do that. Let's do it this way'. So that also, I think can heavily influence the outcome of a product. So, in terms of, you know, offering amenities and services for children on board within the age ranges of your children, who do you think's doing it best and who do you think can improve? If you want to name them? Really, we're looking at, you know, recognizing, you know, who's leading the pack in terms of and leading the space in terms of really catering to families.

{Carmen}: Yeah, I would say definitely. Turkish Airlines, I think, does a great job in terms of just the range of offerings they have. You know, they do have a kids amenity kit, but then they also have this special like bar like bar menu. Well, not bar as in alcoholic drinks, but a snacks menu that my girls definitely loved. Yeah. So while you're watching a movie, you can order some popcorn and pretzels and candies and things like that. So they really like that. I think that made it really fun. So I think when it comes to catering to kids, it's not always just about the kid's specific amenity kit. I will say that for my girls, the in-flight entertainment system and the range of kids movies on offer, that's, almost a bigger deal, I think, for them than whether or not they get some kind of kids amenity kit or what exactly is in there. I would say that they always appreciate that gift, but it's sort of, it's kind of set aside pretty quickly. And I think the entertainment system is really big. And then also, I think just the more intangible things like. You know, I think sometimes when you're traveling with kids, you'll find that certain environments tolerate kids and then certain environments welcome kids. And those are not the same thing. Right. And so I think our girls are definitely very sensitive to that. And they can tell when they're genuinely being welcomed as sort of, you know, just another passenger who also gets to be there versus, oh, okay, you've got your kids with you. Okay. Well, have a seat. So I think I think sometimes the somewhat more intangible aspect, which really comes obviously to like crew training and the service culture that can also, I think, make or break an experience when you're traveling with kids.

{Corinne}: Okay, interesting. So would it be fair to say that perhaps rather than investing, if an airline, you know, some airlines are really budget conscious and money is tight in some parts of the world, money means nothing but, you know, if money is a key factor, would you say rather than investing in a children's amenities kit, invest that money in children's entertainment?

{Carmen}: In my experience with my family, yes, I think that that leaves a far deeper impression when it comes to my girls than the amenity kit, because, you know, it's the



amenity kit can provide a few minutes of diversion, really realistically. Whereas if you got 12 hours to fill, you know, that entertainment system becomes really, really important. And of course, you know, most families are also going to travel with their own device. You know, if you're a prepared parent, you'll have probably preloaded a few things just in case, you know, in cases of emergency. But obviously, it makes a flight so much more pleasant when, you know, kids can kind of choose their own movies. And there's a solid selection to choose from, not a bunch of, like super outdated movies or not just, you know, only 2 or 3 and then everything else is for adults. So yeah, I do think that's really important.

{Corinne}: So talking about in-flight entertainment, which is one of my favorite topics, you've obviously experienced the in-flight entertainment on all the flights with the girls. There are some I know and I don't know if you're aware that have a reputation for doing certain things, but I'd be really interested to hear your experiences as a passenger with children and children's content. So, do you feel that there is any particular airline or some airlines out there that offer more variety and more entertainment through, and let's talk about the seatback IFE versus streaming. They're kind of two separate products and they all have different limitations and different ways of doing things. But from a seatback entertainment, those airlines that do offer that product, do you feel that anybody is leading the space in terms of children's programming and entertainment?

{Carmen}: So, for my daughters, they think that JetBlue is one of their favorites when it comes to in-flight entertainment. They think Emirates is really solid, which no surprise there. They're definitely known for having a very extensive one. And then Turkish Airlines was actually one of their favorites. They felt like the kids selection was just really strong. And I think it had a nice mix of new movies. But then also, you know, some of the classics that they love. So I think for them so far, those are the three top picks when it comes to in-flight entertainment.

{Corinne}: And what's really interesting is obviously Turkish, English isn't the first language in that country, nor Emirates. So obviously there was a lot of English programming for children that they really enjoyed. From your perspective, do you get time to do stuff in flight and do you watch the entertainment? What are your thoughts on the content for you? Do you ever get a chance to watch it, by the way, is probably the question I should be asking. Or are you working all the time?

{Carmen}: No, I definitely have a chance to watch movies and shows on, on planes. Yeah. It's one of the most fun experiences, parts of the experience. Some airlines do it better than others, but then I can also see how it can be challenging because entertainment is somewhat of a subjective thing, right? Where what I consider to be a good selection may seem like overly commercial to someone else. Or maybe, you know, one airline has a lot of, you know, foreign films or independent films, and then someone else might be like, 'Oh, there's not enough superhero movies'. I can see how it



can be a bit tough for airlines to try to appeal to everybody. I definitely do think that it's a big miss when, when it comes to TV shows, when you just sort of have like three random episodes of like a season seven of a show and it's like, who? Who's really going to, I'm not sure who that really helps because if you're a fan of the show, then you've probably already seen those. But if you're brand new to the show coming in at season seven, episode four isn't a great entryway into enjoying that series. So, I definitely think on the TV front, that is often the weakness that I see. Movies, I think, you know, most airlines have a pretty decent selection of sort of more classic stuff and then some of the newer releases.

{Corinne}: Yeah, a lot of them do use the same content providers to source and curate that content. Obviously, they do put a regional selection in as well. But really interesting comment you made there about the TV, because I do recall in my travels in the past as well, seeing a TV show on a foreign carrier and only just a couple of episodes, it's like, 'Oh, how did this character come to do this?' And you don't know. So really, I think what I'm hearing you say is you want box sets, but if you can't put the whole box set on there, at least,

{Carmen}: Start from the beginning {Laughing}

{Corinne}: Start from the beginning, which makes sense. Any other features of the in-flight entertainment that are popular and that you really like and that your children really like?

{Carmen}: Um, my girls definitely play some of the games. I know, me personally, I really just stick to the movies and TV shows primarily. I don't find myself really browsing like the books, music, podcasts as much. And I think, yeah, for my girls too. I think they'll dabble in a little bit of the games, but they're really more focused on, I think, movies, movies for them primarily rather than TV shows. I would say.

{Corinne}: I have to ask, who do you think has got the best seatback in-flight entertainment that you've used, say, probably last year on all your travels? Again, you didn't fly everybody. But of those that you have flown.

{Carmen}: Yeah, one of the airlines that I thought was particularly enjoyable to watch was Singapore Airlines. And I think it's because obviously, like the size of the screen, you know, that does matter. Like it was just sort of a very comfortable viewing experience. So one feature that Singapore Airlines has, which I think I have seen a couple of airlines do, but I think it's not as widespread as it could be, is sort of like a 'Save to playlist' function where, you know, as you're browsing TV shows and movies because sometimes it's like you're browsing or browsing and browsing and then you haven't quite committed that. It's like along the way you've seen some good options, but you haven't quite decided to like, okay, this is the one I'm going to watch. It's kind of fun



to be able to just add these to a playlist and then, then you can go to the playlist and be like, Oh, okay, so these are the top picks. And then from there you can decide which one you're going to watch first. And then maybe if you want to be ambitious, you can like truly curate a playlist to last you through the whole flight. So, I think that that feature I really like a lot just as a traveller. And I know for sure Singapore Airlines had it. I think that may just be the first time that I had personally noticed it and used it. So, since then I think there have been a couple other flights where I've seen it. But yeah, that one just kind of jumps out for me.

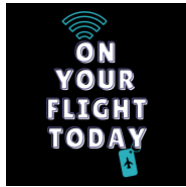
{Corinne}: Okay. Interesting. Yeah. It's like adding to favorites and building your playlist. So you get on board, you can set up your whole programming for the whole flight. I guess on that note, because I do know Singapore Airlines offer this as well, they give you the ability to create your playlist on the ground through the app before you board and before you travel. So as a frequent traveller, especially with children, how much would you like that feature? Have you used that feature and would you like to see more of that?

{Carmen}: I think it's a great idea. I think for personally for us, because of the volume of travel that we do, we are not able to plan ahead as much as I would love to, but I think it's a great feature. And definitely, you know, especially when there's an airline where you're already able to select other things ahead of time. Singapore Airlines, they offer you the ability to kind of pre-book or pre-plan several different aspects of your flight, like they have something called Book the Cook where you can actually pre-select what meals you want and, you know, put in any special requests and things like that. So I think in cases like that, it makes sense where you are sort of pre-planning your meals, maybe putting in any special requests and then, yeah, at the same time, why not start start customizing your entertainment experience? I would love to say that I have enough time to plan ahead on every trip like that, but realistically for us, sometimes it's like we just got on the flight and figure it out. But I think it's a great feature.

{Corinne}: Yeah, I'm a bit like that too. It's like I wish I had time. Sometimes I have time to plan, especially if I'm going somewhere I haven't been or flying someone I haven't flown. But there are other times where I'm still packing while I'm halfway out the door. So totally get that. But really interesting that you talk about playlists and the ability to favourite, correct me if I'm wrong, but did you actually say that you did use that Singapore Airlines feature of planning? It's in the app. Did you download the app before your flight and plan your playlist?

{Carmen}: No, I did not actually do it ahead of time, but I just did it on the screen. But I realized during the flight that, that is something I could have done, which I think is a great feature. Yeah.

{Corinne}: Yeah. I think there's some other airlines doing it, so it gives you the ability to



plan your selections through the app and then to pair your device with the seatback screen and transfer that information. So interesting, so I guess all those inflight entertainment connectivity designers out there, something to think about.

{Double chime sound}

{Corinne}: Just in terms of regional differences. So really what I wanted to get your take on, so I know you've flown all over the world. We've got, you know, the various continents Asia, Europe, Australia, the Americas. From a regional perspective, which region do you feel is really leading in terms of in-flight passenger experience? If you think it is a regional thing?

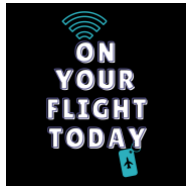
{Carmen}: You know, in our experience, definitely the Middle East seems to be a region that's really doing it well. And then also Asia seems great. I can confidently say that the US is at the bottom of the heap when it comes to the in-flight experience. I don't think that's a very controversial statement. You know, that's definitely what we've observed. I mean, JetBlue, I think, does a lot of things well. And I think in many ways they're sort of elevating what American aviation can look like. But, you know, overall, there's still a long ways to go, I would say.

{Corinne}: In terms of the US. Can I ask, have you flown with your family in premium cabins over the last few years?

{Carmen}: Um, so out of those, I would say when it comes to premium cabins, we've primarily done JetBlue. We have flown Delta One like right before Covid. But it was even then it was like a bit of an older Delta One product. So, you know, maybe not the best that they have to offer right now. We haven't done Polaris yet and I don't think we've done American. We have done American premium economy, which actually I quite liked. I thought it was pretty sleek. We've done Alaskan Airlines first class and Hawaiian Airlines first class. I don't know, like Alaskan Airlines. I feel like they seem to be one of those airlines that people really love. I don't personally get the hype. Maybe it's more of a West Coast connectivity thing. I don't think they are as extensive in New York. But yeah, the product was not great. You know, the fact that they don't have screens like they give you iPads, but then they were really weird about the iPads. It seemed like they were very unwilling to give them to us. It was almost like, oh, like it was like almost like this. Like for those of you on audio, I'm like, you know, tugging with my hands. It was like,

{Corinne}: Why do you think that?

{Carmen}: I don't know. It was very strange. Like, that's why I was it kind of turned us off. It's like, well, you don't have screens. You're providing these iPads, but then you



don't seem to actually want to give them to us. And especially for the kids. I think they seemed like especially reluctant to hand over the device to them. And it's like. They're kids like they play with iPads all day long. Like, if anyone knows how to handle it, it's them.

{Corinne}: Do you think it's because there's an expectation that everybody's traveling with a device, but we'll give you one if you really don't want to use yours?

{Carmen}: I don't know. It's bizarre because when we flew, we flew Hawaiian Airlines recently in their, I guess, domestic first class. And they also provide devices, but they gave them very freely. But there's this sort of a pole that pulls out and then folds over. And then you put the iPad on the the sort of this pole that sticks out. And so, you know, the crew came and they like, pulled out the pole and they put the like there was no question of like, do you want this? And being like, they just like plopped it down. So and I feel like Alaskan and Hawaiian are often, I think compared like somewhat in the same category where they're both domestic airlines, but maybe a little bit more of a niche product. So yeah, I don't know what was the deal with the reluctance to hand it over, but it definitely took away from the experience to say the least.

{Corinne}: And that was just a one-time experience on Alaskan with a tablet?

{Carmen}: Yes

{Corinne}: Could have just been a crew having a bad..

{Carmen}: Yes

{Corinne}: Yeah. Okay. Interesting to hear your US experiences. I'd love to have you back once you've flown Polaris and to hear and once you've done American as well. There are some content creators that focus specifically on airline. But as I said, what I really like about your channel is it's all about travel. You don't focus on any particular mode. So but you still have the experiences that others do. So, I think that's really great.

{Double chime sound}

{Corinne}: I just really want to drill down on a couple of videos that you shot. I wanted to talk a bit more about La Compagnie, the all-business class cabin in a 2-2 configuration, 76 seats. So, what was really interesting was that was the first video I saw of yours and how I discovered you on the Internet. And also lately we have heard of a new all-business class aircraft emerging in the Asia region as well. And what was surprising for me, a lot of people aren't really aware of these all-business class carriers. But then again, La Compagnie, they've only got two aircraft. That was a really fantastic video. And I guess I just wanted to hear your overall experience of an all-business class



aircraft. Do you find the people on board were different? The experience, at a high level, how was the whole experience of being on an all-business class aircraft versus one that has different cabins for different travellers?

{Carmen}: Yeah, I think it was definitely interesting because the funny thing is that when the whole aircraft is business class, there is no real priority in boarding. It's sort of like we're all in the same cabin. And so there was no particular order that they boarded even in terms of like row numbers or anything like that. So it was a bit of a free for all for boarding, like not in a bad way, but it was just different than what you're used to. And then I think also the other positive thing is that because everyone has a business class seat, you don't get that sort of, you know, sometimes when you're sitting in first or business class and then like the economy, passengers have to like walk by your seat to get to their seat. Sometimes there's a little bit of like that awkward tension where they're looking at like, 'I wish I was sitting here instead'. And, you know, so you don't get that at all because everyone's going to the exact same type of seat. So that's kind of nice. Yeah, it's so funny because that, you know, just being on YouTube, there's, there's always going to be something about a video that people react strongly to and it's never the thing that you think it's going to be. So for example, when we did our review of Emirates, people were up in arms that I was critical of the fact that our chauffeur drive driver didn't offer to help to pick up our bags and load them in the car, even though that's to me, that's a very standard behaviour of any type of whether it's like, yeah, not even a chauffeur, but Uber drivers, taxi drivers like airport, you know, long term parking at the airport, shuttle drivers, they all help with bags that sort of standard etiquette. But people were up in arms that I dare to like critique that. And, you know, such a diva for, you know, 'get your own bags'. But when it came to La Compagnie, the thing that people really fixated on was the fact that I was critical of the portion sizes because the glasses and the cups that they use, like, I'm not even joking, like it really feels like it's a shot glass. Like it's very strange.

{Corinne}: Yeah, I saw the video.

{Carmen}: Like, I mean, airplane, you know, cups. And they're already going to be a little bit smaller than, you know, typically you might have at home, which is fine, but these were many times smaller than that. And same with the food. You know, the portion sizes were really ridiculously small. But of course, on YouTube, everyone's like, 'oh, you're you're flying a French airline, you're expecting an American sized portion'. And it's like, bruh, like, no, I'm expecting a normal airline sized portions. I mean, these portions are very small compared to every European airline we've flown, Middle Eastern, Asian, even American airlines, you know. So that's just kind of funny that that was the point of controversy in that video.

{Corinne}: Quite interesting because I did, you know, see that vide, and I noted how you said the cup of coffee is only like three sips. I think you got out of it. The portion sizes



are a lot are a lot bigger in the US. But as you say, consistency across the industry, you know, bearing in mind the trays, the plates, the bowls, a lot of airlines, not all of them, but a lot of them buy it from the same manufacturers. So there could be some standards there. That's something I'd need to dig into. But interesting that you said that they had really small. And I thought what was interesting as well is that, you know, when I saw the video, I thought, oh, I'll have to try them out. It looks lovely. But then you don't get that feeling of being special.

{Carmen}: Right.

{Corinne}: And that extra level of service. Do you feel that the service is probably the key differentiating factor when comparing an all-business class carrier to the business class of a premium airline?

{Carmen}: Yeah, I think the service is definitely a factor, but I think there were probably also some logistical challenges to having an all-business class flight. In that, for example, they would have to heat so many more meals than, you know, maybe like on a shorter flight. So one of the issues that we ran into was that on one of the legs our food just wasn't heated all the way through. And so obviously, that takes away from a premium feel. But I would imagine that. You know, they're fairly limited on kitchen space because of the setup of the cabin. I'm not sure if there's one kitchen or two. I don't know if there's one at either end. Yeah. In addition to the service elements, I think that to operate some kind of an all-business class flight, I imagine that there's a lot of logistical hurdles. There's probably many more that I'm not even thinking of or can be aware of, just as a consumer that can very much get in the way of providing a premium experience. And, you know, having lukewarm food is definitely one of them. Like that's not especially when the portions are really small. Like it makes it even less appetizing.

{Corinne}: Interesting you say that because I can see both sides of it. Having an all-business class cabin from an entertainment perspective would be a dream come true because you're only configuring for one type of handset, one type of seatback screen. You know what I mean? You're not having to differentiate. It could you know, it's surprising that and maybe, you know, I don't know how old they are and how long they've been around, but maybe it's something that's on their roadmap because I know they've retired their 757s at La Compagnie and they're now flying A321neos. Were you on the A321?

{Carmen}: I believe so, yes.

{Corinne}: Okay. Yeah. Because you flew after you flew just last year, didn't you?

{Carmen}: Yeah.



{Corinne}: But my expectation would have been it should probably be a more consistent experience. And I noted that you said coming back from Milan, back into New York, there were differences in the amenities kits. There were differences. You said your food wasn't heated, but from an onboard experience, inflight experience being an all-business class cabin, I would have, you know, my expectations were probably a lot higher. But anything that's luxury and that's probably why we're in this business because we love it.

{Carmen}: Yes.

{Corinne}: Who doesn't? If you can afford it, why not? You know, But so be interesting to see what happens there. But yeah, really fascinating. Your trip on La Compagnie and thanks for doing that video because I did not know of and believe it or not. And yeah, so they're going to be on my radar.

{Carmen}: Oh.

{Double chime sound}

{Corinne}: I just want to hop over to Emirates and Qatar. So Emirates and Qatar are the two carriers. You've flown in the Middle East, you've flown the Emirates business class and the Qatar Qsuite, which personally is one of my favorites. I've flown it quite a bit. And the single, the double. My husband and I had the double bed. I saw that you made use of..

{Carmen}: the Quad.

{Corinne}: The quad seating, which looks like to be a really fantastic for family.

{Carmen}: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's amazing.

{Corinne}: For your Qatar experience, can I just confirm, was that right in the heart of Covid or was it?

{Carmen}: Oh yes

{Corinne}: Yeah, because you did describe your video as, well, you actually did disclaim by saying "if you don't want to hear entitled whining or if you just want to hear about rainbows and unicorns, this isn't the video for you".

{Carmen}: {Chuckling}

{Corinne}: And it was the good, the bad and the ugly. Quite honestly, I find it hard to think of anything about Qatar being bad and ugly, however, on board. I think it's



fantastic, but I have had some challenging ground experiences prior to Covid. So, I guess can you just elaborate the bad and the ugly? Did that have anything to do with the in-flight experience?

{Carmen}: No. And that's the thing that's so remarkable, I think, about both Qatar Airways and Emirates. We didn't have any significant poor ground experiences with Emirates, but with Qatar, the in-flight experience is flawless. I can truly say that like flawless, there's I couldn't think of a single thing that I could critique about it. But there's such a big difference between the in-flight experience and just about every other touchpoint that you have with the airline. So whether it's talking to people at the call center, it's like the worst service ever. Like both in terms of not very polite or friendly, but also just not very competent and actually helping you get anything done. That particular flight for us, you know, the bulk of the video was me talking about the horrendous hurdles we had to go through because, and you know, admittedly, this was our fault. We made a bit of a timing mistake with our PCR test. So this was January of 2021. So definitely still kind of height of pandemic era aviation rules. And so we kind of mistimed our PCR test. So then we had to rush across to the other terminal to get it, to get a new test and had to pay like almost \$1,000 for all four of us to rush this test and all this. It was like so much of a headache. But yeah, there's just such a vast difference between the ground experience or the call center experience versus the in-flight experience. And that's the thing that really boggles my mind because I don't really understand how you can be an airline that prides itself on being like the best in the world and then only. Have a really good in-flight experience, but kind of fall down so dramatically on all the other aspects, because, yes, the in-flight experience, that's the sort of crowning glory. That's the very memorable thing. But if it's surrounded by all of these really poor experiences on either side, it does detract from even if that in-flight experience was stellar, your overall feeling about the airline is not such uncomplicated admiration, you know what I mean? So, yeah, I find it really odd that you would be okay with such a low level of service on this side, but then have such high standards on this side.

{Corinne}: If ever you fly them again. The club is just like the plane.

{Carmen}: Oh, I believe it.

{Corinne}: So the clubs and the onboard experience, I feel, are their real strengths. But I did, you know, struggle with some of my ground experience. One thing I have to give credit for, I had an issue with the duty free product I bought. I contacted them through Qatar and probably they've got a third party handling that gets passed on to. I was really impressed. They were speedy in replying, responding, resolving the issue, sending a replacement. It was really, really fantastic. So probably a really great duty free provider that's providing support to them. So that was really one of the main contacts I had. I thought, 'Oh wow, that was great'. So I'm starting to think everything's great, but do you feel that Covid had a significant impact on that experience? Or even I know you haven't



flown them since then, but do you think that would the bad and the ugly would still probably be around today?

{Carmen}: I mean, all of the issues that we experienced were obviously related to Covid. So just the fact that we had to deal with their customer service at all was pretty much like 90% Covid related things. But, you know, not having really dealt with them before Covid, I don't think I'm really in a position to kind of make that judgment call, whether it's like things were better pre-pandemic, you know, post pandemic. But yeah, I just find it odd that, you know, an airline would be so tolerant of like such a vast difference of level of service in, in one department over another. But all that said, even despite all that drama that we went through with them, I'm absolutely going to fly them again because the Qsuite experience was incredible. And especially, you know, as a family like having that Quad set up was so cool because usually when we fly business class, the you know, the nice thing about flying, you know, business first is obviously you have the space, you have the privacy, but then sometimes that's at the detriment of connecting with your whoever you're traveling with other than just, you know, if you're you have one companion. But then with our girls, it's like we usually go through the whole flight without talking or really seeing them because they're just in their own little world, playing with each other and talking to each other, enjoying their time. But the fact that all four of us could, you know, face each other and pull those dividers and actually interact and enjoy each other's company for the whole flight, that was such a such a unique experience. So definitely one we want to do again.

{Corinne}: As you highlighted, not all Emirates business class are created equal, but you'll be pleased to know that sounds like it's changing. They announced last year they're doing a 2 billion customer investment in their fleet for their A350 and 777 aircraft. So I'm guessing maybe they saw your video and heard you. But yeah, it can be quite disheartening when, you know, you see a business class product, you assume it's across the fleet, you book the ticket and you get on there and you find it's not... can you just give us some insight into how you felt and when you discover that, oh, you could have paid the same price and had a better experience on an Emirates A380.

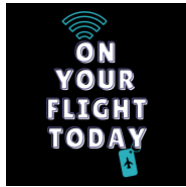
{Carmen}: So we actually for that flight we did, we took both. So we took the A380 from New York to Dubai, but then we went from Dubai on to Nairobi. So for that leg, it was on the 777. So it was cool because we got to kind of compare and contrast what those experiences are like. But we could very well have ended up on the 777, right, even from New York to Dubai, because I believe both aircraft service that that route. So yeah, definitely in our video we kind of wanted to highlight that, hey, you know, just because you're booking a business class flight, they're not all the same. And you do still have to pay some attention to, you know, exactly what product you're getting, which, you know, frankly, like for people who are already into aviation, that's totally fine. And honestly, I think that's part of the fun of it, of booking and researching and planning to make sure that, oh, you get the best product or try to fly something new that they now offer. But I



do think that for the regular consumer, it is a bit disheartening that you could end up buying a business class seat and be in the middle between with passengers on either side of you, like for the same price that you would be flying, you know, a nice single window seat on the A380. So yeah, we got to experience both. But, you know, back to the chauffeur drive thing, I think the other thing that was also maybe a bit lost on some of the viewers is it's, it's yes, it's sort of surprising that you would expect more from Emirates being that this is part of like this is literally how the Emirates experience begins. Right. Because it's the journey from your house to the airport. So that's the first touchpoint. But then the other thing is that, you know, the chauffeur drive is essentially something that's provided to the highest revenue passengers because if you're booking an award travel ticket, you don't get the chauffeur drive. It's only if you're actually essentially paying cash for your ticket. And so it's especially weird to me that, you know, you're providing the service, which is a premium within sort of a premium experience already, and yet the sort of highest revenue passengers are getting this fairly subpar experience with the chauffeur drive, which in New York, at least they outsourced that to Blacklane, which we've used the Blacklane app. It's, you know, for those who are not familiar, it's kind of like Uber, but only Uber Blacks is kind of a way to think about it. And we've used Blacklane in different countries and it's pretty fine. But in New York it's like, yeah, New York services, it is what it is. So, it's you're definitely getting that New York experience, but it's unfortunate. I feel like, I don't know, I would feel like Emirates passengers should deserve a little more than that.

{Corinne}: Oh, interesting feedback. Would it be fair to say that it could be worthwhile for airlines to put some investment in the booking path to really show you, granted equipment changes happen at the last minute, aircraft changes, but do you feel that it could be kind of a good investment and help with the overall passenger experience to be not necessarily transparent, not that they're hiding it, but to be, to provide information on the cabin and the experience in the booking path? So if you are booking on A777 in that example, you know, I know that they're getting retrofitted, but if you are booking in a cabin that might not have the latest product, that they should be more transparent about that, especially if you're not a frequent traveller or an avgeek?

{Carmen}: I mean, from a customer perspective, absolutely. That'd be great. But I can also understand that it's probably not in the airline's best interest to do that because they do have planes to fill and they don't only want to fill one type of plane and not the other. But yeah, I mean, I do feel that seat maps and things like that are often fairly strategically hidden or you only really get to see the seat map when you're about to check out completely. Like I know JetBlue Mint, you know, they they have, you know, two different products right now. They have, you know, the older one and the newer one, which is and the older one is more. I think it's like a 2-1-2 configuration with that throne seat in the middle. Newer product is the 1-1 configuration, which is really what you want. But yeah, they make it really difficult to find which ones have the newer product. Like you have to go through so many levels of clicking and there's no way to



just sort of filter for it. But you know, I imagine that that is also deliberate on the part of the airline. So yeah, there's there's definitely always going to be a bit of a gap between what the customer would like and then maybe what makes most financial sense for the airlines.

{Corinne}: Interesting I don't know if it's deliberate, though, having seen and heard some stuff behind the scenes. I know what I do know is and I saw a tweet as recent as yesterday, a passenger that was booked on Qatar First expecting their seat, but ended up, I think, on one of their 777 that had like a dated business class product. And it's like, what happened to my seat? I know for me, I would deny myself boarding. I feel like, yeah, like I can't do that. I can't do that. I've been lucky. Every time I've booked it, I've gotten it and it's been great. But overall, I'd received feedback, they're quite consistent. And from what I've seen, even though you might not have the Qsuite, but they're quite consistent. Did you find the service on Emirates was consistent? Were there any inconsistencies as a result of the different products?

{Carmen}: Not particularly. I would say that there was one leg on the 777 where our flight attendant was just not...she just wasn't the friendliest, I would say. But I don't really feel like that was necessarily linked to the the hard product in any way because then on the second leg, on the 777, it was fine. So, I didn't I didn't feel a tremendous difference between the two. But yeah, I do really like the Emirates service style. It reminds me a little bit of Singapore where I feel like both of them have a bit of like a casual, not afraid to have fun kind of vibe. Whereas Qatar, it's amazing service, but it's very stiff and very formal. So, I personally, as, as much as Qatar is amazing, like I do kind of enjoy a little bit more of a slightly more casual like friendly, a little bit, not taking yourself so seriously kind of service style. But you know, I've also lived in the US for a long time.

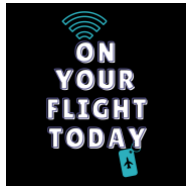
{Corinne}: {Laughing} Yeah

{Carmen}: Yeah, that's probably that influence.

{Double Chime sound}

{Corinne}: A couple of quick questions. Do you connect to inflight Wi-Fi? Have you had a great experience? Do you feel that it hasn't been as great, has it met your expectation? You know.

{Carmen}: You know what? I always have problems connecting to the Wi-Fi no matter what airline, what product. I don't know if it's just me. I haven't been able to figure it out. Maybe it's like my VPN settings. I rarely have been able to connect successfully. And then and then also part of me is like, well, it's kind of nice to not have Wi-Fi for a few hours and actually, you know, force myself to take a break from the Internet for a while.



{Double Chime sound}

{Corinne}: You're from New York. You know, our listeners are from all over the world. I've never been to New York City. I've been to New York, Upstate New York. But if there's one place to definitely see in New York, what would you recommend it be?

{Carmen}: Ooh. I think you got to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. You know, we live in Brooklyn, so I'm a little bit biased, but it's just such an iconic bridge. It's a fun walk. And yeah, it's just kind of a unique experience. And then also, once you get onto the Brooklyn side, that kind of deposits you into Brooklyn Bridge Park, which is just a beautiful park all along the waterfront. Definitely, you know, do that in warmer, milder temperatures. I don't recommend it in February. But yeah, I would say that that's a can't miss experience.

{Corinne}: Because one of the things I do like to ask my guests, because they all come from all parts of the world, is as a local, you know, we know what the tourist brochures say, what to see, what to do. But you know, what's an experience that's really great. And then I just have to ask if there's one thing. I came to New York City to come and eat, what would it be?

{Carmen}: You have to have a bagel here because truly, anytime I've eaten a bagel anywhere outside of not just, you know, America, but New York City specifically, they've been terrible. So I think most people have never tasted what a bagel is supposed to taste like. So you got to have a bagel if you come here because they're just made different.

{Double chime sound}

{Corinne}: I can't recommend it enough. I think you provide some really fantastic resources for families travelling with children and some really great insights. And it's beyond the aircraft as well, like destinations, what to do, what to see, and how to keep the kids entertained. So how can we find you find more information?

{Carmen}: Yeah. So we are under 'Top Flight Family' that's our brand or username on basically all of the social channels. So whether you're more of an Instagram user, TikTok is your thing. You like watching YouTube videos. We're on all three under 'Top Flight Family', so you'll find us there. So, our website is TopFlightfamily.com We don't publish there as frequently as on the socials, but feel free to look through the archives there as well.

{Corinne}: Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and particularly your experiences of traveling with children, giving some really great feedback to those in the



industry that create the products, craft these experiences. Lots to think about and you know we've covered a lot of regions. Before we go, is there anything else you'd like to add?

{Carmen}: I think just to get out there and you know, if you do have kids, don't feel like travel has to stop or slow down, bring your kids with you. And even if they don't remember it, you're going to remember it. So keep that in mind.

{Corinne}: I think it's fantastic what you're doing with your children. I know a lot of people are afraid and challenged to travel with children, but I think if you can and from the sounds of it, airlines are really working on improving that experience, making it easier. Obviously, some do it better than others, but, you know, it's not impossible. It can be done with planning and preparation. So, I hope that encourages other families. And yeah, they might reach out to you after this as well to get some of your experience and expertise. But anyway, thank you very much Carmen, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you for joining us today.

{Carmen}: Thank you.

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