



Spirit passengers feel the squeeze

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It could have been that I was influenced by multiple studies and surveys that put the airline at the back of the runway. Spirit airline CEO Robert Fornaro recently told investors, “For a very long period of time, we didn’t run a good airline.” Fornaro also stated that the airline’s 2,500 flight attendants have never received service training, which will likely come as a surprise to no one.

He said he’s working on the airline’s performance, and will eventually get around to customer service training for staff.

I had to fly again for myself — and this time I took careful notes so I wouldn’t block out any trauma. Against my will and the advice of friends, I bought a ticket on Spirit for a flight from Fort Lauderdale to Boston.

Spirit has gained a following because its fares are often precipitously lower than its competitors. I wouldn’t call this airline barebones, I’d call it bones that have been cleaned off by the crows, bleached in the desert sun, and then crushed into gravel. Nothing is free on Spirit, except the one personal item (16 inches by 14 inches by 12 inches) you’re allowed to bring.

Free carry-on? What do you think this is, Emirates? Spirit charges for carry-ons based on where you’re going rather than a flat fee. The carry-on fee for my flight ranged from \$37 to \$65 (depending on when you paid for it). Ironically, checked baggage is slightly less expensive than carry-ons. You can shave a few dollars off of all of those fees if you’re a member of Spirit’s \$9 club. But that club costs \$60 a year, not \$9.

For my flight I took a personal item (a backpack), and I checked a suitcase, which cost \$32. I also splurged and paid \$20 more so I could choose my seat rather than getting assigned an unwanted middle seat. That strategy worked against me because a very large man who smelled of horseradish and Axe Body Spray was in the middle seat of my row, and his ample frame spilled over into my personal space.

The first thing I wrote in my notebook was that comfort level was akin to a seat on the Orange Line, but at least on the subway I have more legroom. I fished the food menu out of my seat-back pocket. The pocket was filled with boarding passes of passengers past (but no safety card). Which led me to believe that perhaps Spirit isn’t the most fastidious airline.

“Put your cellphone into airplane

mode,” one of the flight attendants instructed before take-off. “Finish up your text messages, Facebook and Instagram posts, and make sure you’ve got your Tinder dates lined up now.”

“Also, I hope you were paying attention during the safety announcement. Otherwise, you’re going to be in trouble.”

And on that happy note, we were off.

My plan was to work on the flight, but that quickly proved impossible because the seat pitch (the distance between seats) is 28 inches on Spirit planes. According to the website Seat Guru, that’s tighter than any other domestic carrier. I could barely open my laptop. Also, I was afraid to open my tray table because it was metal and looked slightly unsafe. It seemed bet-

ter suited for a prison than a plane.

The good news: I didn’t have to worry about anyone reclining in front of me. The bad news: None of the seats recline.

There was no beverage service. I could have bought water or soda onboard for \$3, or a snack for \$3, but I made sure I ate before the flight to fend off starvation and dehydration. I contemplated ordering a Buzzballz (a pre-mixed cocktail that comes in a ball-shaped can) to kill time, but I thought I should keep my wits about me in case of an emergency.

Just as I started to doze off, the flight attendant took to the PA and announced a contest. So exciting! A middle seat passenger could win 5,000 free miles if they spotted the Lucky Seat Voucher when they pulled down their tray table. This was just like “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” except the golden ticket wasn’t a prize, it was a punishing promise of future trips in a cramped seat.

After the lucky voucher was found, the flight turned into an infomercial at 30,000 feet. Flight attendants came through with applications for the Spirit World MasterCard. If we signed up on the flight, we’d get extra miles. But wait, there’s more! If we signed up on this particular night we’d get an-

other 2,500 free miles.

It seemed that they were giving away miles like water, except they don’t give away water. It was still \$3. I knew that this airline made money on charging for fees, but this was ridiculous. The business model was clear. Spirit squeezes passengers on planes, gets them paying fees that are about the same as airfare, and keeps them coming back.

For better or worse, there was nothing particularly memorable about my flight. It was cramped, the flight attendants were occasionally rude, but I’ve encountered these things on many other airlines. I had no delays or cancellations. With fees, my one-way flight ended up costing about \$160. That’s about \$80 less than I would have paid for the same flight on JetBlue.

If I were a student coming back from spring break, I would fly Spirit and spend the savings on booze. As an adult, I don’t mind paying a bit extra for space. I’m also happy to pay extra for a safety card in the seat-back pocket and a tray table that doesn’t scare me.

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PHOTOS BY NECÉE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Life is a breeze at Florida’s Jupiter Beach Resort & Spa

By Necee Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

It’s winter in Jupiter, Fla., and it’s 81 degrees. Pelicans fly in formation, circling above the twisted limbs of sea grape trees before wheeling out across the pale blue Atlantic. I observe all this from a shaded hammock, swaying to the sounds of the surf. From this breezy perch, life is pretty much perfect.

Those looking for getaway may want to consider the Jupiter Beach Resort & Spa. Located 20 miles north of Palm Beach International Airport, the 168-room resort is ideal for an active family vacation in a low-key and quiet locale. Parents can relax at the heated oceanfront pool, waterfall hot tub, aforementioned shady hammocks, or full-service spa while the kids partake of all kinds of on-site activities, including basketball, tennis, billiards, poolside movie nights, or simply playing

in the surf and searching for shells along 1,000 feet of secluded shoreline.

Entering the spacious lobby was a bit of a surprise — albeit a nice one. I was expecting the usual Florida décor (pastel colors and seaside motifs) but found instead something reminiscent of West Indies British Colonial style. Cream walls with carved dark wood panels, ceramic vessels sprouting decorative live palms, Chinese Chipendale-style bamboo chandeliers, and a beamed and coffered ceiling led to an elegant elevator where louvered wood shutters were illuminated by shaded sconces. The theme continued in my king bedroom where oversized mahogany furniture, including dark chocolate marble-topped dressers, were lightened by rattan, bamboo and leather accents, cream walls, and white, gold, tangerine, and dusty-rose fabrics. In the marble bathroom, the wallpaper sported pale green palm

fronds. I sat on my seaside balcony and wondered, “Where’s my Hendrick’s and tonic?”

Of course room service could have delivered my cocktail (the staff is extremely friendly and attentive) but I decided instead to check out other drinking and dining options. The Sandbar, as the name implies, is a casual outdoor oceanfront bar and dining spot where bathing suits are the norm. Sinclairs Ocean Grill, open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., offers casually-elegant indoor and outdoor seating, but you must wear a cover-up. Both serve a lunch menu of salads, sandwiches, and burgers, and go upscale for dinner with entrees such as lemon pepper mahi, Florida black grouper with jumbo lump crab, and roasted rack of lamb. A kid’s menu—available at any time in any location—has popular items such as chicken fingers, penne pasta and cheese pizza. For a menu of lite bites such as surf and turf sliders, Caribbean shrimp and short ribs,



Jupiter Beach Resort & Spa offers a pool and beach, and hammocks in the shade.

to the newly restored Jupiter Lighthouse where guests can climb 105 steps for stunning views. For a sense of “old Florida,” Jonathan Dickinson State Park’s sand pine scrub, mangroves, and river swamps offer miles of paved and off-road opportunities for biking, horseback riding and hiking, as well as canoeing and kayaking along the Loxahatchee River, Florida’s first federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

head to Sinclair’s Lounge, open late afternoon to midnight with live music on weekends.

Off the property, Jupiter offers more family-friendly activities that can be arranged by the concierge, including sea kayak-

ing, snorkeling, biking, fishing charters, manatee queen boat tours and boat rentals, as well as guided sea turtle walks and eco-adventures offered by the nearby Loggerhead Marine Life Center. The resort is also close

JUPITER BEACH RESORT & SPA, 877-389-0571, www.jupiterbeachresort.com

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