

AVIATION CAREERS SERIES Error! Bookmark not defined.

FLIGHT ATTENDANTS



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INTRODUCTION

Aviation has progressed a long way since the 120-foot flight by Orville Wright on December 17, 1903, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and since the first US airline began operating between Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida, on January 1, 1914. Today supersonic aircraft fly routinely across the oceans, and the aerospace and air transportation industries employ more than two million people.

In response to its Congressional mandate, the Federal Aviation Administration, as part of its effort to plan for the future of air transportation, conducts an Aviation Education Program to inform students, teachers, and the public about the Nation's air transportation system.

Aviation offers many varied opportunities for exciting and rewarding careers. The purpose of this pamphlet, and others in the FAA Aviation Careers Series, is to provide information that will be useful in making career decisions. Publications in this series include:

- 1. Pilots & Flight Engineers*
- 2. Flight Attendants*
- 3. Airline Non-Flying Careers*
- 4. Aircraft Manufacturing*
- 5. Aviation Maintenance and Avionics*
- 6. Airport Careers*
- 7. Government Careers*

There is also an introductory brochure entitled "Your Career in Aviation: The Sky's the Limit," and one entitled "Women in Aviation."

Free brochures may be obtained by sending a self-addressed mailing label with your request to: Superintendent of Documents, Retail Distribution Division, Consigned Branch, 8610 Cherry Lane, Laurel, MD 20707.

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Aviation Career Series—Flight Attendants

GENERAL INFORMATION

While the flight crew in the cockpit is responsible for getting the passengers to their destination safely and comfortably, the flight attendants are in charge of the cabin, and they, too, are responsible for the safety and comfort of the passengers.

The flight attendant's normal routine is to see that the passengers are seated properly and to serve refreshments or meals during the flight. The attendants are also trained to handle emergencies, and over the years many of them have honored their profession with heroic service.

Flight assignments usually require overnight stays in cities away from home base. Flight attendants are then given hotel accommodations and travel allowances for meal expenses and transportation.

Although most flight attendants hired by US airlines are women, men are hired as well. There are job opportunities for married and single persons, and older as well as young people. The duties and working conditions for men and women flight attendants are identical.

Nature of the Work

The chief responsibility of a flight attendant is to ensure safety of the passengers and their evacuation in case of emergency. Routine duties are as follows:

A. Preflight Duties

1. Attends preflight briefings by the captain to learn about expected weather conditions, special passenger problems, etc.
2. Checks passenger cabin and galleys before passengers board to see that all supplies, safety equipment, and food are on board and in place.
3. Greets and directs passengers to their seats; assists passengers with young children and the elderly or handicapped.
4. Helps passengers stow hand luggage and coats.
5. Checks seat belts and observance of "No Smoking" signs.
6. Makes announcements over public address system regarding weather, altitude, estimated flight time, etc.
7. Demonstrates use of safety equipment.

B. Inflight Duties

1. Distributes reading materials, pillows, and blankets to passengers who request them.
2. Serves refreshments and meals to passengers and crew.

3. Gives first aid to uncomfortable or ill passengers.
4. Answers passengers' questions and reassures apprehensive travelers.
5. Takes special care of unaccompanied children.
6. Makes landing announcements and checks to make sure cabin is secure for landing.

C. Postflight Duties

1. Writes reports on minor medication given to passengers, lost and found articles, cabin and equipment needing attention and numerous other matters that may need to be reported.
2. If required by the airline, performs tidying chores such as folding blankets, wiping off the buffets, and straightening curtains.

In addition to performing flight duties, flight attendants sometimes make public relations appearances for the airlines during "career days" at high schools, at United Givers Fund campaigns, and at sales meetings, conventions, and other goodwill occasions.

Working Conditions

Flight attendants spend most of their time in the passenger cabin of an airliner. They fly from 75 to 85 hours a month. In addition to flight time, they have about 50 hours a month duty time between flights, and they must be present for check in to crew scheduling and briefing at least an hour before flight time. At the end of the flight, the flight attendant may have reports to complete. In most cases, agreements between the airline and the union determine the total monthly working time.

The hours in a flight attendant's working day are irregular and are determined by the flight assignment. If the flight leaves at 5 A.M., the flight attendant is expected to report to the captain by 4 A.M. The maximum number of flying hours per day is also set by union agreements and government regulations.

Over a year's time, each flight attendant averages about 156 days off, not counting partial days off before and after trips. (The average office worker has 96 days off and, works eight-hour days.) Flight attendants frequently work at night and on weekends and holidays. They may bid for flights, but the final assignment is determined by seniority.

Flight attendants are required to buy uniforms and to wear them while on duty. Uniform replacement items are usually paid for by the airline. The uniform is made to measure and is designed by top names in the fashion world to look like a coordinated high-style ensemble rather than a work-a-day

uniform. Usually the airline gives flight attendants a small monthly allowance to cover cleaning and mending.

Inflight duties keep flight attendants on their feet most of the time. To accomplish all their tasks during the few hours in the air, Flight Attendants frequently must work at top speed. At times, they must serve meals and pour beverages under rough and uncomfortable flying conditions. (No hot beverages are served in turbulent air.) They must be pleasant to all kinds of people, some of whom can be annoying and demanding.

Depending upon seniority, the flight attendant may be directed by a senior flight attendant or may direct the work of a junior flight attendant. Flight attendants may provide elaborate service to a small number of first-class passengers or less elaborate but substantial service to a larger number of tourist-class passengers.

Where the Jobs Are

Flight attendants are employed by every airline and are based, or “domiciled,” at major cities along the airline's routes and at the airline's headquarters city. In general, flight attendants work out of major airline centers such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, Denver, Atlanta, Boston, Kansas City, Detroit, Seattle, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Washington, DC.

Wages and Benefits

Usually a guaranteed monthly salary is paid for a minimum number of base hours ranging from 67 to 85, depending upon union agreements. For every hour flown above the minimum guarantee, extra incentive payments are made on an hourly basis. Flight attendants on international flights customarily mean higher salaries than those do on domestic flights.

Flight attendants earn about \$12,000 to \$14,000 annually to start, with small increases during the first five years of employment. Those with six years of flying experience have median annual earnings of approximately \$27,000, while some senior flight attendants are paid \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year. Flight attendants receive extra compensation for overtime, and for night and international flights.

A flight attendant has the same benefits as other airline employees, such as paid vacation, paid sick leave, paid medical insurance and life insurance, and retirement benefits, greatly reduced air travel expenses for self and immediate family, and credit union membership. With the time and low air fares at their disposal, flight attendants can afford to vacation almost anywhere in the world.

The majority of flight attendants are represented by one of the following unions: Association of Flight Attendants, Teamsters (IBT), or Air Transport Division of the Transport Workers Union of America. Several airlines have company unions (such as the Association of Professional Flight Attendants).

Opportunities for Advancement

If they successfully complete the training course, new flight attendants begin work on a probation basis for six months. During this time, they are on call to work on extra flights or as replacements for flight attendants who are ill or on vacation. Their work is periodically observed by the airline's management staff. If the probation period review is favorable, the new flight attendant can advance in time to become a senior flight attendant, supervising flight attendant, or an instructor.

Flight attendants also may be considered for positions in reservations or ticket sales, public relations, or personnel recruiting, depending upon qualifications for these positions. Their experience qualifies them for numerous jobs involving contact with the public. Fewer flight attendants, however, are changing jobs. The past average tenure of two years is now more than seven years and increasing. The flight attendant job is now being viewed as a profession for career-minded individuals.

Requirements to Enter the Job

A. Physical: Applicants usually must be at least 19 to 20 years old, although some airlines have higher minimum age requirements. Flight attendants must be in excellent health and be able to speak clearly. They should have an attractive appearance, good personal hygiene, and a height of at least 5' 2" in order to reach overhead bins. Weight should be in proportion to height. Vision may be corrected with eyeglasses or contact lenses.

B. Personality: Applicants must be poised, mature, emotionally stable, outgoing, and good conversationalists.

C. Marital Status: Married men and women with children are eligible, as are those who are single, widowed, or divorced.

D. Education: Applicants must be high school graduates, but persons with several years of college or experience in dealing with the public are preferred.

E. Other: Applicants who desire to fly international airlines generally must be fluent in a foreign language, such as French, Spanish, German, or Japanese.

Training

Airlines operate flight attendant training programs on a continuing basis or as needed. The large airlines have schools with campus-like facilities for training flight attendants. Training periods range from four to six weeks. Trainees learn about the theory of flight, the components of an airliner and their functions, airline terminology, air traffic control, emergency and safety procedures, evacuation, first aid, airline routes and regulations, serving methods, and a host of other

details. Courses are also provided in personal grooming and weight control. Trainees for international routes receive additional instruction in passport and customs regulations, as well as methods of dealing with terrorism.

Each year flight attendants are also required to go through recurrent training and pass an FAA safety examination in order to continue flying.

Room and board, room and school supplies are provided free, as well as air transportation from the trainees' homes to the school. The value of the airlines' flight attendant training program amounts to several thousand dollars per student.

Some schools and colleges offer flight attendant training that may give a candidate some advantage. However, these graduates may still be required to complete an airline's own training program. Therefore, it is advisable for the candidate to check with the airlines for their policies regarding prior training.

After finishing their initial training, flight attendants are assigned to one of their airline's bases. New attendants are placed in reserve status and are called on either to staff extra flights or all in for attendants who are sick or on vacation. Reserve attendants on duty must be available on short notice. Attendants usually remain on reserve for at least one year, at some cities it may take five years or longer to advance from reserve to permanent status.

Outlook for the Future

Competition for flight attendant positions will remain strong through the end of this century; the perceived glamour of the airline industry and the opportunity to travel will continue to attract job applicants.

Growth in population, including those who have the desire or need to travel, will increase the number of airline passengers. FAA regulations require one attendant for every 50 seats. It is estimated that about 132,000 additional flight attendants will be needed by the year 2004. However, persons considering a career as a flight attendant also should be aware that downturns in the economy could result in flight attendants with low seniority being put on part-time schedules or laid off.

Where to Apply

Most, if not all, of the major airlines are members of the Air Transport Association. The ATA offers a brochure entitled "People of the Airlines" that lists the names, addresses, and phone numbers of its member airlines. You can request a free copy of this brochure from the Public Information Department, Air Transport Association, 1709 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006.

Listings of the regional airlines are more difficult to obtain. You can probably locate those regionals serving your own area by consulting the telephone directory yellow pages. Extensive information and airline career assistance are provided, for a membership fee, by the Future Aviation Professionals of America (FAPA), 4959 Massachusetts Boulevard, Atlanta, GA 30337; 1-800-JET-JOBS (1-800-538-5267), ext. 190.

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT TALKS ABOUT HER JOB

Marianne Moore is a flight attendant with USAir and a representative of the Association of Flight Attendants. She has had more than 20 years of service as a flight attendant.

Very intensive training is necessary to become a flight attendant. First of all, over the years, it's become a lot more popular job, and the airline companies go through a big screening process in selecting the applicants who will go through training school.

Different airlines have different educational requirements. Their physical requirements are not as strict as they used to be, mostly due to legal battles and union representation. We now have mothers who can fly, and weight restrictions are much more lenient.

The training schools are run by the airlines according to FAA requirements. You spend most of your time studying, learning the Federal Aviation Regulations inside and out. You must know the aircraft that you're going to be flying. You have to know how to evacuate an airplane under many different conditions, and you go through all the scenarios that might be countered in an emergency. We are taught first aid.

Once a year we have to go through recurrent training and learn anything new that's come out. It's sad to say, but every time an airplane crashes we learn a lot from it. Also, we have to practice emergency procedures, including a mock exercise in evacuating an airplane. You get into the simulator and go to your exit and sometimes the exit will be blocked by fire and you have to know what to do in that situation.

After the TWA incident in Beirut, we were required to go through eight hours of hijack training because the government and the airlines felt the crews needed more background in that area.

In order to make an informed choice as to an airline career, I would most definitely research the airline that I was giving my application to. The airlines can be selective, but you can be selective, too. Contact the FAA or the Department of Transportation and try to find out if the airline of your choice is financially stable and has a good operating record.

Apply to several airlines; don't put all your eggs into one basket. I think it's very important to realize that it's a transient job, especially with mergers and acquisitions and the way that the airline industry is growing. But you have to be flexible. That's the name of the game. You might be told one day--or you might just pick up a newspaper and find out--that your airline was bought by somebody else, which more than likely means you'll have a move on your hands. You have to go to where the flying is.

You have to realize that it's not all a glamour job. You do get to work with the public and you can get a lot of fulfillment by the things you do for your passengers, but it's hard and tedious work, and it's very uncertain these days.