

Do the needs of the many justify the sacrifice of the few (or the one)?

Once again sitting in a metal tube, hurtling through the air at an elevation where the outside temperature is -40 and yet if anything, I'm too warm and wondering, just 8 or so hours into this ordeal, if it's survivable.

52 hours from when I started I'll be back home. In the meantime, I'll have been on 6 flights, covered 17,891 miles, and not stayed in any one place more than 6.5 hours... and that will have been in the middle of the night.

San Francisco. Seattle. Tokyo. Singapore. Tokyo again. Las Angeles. San Francisco.

Where is the SST (Concorde, super-sonic plane capable of three times the speed of the planes I'm traveling on) when I need it? For that matter, where is my sanity? Why would anyone do this?

I'll tell you why. It's not for me; I'd rather be out riding Tuesday morning with the guys. But my family does enough traveling that it makes sense for me to attain a moderate level of status on the airline (United) so that the frequent-flyer miles I earn can be used more-easily for free travel. Not just free travel, but... get this... quite often Karen, Becky & Kevin get to fly in Business or First Class, on miles I earned... earned flying exclusively in coach. Because the only way you can earn the elite status required for such wonderful benefits is through paid bis (butt-in-seat) miles. No way can I afford to pay for a business fare, let alone first class.

Two hours to Seattle. Piece of cake. 3.5 hours into a 10 hour flight to Tokyo. Squirming already setting in. Normally, one endures unfavorable things because there's a carrot at the end of the stick. My carrot? 4 more flights after this one.

It's a rather unique test of my will. I have a plan (remember, I always have a plan). I'm going to stay on California time the whole trip, which, if I can convince myself to sleep on the segments to & from Singapore, should actually keep me from being jet-lagged.

The trip is actually timed such that my 12:20am-7:05am stint in Singapore corresponds to something like 8:20am-3:05pm. I'll be uniquely positioned to observe whatever zombies exist in Singapore! How do you put a price on that?

United calls this level of insanity, er I mean elite, "Platinum." You get it for flying 75,000 paid miles in one year, although there are non-flying means to chip away at a small part of that (up to 5,000 miles can be earned through using a special credit card on United's website when purchasing tickets, and another 5,000 miles from hitting a spending threshold). United has 6 levels of customer status, with Platinum being 4th from the bottom (or 3rd from the top).

By earning Platinum status, I get a monstrous free luggage allowance (that I'll never use), I get to use the "fancy" lounges free when traveling internationally, and, best of all, for award (free flights booked with miles) tickets, no fees, even to cancel (typically \$150).

No fees for booking close-in (within 21 days, you usually have a \$75 extra fee tacked on). An expanded selection of seats. All of which basically allows me to fly my family places in biz or first, for about the same number of miles most people use for coach. All while I'm back in... coach. Because I have to pay for my trips (to earn status) and no way can I afford business, let alone first.

What about the cost of this flight to Singapore? \$1162 before using an expiring \$500 e-certificate I "earned" due to a mishap on an earlier United flight. No cost for meals (still free in International), and as for my time, I'm actually getting some things done which I normally wouldn't due to interruptions etc. That's one of the nice things about planes without wifi. No interruptions.

Oh, one other benefit to Platinum status. The FA remembers your drink (tonic water) when she brings by the tray of cups in-between the normal meal services. That's got to be worth something, right?