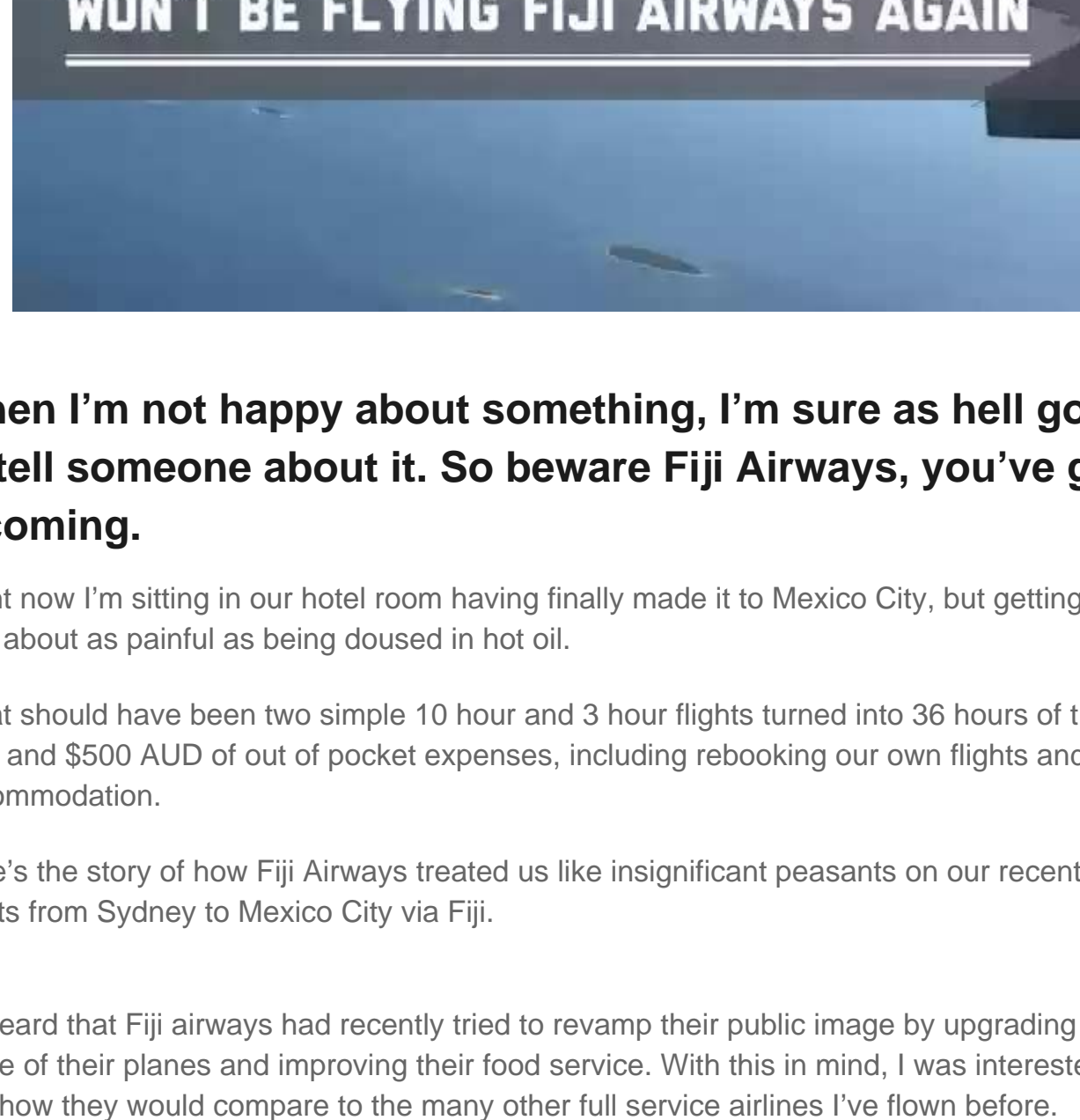


Destinations, Fiji, fiji airlines, fiji airways, Journal, Oceania - May 26, 2015

My worst flight ever: Why I won't be flying Fiji Airways again



When I'm not happy about something, I'm sure as hell going to tell someone about it. So beware Fiji Airways, you've got it coming.

Right now I'm sitting in our hotel room having finally made it to Mexico City, but getting here was about as painful as being doused in hot oil.

What should have been two simple 10 hour and 3 hour flights turned into 36 hours of travel time and \$500 AUD of out of pocket expenses, including rebooking our own flights and accommodation.

Here's the story of how Fiji Airways treated us like insignificant peasants on our recent flights from Sydney to Mexico City via Fiji.

I'd heard that Fiji airways had recently tried to revamp their public image by upgrading some of their planes and improving their food service. With this in mind, I was interested to see how they would compare to the many other full service airlines I've flown before.

SYDNEY TO NADI (SYD-NAN)

We booked our flights about 10 months in advance so time changes were always going to be possible, but what I didn't expect was to be advised of a 9 hour delay only a day before we were due to fly out.

If we were to accept this time change, we'd arrive into Fiji at the incredibly useless time of 3:15 AM, so we opted to change to an early morning flight in order to arrive at an acceptable hour.

Dragging ourselves out of bed at 4:00 AM, we made our way to the airport for our new 6:30am flight, but after checking in we discovered that this flight had now been delayed by an hour. I daydreamed about that extra 60 minutes of sleep I could have had.

Sitting in the gate with our fellow passengers, we noticed that every second person was under the age of 5. This of course meant any attempt at catching up on sleep from our early start was abolished. This was not Fiji Airways fault of course, but it did have us dreading the flight.

Just as we thought we might be able to board, a gate change was announced... to the opposite end of Sydney's international airport. Along with the other passengers, we grumbled tiredly as we made the 15 minute walk to our new gate.

Finally, we boarded and began the 4 hour flight to Fiji. As you would expect of any flight where the majority of passengers are small children, we were treated to at least 1-3 crying babies in our vicinity at any one time. It was not a restful flight.



NADI TO LOS ANGELES (NAN-LAX)

We somewhat enjoyed our 4 days in Fiji even with a bunch of things not going to plan, and organised a taxi back to the airport for the next leg of our trip to LA.

I'd checked the flight status about an hour before we left. Our taxi driver asked us if we were sure that our flight was departing on time as he'd received a notification that it been delayed by 1-2 hours. Assuring him that we'd checked, we continued on to the airport.

The endless line to check in was at a stand still. With no indication of what time our flight would depart and the queue not moving forward, we stood around and wondered what the hell was going on.

And then it was announced. Our flight was delayed until 7:05 AM the next morning, *yet another* 9 hour delay.

Wishing they had notified us of this before we left the hostel, we stood around for a while longer awaiting further instruction. An announcement was made that they would be giving out food vouchers, but that they would be only valid for use inside the airport.

Not at all satisfied that the airline had apparently *'run out of hotel vouchers'* for everyone waiting in line, we decided to forego the food vouchers (and a night on the airport floor) and booked a room at a nearby hotel; a decision shared by some other passengers from our flight.

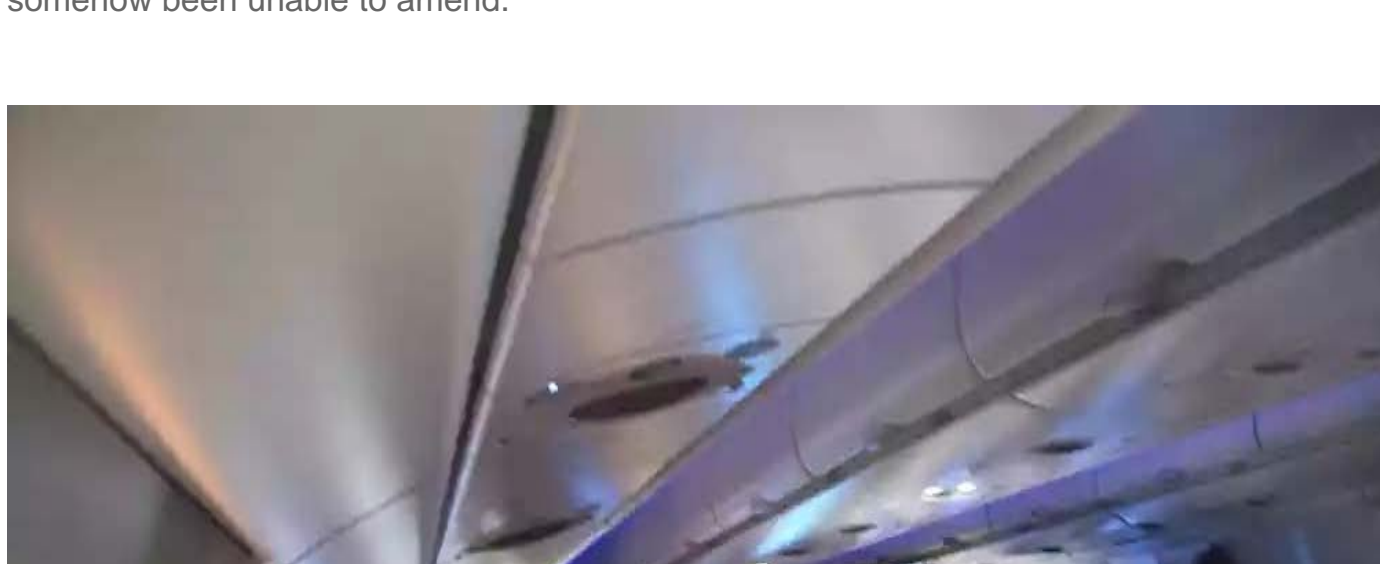


Arriving at the hotel around 9:00 PM, we had a quick dinner then tried our best to get some sleep before we made our way back to the airport at 5:00 AM.

Once we entered the airport we discovered that yet again, our flight had been delayed. First 20 minutes, then another hour, bringing our total flight delay to 11 hours.

Standing in another glacial pace airport queue, we waited an hour and 15 minutes to check in while the staff seemingly did not much. There were desks open for a flight to Auckland with no one checking in, and instead of helping the passengers for our stupidly delayed flight, the staff sat there and gossiped.

Inside the airport, we got chatting to a family sitting next to us in the lounge who confirmed a rumour that we'd heard earlier. Apparently a week prior, a luggage carrier had run into a Fiji Airways plane, which had caused a chain reaction of delays that Fiji Airways had somehow been unable to amend.



LOS ANGELES TO MEXICO CITY (LAX-MEX)

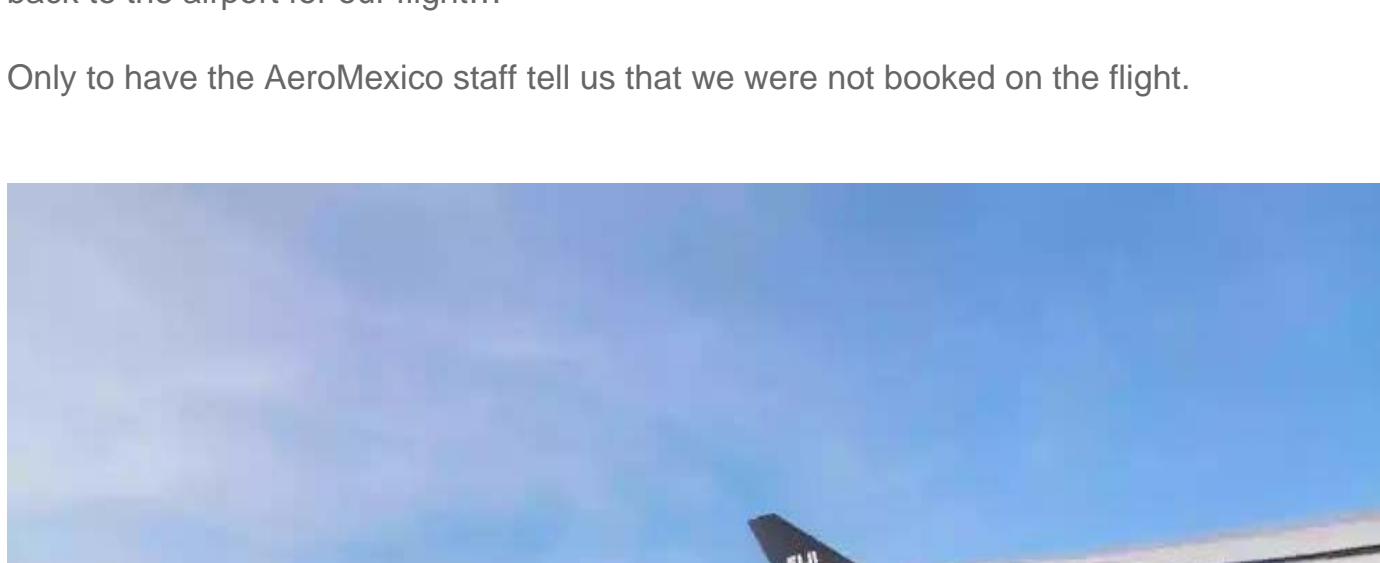
We eventually boarded the flight and made it to LAX. I thought this would be the end of our troubles, but no, it gets worse. Much worse.

What was once an 11 hour stopover in LA (where we'd planned to leave the airport and explore Venice Beach) was now going to be about 15 minutes – not nearly enough time for us to make it to our connecting flight to Mexico City.

Fiji Airways staff were on hand after we disembarked to help out the passengers stranded by their excessive delays. A nice gesture, considering they'd done nothing to assist us at any other stage.

They gave us a hotel and told us we were booked on an AeroMexico flight at 6:30 AM. As it was already 1:30 AM, we spent 2 hours having a nap and a shower in the room then head back to the airport for our flight...

Only to have the AeroMexico staff tell us that we were not booked on the flight.



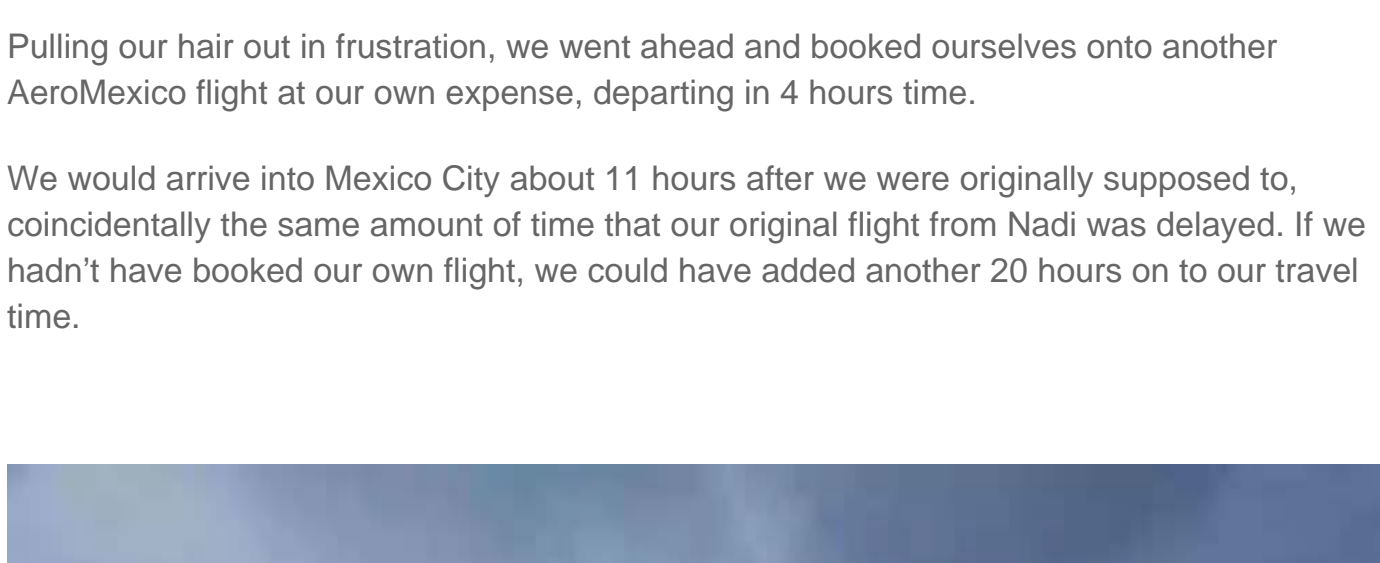
It was at this stage that I burst into tears, and not in a graceful movie star kind of way – more like a *can't control my excessive sobbing because I'm so fucking tired and frustrated* kind of way.

We extensively searched the airport for any Fiji Airways staff, but their check-in counters were a ghost town.

Not a ghost town, but they, we tried calling their customer service number numerous times, only to be told that they couldn't get us onto another flight until 7:30 AM the next day (a full 24 hours away) and that we could only receive a hotel for the night if we could find Fiji Airways staff at the airport (of which there weren't any, and wouldn't be until the next flight arrived late that evening).

Pulling our hair out in frustration, we went ahead and booked ourselves onto another AeroMexico flight at our own expense, departing in 4 hours time.

We would arrive into Mexico City about 11 hours after we were originally supposed to, coincidentally the same amount of time that our original flight from Nadi was delayed. If we hadn't have booked our own flight, we could have added another 20 hours on to our travel time.



How an airline can be so incompetent at amending something as simple as one delayed flight, I will never know.

We've now attempted to email Fiji Airways for compensation for our hotel, our meals, and the rebooking of our onwards flights when we arrived, which came to a total of \$500 AUD. We'll find out in the next 60 days whether Fiji Airways will redeem themselves.

Needless to say I won't be flying Fiji Airways again, and I'd encourage you to do the same if you place any sort of value on your time and sanity.

UPDATE TO OUR SITUATION AS OF 16TH OCTOBER 2015

Well, it took about 100 emails between ourselves, Fiji Airways, and our travel agent, but we finally got *something* back... a refund of \$412 AUD for the unused LAX-MEX segment of our flights.

This is all we could get. No compensation at all for the hotel or additional cost in our rebooked flights.

At this point, I'm satisfied that we were able to get something back, but getting anything out of Fiji Airways was like drawing blood from a stone. My opinion on Fiji Airways has not changed, I will still never be flying with them again!

Have you ever had such a terrible flight experience? Share your story with us in the comments!

Share

BACK TO A GLOBE WELL TRAVELLED