



Although the primary job of flight attendants is to ensure that safety regulations are followed, they also try to make flights comfortable and enjoyable for passengers.

At least 1 hour before each flight, flight attendants are briefed by the captain, the pilot in command, on such things as emergency evacuation procedures, crew coordination, length of flight, expected weather conditions, and special passenger issues. Flight attendants make sure that first aid kits and other emergency equipment are aboard and in working order and that the passenger cabin is in order, with adequate supplies of food, beverages, and blankets. As passengers board the plane, flight attendants greet them, check their tickets, and tell them where to store coats and carry-on items.

Before the plane takes off, flight attendants instruct all passengers in the use of emergency equipment and check to see that seat belts are fastened, seat backs are in upright positions, and all carry-on items are properly stowed. In the air, helping passengers in the event of an emergency is the most important responsibility of a flight attendant. Safety-related actions may range from reassuring passengers during occasional encounters with strong turbulence to directing passengers who must evacuate a plane following an emergency landing. Flight attendants also answer questions about the flight; distribute reading material, pillows, and blankets; and help small children, elderly or disabled persons, and any others needing assistance. They may administer first aid to passengers who become ill. Flight attendants generally serve beverages and other refreshments and, on many flights, heat and distribute precooked meals or snacks. Prior to landing, flight attendants take inventory of headsets, alcoholic beverages, and moneys collected. They also report any medical problems passengers may have had, and the condition of cabin equipment. In addition to performing flight duties, flight attendants sometimes make public relations appearances for the airlines during "career days" at high schools and at fundraising campaigns, sales meetings, conventions, and other goodwill occasions.

Lead, or first, flight attendants, sometimes known as pursers, oversee the work of the other attendants aboard the aircraft, while performing most of the same duties.

Working Conditions

Because airlines operate around-the-clock year-round, flight attendants may work nights, holidays, and weekends. In most cases, agreements between the airline and the employees' union determine the total monthly working time. Attendants usually fly 75 to 85 hours a month and, in addition, generally spend about 75 to 85 hours a month on the ground preparing planes for flights, writing

Flight Attendants

(O*NET 39-6031.00)

Significant Points

- Job duties are learned through intensive formal training after workers are hired.
- The opportunity for travel attracts many to this career, but the job requires working nights, weekends, and holidays and frequently being away from home.

Nature of the Work

Major airlines are required by law to provide flight attendants for the safety of the traveling public. Although the primary job of the flight attendants is to ensure that safety regulations are followed, they also try to make flights comfortable and enjoyable for passengers.

reports following completed flights, and waiting for planes to arrive. Because of variations in scheduling and limitations on flying time, many flight attendants have 11 or more days off each month. They may be away from their home base at least one-third of the time. During this period, the airlines provide hotel accommodations and an allowance for meal expenses.

The combination of free time and discount air fares provides flight attendants the opportunity to travel and see new places. However, the work can be strenuous and trying. Short flights require speedy service if meals are served, and turbulent flights can make serving drinks and meals difficult. Flight attendants stand during much of the flight and must remain pleasant and efficient, regardless of how tired they are or how demanding passengers may be. Occasionally, flight attendants must deal with disruptive passengers.

Flight attendants are susceptible to injuries because of the job demands in a moving aircraft. Back injuries and mishaps opening overhead compartments are common. In addition, medical problems can occur from irregular sleeping and eating patterns, dealing with stressful passengers, working in a pressurized environment, and breathing recycled air.

Employment

Flight attendants held about 124,000 jobs in 2000. Commercial airlines employed the vast majority of all flight attendants, most of whom live in their employer's home base city. A small number of flight attendants worked for large companies that operated company aircraft for business purposes.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Airlines prefer to hire poised, tactful, and resourceful people who can interact comfortably with strangers and remain calm under duress. Applicants usually must be at least 18 to 21 years old. Flight attendants must have excellent health and the ability to speak clearly. In addition, there generally are height requirements, and most airlines want candidates with weight proportionate to height.

Prospective flight attendants usually must be willing to relocate, although many flight attendants are able to commute to and from their home base. Applicants must be high school graduates. Those having several years of college or experience in dealing with the public are preferred. More and more flight attendants being hired are college graduates. Highly desirable areas of concentration include such people-oriented disciplines as psychology and education. Flight attendants for international airlines generally must speak a foreign language fluently. Some of the major airlines prefer candidates who can speak two major foreign languages for their international flights.

Once hired, candidates must undergo a period of formal training. The length of training, ranging from 4 to 7 weeks, depends on the size and type of carrier and takes place in the airline's flight training center. Airlines that do not operate training centers generally send new employees to the center of another airline. Airlines may provide transportation to the training centers and an allowance for board, room, and school supplies. However, new trainees are not considered employees of the airline until they successfully complete the training program. Some airlines may actually charge individuals for training. Trainees learn emergency procedures such as evacuating an airplane, operating emergency systems and equipment, administering first aid, and water survival tactics. In addition, trainees are taught how to deal with disruptive passengers and hijacking and terrorist situations. New hires learn flight regulations and duties, company operations and policies, and receive instruction on personal grooming and weight control. Trainees for the international routes get additional instruction in passport and customs regulations. Towards the end of their training, students go

on practice flights. Additionally, flight attendants must receive 12 to 14 hours of annual training in emergency procedures and passenger relations.

After completing initial training, flight attendants are assigned to one of their airline's bases. New flight attendants are placed on "reserve status" and are called on either to staff extra flights or to fill in for crewmembers who are sick or on vacation or rerouted. When not on duty, reserve flight attendants must be available to report for flights on short notice. They usually remain on reserve for at least 1 year but, in some cities, it may take 5 to 10 years or longer to advance from reserve status. Flight attendants who no longer are on reserve bid monthly for regular assignments. Because assignments are based on seniority, usually only the most experienced attendants get their choice of assignments. Advancement takes longer today than in the past because experienced flight attendants are remaining in this career longer than they used to.

Some flight attendants become supervisors, or take on additional duties such as recruiting and instructing. Their experience also may qualify them for numerous airline-related jobs involving contact with the public, such as reservation ticket agents or public relations specialists.

Job Outlook

Opportunities should be favorable for persons seeking flight attendant jobs because the number of applicants is expected to be roughly the same as the number of job openings. Those with at least 2 years of college and experience in dealing with the public should have the best chance of being hired. The majority of job openings through the year 2010 should be due to the need to replace flight attendants who transfer to other occupations or who leave the labor force. Many flight attendants are attracted to the occupation by the glamour of the airline industry and the opportunity to travel, but some eventually leave in search of jobs that offer higher earnings and require fewer nights away from their families.

Employment of flight attendants is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2010. Growth in population and income is expected to boost the number of airline passengers. Airlines enlarge their capacity by increasing the number and size of planes in operation. Because FAA safety rules require one attendant for every 50 seats, more flight attendants will be needed.

Employment of flight attendants is sensitive to cyclical swings in the economy. During recessions, when the demand for air travel declines, many flight attendants are put on part-time status or laid off. Until demand increases, few new flight attendants are hired.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of flight attendants were \$38,820 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$28,200 and \$56,610. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$18,090, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$83,630.

According to data from the Association of Flight Attendants, beginning flight attendants had median earnings of about \$14,847 a year in 2000. However, beginning pay scales for flight attendants vary by carrier. New hires usually begin at the same pay scale regardless of experience, and all flight attendants receive the same future pay increases. Flight attendants receive extra compensation for night and international flights and for increased hours. In addition, some airlines offer incentive pay for working holidays or taking positions that require additional responsibility or paperwork. Most airlines guarantee a minimum of 65 to 75 flight hours per month, with the option to work additional hours. Flight attendants also receive a "per diem" allowance for meal expenses while on duty away from home. In addition, flight attendants and their

immediate families are entitled to free fares on their own airline and reduced fares on most other airlines.

Flight attendants are required to purchase uniforms and wear them while on duty. The airlines usually pay for uniform replacement items, and may provide a small allowance to cover cleaning and upkeep of the uniforms.

The majority of flight attendants hold union membership, primarily with the Association of Flight Attendants. Others may be members of the Transport Workers Union of America, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, or other unions.

Related Occupations

Other jobs that involve helping people as a safety professional, while requiring the ability to be calm even under trying circumstances, include emergency medical technicians and paramedics and firefighting occupations.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities and qualifications required for work at a particular airline may be obtained by writing to the airline's personnel office.