

## New 'club class' — filling in the air class system

**I**S THERE a life after first-class? Or is it all downhill from here?

The voice belongs to Doris Scharfenberg of Farmington Hills, who is flying with me to London aboard British Airways Flight 76.

We have lucked out. We were scheduled to fly club class, and we have been unexpectedly upgraded to first-class. As any aristocrat will tell you, once you have tasted luxury, it is hard to go back to your old ways.

THE CLASS SYSTEM on airplanes is not based on what family you were born into or what school you attended, but how much you or your employer paid for your ticket. These first-class seats from Detroit to London cost \$1,580 one way, which is more than I paid for a three-week European vacation in 1969.

The regular economy ticket is now \$588, the new super club class is \$860, and you can get discounted fares as low as \$244 for standby and \$488 for Apexfare, depending on advance booking and season. All prices are one-way; double them for the cost of a round-trip ticket.

This first-class cabin and service is vaguely reminiscent of what all air travel was in "the good old days," although nobody had this much room for their feet, even then. In those faraway days, air travel was for the relatively wealthy among us, a situation which changed dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, but may very well be coming true again.

AS LARGE NUMBERS of Americans flowed to Europe for the bargain travel of the 1960s, air fares got lower and lower, especially on charter flights. The deregulation of airlines ended the heyday of charter flights, but it began the battle of the airline discount.

That and spiraling fuel costs, as well as other costs, including the devaluation of the dollar, made big changes in the size of your seat and the services provided.

Economy fare buys one of three seats across near the window, or one of five abreast in the center section of a jumbo jet. Most of us buy those seats, unless we are on expense accounts or are fairly wealthy, even though we are a little cramped for space.

Club class was introduced to satisfy the businessman who is paying the full economy fare but getting the same service as the vacationer who paid much less for a discounted ticket. (You must buy in advance and deal with certain limitations in flying times to get a discount, and business people can't always do that.)

IN CLUB class (Pan Am calls it clipper class), the business traveler gets some of that first-class attention, a choice of meals and more leg room. From Detroit to London, British Airways offers their Super Club service with two-abreast seating for \$850 each way. For many people, the extra comfort is worth the additional cost. However, it's still a huge jump in cost and quality in moving from club class to first-class.

Airlines give it different names, but any way you look at it, it's more room and more money. Airline flights across the Atlantic are only six to eight hours, so very few people are willing to pay the high first-class fare for that short a time. Airlines have therefore piled on the luxuries for those few who do.

We are sitting in huge seats with ample space in front of us for our feet and for the reclining chair to stretch out almost horizontally when we are ready to sleep.

THE CHAMPAGNE begins as we board in Detroit at 7 p.m. and is still being served on the breakfast tray as we approach England.

There are three cabin attendants for 20 people, and they lavish us with attention: drinks, hors d'oeuvres, beef Wellington served from a trolley, a selection of wines, strawberry Romanoff. Anything our little hearts desire.

And when it's time to sleep: soft socks, eye shades and a reclining seat. I could get used to this if it didn't cost more than \$3,000 round trip for the pleasure.



IRIS AND MICKY JONES

Whole pigs, roasted to a glistening brown, are spread on tables for market day in Riobamba (left). Strollers stop and buy a serving of meat cut from the side of the pig.

## Ecuador

# Growing corn in the mountains

Continued from previous page

the country: first-class hotels in the cities, one or two smaller hotels in most of the towns, a few roadside hostilities and government-approved paradises being built in many areas.

Riobamba is a predominantly Indian town. Here the white rounded hat, reminiscent of a bowler hat, traditionally tops a bright red poncho. It is here that we are first introduced to Ecuador's wonderful marketplaces.

There are actually several markets in Riobamba on market day: the meat market, craft market, vegetable market and others, spread across adjoining squares. Whole pigs, roasted to a glistening brown, are spread on tables. Strollers stop and buy a serving of meat cut from the side of the pig.

Everything is sold here — sacks of monkeys, striped sisal carrying bags, the ikat tie-died ponchos with white fringes that are popular in certain areas of the south, used and new embroidered blouses, blankets, and great mounds of fruits and vegetables. This is a local market, Indian selling to Indian.

WE CLIMB HIGH into the Andes now for the long drive to Cuenca. Here we see the highland grass used to thatch houses. As we climb into the dry hills, the adobe houses with thatched roofs look like brown haystacks. They are windowless, designed to retain the warmth of the sun during the chilly nights.

A brief stop at Balbanera, the oldest church in the country, and another to watch a woman selling hot food from a coal fire beside a scenic lookout; half a mile below, a gleaming mountain lake shimmers in the sun.

Here the mountains rise in brown ridges of highland grass to the blue and white sky. These are barren green hills without crops or houses, although occasionally two wrapped women make a skyline on a hill or a cluster of brown and white cows patch a slope.

From a gravel road high in Canari country further south, we look down at bright green fields and stone fences sloping to the bottom of the hills and climbing steeply up the other side. There are clusters of red tile roofs, the bleating of sheep, splashes of color as the men and women move across the fields.

Finally, after many hours, the ruins of Ingapurica rise on a distant hill. Llamas graze beside the road. This is more than the sound of music; this is a whole symphony of light falling down the Andes. At twilight, the Inca ruin makes a circular silhouette against the sculpted green hills, with farms and large white, red-roofed houses patching the hills on either side.

This is the only Inca ruin visible outside of Peru.

IT IS LATE now, and we are eager to get to Cuenca, where they are celebrating the 424th anniversary of the city in the square with fireworks. The spectacle of lights rises above the Old Church on one side of the square and the New Church on the other. The "new" one is only 200 years old.

This is a city of about 120,000 people, and the El Dorado Hotel is one of several modern hotels here. The market is busy on Sunday morning, but we are heading briefly south to two village marketplaces, Gualaquero and Chordeleg.

This is the land of the so-called Panama hat, which doesn't come from Panama but from Gualaquero and Chordeleg. During the early days of the Panama Canal, this distinctive straw hat was sold in large quantities to the canal workers; thus the misnomer.

People here, who are called Cholo, wear the Panama hat everywhere, although there are still lots of fedoras in evidence. Women wear them over embroidered blouses and wide, pleated skirts, bright blue or red or green with embroidery at the edges.

The hat is made from toquilla, which is actually a tropical plant from the coast, but it is traditionally made in these mountain villages.

From the edge of the market at Gualaquero, the church tower and high patchwork mountain fields make a backdrop for the Sunday market. The shoeshine boys line the edge of the square. The old man and the child carry live chickens for sale under their arms. A crowd gathers around the man selling wooden bowls. A long row of whole roasted pigs glows bronze beside a butcher whacking a carcass with a huge ax.

There are gleaming mounds of pastry. The lottery man goes by. The church bells call the faithful to Mass. The children run barefoot between vegetable stalls. Paint it all with bright skirts, bright ponchos and every kind of hat — Italian fedoras, Panama straw hats and white felt bowlers.

At Chordeleg, a few miles down the road, the people gather in colorful laughing groups around the pretty little square beside the tall white church.

THIS IS THE history of Ecuador at a glance. The great green mountains, with trees falling darkly down their sides from the very tops. The Indians, who have been here thousands of years, are in from the fields because it is Sunday and almost every Indian in Ecuador is Catholic.

For information about Ecuador, write to Dirección Nacional De Turismo, Box 2454, Quito, Ecuador, or Adventure Associates, 5525 Maple, Suite 116, Dallas, Texas 75235, (214) 357-6187.

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