

Top 10:

Feel-good travel tips

Crumpled clothes, jet lag, dry skin... Avoid the pitfalls of flying and you'll land feeling first-class. **Alicia Miller** explains how

1 Find pre-flight serenity

Airports are busy, stressful places — especially in stopover hubs such as Dubai or Heathrow. But you can enter a Zen-like state by kicking back the hour before boarding in a chilled-out airport lounge. You don't have to be flying Business or First Class: for example, No 1 Lounges, which has branches at Gatwick, Heathrow, Edinburgh and Birmingham, are open to everyone, and feature cinemas, cocktail bars and showers (no1lounges.com; from £24 for one visit). Sign up for a Tastecard as well (tastecard.co.uk; from £1) and you'll save up to a further 25% on entry.

2 Bag more space

Nothing is more luxurious on a long-haul flight than space to stretch out — and sleep. Maximise your chances of having an empty seat next to you by booking a less popular day for flying — usually Tuesdays to Thursdays — and when you check in online, choose a seat in the middle bank near the back of the plane (almost always the last to fill up). Avoid the front seven or eight Economy rows, which are the most popular, and also where travellers with babies are often placed. If you're booking a notoriously busy flight — say, London to New York on a Friday night — but still want space, consider paying extra to book an exit row seat. For example, on BA you'll get several centimetres more legroom, from just £50 long-haul.

3 Remember the wet wipes

Quick flight turnarounds mean that plane-cleaning might not be so thorough, leaving germs to thrive. Protect yourself from illness by disinfecting the area around your seat as soon as you board — use antibacterial wipes on arm rests, head rests, tray tables and screens. Rather than place personal items, such as earphones, directly into the seat pocket — often the germiest spot — wrap them in a plastic bag first.

4 Don't dress to impress

Instead of tight-fitting or restrictive clothing, opt for roomy and cosy togs.

That doesn't mean you have to look sloppy: stylish, comfy and wrinkle-free clothes can be found at the likes of Kit and Ace (kitandace.com), Sweaty Betty (sweatybetty.com) or Lululemon (lululemon.co.uk). Plane cabin temperature is usually kept around 22C, but since you're stationary for most of the flight it can feel much colder — so pack extra layers, including a scarf and jumper and, if it's a daytime flight, even your own light blanket (airlines tend only to provide them at night).

5 Watch what you eat

Changes in air pressure on the plane mean that gases can expand your stomach by about 30% — with unpleasant effects for you and your neighbours. Minimise the discomfort by avoiding heavy, greasy foods, such as burgers and pizza on the day of travel, keeping meals small; forgo fizzy drinks, too. If you're worried about getting hungry mid-flight, bring along protein bars (make sure they're nut-free, in case a fellow passenger has an allergy). Consider eating a vegetarian meal on board, as options are often lighter — request a meal in advance from your airline, and you'll be among the first served. Which also means you'll finish eating earlier, leaving you free to...

6 Get some shut-eye

Even a couple of hours' sleep on a flight can make a big difference: you'll arrive at your destination feeling brighter and better equipped to handle jet lag. Don't feel sleepy? Turn off your seatback screen and mobile phone — both sources of stimulating blue light — and instead read a book or listen to music. Bring along sleep-inducing chamomile or valerian root tea bags (ask cabin crew for hot water) and an eye mask (not often provided in Economy). Block out sounds with earplugs or, ideally, noise-cancelling earphones, which dull engine thrumming (try Bose, from £250; bose.co.uk). Get the right travel pillow, too: rubbery blow-up ones can slip, while doughnut-style cushions are bulky to carry. Instead, try the compact, adjustable Trtl (trtltravel.com;

£24.95), a scarf-style pillow with excellent support.

7 Hydrate, hydrate

Plane air is very dry: humidity levels usually dip below 20% (that's lower than the Sahara Desert). So, tempting as it is to raid the free drinks trolley, avoid caffeine and alcohol — both diuretics — and instead drink plenty of water. Bring your own empty bottle to top up regularly; most airports have water fountains once you've passed through security.

8 Show your skin some love

Dry air also wreaks havoc on skin. To keep your complexion holiday-ready, remove any make-up, then apply a hydrating face mask. Sisley's Black Rose Cream Mask (sisley-paris.com; £111 for 60ml), for example, will plump skin, brighten your complexion and, handily, doesn't require rinsing off. (If that's too expensive, try asking for a sample at Duty Free!) Perk up tired eyes with an under-eye sheet mask just before landing (try Rodial Dragon's Blood Eye Masks, £39 for eight pairs; rodial.co.uk). And remember your hands can get dehydrated by plane soap: the Body Shop Hemp Hand Protector (thebodyshop.com; £5 for 30ml) is moisturising, but not greasy.

9 Get up and stretch

Besides increasing your risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT), sitting still throughout a long journey makes you stiff. Get up every couple of hours to stretch arms and legs, and have a two- or three-minute walk around the cabin. When seated, rotate your ankles, wrists and shoulders regularly. If you're prone to muscle tightness, consider packing a portable self-massage tool. The tiny, discreet Hayo'u Beauty Restorer (hayoumethod.com; £38) is designed for circulation-boosting face massages, but can also be used just as effectively on hands, feet and shoulders.

10 Refresh an hour before

If you wait until the pilot commences the descent to visit the loo, you'll join a long queue. So brush your teeth, put in your contact lenses, change clothes — whatever it is you need to do — one hour before your flight's scheduled landing time. That way you can swan back to your seat through empty aisles, feeling fresh, relaxed and ready to disembark at your destination. ■

Want to minimise jet lag?

There's no magic cure, but you can begin mitigating the effects while still in the UK. If flying eastwards, try going to bed half an hour earlier each night in the week before departure. When flying west, stay up half an hour later instead.