



# ‘These seat nazis seem to think they own the place’ Mile-high mugs

**DIANA PLATER** finds manners fly out the window on long flights

**Y**OU have settled into your seat on the plane and you are cursing to yourself that you did not hand over the extra few thousand dollars to get a business class seat, but you are resigned to a cramped flight anyway. Never mind, you will survive.

Then the person in front pushes his seat back. Not a little way, but the whole way, so that if you were eating at the time, the food would be in your lap.

To give yourself some space, you push your seat back — not the whole way, but at least enough to let you breathe without a respirator.

The person behind you then jumps up and calls out to the flight attendant, who comes down and tells you to put your seat back up.

“But what about the guy in front?” Nobody says anything to him.

Does this sound familiar?

It must, because in a recent online survey on plane etiquette conducted by TotalTravel.com inconsiderate seat reclining was voted the most annoying habit of air travellers.

Seat kicking, screaming babies and unpleasant body odours were also high on the list.

“There’s nothing worse than someone reclining their seat on a plane while you are eating and your food and drink ends up in your lap,” says Paul Fisher, TotalTravel.com global marketing manager.

“Seat recliners are also notorious for reclining their seat so far backwards that they squash the passenger behind them and they have no room to move. These seat nazis seems to think they own the place.”

The survey covered 738 travellers between December and January.

One third believed inconsiderate seat reclining was the worst.

Other pet hates were seat kicking (22 per cent), screaming babies and children (19 per cent), bodily odours (19 per cent), talking loudly and incessantly (6 per cent) and frequent visits to the toilet (2 per cent).

Mr Fisher says plane etiquette has become even more of an issue with the advent of low-cost carriers, which have been steadily reducing passenger space to squeeze more paying passengers in.

“When there’s reduced leg room for passengers, people are bound to get annoyed with one another very quickly in such close confines,” he says. “It’s more like coach travel than air travel.”

On a flight from the Gold Coast to Sydney, he says the person in front “just about broke my kneecaps”.

So what is plane seat protocol?

Mr Fisher says there are no official rules on seat reclining — apart from it being compulsory to have the chairs and trays up for take off and landing. But people are expected to make their own judgment.

Problems for passengers are causing problems for staff, who have to juggle sensitive situations, some of which border on “air rage”, he says. On long flights, alcohol can make things much worse. Airline staff have to use their judgment about continuing to serve drunk passengers.

“As more people fly it can become a powder keg, especially on long-

haul flights, and especially when every seat is taken and people can’t move,” Mr Fisher says.

Staff also have to deal with agitated passengers when in-flight entertainment systems don’t work.

Flight Attendants Association of Australia president Steven Reed says most people are considerate when it comes to seat reclining, but one problem is that passengers are getting bigger and need more room.

Another is that low-cost carriers have less for passengers to do on board, especially with everything from movies to pillows costing extra.

Australians have been spoilt and have high expectations of service on flights, while American domestic travellers are used to cattle class.

Mr Reed says crews on the low-cost carriers are generally younger and less experienced at handling problems such as drunks.

He says flight attendants are trained in responsible service of alcohol and most do a “verbal judo” course as part of their training, with techniques on how to defuse aggressive passengers.

But he says there is not a lot of recurrent training as “with a remote workforce it’s expensive to get them on the ground to give training”.

“When flying, it’s wise to be on your best behaviour as passengers are seated in very close quarters for extended periods of time,” Mr Fisher says. “It’s clear from this survey that good manners go a long way.”

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