



The Worst Seats on a Plane and how to avoid them by Sarah Schlichter

You are crammed into a middle seat at the back of an airplane with neighbors encroaching on your armrests and an endless chorus of flushing sounds from the lavatory nearby. You are stuck in one of the worst seats on a plane and you have to ask: how did you end up here and how can you make sure it never happens again?

Seat selection can make a huge difference in how comfortable you are in flight, especially on long international trips. I interviewed an expert to help identify the worst airplane seats and explain how you can land yourself a better spot on your next flight.

Where are the worst seats? “The worst seats are generally in the last row of the aircraft”, says David Duff, former Content Specialist at SeatGuru. “The seats there more than likely have limited recline and the proximity to the lavatory and galley are going to be bothersome since you are dealing with noises, smells, people queueing to use the lavatory and the flight crew opening and closing storage compartments and chatting”.

Sounds terrible but wait...there is more. “May times, the windows are missing at these seats as well” Duff continues, “and to top it all off, you are going to feel turbulence a bit more toward the back of the plane”.

Being in the back also means you are one of the last ones off the plane – not ideal if you are trying to make a tight connection.

Ok, so the back row is the single worst place to sit on a plane and you should steer clear of it at all costs. But which other seats should you avoid?

All middle seats are unpopular for obvious reasons, and the seats in front of an exit row aren't ideal either. “These seats usually have limited recline in case the plane has to be evacuated,” Duff explains.

Even the desirable exit row seats, which typically have extra legroom, have a potential downside: “one of the major complaints we read about from the [SeatGuru](#) community is how the seat nearest to the exit door tends to be colder than surrounding seats,” says Duff. If you value the extra leg room the exit row typically offers, pack an oversized scarf or fleece to keep warm.

Finally, when considering a bulkhead seat, keep in mind that you won't have storage under the seat in front of you, which can be inconvenient if you like easy access to personal items like travel kits or over-the-counter medications. You should also be aware the bulkhead seats tend to be popular with babies and their parents as they are an ideal spot for bassinets.

How to Avoid the worst seats on a plane: Consider making an airplane's seat layout part of the decision-making process when you are planning which flight to book. For example, if you have a choice between a flight on a plane with a 3-4-3 layout and one on a plane with a 2-4-2 layout, consider booking the latter if the fares aren't too different because that plane has a lot fewer middle seats you could possibly get stuck in. (Keep in mind, though, that the airline may change its aircraft at the last minute, so you might not want to pay too much extra for a preferred layout).

Also check whether the airlines you are considering charge a fee to choose your own seat. If it's a long flight where comfort is important, opt for an airline that allows you to choose your seat for free.

Once you have booked, don't use your airline or booking site's seat map as your only resource when choosing where to sit. [SeatGuru's](#) detailed aircraft cabin plans flag seats with potential problems such as limited recline, proximity to galleys and/or lavatories, misaligned or missing windows, and reduced seat width. The site also highlights seats that are particularly desirable for one reason or another, such as extra legroom or storage space. As a bonus, you can read reviews and look at pictures from previous flyers who have had the seat you are considering.

Need more options? TRIPADVISOR offers REVIEWS FROM PAST PASSENGERS on dozens of airlines.

After you have figured out the seats you want and the ones you don't...it's time to make your choice. You can usually select your seat at the time of booking or when you check in, though you will have more options if you make your choice earlier in the process. If you are unhappy with your options online, see a gate agent at the airport who may be able to move you.

Many airlines charge extra for the most in-demand seats (such as exit rows or seats with extra legroom) while others make you pay a fee for any seat selection at all. In these cases, the question becomes how much it is worth to you to claim the seat you want.

"We understand that travelers want to save money on their flight and be comfortable at the same time, and sometimes that means you have to pay a bit extra for that comfort" says Duff. "A lot of the flying experience is out of your control, so why not make sure that you are able to control one thing?"

Keep in mind that choosing your seat in advance is not an iron-clad guarantee that you will get to sit there. Most airlines contracts of carriage permit them to change seat assignments if necessary, and the maintenance issues or schedule disruptions could force the carrier to substitute a new plane with a different seat layout. If this happens and you are unhappy with your new seat assignment, speak with a gate agent as soon as possible and politely ask which alternatives are available.

Note, too, that if you check in late or show up at your gate at the last minute, the airline might assume you are not coming and give your seat away to someone else. To prevent this, check in online up to 24 hours in advance and give yourself plenty of time to get to the airport.