

This is the first of an 11-part, **TARGET** series, dealing with travel in select areas of Germany, Italy and France, in that order.

The aims of this series, as with the other series that will follow, are to inform **TARGET** Subscribers of the existence of some of the best hotels in the world and which restaurants are worthy of serious consideration – and which restaurants should be avoided.

TARGET, especially, sought out areas of countries which are not, usually, found in travel brochures. The hotels/restaurants that were selected, also, are not, normally, recommended by travel agents – because they are not widely known.

The managements of the selected hotels/restaurants had no idea of **TARGET**'s objectives so that the surveys were based on impartiality and, as always, without prejudice or bias.

Some of the hotels/restaurants in this 11-part series did not live up to expectations: This medium has pulled no punches and has stated the facts, plainly and honestly.

'Travelling With TARGET' will be published biweekly, henceforth.

**UNLESS ONE IS AN ABSOLUTE MASOCHIST, THINK TWICE
BEFORE FLYING AIR FRANCE OUT OF HONGKONG:
IT CAN BE A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE !**

Flying Air France out of Hongkong International Airport can be extremely tiring, frustrating, uncomfortable and very annoying.

As well as being very exhausting, mentally.

Air France is far from being the best airline in the world, of that, there can be no question.

Air France is French, you know.

Enough said?

Not that **TARGET** () has anything against the French because French products, often, stand out in a class of their own: It is difficult to beat the good French wines; the country's dairy products are among the best in the world; and, many French fashion houses are unbeatable.

But Air France!

It must be among the pits of the world when it comes to taking passengers from Hongkong to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, the Capital City of France.

Air France was chosen by **TARGET** to kick off the first of an 11-part series of articles, aimed at answering, at least, the following questions:

*In which hotel should one stay in that foreign land?
When and where to travel to that distant place?
Was the money well spent on that trip?
With whom should one travel?*

Selecting Air France to take **TARGET**'s team to Paris, France, was a mistake.

It is one that shall not be repeated.

But, for this first trip, that lasted the best part of one month, all of the flying, allowing this medium's reporters to visit Germany, Italy and France, in that order, was left in the incapable hands of the French national carrier, better known as Air France.

TARGET hastens to add, however, that there were no physical accidents on the 6 occasions that this medium was a passenger on this carrier's aeroplanes – which says something, doesn't it?

The horrors of Air France started at about 9:00 p.m. on Friday, August 29, 2008, when **TARGET**'s team attempted to check in at Hongkong International Airport at Cheklapkok.

Within minutes of attempting to check in for Flight AF185 that was scheduled to leave Hongkong at 11.23 p.m., the Chinese, check-in lady informed this medium that one of the seats, assigned to **TARGET** – 1A – was broken, and that it could only be adjusted in any direction with the help of the cabin crew because the electrics had gone haywire.

TARGET asked:

'If the one of 8 seats in the First-Class Compartment of the Boeing 777-W, which is Flight AF185, is not functioning properly, it is quite likely that there are other problems with the aeroplane, don't you think?

'It seems that it would be wise to investigate this aeroplane further because it would be difficult to repair it at 34,000 feet.'

One of **TARGET**'s team used to be in possession of a valid Hongkong Private Pilot's Licence and it is a given for any competent pilot that, prior to considering, taking off on a trip, there should be nothing wrong with the aeroplane – before even starting to taxi to the tarmac.

Also, a careful visual inspection of the aeroplane, the exterior as well as the interior, is, always, done, prior to even attempting to start the engine.

The Chinese Manager (assumed) of the ground staff of Air France, then, informed **TARGET** that Air France only had this one aeroplane available and that it was quite unlikely that the seat, assigned to **TARGET**, could be repaired before take-off.

As for inspecting for other faults on the aeroplane, there was no time for such an investigation, **TARGET** was told (!!!).

However, as it turned out, Seat 1A was switched with another passenger who had to suffer for the entire, 12-hour trip whenever the lady's seat had to be adjusted or when the dining table had to be produced or, even, when the visual display monitor of the television was requested.

The cabin crew was quite attentive, however, and quickly came to lady's assistance when requested.

Members of the French, female cabin crew, designated to assist this passenger, were, always, armed with a dull, stainless-steel kitchen knife, the blade of which was used to insert in various places of the chair's mechanism in order to make it move, this way or that way, or to pry open the small door at the bottom on the chair assembly, behind which were the television's '*intestines*'.

TARGET was proved correct, that there could be other problems with Flight AF 185, because the public, television repeater station's monitor, placed in front of passengers, was broken, and the in-flight entertainment system was only partially operable for the entire, 12-hour flight.

One of the stewardesses explained to **TARGET** that some of the electrical systems, aboard the aircraft, '*are old*' and, '*in all honesty, they need to be replaced.*'

A pleasant touch of honesty: It goes a long way.

During the 12-hour journey, the following, major 4 things went wrong aboard this ill-fated flight:

1. The supply of toilet paper was depleted about half-way through the flight. As previously stated, there were only 8 passengers in the First-Class Section of this flight;
2. The beef course, which was one of the main dishes of one of the 2 suppers that were offered to First-Class passengers, had gone bad and could not be eaten;
3. The temperature on board, during the night, could not be adjusted to a comfortable level; and,
4. The in-flight entertainment console went wonky, completely.

On arrival at Charles de Gaulle Airport, it took the best part of 2 hours to go the distance of about one mile, from one part of the airport to another, in order to catch a connecting flight from Paris, France, to Berlin, Germany.

TARGET is happy to report, also, that, aside from the absolute chaos at Charles de Gaulle Airport, at 6:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 29, 2008, with 3 policemen, screening about 500 people for irregular passports, etc, most of passengers, screaming and yelling at the inefficiency of the system, especially since the air-conditioning system was only partially operational, nothing untoward happened.

Nobody died, of that **TARGET** is certain, although there were many passengers whose blood pressures were raised, considerably.

The flight from France to Germany was just one hour and 20 minutes long and, after reciting incantations to the Maker of all men, **TARGET** disembarked from the second, Air France flight, haggard, but very grateful at being alive with no noticeable soiled linen.

Flying Air France on international routes outside the European Union, **TARGET** came to realise, is for the physically fit passenger, only, because, among everything else, such as suffering, having to sit in one of the cabins of an aircraft for some hours, connecting with other flights at Charles de Gaulle Airport means jogging for about an hour or so and, then, comes the frustration of trying to find the correct terminal, coupled with trying to locate the correct boarding gate.

And Air France does not give a hoot as to which class in the aircraft that a passenger is flying because everybody is treated equally: Like cattle.

All of the above is very disappointing, of course, and, in addition, flying First Class with Air France when even the wines are not up to par and the food is YUCK! ... Well, what is one to state when one of the main dishes has gone bad?

TARGET felt very sorry for the crew of that Air France, Flight 185, because the ladies did try to do their best under the very trying conditions, but, if one's brush is too old, it is difficult to paint well.

Lastly, on the subject of Air France, the lounge, reserved at Hongkong International Airport, accommodates both First-Class Passengers as well as Business-Class Passengers.

There were very few amenities, available in this lounge on Friday, August 29, 2008, and **TARGET** would have been better off to have gone to one of the public restaurants in the concourse in order to await boarding the aircraft for the tortuous trip from Hongkong to France.

Conclusion: One is advised to try to avoid, travelling on Air France from Hongkong, unless one is a masochist.

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