



Guest Correspondent Marian McF., Fresno CA: We fly mostly on Southwest and buy the cheapest tickets. Because SW is a no-seat assignment airline, it takes a bit of strategy. At check-in, SW clerks assign passengers before flights to waiting lines marked A, B, C and D.

It's advantageous to book boarding passes on line from 24 hours before the flight. If you're late to get your online boarding pass just an hour before flight time, your chances are that it will be a B, C or last-to-board D pass holders.

Passengers with A passes are boarded first. If the SW flight originates in your city, A passes allow you to choose just about any seat you want. If your city is a stop-over, and passengers already aboard, as an A ticket, at least you'll have first choice of the best available seats. Another way to grab best seats is if you're considered special boarding. Families with little kids, people in wheelchairs and on crutches, and the very elderly are usually allowed to board before everyone else.

As for getting best pre-assigned seats on flights, money talks for top choices. Many airlines now have all kinds of pricey seats, called first class, business class or some other snooty title. The seats are plush and wide, usually just two across, very comfy, with lots of leg room, often with a steak dinner and champagne included in the heavy price.

Back where the crammed-in peasants sit in five-seats-across rows, they may be paying \$200 for their uncomfy flight, while the flying royalty could be paying \$2,000. Of course, both arrive at the same destination at exactly the same time.

Most travel agencies, both online and traditional ones, will have complete seat charts to see before booking on seat-assignment airlines. The earlier you make them, the greater choice of seats. Taste in seat selection varies from person to person.

Many prefer window seats that are near the front of the plane. Some believe a seat over a wing has the least motion for those who fear air sickness. I have a gimpy left leg, so I always try for an aisle seat where I can stretch it out after everyone is seated.

Once seated in a reserved seat doesn't necessarily put glue on your pants. If, during the flight, you have bothersome seatmates, and available seats elsewhere, ask a flight attendant to get you to another seat. If there are many empty seats, there's no reason to suffer in the middle of a jammed row of five across.

When there are three or more empty seats together on a long flight, and you want to stretch out, as soon as the aircraft is in the air, either grab them, or when necessary, ask a flight attendant for permission to go flat. Whenever I fly cross country or overseas, and paid only for a cheap seat, a change can happen. I ask the attendant if I may sack out in an unsold comfy upper-class seat. Sometimes it works for free, sometimes not.

If you're flying with small kids or infants, you may want to select a bulkhead seat, those facing walls between compartments. They usually don't offer much more leg room, but there is a measure of privacy for diaper changes and other childcare chores.

In some aircraft, there are hooks for holding net hammocks on the walls, and they make soothing, swaying beddy-byes for infants. Additionally, your kids won't be as bothersome to other passengers, because they won't have people sitting in front of them.

The best way to get the best choice of seats, when your airline assigns them, is to make your reservations as early as possible. If you'll be flying Southwest or other airline that offers first come, first seated, be sure to keep your computer or smartphone fired up so that on the stroke of 24 hours before flight time, you can print out an A boarding pass.