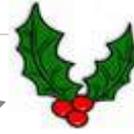


# SRMN Newsletter



## Merry Christmas



### Editorial

Christmas is nearly upon us and perhaps like us you are busy planning your next trip. Or maybe you are on the road and will be far away from family and friends.

Wherever you are we wish a you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

New Year is a time for making resolutions so if you have yet to make that first step on your trip of a lifetime there is no time like the present to make all your dreams come true.

Have a wonderful time

Clive and Ann Barker

### Roam Sweet Home

The November 2014 edition of the Saga Magazine has a feature about "Grey Nomads who've swapped the security of humdrum bricks and mortar for a life on the open road" mostly in Europe for longish periods in their motorcaravans. This has some interesting insights into things learned by some travellers living this sort of life and their experiences. There are also some tips and advice along with some of the things they have missed following such a dramatic change of lifestyle

### Travel Tip

If you buy a reed basket, or anything similar, put it in the deep freeze as soon as possible for 24 hours before using it to kill all the bugs

### Country Information - Rwanda

Effective from 1 November 2014, UK nationals now require a visa to enter Rwanda. This requirement also applies to nationals from Australia, Germany, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and the USA. A 30 day tourist visa costs £20. You can apply online here <https://www.migration.gov.rw/index.php?id=28>



Mongolia

## About Tyres - Part 3

### Other Markings

#### Tubed or Tubeless

The tyre will be marked with one of these words so there can be no doubt which type it is.



#### Regroovable

Regroovable tyres are marked Regroovable. Tyres that are not regroovable have no marking.

Lorry tyres are usually made with a considerable thickness of rubber around the circumference. It is so thick that once the existing tread pattern is reduced to about a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of its original thickness (3 – 5mm), the tread can be cut deeper (or regrooved) to bring it back to as new condition. However with the complex tyre patterns now and the need for special machinery to ensure the cords aren't cut – its not advisable to actually regroove a tyre.

Note that the law does not permit tyres to be regrooved for vehicles which are 4x4 or passenger vehicles of less than 3050kgs. Regrooved tyres should not be used on the steer axle.

The great advantage of a regroovable tyre for the overland traveller is that the tyre is much more robust and is less likely to have a puncture through the tread even in the most arduous conditions. Note that the sidewalls are not so robust and you may suffer punctures due to rocks, potholes etc. Tyres not designed for lorries are unlikely to be regroovable although there are some special tyres available for vehicles with off road capability such as Land Rovers with extra thick treads. These are not legal on the public roads after being recut.

#### Date of Manufacture

Since the year 2000 European tyres have been clearly marked with the date of manufacture. This is shown on the sidewall as a week number and year in the form 2313. In this example the tyre was made in the 23<sup>rd</sup> week of 2013. Before this, manufacturers used a code. You would need to check with them to decipher the date.

Tyres deteriorate with time and should never be used if more than 7 years old – 5 years is in fact the recommended limit.

#### Arrow

You may find an arrow on tyres intended for directional tyres to show the direction of rotation.

#### Outside

This word is used for asymmetrical tyres. The word "Outside" or "Outer" indicates which side of the tyre has to be fitted so that it is on the outside of the vehicle.

#### TWI

Some tyres have the letters TWI at intervals around the outer edge of the sidewall. This means Tyre Wear Indicator and shows the location of the raised areas at the base of the tread to show when the tyre is reaching the minimum legal limit.

## Choice of Tyre

Overlanders spend many months on the road and will meet all types of road conditions from very cold with ice and snow to very hot and sand. So the choice of tyre is going to be a compromise depending on where you intend to travel.

Depending on the wheel rim size you may have a choice of (amongst others)

- Snow Tyres
- Winter Tyres
- All Season or Mud & Snow Tyres
- All Terrain Tyres
- Off Road Tyres
- Standard (or Summer) Tyres



Winter tyres are a development of snow tyres with better grip, less noise etc. These are marked with a logo: a snowflake inside a mountain peak. They have quite a chunky tread pattern so you might be forgiven for thinking they would make good off road tyres. However the tyre compounds are designed to work at cold temperatures and shouldn't be used at over 15°C.

Arguments rage continuously as to the best tread pattern for a tyre. Manufacturers bring out new designs from time to time. However there are categories of design aimed at a variety of uses. The pattern on a standard van tyre will be designed for use on both wet and dry tarmac (black top) roads to give a compromise between wear rate, safe handling characteristics, and noise level amongst others.

I would suggest however that an overland traveller would be best served by using tyres designed for mud and snow although technically any tyre with grooves could be described as such by the manufacturer. However M and S tyres in a range normally have better grip in mud and snow than a similar standard tyre. Roads in the furthest (and not so far) corners of this planet may well be unmade and anything from graded gravel to loose sand or mud. If you meet snow then this could include any type of road surface. Mud and snow tyres have a more chunky tread pattern which gives much better grip than the standard type and are perceived by some to have more eye appeal! The disadvantages are slightly less grip on wet tarmac, some whine and possibly a shorter life (although that mostly depends on how you drive and where you go).

You may have to search for mud and snow tyres for your vehicle as they are less common but you will see on "M + S" somewhere on the tyre wall if they are meant for this purpose. Mud and snow tyres are intended to be mounted on the powered wheels. So they go on the front for front wheel drive, on the rear for rear wheel drive and on all wheels for 4x4 etc. The tyres on such wheels are known as drive tyres. It is usual to put drive tyres on the rear of front wheel drive vehicles but larger rear wheel drive vehicles will probably use a matching tyre with a different tread pattern called a steer tyre on the front wheels.

Follow the manufacturer's advice. This means you should have two spare wheels with one of each type of tyre. Two spare wheels is a good idea anyway.

In my experience mud and snow tyres are better than ordinary tyres in sand but the tread pattern does tend to scoop the stuff out from below the tyre if you aren't careful and you rapidly dig a hole. If there is a hard surface below, all well and good

but if not and you are driving over a lot of sand you should lower the tyre pressures or get proper sand tyres which run at quite low pressures.

For the more adventurous than off road tyres can be fitted. These are usually noisy and have reduced wet grip characteristics as well as shorter tyre life. There are a lot of different tread patterns available for Landrover sized vehicles. Larger vehicles are often fitted with MPT tyres variously known as Multi Purpose Tyres or Military Pattern Tyres. These have very chunky tread.

MPT70 - This design has large bars across the tread and is used mainly in the construction industry



MPT80 - This economical design has large blocks of tread and is used both on and off road.

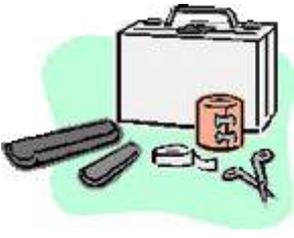


MPT81 - This design with an optimum tread pattern is probably the best around.



The availability of these tyres is almost totally restricted to 20 inch rims.





## FIRST AID AND MEDICAL ADVICE FOR TRUCK AND VAN BASED OVERLANDERS... (Paul Longden)

**Truckitis:** That sick, impending feeling that the truck or your preparation might not be adequate (generally starts 2 years prior to each journey).

**Truckache:** That sick feeling when a native mechanic uses a hammer on your beloved truck.

**Truckjaw:** The face when your other half sees the credit card bill for the latest truck gadgets you've bought.

**Truck breakdown:** So bad it needs towing.

**Truck nausea:** Usually occurs one week prior to the MOT.

**Truck sprain:** The sick impending feeling you get when you suspect you've overloaded.

**Truck flu:** Usually an unidentified drip of fluid from underneath or non-definable squeak or graunch that drives you to distraction.

Marilyn and I have experienced all the above medical conditions.



Thankfully Ben, our beloved Mercedes 814D, is complete and looking forward to his next adventures, as is Mr Moo our travelling companion. Our plans are:

Late 2015 on retirement – Greece, Turkey and East Europe (just a short trip as we plan to visit North Korea and China without Ben and Moo just beforehand, but we've not told them yet);

Dec 2015 – March 2016 Paul is doing charity work as a Peace Monitor in the Middle East;

Summer 2016 – Europe - then we and Ben head off to South America;

2017/2018 – Silk Road. If anyone else has thoughts of going then Mr Moo (c/o Marilyn) would be delighted to hear from you.

Wishing you all safe and happy travels.



Marilyn, Paul, Mr Moo and Ben.  
([marilynlongden@btinternet.com](mailto:marilynlongden@btinternet.com))

## Life on the Road

Desert Playground by Louis Couteaud



### WHAT'S HAPPENING on IMPLEMENTING 'The Way Forward'?

Update

In September, members of the Network were consulted on proposed organisational changes. Members were asked to reply by the end of October 2014.

The responses received were not numerous – but were unanimously supportive, and several were enthusiastic. As a result Stephen Stewart and I are pressing on with implementation. The next steps are that

from 1 December 2014 existing members of the Network will be invited to re-register using the new membership form and to join the Yahoo Forum/Group if they are not already a member...

after 1 December 2014 those applying to participate in the Forum/Group will only be able to do so on successful application for membership of the Network, and those already registered on the Forum/Group will be invited to join the Network by completing and submitting a Network application form.

The consultation gave us the spine of the new application form and we're close to finalising its presentation.

Do drop me a mail if you have any queries about this process.

**Les Brook**  
general@silkroute.org.uk

## Member Profile

Having retired early we moved to France in 2002 solely with the view of buying a motorhome and travelling extensively in Europe, Asia and North Africa.

Over the next 9 years we did just that. Our first journey was to Scandinavia and NordKapp and that just whetted out appetite for even more journeys. So in 2004 we went to all of the Eastern European countries and then via Belarus to Russia (camping in Moscow and St Petersburg) and onwards to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Then we went via Italy to Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Turkey to Greece. In the intervening months we managed to visit every European Country more than once. Most years we were travelling for a least 7 or 8 months before returning home to France. The distinct advantage of having a French registered motorhome was that our standard green card covered every country in the world, plus no road tax and cheaper carnet de passage via ADAC.

Our confidence grew so then we did the Silk Route to China via Turkey, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and back home via Mongolia, Russia and Belarus. Being glutens for punishment we then did Paris to Kathmandu via Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India returning via the same countries.



The best two retro fit things we had fitted were 2 x 11Kg Gaslow tanks and AirRide suspension. Although we suffered a few punctures and one leak on the water heater our Mercedes engine and chassis behaved beautifully during every trip. I accept now one or two of the countries we visited are problematic but we would not have missed the trips for the world. We met and still keep in touch with some wonderful people and have memories that others can only dream about. Bon Voyage!

Mike Annan



## Christmas Quiz with a Travel Flavour

### Questions

- 1 What is the journal of the Magic Circle called?
- 2 Which continent has the most World Heritage Sites?
- 3 How long does it take a Scotch Pine Christmas tree to reach a typical retail height of 6 to 7 feet ?
- 4 What is the name of Australasia's highest mountain?
- 5 What is the date of St Stephen's Day?
- 6 Which country has the greatest number of tourists?
- 7 What Christmas item was invented by London baker Tom Smith in 1847?
- 8 Which is the busiest underground station in London?
- 9 What is the name of the cake traditionally eaten in Italy at Christmas?
- 10 What did the first ever SMS text message, sent December 3rd 1992, read?
- 11 How many gifts would you receive if you received all of the gifts in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas"?
- 12 In which country would you use Lempiras?
- 13 Which English leader prohibited the singing of Christmas songs ?
- 14 After Canada and Mexico, what country is closest to the USA?
- 15 The following all mean 'Merry Christmas' in which language ?
  - a. Hyvaa joulua
  - b. sung tan chuk ha
  - c. froehliche weihnachten
  - d. nollaig shona dhuit
  - e. mele kalikimaka
  - f. god jul
  - g. boas festas
  - h. kala christouyenna
- 16 The traditional English 'Father Christmas' was not dressed in red. What colour did he wear ?
- 17 What is the capital of Suriname?
- 18 What is the other name for the Holly plant ?
- 19 On which sea is the port of Archangel situated?
- 20 What is the most common gift received from a Christmas cracker?
- 21 Which country has the most lakes in the world?
- 22 Which famous tourists destinations have these initials?
  - a GWOC
  - b GBR
  - c SOH
  - d POG
  - e TM
  - f MP
  - g TOL
  - h AW
  - i RDJ
  - j GC
- 23 Where is the tallest building in Europe?
- 24 On which festive day do the French eat Galette des Rois?
- 25 The name of which overseas territory of the United Kingdom when translated means 'eel'?



Answers on the last page

*Christmas makes me happy no matter what time of year it comes around.*

*- Bryan White*

## Funny Road Signs

★ Let us have your photos to include in future Newsletters ★



*If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there - Lewis Carroll*

# Thoughts on taking a shower on a campsite

— NB written from a female perspective!

## In the UK

Be sure you have enough clothes for the draughty homeward walk.

On arrival at shower block, note which shower is closest to door, which to drain and which to heater.

Choose accordingly.

Check shower works and is hot. Get it started to warm up the chilly cubicle before undressing.

Enter shower trying not to shiver.

Keep part of anatomy pressed on shower timer button so it does not switch off or become cold.

Struggle to wash self with one hand.

Revel in hot shower while it runs.

Brace yourself for exit.

Seize towel and dry upper body rapidly. Tie towel round waist.

Grab strategically placed top and jumper and put on as quickly as possible.

Skip bra.

Dry bottom and legs, put on knickers and trousers.

Dry one foot and put on sock one and shoe one.

Dry second foot and put on sock two and shoe two.

You are now done. Consider hair and realise no coin so vigorously dry and march determinedly to motorhome for warming glass of red



towel wine.

## Abroad

Run to shower block. Strip off. Start shower. Cool down.

Dress slowly and carefully.

Toss damp hair over shoulder a la shampoo advert style.

Prance out of shower block.

Head for motorhome and lovely refreshing glass of cool white



wine.



# International Driving Permit (IDP)

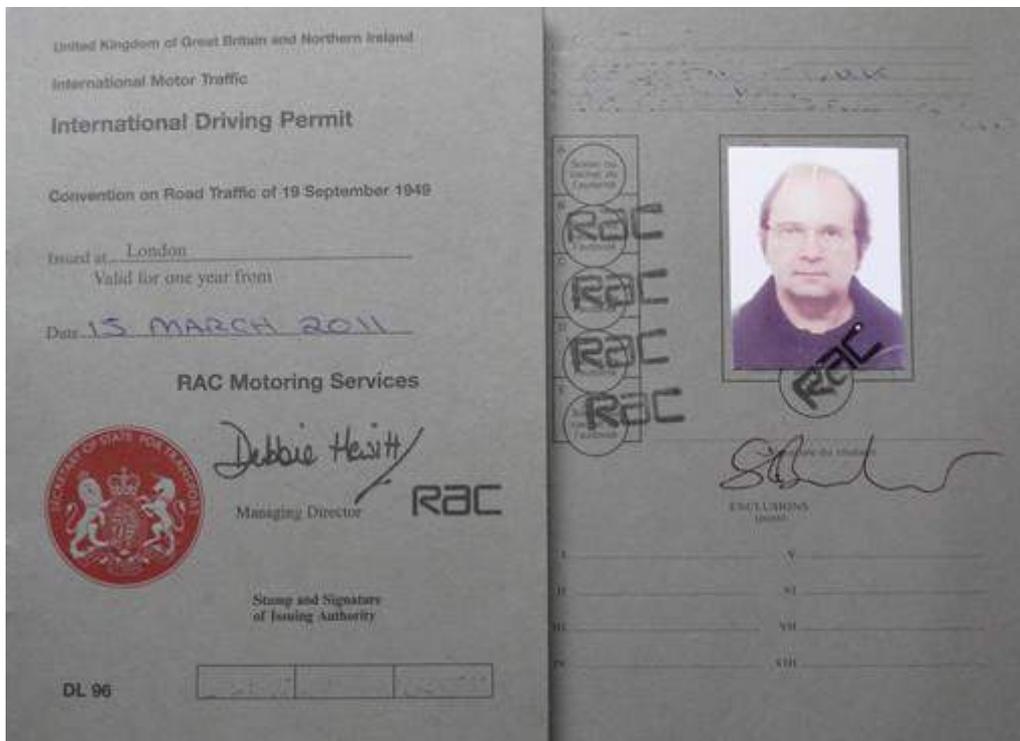
An IDP is an essential document for the overland driver. It is an internationally accepted permission to drive vehicles directly based on the holder's national driving licence. The foundation of the IDP comes from the 1926, 1949 and 1968 Conventions on Motor Traffic with various amendments the most notable being in 2011.



## Versions

There are two versions of the IDP available

The 1949 version used in most countries and the 1926 version is required in Somalia and Iraq. It is also probable that it is valid in Brazil, Uruguay, Lichtenstein and Mexico.



Since most countries have not signed all the various Conventions and amendments the requirements to use an IDP are not always clear. Similarly although not required, it is not always clear whether either or both versions of the IDP are valid in any particular country.

So the best policy is to always have a 1949 version and if going to the named countries above have a 1926 version as well.



## Where to get an IDP

Both the RAC and the AA will issue either or both versions. You can get online application forms here

RAC

<http://www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/international-driving-permit/>

AA

<https://www.theaa.com/getaway/idp/>

Post Office – by application only over the counter at some main post offices.

<http://www.postoffice.co.uk/international-driving-permit>

The RAC is willing to issue more than one identical IDP at the same time. This can be useful as you then have a disposable document if necessary. I also keep an expired version to hand out as often the wrong date is not noticed.



### **Completing the Application Form**

The form is fairly self explanatory and simple to complete. Note the list of countries on the form and the important notes detailing special requirements.

Countries to be visited.

You are asked to complete a list of countries you wish to visit. Put in all you can but if there is not enough room I would suggest generalising the list such as East Africa or Far East. The IDP can be used worldwide even if the country you are in is not listed as a signatory. In most instances the officer is most unlikely to have seen one before.

Start Date.

You cannot get an IDP more than 3 months before the start date. However you may not need the IDP to start immediately if you are driving through Europe for example, when an ordinary UK licence is acceptable.

Finish Date

Note that the IDP lasts for one year only, when you need to apply for a new one.

Delivery

There is only space for one address on the form. If you want it delivered to a different address make sure you write this address clearly in a suitable space on the form itself.

Declaration

Don't forget to sign!

You will need a passport size photo to accompany your application, copy of the ID section of your passport and a copy of your current driving licence (including the photocard part). The fee can be paid by including your credit / debit card details on the form or by cheque in which case expect some delay.



### **On Delivery**

Check that the dates are correct on the front of the document.

Check that you have the correct photo!

Check that all the relevant Classes have been overstamped.



## Comment

The Classes of vehicles that can be driven as shown on the two versions of the IDP do not directly compare with the Classes on your driving licence.

### Licence Classes according to the 1926 Convention

<i>Class</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>Motor vehicles of which the laden weight does not exceed 3,500 kg.</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Motor vehicles of which the laden weight exceeds 3,500 kg.</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Motor-cycles, with or without side-car.</i>

### Licence Classes according to the 1949 Convention

<i>Class</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>Motor cycles, with or without a side-car, invalid carriages and three-wheeled motor vehicles with an unladen weight not exceeding 400 kg (900 lbs).</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Motor vehicles used for the transport of passengers and comprising, in addition to the driver's seat, at most eight seats, or those used for the transport of goods and having a permissible maximum weight not exceeding 3,500 kg (7,700 lbs). Vehicles in this category may be coupled with a light trailer.</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Motor vehicles used for the transport of goods and of which the permissible maximum weight exceeds 3,500 kg (7,700 lbs). Vehicles in this category may be coupled with a light trailer.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Motor vehicles used for the transport of passengers and comprising, in addition to the driver's seat, more than eight seats. Vehicles in this category may be coupled with a light trailer.</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Motor vehicles of category B, C, or D, as authorised above, with other than light trailer.</i>

You will see that the 1949 Convention does not have a Class that includes your overland vehicle if it weighs more than 3500 kgs since its not used for the carriage of goods. However this seems to be ignored when the IDP is issued.

The inclusion of vehicles over 3500kgs for any use was included after the 1926 Convention until the 2011 amendment to the 1968 Convention. However to my knowledge so far no organisation in the UK has issued IDPs which conform to the latest version of the Licence Classes (which are identical to the current classes on the UK national driving licence).

*Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and celebrate the journey*

*– Fitzhugh Mullan*

## SCARY MOMENT

I had to fit a Seagull water purifier to the van and this entailed drilling a very large hole in the work surface near the sink and cooker. Now bear in mind this was our brand new Bimobil and we are still a bit precious



about it, so I was terrified of getting it in the wrong place and b\*\*\*\*\*ing up the new worktop. Due to the constraints imposed by the pipe work, the location of the sink and the drawer underneath the worktop, there was about one mm of space around where the tap had to go, i.e. a bit wrong and the whole thing would not work. Talk about

measure twice! I think I measured 10 times, asked Virginia to check the measurements, checked again and then had a rest before I checked once more. Then I drilled the hole. Luckily it worked out o.k. And the rest of the fitting was a breeze (note for anyone doing the same, order the inline fitting from the supplier as it does NOT come in then kit) . So we now have a nice pure water feed.



Al Williams

## Adventures in a Landrover

My Landrover Defender 110 is now 15 years old and I am due a new one which I will be ordering shortly. It will be a 130 this time and again I will have it converted into a camper van with a lift up roof so you have the benefit of standing up in the vehicle and it will also fit in a container for safe passage overseas. My present Landrover was converted in Austria by LYNDI in 2000 and I have been very pleased with the work. However this time I am going to Germany where the expertise is just as good and I am sorry to say a lot better than the UK. We produce an amazing vehicle in the Defender and there are dozens of firms in the UK that provide add on off road equipment that are the best in the world but not camper van conversions.



In Australia, Toyota seems to be the most popular off road vehicle but the Landrover is still a major player and there is a lot of after market off road equipment which has been tried and tested in the outback of Australia which are available in the UK or online.

My first experience of overland travel was to Morocco in 2002 and then it was to Libya and then to Algeria before our major overland trip to South America with the Silk Route Motorcaravan Club in 2005, now known as the Silk Route Motorcaravan Network. We, that is my wife Barbara and I spent eighteen months in South and Central America before returning home from Los Angeles in January 2007.

It was during that year that Barbara was diagnosed with Huntingdon's Disease which was quite a shock to both of us as there is no cure and can only get worse. However we did not let it stop us making plans to drive round the world and in June 2010 we set off for Australia. Driving overland as far as Kelang in Malaysia where we shipped the Landrover in a container to Medan in Sumatra. We island hopped through Indonesia to East Timor and spent a week washing the vehicle before it could be put in a container for Darwin.

We travelled 20,000 miles in the nine months we were in Australia and then shipped out of Brisbane for the States. We started in New York going down the East Coast and then crossed the Southern States before going up the West Coast to Canada. Once in Canada we headed north and went as far as Prudhoe Bay in the far north of Alaska. We returned south on a slightly different route, where we could to head for Calgary. It was then due east across Canada to Newfoundland. Our final destination was Halifax in Nova Scotia to ship the vehicle back to Liverpool. All in all a fantastic trip. We did do a blog [www.landrover-nts31.co.uk](http://www.landrover-nts31.co.uk) but the links on some of the diary pages have stopped working and I am not sure how to fix it. It is possible to go back to the diary page and go to the next page from there.



Now I have to plan my next trip with the new Landrover, a photo of which I will post once I get it.

Norman Seddon

**Many travellers have to fly, maybe after shipping their vehicle or having a break during their journey so we hope the article below will be of interest – it might even inspire those of you trying to find that elusive Christmas present.**

## **What they don't tell you in the plane safety demo**

*By George Hobica | Airfarewatchdog*

Have you ever wondered exactly why airlines dim the lights upon landing, making you grope to find the overhead light just as you were about to finish your Sudoku? (Hint: It's not to save electricity.) Or why it's so important to put your own oxygen mask on before helping others? Or what's it like jumping onto a 737's inflatable emergency slide? And just how heavy are those over-wing exit doors?



Well, British Airways has just the thing: the BA Flight Safety Awareness Course, a modified version of the same training that flight crews go through after they're hired and then once a year thereafter. Even if you're not the pessimistic or overly cautious type, it's a fascinating way to spend a day in London. *See here - Ed*

<http://www.britishairways.com/en-gb/baft/flight-safety-awareness/flight-safety-awareness>

You get to jump down an emergency slide! And if you've ever wanted to pull the inflation cord on one of those airplane life vests, this is your chance. You also get to evacuate a cabin filled with smoke (it's the kind used in a theatre or rock concert, but it does the trick). You'll practice the fine points of the "brace position." And best of all, you understand why some of those more obscure procedures and safety warnings are part of the flight experience.

### **Check those life vests**

One thing they don't tell you in the typical safety demo: people take those life jackets, located under or between your seat, as souvenirs. It's a vile and punishable offence, and while airlines do check each seat at the start of every day, a plane could make several trips in a day, during any of which a passenger could steal a life vest.

Not that it may much matter anyway. Only a small fraction of the passengers on US Airways Flight 1549 bothered to grab their life vests when Captain Sullenberger ditched his Airbus A320 into the Hudson River.

### **The proper brace position**

Some of the finer points of flight safety may seem particularly arcane, but there's a reason for every detail. If you've ever bothered, for example, to look at the safety card in the seat back pocket, you may have noticed that the correct brace position is to put your hands on your head, but not in just any slipshod fashion (and definitely not with the fingers locked together). See how the illustration shows one hand over the other? Is that just arbitrary? No as it turns out. Should something fall on you during a crash landing, you want to protect at least one hand (preferably the one you write with) because you'll need it to unbuckle your seat belt when it's safe to do so. Your other hand is in that position to provide some protection to your "strong" hand, which will be doing the unbuckling.

### **Put yours on first**

You've heard it over and over: put on your own oxygen mask before helping those around you. But the safety demos never tell you why that's so important. The reason? You might only have 15 or 20 seconds in the event of a cabin decompression, during which all oxygen would be sucked out of the plane (and your lungs), before you'd experience confusion and a euphoric stoned state, at which point you might forget everything you heard during the safety demo (if in fact you even listened, which you probably didn't).

In 30 to 45 seconds you'd probably pass out. So it's important to act quickly. (I think that if the standard safety announcement explained some of these fine points, people might put down their newspapers). Andy and Diane, our instructors, also explained what else to expect during a sudden decompression: a burning smell from the oxygen canisters, severe vibration, a rapid descent (typically a drop of 20,000 feet in just 3 or 4 minutes), and an automated announcement telling you what to expect (because, obviously, the crew would have



their own masks on and wouldn't be able to communicate with passengers).

### **Why not fly backward?**

And speaking of the brace position, wouldn't it be unnecessary, I asked Andy and Diane, if airlines oriented their seats so that everyone was flying backwards? After all, in the event of a crash landing or controlled emergency landing, there would be no need to assume the brace position if the seats didn't face forward. Isn't that why flight attendants face backward in their jump seats? "People equate rear-facing seats with trains", Andy answered. "We'd be out of business in a week," said Diane.

And why not have three- or four-point harnesses rather than seatbelts, such as those worn by flight attendants, one of my classmates asked? Aren't they safer? You've probably guessed the answer: airlines recommend keeping your seatbelt fastened whenever seated, and no one would want to wear such an uncomfortable contraption during the flight.

### **"Touch drills" and "muscle memory"**

While your pilots are waiting for takeoff, it may surprise you that they're probably doing a safety drill -- what if this or that should go wrong on takeoff, which buttons would we push or steps would we take? So they go through the motions of various procedures, touching and even moving the controls. They call these touch drills, and Andy and Diane suggest that passengers do the same thing just before takeoff, perhaps buckling and unbuckling their seat belts three times. Sounds daft? "It's muscle memory," said Diane. "In an emergency, people panic. They think they're in their cars, and try to release the seatbelt by pushing a button rather than lifting a flap."

### **Why does red mean go?**

And what's with that escape path lighting along the floor? Why would red lights indicate an exit? Shouldn't they be green (as in go) instead? Andy explained, they're red because they show up better in a smoke-filled cabin. And indeed it's true, as we learned when our "cabin" became a soupy fog.

### **Those doors are heavy**

What about those emergency over-wing exit doors? How heavy are they exactly, and how easy are they to open and toss? Well, we practiced on a Boeing 737. The answer? Even for me, a fairly strapping 6-footer who goes to the gym regularly, they're pretty heavy (40 pounds to be exact). It's not just the weight, but manoeuvring them while sitting down that's an awkward challenge.

Tip: sit way back in your seat or you'll hit yourself on the head when the door swings down. Another tip: use your knee to rest the door and then swing it out and throw it on the wing (don't worry, you won't be sued for damages). I was surprised that the actual latch mechanism is so easy to engage you can do it with one finger. Even though, according to our instructors, it's been 27 years since an over-wing exit door has had to be opened on a British Airways plane (other than in this cavernous training hangar, that is), I still feel safer now that I've done it.

The bad news is that half the people (probably more) who I see sitting in those exit rows wouldn't have the strength to manage the door. Airlines should not sell these seats to anyone merely because they can pay the fee for the extra legroom. But don't worry if some nut tries to open the doors in flight. They're impossible to open owing to air pressure being much higher inside the plane than outside.

### **Perhaps the most macabre little titbit**

Next time you get on a plane, take note of the handles by the door, just inside the plane. What on earth are those for? Well, in a panicked emergency evacuation, when the flight attendants are manning the exit door, passengers, in their mad rush to get off, have a tendency to push them out of the way, sometimes all the way down the slide. The handles are there to make sure that the flight attendants stay on the plane if that's what they need to do.

### **Why don't airlines tell us all this?**

I left the course thinking that more passengers would listen to the pre-flight safety demo if airlines shared some of this insider information before each flight, maybe mixing it up from time to time so that the demo doesn't bore people. On one flight, the demo might include the finer points of opening the over-wing exits. On another flight, more information about why it's so important to put your oxygen mask on first (and quickly) before helping others. More passengers would probably do what they're told in an emergency if they knew the reasons behind these rules (and time and time again, in emergencies, passengers do not listen, do the wrong thing, and become victims).

Speaking of the whys, just why do airlines dim the cabin lights during night time takeoffs and landings? You guessed it: to help adjust your eyes to the dark (either inside a smoke-filled cabin or on a darkened runway). And why do some airlines ask that you keep your shoes on (except high heels, which can tear the slide) when taking off and landing?

Because the runway might be burning hot after you jump down the slide. And while it's doubtful that airlines will ever add these extra details to their pre-flight safety drills, the main thing I left the course with was a better respect for the thought that has gone into airline safety over the years, as each crash and emergency landing contributes to collective knowledge. And I have even more respect for flight attendants who, as we all know, are primarily there for no other reason than our safety.

## **My Favourite Photos**



The Caravanserai at Tash Rabat in the Torogut Pass, Kyrgyzstan

## Preparing for Christmas in Your Motorcaravan

This needs a bit of forward planning if you are on a journey to far distant lands. So this Christmas you not have the chance to stock up before setting off for next year.

mini Christmas tree such 20cm tall. There are others lights even shorter. Of decorations which you to fairy lights. Like us you Christmas stocking Santa Claus may find in



You might find space for a as this one which is only around with fibre optic course there are other could consider from tinsel might like to have a containing small gifts which places you visit along your

route. The stockings can be tucked away somewhere until Christmas Eve. Some fellow travellers even created a full sized fireplace ( admittedly in 2 dimensions) with a narrow mantelpiece and imitation flames on which to hang the stockings

Then of course there is the celebratory meal to think about. The most obvious item that you can buy now for next year is a Christmas Pudding. Good quality puddings have a very long Use By date easily more than a year ahead as should be th case with Christmas cakes. Other things are not so easy but you may find sweet treats and tinned products that may be useful. If you like brussel sprouts these are available in tins but having tried them one Christmas I can happily say that they are only a very poor imitation of the real thing and are only for the diehard traditionalist. It all depends on your tastes and what you can find but even a few items can make a Christmas in the middle of nowhere a bit special.



Here are a couple of samples of decorated vehicles to spark your own ideas



And finally instead of giving expensive presents to each other or distant family and friends, how about giving something – money or small gifts to those near where you are camped



Christmas, camping in Cape Town

who are less fortunate than you. You need to do this with care and humility and is perhaps best done through NGOs or other local organisations.





## Christmas Quiz – Answers

- 1 The Magic Circular
- 2 Europe
- 3 7 years
- 4 Mount Cook in New Zealand
- 5 Boxing Day
- 6 France (84.7 million in 2013)
- 7 The Christmas Cracker
- 8 Waterloo
- 9 Panettone
- 10 Merry Christmas!
- 11 364
- 12 Lempiras are the currency of Honduras
- 13 Oliver Cromwell
- 14 Russia
- 15
  - a. Finnish
  - b. Korean
  - c. German
  - d. Irish
  - e. Hawaiian
  - f. Norwegian
  - g. Portuguese
  - h. Greek
- 16 Green. A sign of the returning spring.
- 17 Paramaribo
- 18 Ilex
- 19 The White Sea
- 20 A hat (every cracker has a hat)
- 21 Canada which has an estimated 3 million lakes
- 22
  - a Great Wall of China
  - b Great Barrier Reef
  - c Sydney Opera House
  - d Pyramids of Giza
  - e Table Mountain or Taj Mahal
  - f Machu Picchu
  - g Tower of London
  - h Ankor Wat
  - i Rio de Janeiro
  - j Grand Canyon
- 23 Moscow – the Mercury City Tower at 339m (1112ft)
- 24 On the 6th of January, Epiphany or 'Kings Day'. Galette des Rois is 'Cake of Kings'
- 25 Anguilla, one of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean

*That's all folks!*

*except to wish you all*



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