



Dear All,

It's Spring, and Song is starting to blossom. Credit should be given and shared equally by the motivated, dedicated employees of Song and the man in charge - John Selvaggio.

Who says so? The three articles below - one from the West Coast (LA Times), one from South Florida (Palm Beach Post) and one from the business community (BusinessWeek).

Both BusinessWeek and the LA Times recently ranked the Song product and experience - Number One - above all other discount carriers including Southwest, AirTran, JetBlue, Ted, and Frontier.

Without getting too wordy and philosophical, what's happening at Song could just as easily happen at the mainline Mothership Delta. The key is the employees are focused on their mission: to provide a good service, beat the competition, and make money.

They are doing it with simple pricing and giving the customer what they want - comfy leather seats, in-flight entertainment, and tasty food/drinks. The employees are upbeat and Mr. Selvaggio has them eager to sell the food and drinks - one key to making money.

Once Jerry gets his new team in place and completes a smart deal with the pilots - for the benefit of both sides - this is the way the company could/should be heading. Rather than be embroiled in continuing controversy and perpetual uncertainty, we should be focusing on working together to enhance our ability to make money again with great service, a compellingly simple product, and a rejuvenated work force.

In a customer service operation like ours - it is more than "just business". And Song is currently leading the way to illustrate what's possible in a very competitive lanscape.

Enjoy the articles below. It feels good to read something positive about Delta for a change.

It's time to start flying right again.

Respectfully, Mike Stark

Flying the Frugal Skies Can Be Fun

We fly five carriers, including newcomers Song and Ted, and find that the little things (jokes, entertainment) go a long way

By Jane Engle, *LA Times*, March 21, 2004

Time was, Southwest was the only discount airline most people knew. No more. The "bus of the skies" has a host of imitators, all promising low fares and high fun.

Now the question is this: Who really delivers?

To find out, I rode four self-proclaimed low-cost carriers -- Delta's Song, JetBlue, United's new Ted and Southwest -- plus United on a cross-country barnstorming tour last month to compare service, entertainment options, food, comfort levels, fares and more.

My main impression of these five (chosen because they serve this market or they're new): Song was a standout, with its cheerfully corny crew, wacky color scheme, gourmet food and onboard trivia contests. JetBlue pulled up second. As for the rest, I found little difference in the flying experience -- or sometimes even fares -- from one to the next.

I chose a route that would take me from Los Angeles to the East Coast and back: Song from LAX to Orlando, Fla.; JetBlue from Orlando to Boston; United from Boston to Denver; Ted from Denver to Las Vegas; and Southwest from Las Vegas to LAX.

This was not a scientific sampling, certainly. Trip legs varied from 4 1/2 hours on Song and United to an hour on Southwest. I wasn't able to taste full menus on all flights. Even within the same airline, different crews may give different service. Fares, of course, shift constantly.

So I can report only what I found on my flights, detailed in the order flown:

Song

Delta launched this low-cost carrier last April on a fashionable note: Kate Spade designer crew duds, organic buy-onboard menu by former W Hotel chef Michel Nischan and seatback TVs. All this plus extra legroom.

The airline shuttles mainly between the Northeast and Florida but also flies nonstop to Florida from the West, including Los Angeles. Its promise, on its website, www.flysong.com: "The song is personal. It's unique. Memorable. And brings a smile to your face."

It does just that, for the most part. My LAX gate crew for my morning Song nonstop to Orlando was subdued. But at 54B next door, a Song agent regaled -- or tormented -- his captive audience with jokes such as: "Knock knock." "Who's there?" "Shelby." "Shelby who?" "Shelby coming around the mountain when she comes."

"We try to make it fun," he said.

Inside the squeaky-clean B757 cabin, where the color scheme was bright blue with lime, purple and orange accents, the good humor carried through to the safety audio, set to salsa music.

"You're lucky," the crew told us: We were on one of the first Song planes to be wired for live satellite TV, with 24 channels.

Or not so lucky. For more than half the flight, my seatback monitor and some others cut out every few seconds. ("It worked perfectly" westbound, the apologetic crew said.)

A diverting bonus was an on-screen music-trivia contest with such questions as: "What was the name of Kid Creole's band?" and " 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was a super-hit for which group?" (Answers: the Coconuts; Nirvana.) Sign-on names and seat numbers were posted for the top 10 scorers. (My tally: an unhip 44%.)

You pay for food, and it's not cheap. But my gourmet vegan sandwich, a 7-inch-diameter lavash stuffed with grilled vegetables, tofu and rice, was worth the \$8, and the Song Sunrise (vodka, orange juice and a splash of cran-apple), \$5, wasn't bad either.

When I asked a shuttle van driver the next day what he'd heard about Song, he replied: "I hear mixed. There are no magazines and no [free] food."

Almost true. (There was a budget travel magazine in my seatback.) But I agreed with fellow passenger Ann Nethero of Moorpark: "When I was told I was flying Song, I thought, 'What kind of rinky-dink airline is that?' But it's really nice."

So was my one-way fare: \$129.10 (including taxes), the lowest in the market the day I booked it.

JetBlue

This 4-year-old New York-based carrier, with a West Coast hub in Long Beach, has enjoyed a meteoric rise, powered by low fares, roomy leather seats and 24 channels of satellite TV beamed to every seatback. It flies to 23 cities (including Ontario, Calif.) in 11 U.S. states and Puerto Rico.

It also sports a breezy, cheeky style.

When the door to the jetway kept setting off an alarm as I waited for my 7:35 a.m. flight to Boston, the JetBlue gate agent in Orlando made the sign of the cross and remarked, "That was just to make sure you guys were awake."

Directing us to pick up headphones from a box before boarding, he announced, "They're free now. But if you get on the plane, they're \$5,000."

By comparison, the crew on our A320 played it straight. But flying was still fun.

My TV monitor worked, with occasional audio glitches. I'd been able to plan my viewing before flying by checking schedules on www.jetblue.com. Guides to travel manners ("Be nice"; "Pack your own meal") and "Airplane Yoga, or how to look like a real weirdo to your fellow passengers" were clever.

The offerings. The latter included the airline's reduced-fat "blue" potato chips, party mix and cookies. There was no buy-on-board program. The cabin was a vision in gray; I missed Song's hues.

Nonetheless, JetBlue has a near-fanatic following.

"They're wonderful," said Jen Savage, a passenger from Saco, Maine. "You get your own TV. They have good prices."

Yes they do. My one-way fare was \$87.60, lowest in the market when I booked.

United Airlines

This industry giant, which traces its roots to a 1926 air-mail service, is the largest U.S. airline under bankruptcy protection. Since filing in December 2002, it has continued to fly but was still in Chapter 11 at the Travel section's press time Tuesday.

United has cut costs, reduced some business fares, launched a low-cost carrier named Ted and made other changes to pull out of its financial tailspin.

At Boston's Logan airport, I checked in for my 9 p.m. flight to Denver at one of the self-serve kiosks. The remaining staff tagged bags and processed customers with paper tickets.

The gate agents were efficient and cheerful although devoid of knock-knock jokes -- a mercy, perhaps. Ditto for the onboard crew.

The mostly gray cabin of our B757 showed some fatigue: Worn seatback pockets were stuffed with unwrapped headphones and well-thumbed airline and Sky Mall magazines. I missed having a personal TV, although "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World," screened on drop-down cabin monitors, was a classy film offering.

My main complaint was legroom. With the seat in front reclined, my knees cleared the seatback by barely 2 inches, less than half the gap on Song and JetBlue. I'm 5 feet, 7 inches tall. No wonder 6-footers scramble for bulkhead and exit-row seats.

There was no free food on my 4 1/2-hour flight, another "frill" that the once-glamorous majors are eliminating to compete with their low-cost cousins. But my \$7 chicken Caesar salad wrap, bought onboard, was ample and tasty.

Except for legroom, United delivered a good flying experience. Yet it got a lukewarm response from several passengers I spoke with.

Typical was Avery Hancock, a San Francisco resident who attends college in Boston. When asked why she takes United, she replied, "I'm used to it, and I get [frequent flier] miles." Besides, she added, discounter Southwest doesn't fly this route.

As for the fare: Had I booked JetBlue, I could have flown for \$87.50 instead of the \$127.60 I paid on United.

Ted

I had high hopes for a fun date with Ted, the low-cost operation that United launched in February downside on my nearly three-hour flight: no magazines and skimpy, albeit free, food from its new Denver hub, serving Ontario, Calif., and other cities.

Sporting white, blue and orange plumage, Ted, which takes its name from the last three letters of United, is "warm, friendly and casual," its publicity says. It also seemed aggressively trendy. The onboard "Tedelevision" and "Tedtunes" entertainment was getting enthusiastic reviews from teens.

But I was mostly disappoin-Ted.

It started with check-in at the Denver airport for my afternoon nonstop to Las Vegas, where I confronted a bank of automated kiosks. A couple of the staffers who worked the counters, tagging bags and giving tips on using the kiosks, wore Ted baseball caps, but they served United customers too.

When I asked a mostly monosyllabic Ted-cap wearer about the meal policy, she replied: "I don't know. You'll have to ask the gate agent." He told me there would be no meals because the one-hour, 49-minute flight was too short to qualify. (On longer flights, you can buy \$7 club sandwiches and salmon Caesar salads.)

At the gate, there was a forest of orange signs, offering cheery greetings such as "It's a great day to be flying," and "Ted is happy to see you."

But onboard, it was much like flying United, with its pleasant but business-like crew and cramped legroom. Plus one unsettling oversight: a used tissue in my seatback pocket.

Ted's entertainment was hipper, of course. There was no seatback satellite TV, but drop-down monitors showed a Liz Phair music video, a profile of teen singer-actress Mandy Moore, an episode of NBC's "Scrubs" comedy and other shows. Music on 14 channels ranged from retro to house and trance mixes; classical was scarce.

We got little bags of party mix and beverages, including what Ted touts as Starbucks coffee. The anemic liquid in my cup bore little resemblance to that heart-racing brew.

When I asked a couple of passengers what they thought of their Ted flight, they shrugged, although acknowledging they liked the music.

"They've got to work on that coffee," added a woman across the aisle.

That and a couple of other things.

On the upside, Ted delivered the lowest fare of the five carriers I compared, \$179.10, matching low-cost competitor Frontier.

Southwest Airlines

This granddaddy of discount carriers, launched in 1971 from Texas, pioneered "flying for peanuts" with a sense of humor.

Although Southwest's flights, once regional, now stretch from coast to coast, you'll still get only peanuts on shorter sojourns, and you won't get a reserved seat. Just hope you get into Boarding Group A.

But Southwest is looking a little tired these days, judging from the packed, hourlong flight I took from Las Vegas to LAX.

The repairman apparently hadn't made a recent pass through our B737 cabin. My reading light didn't work. The seat in front was locked in half-recline. A couple nearby shifted seats, complaining they couldn't turn off the arctic blast from their air vent.

Although the crew was pleasant enough, they weren't funny. Not one corny joke or silly guessing game. Just the standard safety announcements.

I was grateful for my two bags of free peanuts and an apple juice and for my \$47.60 fare, the lowest on the day I'd booked it. Southwest still gets that right.

But for me, on this trip, there was little difference between flying Southwest or United or Ted.

For some, that's the point.

"I used to hate Southwest because it was a bus, and other airlines offered better service," said Martin Fung, a Los Angeles businessman waiting in the Las Vegas airport for his flight home. "But now Southwest is more consistent."

Nearby, Gail Orr, a lawyer from Calabasas also waiting to fly home on Southwest, commented, "They're cheap, and they get you there. What more could you ask?"

But some fliers do ask for more.

Allison Zahorik of Redondo Beach, a handbag designer who was in Las Vegas for business, is a fan of Southwest, having been on flights with more typically jolly crews.

"I like the people," she said. "They make a lot of jokes and make you feel comfortable." For a less-than-avid flier like her, "it makes a huge difference," she said.

Doug Benton, an engineer from Northampton, Mass., whom I met earlier in my journey, explained it this way: "Flying is inherently stressful to me. So any time they try to lighten it up, it's helpful." He "absolutely loved" having his own seatback TV on Song.

I hope the airlines are listening to customers like Zahorik and Benton.

Flying, after all, was once fun. As Song and JetBlue prove, it still can be, even when done on the cheap.

Bright colors, tasty food, TV: It's all on value airlines

By Cheryl Blackerby, Palm Beach Post Travel Editor

Sunday, April 25, 2004

I'm flipping through the TV channels: Tony Blair looking older by the minute on the BBC; Baghdad on CNN; Jennifer Lopez on E! (Is she going to give that engagement ring back or not?); Emeril on the Food channel ("Bam!"); *Curb Appeal* on HGTV (Now *there* are some ideas

for the ugly front walkway); and *Trading Spaces* on The Learning Channel (Don't the homeowners ever learn? If you tell the designer not to paint the armoire, then the designer absolutely *will* paint the armoire.)

Soon, it's time for dinner -- Oregano Scented Organic Chicken and Baby Spinach Salad. Should I have the Bonterro cabernet with that?

And before I know it, we're landing in West Palm Beach.

Yep, 2 1/2 hours on Delta's Song and what a pleasant experience it was.

Waiting in the dingy gloom of LaGuardia Airport in New York, I was actually looking forward to the flight home on Song: Those leather seats in bright, happy colors. The cheerful, chic flight attendants dressed by designer Kate Spade. Not to mention the little television screens -- one per passenger -- on the backs of seats. And the food.

What happened to pretzels-only flights and nothing to do but read the book you brought with you?

The value airlines, that's what. And Song in particular. The much-trumpeted carrier, started last year by Delta, recently received the highest overall ratings of low-fare airlines from both *BusinessWeek* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Others joining the low-fare fray: United's discount subsidiary, Ted; JetBlue; AirTran; ATA Airlines; and Southwest. WestJet, the Canadian low-fare airline, is planning flights to Florida and other destinations. And Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Atlantic, is considering a low-fare contender in the United States.

I didn't get my fare for a song, but it was the least expensive flight I could find. Plus, traveling aboard Song was a lot more fun than flying the parent airline.

Those individual screens have live satellite TV showing 24 channels, and there's an interactive music trivia game you can play with other passengers. Editor note: All 36 Song aircraft are now configured. They completed the conversion of the 757's on time in late March.

By the end of the year, there will be even more entertainment options, including pay-per-view movies (a feature exclusive to Song), and an interactive iXplor moving map program with zoom capabilities and points of interest information.

The food is definitely something to sing about, even if you have to pay for it and the choices are limited and fairly expensive.

Still, there are no bland, dry sandwiches at "Cafe Song," open most of the flight and served by flight attendants.

The menu was created by Michel Nischan, author of *Taste Pure and Simple* (a cookbook that's a favorite of Oprah's and No. 2 on Amazon) and executive chef for the innovative Heartbeat Restaurant and the W New York Hotel.

He focuses on pure ingredients and intense flavors -- without the use of cream, butter and processed starches or sugars -- and his offerings have won accolades from the Physicians

Committee for Responsible Medicine. In a report rating 10 major airlines, Song was cited as the only service to consistently provide healthy meal options for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

A sampling of what's available: organic yogurt with granola, \$3; turkey on whole wheat croissant with cream cheese and mango jam, \$6; Mediterranean Vegetable and Toasted Lavosh Vegan Sandwich (roasted butternut squash, grilled eggplant and zucchini on toasted bread with organic brown rice and tofu cream cheese), \$8.

But there are also guilty pleasures: Mrs. Fields chocolate chip cookies, \$2, Odwalla Super Protein Bars, \$3, and more. Dylan's Candy Bar -- the candy store co-founded by Dylan Lauren, daughter of Ralph Lauren -- provides Song-branded chocolates and candies.

Song is the only discount airline to provide service to Newark, Kennedy and LaGuardia airports. It offers nonstop service between major cities in the Northeast and Florida, plus Atlanta, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and San Juan. Beginning June 1, Song will offer a third daily round-trip flight between Boston and West Palm Beach and a fourth daily round-trip between Boston and Fort Lauderdale. Song will increase service from Hartford to West Palm Beach, for a total of two daily round-trips. (Visit flysong.com or call 800-FLY-SONG). You can't miss the fleet of 36 199-seat, one-class Boeing 757s, with the neon lime-green logos.

Of course, the other low-fare airlines have food and fun, too: JetBlue also offers seat-back video systems, and Ted airline has Ted beer, Ted cocktails, and free headsets in bright colors for TedTV shows, including stand-up comedy and sitcoms.

So given a choice between a dull, pricier flight or one on Song or Ted or JetBlue, the decision is an easy one.

Want to meet for dinner and a movie at 30,000 feet?

Flying Budget, But In Style

Discount carriers are trying to outdo each other in offering in-flight amenities.

By Michael Arndt, *BusinessWeek*

March 15, 2004

I'm somewhere between Orlando and New York on Song, Delta Air Lines's ([DAL](#)) new discount subsidiary, playing a game of music trivia against my fellow travelers. We've just completed round 19 and, with one multiple-choice question to go, I'm in second place.

The final question pops up on the seatback screen in front of me: "Johnny Cash did a cover of *Hurt* by which band?" I know this one: nine inch nails. Too bad for me, the passenger in first place also gets it right and wins the contest. Still, it has been a fun way to pass the time. After scrolling through the channels to see what's on satellite TV, I think I'll play again.

People who look down on low-fare airlines as nothing better than buses with wings are in for a surprise. While Southwest Airlines ([LUV](#)) and a few other discounters cling to their no-frills ways, a new breed of budget carrier is offering a buffet of in-flight amenities that, in some

instances, surpass business-class service on major airlines.

Twenty-four channels of real-time TV on individual screens? Frontier ([FRNT](#)), JetBlue ([JBLU](#)), and Song all have it.

Leather seats? JetBlue and Song have them, too, as does ATA Airlines ([ATAH](#)) on its newest planes.

Gourmet sandwiches and salads? You can buy them on America West ([AWA](#)), Song, and United Airlines' ([UAL](#)) new affiliate, Ted.

Flight attendants on Song will even shake up a Cosmopolitan for you, served in a giant martini glass, for \$5.

FREE TV IN THE SEATBACK

Soon there will be more. Frontier, JetBlue, and Song will offer pay-per-view movies later this year. In a few months, AirTran ([AAI](#)) and JetBlue will start broadcasting 100 channels of free XM Satellite Radio.

Meantime, Song will add streaming MP3 programming to allow passengers to create their own music playlists. The best part is, you can get all these extras at fares that won't hurt your wallet or upset the corporate travel department.

My one-way Orlando-to-New York ticket on Song was \$77. That same flight in coach on Delta? Five times as much, with a 50-minute layover in Washington.

You can thank JetBlue Airways for this bounty. It instantly wowed passengers when it launched in early 2000 as the first airline with free TV beamed live over satellite to individual screens at every seat. Since then, older carriers such as ATA and Frontier have added headset entertainment to keep up.

The two newest contenders -- Song, which started last April, and Ted, which just began in February with flights in and out of Denver -- have only intensified the in-flight-service competition by rolling out à la carte meals and expanding to more markets.

To better judge the latest offerings, I recently hopscotched around the country, flying almost every discount airline out there. While the overall level of coach-cabin service has gone up tremendously in the past few years, there are obvious laggards. Southwest, stubbornly true to its original concept, really is a bus with wings.

And fast-growing AirTran is Southwest with seat assignments, though AirTran now at least sees the need to give fliers more, with its upcoming radio service.

The best was just as obvious. Song's Boeing ([BA](#)) 757 aircraft come with leather seats in light blue, accented with muted orange, green, and purple. They're as comfy as they are colorful. Its live TV package is matched by Frontier and JetBlue, though Frontier charges \$5 for the service.

But no other carrier also offers 24 channels of free audio programming, including one of complete CDs as well as a video game.

Song's food is also highly edible. For \$8, I had a tasty salad of baby spinach, organic chicken, feta cheese, olives, and cherry tomatoes.

The flight wasn't perfect. Like all discount airlines, Song attracts a lot of families, and that can mean kid problems. Three rows up, a child got airsick all over the place. But what other carrier would let me show off my storehouse of music trivia while sipping a supersize Cosmopolitan?

Goodbye, flying Greyhound. Welcome to the new golden age of air travel.

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