

Who’s afraid of Aerophobia?



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I have a good friend who is always ready for an outdoor adventure, be it fishing, hunting, camping, ATV riding, or even a good day hike. If I were to suggest we take off to the Florida Keys for a week of tarpons fishing, he would be packed and ready to go before I hung up the phone. The problem is, anywhere we go, must be by automobile or train. He will not fly.

When I told him that he has aerophobia, he became angry, telling me he does not have an STD. After explaining to him that aerophobia is just a fancy name for fear of flying, he calmed down, but still refused to fly anywhere.

When I first started flying, over 50 years ago, it was not the bad experience it has become today. Back then, airlines offered nice meals, unlimited cocktails, lots of legroom, comfortable seats, and very little restrictions on the type, size, and weight of the luggage you wanted to carry.

Flying has become the worst part of any adventure where flight is the means of transportation. Most



Some flights are easier r to take than others. My hunting buddy and I are on a helicopter flying out of camp, with us crammed inside with moose and caribou antlers. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

regional flights require passengers to be coated in grease so they can cram you into the aircraft. For someone of my size, six foot one and 200 plus never-you-mind weight, I simply don’t fit in the allotted space they amusingly call a “seat.” Drinks you pay for, meals are a package of two stale cookies, and entertainment is usually limited to watching people try and fit in the aisle on their way to what the airline affectionately calls a “restroom.”

Aerophobia, or avio-phobia is the intense and irrational fear of flying. It is an anxiety disorder that can cause significant distress and avoidance of air travel, such as in the case of my friend. He is not alone, as studies suggest an estimated 25 million adults in the U.S. suffer from the fear. While many people experience

some level of fear, a small percentage, around 2.5% have the clinical fear. It would seem that the logical approach, which I have unsuccessfully tried on my friend, would be to provide statistical information to debunk the fear. The chances of dying in a commercial plane crash are statistically around one in 11 million. An MIT study from 2024 found that one per every 13.7 million passengers boardings globally between 2018 and 2022 would experience a plane crash. The same study also found that the fatality rate for those unlucky passengers in a plane crash was around 17.5%. To put that into a different perspective, the odds of dying in a car crash is around one in 5,000. You are more likely to die of a lightning strike or from a

case of food poisoning than from a plane crash. All of this is no help to someone with a case of aerophobia, waiting in line to board a plane.

There are a few things that can help. For starters, book your flight through an experienced travel agent. They know some of the hacks and can help book a flight that is much easier on the nerves. I have used the same travel agent for many years, and she seems to be able to address any concerns we may have, from anxiety to layover problems, a travel agent is important.

Book a seat in a spot that has extra legroom, or at least an aisle seat. All of this comes with a premium economy seat, or a business class seat. Getting up and down, without feeling cramped in and constricted, can make all the difference in a flight. On any long-haul flights, we save our money and go for the business class. Yes, it costs more, but your comfort is important, especially on those 15-hour flights.

Taking care of yourself ahead of the flight and during, is crucial. Make sure you get plenty of rest the days before the flight. Leading up to the flight, exercise regularly, and stay hydrated as much as possible. This gives your body a head start in ensuring your comfort. Even the little things will seem worse, like a headache, when you have aerophobia, so head off as much of that as you can. Bring water onboard with

you and stay well hydrated throughout the flight. Stop the rushing. When your journey has multiple connections, don’t go for the shortest layovers, as that only contributes to the stress. I have had flights with a 45 minutes layover before the next flight, and it is a constant worry and rushing about. My travel agent now allows a minimum of 3 hours between flights for me. This allows the airline to have its usual late arrival and still leave me time to get a bite to eat and not run to the next gate. I know that it is usually “hurry up and get there” but the extra time is far less stressful. For extremely long layovers, book lounge access. My wife and I had a 10-hour layover in Doha, Qatar, on a trip to Africa. We went to the lounge where we ate a fantastic dinner, took showers, and even slept in a private room for a

offer more insight in how to deal with fears. It’s not a good idea to self-medicate, or to drown your sorrows in a cocktails. Alcohol and airplanes are a bad mix because of dehydration, and other effects of alcohol. A single cocktail to celebrate the trip is one thing, but becoming sauced is a bad idea. Aerophobia is treatable, and most people respond well to treatments like psychotherapy, exposure therapy, and anti-anxiety medications for the extreme cases. With the recent rash of plane crashes in the news and on social media, such as the plane that caught fire in Denver, or the plane in Toronto that lost its wings and landed upside down, people have ramped up their safety concerns. This is especially true for people with a fear of flying. Don’t let these fears ruin the opportunity to experience



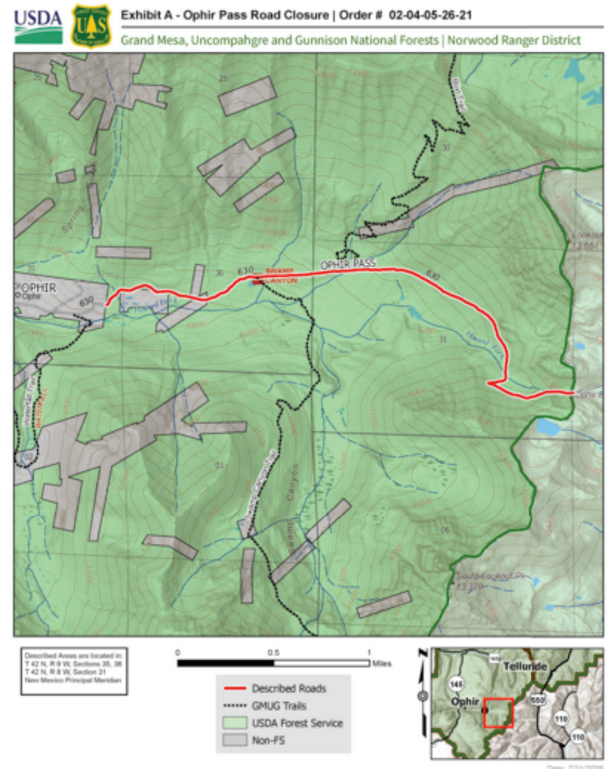
Even when flying business class on a long haul flight, where they feed you well and provide movies, alcohol, and a reasonably comfy seat, many people get apprehensive. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

few hours. It was completely relaxing and enjoyable, and actually part of the vacation. Just about any of the flights that are not the local or regional short jaunts will have seatback entertainment in the form of games, movies, and TV shows. These will usually come with a set of headphones, and this is a great distraction. You can also bring your own tablet or laptop, that you have pre-downloaded something to play. Most flights have in-flight WIFI, so even your cell phone can keep you busy. If this all fails, book yourself a Fear of Flying course that many airlines offer. These courses teach the technical side of flying, how planes fly, turbulence, and

and outdoor adventure, especially the adventures of a lifetime. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and other saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

Ophir Pass Road to close weekdays for mine cleanup

SPECIAL TO THE MDP NORWOOD — The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests’ Norwood Ranger District will temporarily close Ophir Pass Road (National Forest System Road 630) on weekdays beginning Aug. 24 to ensure public safety during hazardous-materials removal and construction work at the abandoned New Dominion Mine. The temporary closure supports the hauling of materials and construction of a retaining wall associated with the mine-cleanup project led by the Forest Service and partner agencies. The road will be closed Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. starting Aug. 24 and continuing through Sept. 11. Ophir Pass Road will remain open daily from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. and all day on weekends during



this period. Full closure details and a detailed map will be added to the GMUG alerts page once the closure is active. The Forest Service appreciates the public’s patience and cooperation as crews complete this important safety-driven mitigation work. For more information, contact the Norwood Ranger District at 970-327-4261.

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