

TRAVEL

What to Do When

The Hijacker Comes

They were headed for Miami, or San Juan or Houston, but a funny thing happened. Over the past eleven months, more than 1,000 Americans have visited Cuba unexpectedly: their airplanes were hijacked. In all, 17 U.S. planes have been diverted to Cuba since January, and a record of sorts was set last week when three jets carrying 238 people made forced landings in Havana within eight days. So far, nobody has been hurt—mainly because airline crews are carefully briefed for such an emergency. Pilots carry maps of Havana's José Martí Airport just in case, and stewardesses are instructed not to argue with would-be hijackers—simply to obey their orders. But nobody has yet thought to brief the poor passengers. The following orders might well be added to the "Important Information" cards commonly stuffed into the seat pockets of airliners:

In the Air—Four Don'ts. Don't be aggressive; hijackers are usually armed, and they tend to be nervous. (The penalty for hijacking is death, or 20 years in prison.) Their choice of weapons varies. Guns and knives are common. But R. Hernandez, a 23-year-old Cuban refugee who held up a National Airlines DC-8 in July, brandished what he claimed was a hand grenade. When the plane landed in Havana, it turned out to be a bottle of after-shave lotion wrapped in a handkerchief.

DON'T panic. Hijackers, although unwelcome, can be congenial. One of the

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three men who took over Pan American's San Juan-bound Flight 281 in November, identified only as José, passed out .32-cal. bullets as souvenirs and chatted amicably with passengers—including Joseph Hunoval and his wife, a honeymoon couple from New Jersey. "He said he was very sorry for inconvenience us," reported Mrs. Hunoval. "Cubans really are very friendly people."

DON'T push the call button. The sudden ping in the cockpit might startle the felon and provoke him to fire his pistol. This could cause the skin of your aircraft to be punctured. In the unlikely event of this occurring, follow emergency procedures.

DON'T call aloud for the stewardess. If you require assistance or must go to the lavatory, raise your hand. Captors

plane. Passengers meanwhile are billeted either at José Martí Airport or at one of two good hotels: the downtown Havana Libre (formerly the Havana Hilton), or the Varadero International, located 35 minutes out of town but convenient to Varadero Airport, from which your prop plane will depart. Depending on your accommodations, here is what to expect:

At José Martí Airport: You will be allowed to circulate freely and make purchases at the airport shops. Havana cigars (25¢ up) and Cuban rum (\$1 per fifth) are the best buys. Neither can legally be imported into the U.S., but passengers on Eastern Flight 73 freely carried both through customs when they returned to Miami. There will be little opportunity for sightseeing, except

KING—DAILY TELEGRAPH, AUSTRALIA



"THIS IS YOUR HIJACKER SPEAKING. OUR ALTITUDE IS 30,000 FT., SPEED 700 M.P.H. ... AND I WISH YOU A PLEASANT, RELAXING TRIP."

permitting, there will be normal beverage service aboard the plane. In fact, abnormal beverage service may be provided. Aboard Eastern Flight 73, hijacked in November on its way from Chicago to Miami, the hijacker himself bought drinks for all passengers who desired them, at a cost of \$20.

On the Ground—Two Dos. Do relax. The Castro regime notwithstanding, most Cubans are indeed friendly, and they will make your layover as comfortable as possible, once formalities have been concluded. These include movie and still photography of all arriving passengers and a routine interrogation: name, address, citizenship and date of last smallpox inoculation. If you are not carrying your International Certificates for Vaccination, you may be inoculated on the spot or, worse, quarantined at the airport.

Do enjoy your stay. Most layovers last overnight, because Cuban authorities will not permit U.S. jets to take off with passengers from José Martí Airport, and it takes time for the airline involved to ferry over a substitute prop

during the trip to the airport on buses provided by the Swiss embassy.

At the Havana Libre: The rooms are still comfortable, the service is still good, and Havana still swings—a little. You will probably be treated to a nightclub, complete with daiquiris, a chorus line and an audience of gaping Eastern Europeans. The shopping downtown is better: in addition to cigars and rum, bargains include East German cameras and beautifully embroidered Czech peasant blouses. These may also be confiscated by U.S. customs on your return, but they can be regained on application to the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, Washington, D.C.

At the Varadero International: Bring a bathing suit, because Varadero Beach, a 15-mile-long ribbon of white sand, is magnificent. Passengers on Eastern Flight 73 were berthed here. They were allowed to go swimming. They were also fed a free meal (appetizer, roast beef, rice, salad, dessert) while two Cuban bands played bossa nova and blues in the background.

¡Hasta la vista!

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