

Shreenand Sadhale

THINK AIRLINE TRAVEL HAS LOST ITS CHARM? SS EXPLAINS THE ALLURE OF HIS WINDOW SEAT



FULL TIME PILOT, PART-TIME MOTORING JOURNALIST. SOME GUYS HAVE IT ALL...

Ive only been to a handful of parties in my life, and, for the most part, they've all been staid affairs. Which is rather ironic. You see, at most of these dos, I run into people who tend to have an ideal solution for fixing the weakening Euro, rising inflation, ISIS, India's meek bowling attack, global warming and Shah Rukh Khan's retirement. Once those issues are dealt with, it goes down the predictable, "So, what do you do?" route.

Now, having an office at the pointy end of a 300-tonne aluminium tube that does 950kph, 10km above the surface of the earth does get some eyes to light up (mostly not from the PYTs, like you would expect). But trust someone (usually a rather rounded man in his mid-forties who's gotten along with a few Scots that evening) to burst the bubble.

"I dread airline travel," he will smirk, "Gone are the glory days of flying. There's no more romance left in aviation. Must be rather boring, no?" "True", I say with a shrug, and add that we are all half the men our fathers were, and move along.

But someday, I would like to take a pause, raise a toast to airplanes, and say this:

That the romance is when you get to see day, dusk and night, all at the same time, from your office window.

The romance is when you depart on an overcast, gloomy, dark day, break out on top and realise, the sun really does exist.

The romance is when you fly during a meteor shower, and you see so many shooting stars, you run out of wishes.

The romance is when you check in at 37,000 feet, and whisper, "Honey, I'm home".

The romance is when you fly from Moscow to Houston. Fifty years ago, you would've had to do it in a spy plane, and fly high enough to be out of range of Soviet missiles. Or, when you fly across the Atlantic without batting an eyelid. Eighty years ago, they were handing out rewards for this sort of thing.

"The romance is when you fly across countries and realise there are no real borders that divide us"

The romance is when you fly across countries and realise there are no real borders that divide us. Except, when you fly over the Line of Control between India and Pakistan. And you see it lit up like a major street for as far as the eye can see.

The romance is when you fly over Europe on a clear day. Within minutes, you've seen the Alps, the Eiffel Tower and the Big Ben.

The romance is when people tell you it's a small world, and having seen the length of the Pacific, you beg to disagree.

The romance is when you ride along the tops of stratus, and you can tell you're really shifting. Even magic carpets wouldn't ride this well.

The romance is when you speak to the same air traffic controller for the umpteenth time. You have never met him, and probably never will, but you recognise him from his voice.

The romance is when you're cleared for a visual approach, and from that point on, it's no computers and no automatics. Just good old stick and rudder.

The romance is when you pop out of low cloud, and what greets you is the sight of three kms of velvet smooth tarmac, lit up like a Christmas tree.

The romance is when after a fourteen-hour transcontinental flight, you look back at your office, and smile!

The romance is that no matter how prosaic you make it out to be, aeroplanes are still mankind's greatest achievement.

The romance is very much alive and kicking, ladies and gentlemen! But a window seat would help you see, and an open heart would help you see it.

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the author.

