

# Charging Overweight Passengers More – Is It Acceptable?

A recent decision by Samoa Air has surprised many in the aviation industry. They are the first airline to determine how much to charge people based on how much they weigh. This happened at about the same time a major European newspaper endorsed the idea of charging people based on what they weigh.



Samoa Air's decision only impacts people using this airline which flies in remote areas of the Pacific. However, it has caused some people to wonder if this was done as a way to generate publicity for a small airline, or if it is an indication that more airlines might follow their lead.

At least one economist, Dr Bhatta from Norway, believes airlines should be basing their fares on a passenger's weight. He states this is fair, because the aircraft burns more fuel as weight increases. The cost of fuel continues to rise, making it difficult for airlines to turn a profit.

The head of Samoa airlines says it is not the number of passengers that matters, but the total weight. They believe it is the fairest way to determine what everyone will have to pay. This is the best solution financially to keep the airline in business.

One might think that other airlines are going to follow the lead of Samoa airlines and implement the same policy. However, such a decision is not without controversy or risk. This is a very emotional issue, and if not handled properly, it could be a public relations disaster for some airlines.

This is why many journalists and travelers around the world have seized on the story expressing their opinion on internet forums and elsewhere. Weight is an issue that many people feel passionate about. There are many who feel disgust at obese people. Others are quite sympathetic towards them. Most people generally do feel compassion for those who are obese due to a medical condition that prevents them from losing weight.



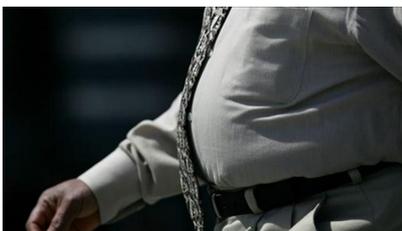
One person who does have sympathy is Anne Bain from Australia. She is the owner of an agency that specializes in helping the disabled make travel plans. She believes charging these people more just makes it harder for them to be able to fly. She also is very concerned that this could lead to airlines deciding to charge for aids the disabled need, such as crutches, walkers and so on.

However, her opinion is clearly in the minority. A recent poll done by a Sydney newspaper claimed that the overwhelming majority believed it was fair to charge obese people more than those of normal weight. An internet editorial, which claimed the fare structure was unfair, received many critical comments saying the overweight should pay more.

There is one valid reason why weight based fares may run into trouble, aside from some negative publicity. Passengers who discover they have to pay considerably more than others may decide to file a discrimination suit. International human rights laws prohibit discrimination of any kind. Many lawyers have the opinion that it may be justified to state that this policy does discriminate against those who are obese.

Samoa Air claims they are treating everyone fairly and equally, because they are based on how many kilograms a person weighs. However, human rights lawyers believe this puts the overweight person at a great disadvantage because of the added cost.

This isn't to say that international laws would be easy to enforce against a certain country. It would depend on to what degree Samoa has included international human rights regulations into their own laws. Australia has not been willing to convert these regulations into law in their country. As a result, airlines may be able to use the loophole that exists between international and domestic laws and be able to implement fee structures based on weight.



There are other potential problems for airlines using this policy. Passengers who must pay more may demand better seating and more room. It is reasonable for them to expect wider seats for their comfort if they must pay more. Samoa Air actually agrees and says that people who pay more should also receive more.

This might not be practical on large airplanes as retrofitting their seats would be an expensive undertaking. At least one US airline gives large passengers a second seat at no further charge if it is necessary.

Samoa Air's decision has created a lot of discussion, both pro and con, in the aviation industry. Fares based on passenger's weight are likely to be a major issue other airlines will have to deal with eventually.

Date: 2013-04-29

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-samoa-air-charges-passengers-according-to-their-weight-article2106>