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Get answers to your air travel FAQs from a pilot



May 01, 2016



Think you're a seasoned travelling pro? You've got nothing on Air Canada pilot Doug Morris who is captain on the Airbus 320 and has three decades of flying experience. Here we ask the flight expert six of your most pressing questions. Who knows, this information may just inspire you — with the airline's recent expansion across the world, becoming a pilot may be more exciting today than ever before.

What do airplanes do when they encounter another airplane?

Air traffic control keeps aircraft safely separated by speed, altitude, heading and distance constraints. But every airliner has a safety back-up system on board called TCAS (Traffic Collision Avoidance System), whereby airliners interrogate each other [pilot lingo for questioning whether an aircraft is friend or foe] when in close proximity. If need be, the system resolves the situation by telling the pilot to either descend or climb.

How did you decide to become a pilot?

There are generally three paths to follow in becoming an airline pilot in Canada: flight colleges, military and flying clubs. I chose to learn flight through flying clubs, but backed things up with university to study physics and later become a certified meteorologist and then worked as a weatherman for Environment Canada for four years. But I kept up building time by offering local flights and obtaining my instructor rating to gain needed flight hours. Airlines began hiring so I threw in the weather map for a low paying co-pilot job flying light cargo in the weather prone Maritimes. Then Air Atlantic based in Halifax hired me as first officer on the Dash 8 and a little four-engine jet. Then the phone call came. Twenty years ago, I started at Air Canada with five years of post-secondary education and 8,000 flight hours.

What do pilots eat?

We don't eat the same thing as passengers for safety reasons, and we shouldn't be eating at the same time. When we order off the menu on a layover, we shouldn't eat the same menu choice. This is just in case someone gets a little bit of food poisoning from the restaurant, although that's never happened to me.

What causes turbulence?

That's the most common question asked. There are seven different types of turbulence, six are naturally occurring, and one is man-made from other airplanes. A lot of people think turbulence is dangerous — it's not, provided you have your seat belt on.

*Based out of the airline's global international hub in Toronto, Doug Morris has written two books on aviation, including *From the Flight Deck*, a general interest introduction to aviation and most recently a textbook on weather for pilots.*

