

## Airline to charge passengers by weight

4<sup>th</sup> April, 2013



Samoa Air has become the first airline in the world to base fares on a passenger's weight. The national carrier of the South Pacific island nation has discarded the

traditional pricing model of asking fliers to pay for a seat and instead has moved to a price-per-kilogram structure. The airline flies domestically between the country's two main islands and has started international flights to American Samoa and Tonga. Travellers pay a price of around US\$1 per kilogram on shorter routes, and over US\$4 on longer flights. Samoa Air CEO Chris Langton said the new initiative would help promote health awareness in Samoa, which has one of the world's highest rates of obesity.

Reaction to the new pricing scheme has been mixed. A spokeswoman from the New Zealand-based campaign group Fight the Obesity Epidemic vehemently opposed the new fares. She said: "I think that's absolutely appalling. It's a stigmatisation of people, and really, just powerfully discriminating." A Samoan community leader said he appreciated that weight was key for airlines. He told the New Zealand Herald: "I weigh 200kg. I would be okay to pay the fare, provided it's reasonable, but I don't think it's a good excuse saying that they're trying to promote healthy living - that's a lame reason." Many industry analysts believe other airlines will follow suit in charging overweight passengers extra.

Sources: BBC / NZ Herald

### Writing

*Charging airline customers based on their weight is very unfair. Discuss.*

### Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

airline / passenger / weight / carrier / domestically / flights / initiative / flights / reaction / campaign / appalling / stigmatisation / discriminating / a good excuse

### True / False

- Air Samoa is the second airline to base air fares on people's weight. T / F
- The airline has recently started flying international routes. T / F
- The charge per kilogram is higher on short-haul flights. T / F
- Air Samoa said it hoped people would think more about their health. T / F
- Everyone said the new system of fares was not good. T / F
- An overweight man understood the new system and would pay more. T / F
- The man said health promotion was a poor excuse for raising fares. T / F
- Travel experts doubted other airlines would start weight-based fares. T / F

### Synonym Match

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. carrier    | a. fiercely   |
| 2. model      | b. got rid of |
| 3. discarded  | c. response   |
| 4. initiative | d. fair       |
| 5. rates      | e. plan       |
| 6. reaction   | f. airline    |
| 7. vehemently | g. shocking   |
| 8. appalling  | h. framework  |
| 9. reasonable | i. poor       |
| 10. lame      | j. levels     |

### Discussion – Student A

- What springs to mind when you hear the word 'air fare'?
- Do you think flying is good value for money?
- What do you think of Samoa Air's new pricing policy?
- What do you think those who are not overweight think?
- What do you think those who are overweight think?
- Why has it taken 100 years of aviation before an airline started weight-based fares?
- Is the present system of paying for a seat the best?
- Will the new air fares encourage people to lose weight?

## Phrase Match

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. base                        | a. opposed the new fares         |
| 2. the traditional pricing     | b. rates of obesity              |
| 3. flies                       | c. reason                        |
| 4. help promote                | d. scheme has been mixed         |
| 5. one of the world's highest  | e. model                         |
| 6. reaction to the new pricing | f. domestically                  |
| 7. vehemently                  | g. health awareness              |
| 8. a stigmatisation            | h. suit                          |
| 9. that's a lame               | i. fares on a passenger's weight |
| 10. other airlines will follow | j. of people                     |

## Discussion – Student B

- Is it discriminatory?
- Should the airline learn more about obesity before charging more?
- Are you surprised an overweight Samoan was prepared to pay more?
- Is the airline wrong to pretend the new fares are all about health?
- How could airlines change fares in better ways?
- Should fliers under 50kg get a discount?
- How would air travel change if all airlines charged based on weight?
- What questions would you like to ask the airline CEO?

## Spelling

- The national irerrca
- caiderdds the traditional pricing model
- The airline flies calieysdomlt
- promote health ewnessara
- the new iaentiitv
- the world's highest rates of isoyetb
- ioacrtn to the new pricing scheme
- ytnevmehle opposed
- absolutely naalgpil
- he deprcteipaia that weight was key
- industry nsstalya
- charging overweight epsessgnar extra

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. h	3. b	4. e	5. j
6. c	7. a	8. g	9. d	10. i

## Role Play

### Role A – Airline boss

You believe it is time for airline passengers to start paying more to fly if they are overweight. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell the overweight flier people are getting bigger so they have to pay more. Tell him/her he/she should lose weight and save money on air fares.

### Role B – Overweight flier

An airline will charge you more to fly because of your weight. You have never been so shocked in your life – Tell the others 3 reasons why. Tell the boss it is discrimination. No airline has done this in 100 years! Tell the boss the airline will lose customers.

### Role C – Thin flier

You think airlines must charge heavier people more. Tell the others three reasons why. You have to be careful with the weight for your baggage allowance, so people must also be careful with your weight. Tell the overweight person it's a good time to start a diet.

### Role D – Obesity help group worker

You have never been so shocked in your life that an airline will start making heavier passengers pay higher fares. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell the airline boss it's pure discrimination. Tell the boss (s)he has little understanding of how much pain and shame this could bring people.

## Speaking - Airplanes

Rank these and share your rankings with your partner. Put the best at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                  |                           |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| • food           | • in-flight entertainment |
| • seats          | • in-flight magazines     |
| • landing        | • other passengers        |
| • drinks service | • flight attendants       |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	F	d	T	e	F	f	T	g	T	h	F
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.