

Fighting the rise of 'air rage'

By Damon Embling

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The number of "air rage" incidents being reported to police at Gatwick airport is on the rise, figures obtained by the BBC show.

Police dealt with 58 incidents on board passenger planes which took off from or landed at the Sussex airport last year, up from 50 on the previous year. Adding in problems recorded on the ground, police were called to an average of almost 10 incidents a week between January and March, including assaults and threatening and abusive behaviour, some of which were alcohol related.

In all, there were 52 arrests and 63 passengers were refused travel.

Sussex Police have launched a crackdown at Gatwick to try to curb the problem of what they describe as "disruptive passengers". Officers are recruiting airport businesses to help them stamp out bad behaviour.

Alcohol offers

Inspector Mark Callaghan said: "We've had some instances since the group started whereby such things as promotional offers on the sale of alcohol have been withdrawn."

"In the confined space of an aircraft half way over the Atlantic it was a terrifying experience for many" Dominic Carman, from London, experienced air rage first hand on a flight from Gatwick to Cuba last summer when a fellow passenger went on a drunken rampage and forced the flight to be diverted to Bermuda.

"This man in particular was very drunk and started to cause arguments with other people, to shout at some other passengers and to be generally abusive and very difficult," Mr Carman said.

"The man got further out of control. He informed one of the cabin crew that he was going to get off and then at that point he lunged towards the door, as if to open the door of the plane.

"He was then restrained forcibly and a short while later, the pilot told us we were going to have to land at Bermuda airport and that he would be taken off the plane."

He added: "In the confined space of an aircraft, halfway over the Atlantic, it was a terrifying experience for many."

Security stress

Alcohol, tiredness, screaming children and too little leg room on an aeroplane are all factors which can cause a passenger to fly into a rage.

But increased security checks on the ground could also be making travellers more stressed, according to Dr Graham Lucas, a psychiatrist who has treated victims and perpetrators of air rage.

"Inevitably it is delay. People become frustrated - [ask] why am I being searched and you got through without any trouble? All the fiddling around that the flying public are aware of does contribute to the stress," he said.

Story from BBC NEWS:

Published: 2009/04/30 23:10:08 GMT