

Short and sweet ... the ten-question profile



Name: Marika Powell Occupation: Flight attendant

TWENTY-seven-year-old Marika Powell is living her childhood dream. Flight attendant, stewardess or air hostess, call her what you like, just don't forget to turn off your mobile phone the next time you fly Rex Airlines. Don't let her disdain for mobile phones fool you however. This happy hostess, who is responsible for making the flights of regional passengers as comfortable and as safe as possible, loves every minute of her job.

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What made you become a flight attendant? And what is the best thing about the job?

I've always been involved in customer service and the travel industry. I saw a position advertised on the website and thought I'd try my luck. I started two years ago in ground school, which went for three weeks. They taught me the everyday duties of a flight attendant such as catering, dealing with crew, passengers, safety, and security, all of the things you need to know in the job. It was always my childhood dream to become one. When I was younger my mum and dad took my brother and I out of school on a few occasions to travel and I suppose I got the travel bug from there. The best thing is easy – being able to reunite families. To see how happy they are when, say a grandmother gets to travel to see her grandchild for the first time. Because we are a country airline we get to know our passengers and share in their happy experiences.

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You must come across the good, the bad and the bizarre. Do any stories stand out?

The good thing is every now and then you get a celebrity who you get to meet and the great people you meet every day. As for the bad, I had a mortifying experience on a flight into Griffith once. It was extremely hot and bumpy and I was sick into a bag right in front of passengers, it was very embarrassing. It's only happened once in two years thankfully. As for the most annoying thing for us flight attendants, it has to be mobile phones. They have to be the worst thing ever invented. No matter how many times you ask passengers to

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turn off their phones because they could interfere with things, they still leave them on. They just don't believe us. There is only a slim chance it will cause a problem, but we don't want to take chances. Mobile phones are the biggest grief we get on daily basis, it drives us batty. We have a saying that passengers must leave their brains in the boot of their cars when they get on board.

Where's the most exciting destination you have been?

Well, in my role as flight attendant I'd have to say my favourite place to fly to would be Merimbula. The flight down is stunning. We fly over Jarvis Bay and it is just gorgeous. As for my all-time favourite destination in the world, even though it's a bit cheesy, I love Disneyland. I'm such a big kid at heart. I've been there twice already, and I'd go back any day.

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Do you ever get nervous flying?

No, I don't, not as in scared anyway. The only time I get a bit worried is if the weather is extremely bad. If it's stormy and there's lightning and high winds. Otherwise I'm not scared of flying at all.

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Is it true when someone sits in an emergency exit row seat they're legally obliged to help out if there's a crash?

This is true. If you are in an emergency exit row seat you will be asked if you are willing or able to guard or operate the door in the unlikely event of an emergency. When you book, customer service will check with you. But if I ask when you are on board if you can do it, and you say no, then I have to move you. If you say yes, there is briefing information available.

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Do you ever forget where you are after landing? And do you get sick of staying in a different port every night?

Forget, yeah, a couple of times I have. It was when I was working a few days in a row and I actually announced we were landing in Ballina when we were coming into Broken Hill. It can get confusing sometimes. There is something about being in a smaller port that is fantastic. We all go out to dinner with the crew and the locals recognise you and get to know you. Having country clientele is one of the best things about my job. You are on first name basis with people. One lady noticed I was engaged

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and when I saw her again recently she asked about the wedding. It surprises me that people are so observant and interested. I find country folk are different to city people in that way.

Can you explain why people fall over each other to get out of the plane when they have to wait for their luggage anyway?

It's one of those peculiar things that we may never really know. I think it could be more of a psychological thing. They seem to think that the quicker they get off the quicker they'll get their bags. It's like when people go shopping and rush to get in line so they can wait at the supermarket. Passengers do it all of the time, they almost trip over each other to get off – it's crazy.

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What sort of training do you have to do? Do you have to do gymnastic training so you can balance in the aisles when there's turbulence?

It's funny you should say that. Because I can actually pour a cup of tea in an aircraft better than I can at home. I think it's because you get used to it. I wedge my feet on either side of the aisle and it keeps me steady. You do tend to become a bit of a circus contortionist. Come to think of it, gymnastics would come in handy.

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Why do hostesses always wear so much make-up? And how about all that smiling, do your cheeks get sore after a while?

Personally, I don't wear much make-up. I think people have a common misconception that flight attendants are all porcelain doll beauties. It is expected that you maintain a high level of personal grooming and presentation for the job, so that might account for everyone being well-groomed.

I've got to admit that I'm a pretty bubbly person, so I do smile a fair bit. But I must be used to it as I don't notice any pain.

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If a plane crashes, do you think people are really going to calmly remember all the instructions you gave?

In one word – no. I'd like to think our regular customers would have a fair idea of what to do. But when it comes to common sense, most people's goes out the window. It is my job to deliver the safety message to passengers because safety is the biggest priority for all airlines.