

Warm feet cost a lot

Curtis Seltzer

**BLUE GRASS, Va.**—We've had below-freezing temperatures for four weeks here at Snowy Mountain. It's been white and slick.

In the spring, as Tennyson wrote, a young man's fancy may turn lightly to thoughts of love, but, in January, an old man thinks mainly about... warm toes.

In that fashion, the idea of Florida sprouted from the Blue Grass ice pack. Then I got a sizzling tip about a non-stop, roundtrip flight on Frontier Airlines from the Shenandoah Valley Airport to Orlando for only \$78 a person.

At that price, I was even willing to take my lawfully-wedded-but-currently-still-anonymous-by-choice spouse.

The total, I thought: \$156. I am known around here for wild spending.

As you might expect, the \$78 teaser fare was unavailable, except for Cub Scouts who were willing to wad up in overhead storage.

After adding taxes to the actual fare of \$105.88, together with \$40 extra for sufficient room to accommodate two attached legs each, the tickets totaled \$346. It was a sum that took my breath away.

It was also a sum that could not be found on Frontier's website where two prices appeared and a third was given over the phone. I fled back into retro technology: a nice travel agent.

I'm not dwelling over the bait-and-switch tickets. Or the \$80 extra for four legs. I'm not complaining about a couple of hundred bucks. I'm pretty sure I'm over it. It's not worth mentioning...that much.

The real problem is that Ms. Spouse and I are never on the same vacation page.

I like to wander around and see new country; she doesn't mind seeing new country as long as it means staying put on a beach. She likes hot sunshine; I like shade. She likes bouncing around on strange horses; I like sailing, which makes her seasick. I like to ad lib; she likes to know exactly where she will be sleeping each night.

"What's the absolute worst that can happen?" I've asked. "So we'll sleep in a rental car for a night or two. How bad can that be?"

"Sleeping in a mouse-size rental car is not my idea of a vacation," she has replied.

“What if I give you the backseat?”

“No.”

“OK. I’ll spring for a big SUV. Like a Tsunami or an Earthquake. We can fold down the back seat and sleep lengthwise.”

“My idea of vacation does not include sleeping in a vehicle next to some malarial swamp in Gator County, Florida,” she said.

“Let’s call it a business trip instead of a vacation. We’ll look for land to buy. Won’t that make sleeping in a rental car more appealing?”

“No.” She said this with some finality.

I sensed that further negotiation on this point might be unproductive.

“I’d take you to Paris, but it’s cold there, too.”

“You’d make me sleep on a motor scooter by the Seine.”

“Have I ever taken you to a motel worse than an Econo Lodge?”

“More than once.”

“Well, you can’t count things that happened in the last century.”

“I can, too. Nothing’s changed.”

Our argument over sun vs. shade ends up in a similar deadlock. I work hard to draw the distinction between miserably hot (60+) and comfortably temperate (mid-40s).

I’ve had no success in persuading her that captaining a sinking sailboat is more fun than being pitched off a horse.

\* \* \*

I admit to having had other historic troubles with vacations for two. There was the time, for instance, when The Duchess and I were planning a hiking trip in Montana’s Glacier National Park.

After determining that The Duchess was “bone-sensitive,” a fancy-dan outfitter sold her a special external-frame backpack that padded her hips with two pinhead-size shearling pasties. (I helpfully noted that our Glacier trip would have been cheaper had we bought a vintage Rolls Royce and hired a chauffeur for two weeks.)

I insisted that we do a short trial run with full packs to see if her sensitive bones were sufficiently protected.

I loaded our packs with the handiest dead weight I had—cans of dog food. (These were *unopened* cans I should point out, and not sacks of common kibble.)

The Duchess had not been born to hump Alpo up Virginia’s Bull Run Mountain. And while she may have thought the whole business of tramping

about in public a little unseemly, she was game and only mentioned the dog-can march once a day for the next year. It was during that period of reflection that she began to wonder why she was hanging around with a lower primate like me.

\* \* \*

Ms. Spouse and I plan to resolve our ideological differences in the same spirit of common purpose and good fellowship that enlightened the White House and Capitol Hill Republicans during 2012.

We will agree to board the Frontier flight and then disembark in Orlando. The significance of this joint resolution should not be underestimated. At least, we won't go over the cliff and forfeit the tickets.

I will agree to sleep in beds, not cars.

I will agree to not drive around in what may appear to be seeming aimlessness.

I will agree to make reservations at motels in advance.

I will agree to avoid no-tell motels, or worse.

I will agree to visit a beach for at least one period of time exceeding five minutes.

I will agree to stand around horse stables too numerous to count.

I will agree to buy no sailboat longer than 60 feet for our upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We both agree to avoid any activity that involves a dancing rodent named Mickey.

See how easy it is to compromise.

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