

Relief from flying phobias

One in three adults, according to US studies, are anxious or afraid to fly. For some this is a minor nuisance, for others it can inconvenience their work or seriously impede the enjoyment of a holiday.

Inconvenience aside, there are also serious health concerns; anxious passengers often self-medicate with alcohol or sedatives. Whilst providing short-term respite from nerves, sedated people don't move around so much, something identified by the World Health Organisation (2007) as crucial in reducing the risk of developing deep vein thrombosis.

Wellingtonian Denise Howland candidly admits first-hand experience of most of the above: A dedicated flying phobic of good standing, serving a full 40 years of panicking. Just thinking about getting on a plane had her throat, chest and fists tighten and her heart leap out of her chest. Any short flight she forced upon herself involved tranquillisers, arriving at her destination thoroughly drained and exhausted, only to just recover until the panic about the return flight kicked in.

When statistically flying is one of the safest modes of transport, why is the fear of flying so pervasive?

For Denise, it involved a panic attack in 1976; her first time on a plane and the attack was so severe she required oxygen. This is common – a traumatic experience can trigger a fear response, while for others the event is less obvious – they just feel inexplicably afraid.

Either way, the process of fear is the same – it's the brain's in-built protection system activating – also known as our fight or flight response. It is this automatic response of the nervous system that kept our hunter-gatherer ancestors alive and why we are still here today. A sniff of a perceived threat and our body is flooded with adrenaline, priming us with the rapid short-term energy necessary to fight the threat or run away.

In modern conventional living there are fewer real life-threats and yet the programme still runs in repetitive attempts



Wellingtonian Denise Howland – heading off on one of many trips after overcoming her fear.

to keep us safe, meaning it is often mis-programmed and unnecessary. This programming can be changed due to the brain's ability to establish new neural pathways for emotions, thoughts and behaviours (what neuroscience calls neuroplasticity).

Neuro linguistic programming (NLP) is the methodology Denise found most effective for changing her response. Now, following frequent flights to Auckland and Australia to visit family, a helicopter ride over Franz Joseph Glacier and a holiday in France, her husband frequently jokes about reversing the results so they can save on expenses! Denise rejoices in her new found freedom and describes being "slightly bored" on flights these days – a leap from the previous 40 years of stressful flying. She says "It was painless and almost felt easy. I just kept thinking, why didn't I do this sooner?"

– Karen Ross / Charlotte Hinksman

References:

- Karen Ross, coach, trainer and speaker – www.freshwaysforward.co.nz
- Charlotte Hinksman, therapist, coach and trainer – www.charlottehinksman.com
- New Zealand Association of Neuro Linguistic Programming – www.nzanlp.org.nz

NZ leads hotel rates hike

New Zealand hotel prices increased 13 per cent over the past year, the highest of any country in the world. Christchurch was up by 32 per cent; Wellington by 15 per cent and Auckland by nine per cent.

Long-haul destinations however, are offering New Zealand travellers value for money.

According to the latest Hotels.com® Hotel Price Index™ hotel prices in New Zealand, which averaged \$132, increased more than any other country worldwide in 2011 and well above the global average of four per cent.

"The strength of the New Zealand currency, the influx of visitors for the Rugby World Cup and the tragic Christchurch earthquake resulted with reduced supply and significantly inflated hotel prices across the country last year," said Hotels.com vice president and managing director Asia Pacific, Johan Svanstrom.

While domestic travel was more expensive for New Zealanders in 2011, the strong New Zealand dollar drove hotel prices down in Asia, the US and Europe. Many long-haul destinations offered cheaper hotel rates for New Zealand travellers than Australia. Prices in Australia became more expensive by 12 per cent to average \$200 in 2011, primarily due to its strong economy and popularity as a business and leisure destination.

In Europe, prices fell in Paris, a traditionally pricey destination, by nine per cent to \$235. Overall, prices in France fell eight per cent. In London, prices fell seven per cent to \$254 and in Venice, prices were down five per cent to \$273.

New York retained its position as the most expensive destination for New Zealand travellers. In the Big Apple, prices increased 10 per cent in 2011, averaging \$338 per night. Elsewhere in the US, prices rose in Honolulu by 14 per cent to \$246, but fell in Las Vegas by 15 per cent to average \$129 per night. The cheapest room rates were found in Bangkok where the average rate was \$109

Meantime, the former Westin in Auckland has been re-launched as a Sofitel. The hotel has been effectively "in limbo" since Starwood departed at the end of July 2011. Hotel managers Accor expect to have an official launch of the hotel in mid-April.