

27 of 71 DOCUMENTS

Mail on Sunday (London)

April 20, 2008 Sunday

## They're right, the rich are happier ...because they don't fly easyJet

**BYLINE:** Liz Jones

**SECTION:** FB; Pg. 26

**LENGTH:** 761 words

LAST week, the Easterlin paradox - a theory mooted by economist Richard Easterlin in 1974 stating that economic growth doesn't lead to greater happiness - was blown out of the water.

Two economists, Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, have found that life satisfaction is greatest in the richest countries.

In the US, they found that 90 per cent of households with incomes over \$250,000 (about £125,000) reported they were 'very happy'.

Only 42 per cent of those with incomes of \$30,000 (about £15,000) gave that response.

They went on to outline exactly why more money means more satisfaction with life, such as the fact that people can afford to work less, and spend time with friends.

I would add to this list an important privilege enjoyed by the well-off, the reason people with more money enjoy an inner serenity, a smug smile playing on their well-fed faces: they never have to travel with easyJet.

Last Thursday, I had to be in Paris for a reception given by the British ambassador at his residence at 39 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore. As I now live an hour from Bristol Airport, I decided to forsake Eurostar and travel by easyJet for the reasonable return fare of £90.

My first difficulty came at check in. The woman sitting behind her computer neither looked up nor said hello. As I handed in my small case, she told me I would have to pay an extra £8. OK, I said, here you are.

'No, you hev to pay over there,' she said, indicating with a toss of her head. I set off, leaving my case on the conveyer belt.

'No!' she shouted. 'You hev to take your case with you.' 'Can't I leave it here?' 'No! It will be unaccompanied.' Pointing out to the lady - who was obviously worried a smile might crack her foundation - that my case would be safe with her proved of no avail.

The real nightmare started on my journey home. I stood for one hour 40 minutes in the queue to check in among a million pinktracksuit-clad, overtired children who were obviously on their way home from Disneyland Paris; their parents, silent and shuffling, looked as though they had spent a week in a concentration camp being tortured.

They're right, the rich are happier ...because they don't fly easyJet Mail on Sunday (London) April 20, 2008 Sunday

I asked another over-made-up harridan why my queue was moving more slowly than the one next door, and she said that was for 'late arrivals'. So, I said, people who turn up on time are being punished for not leaving it until the last minute. The woman then put me in Group B, which meant I had to board last.

As I gave my boarding card to a young man at the gate, he studied it and told me I would have to wait in case there were any 'stragglers' from Group A.

'Just let me on the bloody plane,' I said. 'I find your attitude offensive,' he said, almost in tears (it's amazing how thin-skinned employees in the service industries are, while the customer is supposed to endure, stoically, humiliation upon humiliation and never murmur dissent).

'If you don't step away I won't let you board at all.' We were herded on to a bus and driven to the plane. The driver then refused to let us off the freezing bus for an hour, without explanation. It transpired they had been unable to get an inbound disabled passenger off our plane.

When I eventually sat in my seat, an air hostess wordlessly wrestled my bag from my hands, and shoved it in the overhead locker, which meant my mobile remained switched on for the duration of the flight (nothing adverse happened. You see, they make up these rules to boss us about). I had to pay for a drink.

The staff regarded us with contempt. They didn't smile, or try to help; they just chatted among themselves. RESEARCH also out last week revealed the Customer Satisfaction Index has dropped; the explanation being that something had to give to satisfy our mania for low prices. But it costs nothing to say, 'I'm so sorry.' Earlier on the evening of my return flight, I had stood next to the Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread artworks in the British Embassy, sipping champagne with the president of Cartier, who was telling me how his business is booming: a Chinese man had recently impulsively purchased a medallion costing £250,000. I could have been standing in the Palace of Versailles, chatting to Marie Antoinette.

Isn't it time we demanded that the people in charge of us, who obviously don't know what they're doing, who instead of regulating the economy spend their time writing notices telling us to 'Take your passport out of its holder' or asking (this a new one on the motorway) 'Have you checked your fuel levels?' as if we are all proletarian morons, shape up or get booted out? Now, more than ever, the customer should be king..

**LOAD-DATE:** April 20, 2008

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper