

On a flying visit to cabin crew school

JAMES ELLIS develops a new-found respect for flight attendants as he is put through his paces by the experts

THE aircraft cabin fills up with smoke and through the haze I can see the faint glow of a fire. Though there is searing heat and I can feel myself choking on the fumes I calmly take down the huge white smoke mask from its compartment and pull it over my head.

Pete, my fellow cabin crew member, puts his hand on my shoulder so we do not get separated and we make our way through the wreckage, ensuring that all seats are empty and all passengers have been evacuated. When we reach the fire, I take an extinguisher and douse the flames before we head out the door.

What we find is no remote desert island as seen on the TV show *Lost* but it's an equally desolate surround. We're in a

hangar near Crawley, West Sussex, that, given its proximity to Gatwick, is home to some of the biggest names in both holidays and aviation.

We are being put through our paces by Thomson Airways staff on a cabin crew training day but things are a little more complicated than just switching on a microwave, flogging duty free or asking people whether they prefer tea or coffee. Trolley-dollying this most certainly isn't.

"The chances are you are never going to use any of this," says Captain Stuart Gruber, Thomson Airways Head of Flight Operations, Technical & Training, who has never had a major scare in 20 years.

"That doesn't mean you never will." Training the company's 2,850

cabin crew is rigorous and intense. Over the morning, my respect for their work grows massively. The in-flight safety video is done by six-year-olds, so it should have been child's play but I find myself a mess of limbs and straps.

Things get better, though. My firefighting skills are praised when we take on real flames (the ones in the plane itself were fake and the smoke from dry ice), I become a dab hand at disarming doors and a whizz on slide evacuations which, predictably, are a lot of fun.

For the final part of our day we make the short journey over to Boeing's nearby training facilities, a wrap-around screen making it look for all the world as though we are on the runway at Gatwick.

Former Red Arrow and Training



ALL GEARED UP: James tries his hand at the pre-flight passenger demonstration

Captain Tim Couston shows us the main controls and how conditions can be changed. With one flick of a switch it becomes dark and I can see the constellations. With another I can't see more than 10 feet as thick fog descends.

I take the controls from him and it seems easy at first until we hit extreme turbulence, hail, rain and thunder. We're banking for the grass verge at an alarming angle.

Captain Couston then takes charge, straightens us and with just a couple of bumps and a loud bang, gets us home safely.

I breathe a sigh of relief. For one dreadful moment I thought I'd have to put on the smoke mask again.

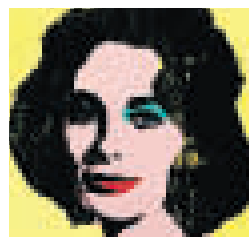
INFORMATION:

Thomson Airways: 0871 231 4691/
www.thomson.co.uk

arrivals By CHARLOTTE CIVIL

CULTURAL CITY TRIP

Andy Warhol created some of modern art's most enduring images including prints of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor (below). Andy Warhol: The Early Sixties exhibition is on at the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Switzerland, until January 23, 2011. The city's Grand Hotel Les Trois Rois (0800 181 123/ www.lestroisrois.com) is offering an Arts and Culture package which combines entry with a stay at the art deco hotel on the banks of the Rhine. It also includes admission to the Vienna 1900 exhibition of works by Gustav Klimt. A two-night package from £700 (two sharing), B&B. Swissair (0845 601 0956/www.swiss.com/uk) offers return flights from London City to Basel from £77.



WINTER WARMER

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HAVE YOU GOT THE X FACTOR?

Sir Cliff Richard and Jimmy Tarbuck took their first steps towards fame with careers as Butlins Redcoats. The holiday company (0845 070 4730/www.butlins.com) - who this week announced a third hotel set to open at Bognor - is touring the country in search of 60 hopefuls. The Butlins Pod will be stopping off at various venues next week including Newcastle Street in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Tuesday), The Arndale Centre, Manchester (Wednesday), Paradise Forum, Birmingham (Thursday) and the Prince of Wales Theatre in London (Friday).

Turn up between 10am and 3pm to record a one-minute audition piece telling Butlins why you should be selected or send a CV via email to butlins.entertainments@bourne-leisure.co.uk



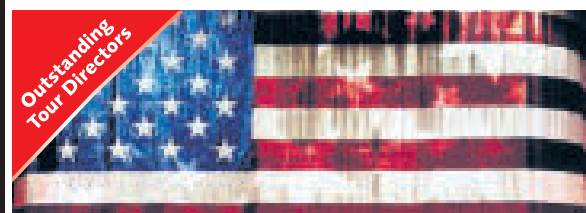
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