

Answers to Travel's Biggest Questions | Skyscanner Australia

Have you ever raised your window blind and wondered about the 'No Step' sign on the wing? Who in their right mind would be standing on the wing anyway? And why do we always have to raise the window blind before landing? [Skyscanner Australia](#) is curious too! We dug deep to find the answers to some of travel's most perplexing questions.



Q. Is the Black Box flight recorder really black?

A. In a word, no. It's actually a bright reddish orange so that it's easy to spot amongst crash debris. Invented by Australian scientist David Warren in 1953, the installation of black box flight recorders changed air accident investigations forever. It's possible the seed for Warren's invention was when as a nine-year-old boy he lost his father to a Bass Strait air crash. 70 years later at his own funeral, Warren's casket bore the label 'Flight Recorder Inventor. Do Not Open.'

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Q. Why do aircraft still have ashtrays in the toilets?

Ashtrays aboard are one part of those quirky 'chicken and egg' conundrums. If you can't smoke onboard why have ashtrays? But if passengers do light up, where will they butt them out? It's hard to imagine a time when it was absolutely normal for passengers to light up their cigarettes as soon as cruising altitude was reached. Despite smoking being banished in the 1990's, aircraft lavatories are still fitted with ashtrays, in the event that a desperate nicotine addict can't help themselves and therefore needs a safe receptacle to butt out. Go figure.

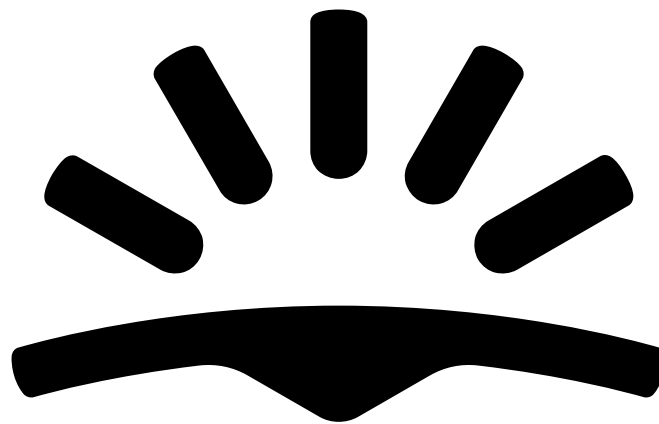
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Q. Why do we have to raise the window shade before landing?

It's all about safety. Despite swanky new Boeing 787 Dreamliners replacing clunky window shades with self-tinting windows, most commercial aircraft still have solid blinds that raise & lower manually. Flight attendants walk the aisle before take-off and landing making sure blinds are all in the open position. The reason? In the event of a crash, visibility helps the crew to evaluate hazards if evacuation is required. Is there a fire? Debris? Fuel? Not something you want to think about, we know. So, please don't get cranky when you're woken up and asked to raise the blind – your survival may just depend upon it.

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Q. What do flaps and spoilers on aircraft wings do?

Flaps and spoilers are a pilot's stop and go equipment. Spoilers help increase an aircraft's rate of descent without causing an accompanying increase in airspeed. Upon landing and once the wheels touchdown on the tarmac, spoilers are fully deployed like a brake to create drag which helps slow the aircraft down.

Flaps on the other hand, which are moveable panels on the trailing edge of aircraft wings, are used to increase lift during takeoff and landing. When the flaps are engaged they increase the curvature, or camber, of the wing which helps an aircraft generate the required lift.

And the No Step sign? That's to warn aircraft maintenance crew of vulnerable sections of the fuselage that cannot take weight-bearing activity.

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Q. What's beneath the floor of an aircraft cabin?

A. There's a myriad of activities going on from nose to tail beneath the floor of the main cabin of an airliner. At the pointy end beneath the cockpit computers and electronics are housed in avionics bays. Moving aft, the wheel well holds the retracted nose landing gear and cabin pressurisation equipment. Then there's the all important air-conditioning units that pump recycled air into the cabins above. Taking up much of the middle section of the lower fuselage is cargo space with luggage packed in large aluminium bins in wide-body aircraft or stacked manually by ground crew. Fuel tanks take up a lot of space for good reason, along with lavatory service equipment. In the tail there's an auxiliary power unit which provides power to auxiliary services like lights, in-flight entertainment and galley services.

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Q. Why do some airlines ban laptops from carry-on luggage?

A. In 2017 intelligence agents and aviation experts identified a new terrorism risk that detected militant groups were planning to smuggle explosive devices inside electronic gadgets. The result was that some airlines, particularly those operating out of Middle East airports, declared that travellers must stow their laptops in checked baggage. Even beyond the terrorism risk, lithium batteries have always been problematic onboard due their ability to store electrical charge. According to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the abundant energy of rechargeable lithium batteries makes them prone to generating heat and starting fires.. The safest way to travel with batteries is either by keeping them installed within the device (which should be turned off) or disarming them entirely.

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