

**Real or fake: airlines that sound too bizarre to be true**



**Kulula**



**A passenger stands next to Eva Airlines' self check-in counters, which are decorated with Hello Kitty motifs, in Taoyuan International Airport, northern Taiwan.**



## ***Germanwings***

With so many bucket airlines out there today, how do you know if the deal you just got on a ticket is actually from a legitimate airline?

Across the Internet it's easy to find people who have been scammed by fake airlines.

In August a U.K.-based group calling itself Fair Airways that claimed it had flights to more than 36 countries yanked its website after first trying to collect \$100 from potential cabin crew and staff. Sunrise Air, founded in 2010, is a legitimate airline that provides charter flights in and out of Haiti, while Sunrise Airlines, established in 1992, is a business-jet charter operator out Taiwan. But a few years ago, Sunrise Airlines a new "startup airline" based in Hungary raised suspicions after it presented itself as a new budget airline on a now defunct website.

Odd airline names or weird-looking aircraft designs don't mean carriers aren't smart choices to fly on.

A large part of being a smart consumer is knowing where to find out about smaller airlines before you purchase your ticket. The good news for consumers is that Department of Transportation tells FoxNews.com they rarely receive complaints that sellers of air transportation are not legitimate operators. Still it never hurts to do your homework.

FoxNew.com turned to travel writer and expert Lee Abbamonte, the youngest American to visit every country in the world, to give us his insights into a few lesser-known airlines.

## **Kulula Airlines**

If you're like me and not familiar with foreign airliners you might think Kulula flies to Hawaii, but you would be wrong. This low-cost airliner has been flying for more than ten years across South Africa. Its main destinations are Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but it may be best known for its sense of humor.

"Kulula is a fun airline. Its planes are a funky neon green, and it's really cheap for getting around South Africa," said Abbamonte.

Kulula often catches people's attention with its unique planes. It's hard to miss their "flying 101" Boeing fleet, which details the parts of the plane in a tongue and cheek way. For the front door you'll read "our door is always open unless we're at 41,000 feet" and for the logo you may blush reading: "the mile-high club initiation chamber."

Kulula also has a humorous line of planes with the message "this way is up" accompanied by several arrows just in case the pilot forgets which way to direct the plane. The humor follows travelers inside the aircraft. Kulula's flight attendants and pilots are known for their funny one-liners during safety instructions like, "There may be 50 ways to leave your lover, but there are only 4 ways out of this airplane" or "Please note we do not accept unwanted mother-in-laws or children."

Abbamonte says he would recommend Kulula because it's a top budget airliner in South Africa and in his experience offered better deals than its competitors.

However, Kulula does not have very good customer reviews on its Facebook page. There are complaints of poor service, constant delays, missing baggage, and flight cancellations. These problems arise on every airline, but it's something to keep in mind when booking a flight.

Abbamonte notes that cancellations on budget or smaller airlines are often due to a lack of ticket sales to more remote locations.

As for safety on Kulula, it shouldn't be a concern with their brand new fleet of Boeing 737-800s and a partnership with British Airways. The airline has a good track record with no crashes since it's been operating according to airline research company Air Valid. Kulula is also the only South African airline accredited with by the IATA Operational Safety Audit, an international program that enforces rigorous airline safety standards.

## **EVA Air Hello Kitty Jet**

Many who see this aircraft might not think it's a real plane, but it's actually a very popular flight in Asia. Think pink everywhere with the cute Hello Kitty cartoon character plastered on everything from the plane's exterior down to the ticket kiosks.

EVA Air, which is a major airline across Asia but lesser known here in the States, decked out five Airbus planes with the loveable Japanese cat that connect travelers in Taiwan to destinations in China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Guam.

At the Taoyuan International Airport in Taipei you won't have a problem finding your flight, and the pink Hello Kitty kiosks where you receive your boarding pass are hard to miss.

The five Hello Kitty aircrafts: With Magic Stars, Loves Apples, Around the World, Happy Music, and Speed Puffs are different in exterior, but all offer a one of a kind experience.

On board adults and children --and adults alike--will love being fully immersed in the Hello Kitty theme with a number of products like headrests, pillows, playing carding, cups, utensils, tray mats, sugar packets, dental floss, toothpicks, and even bathroom toilet paper featuring the cute feline.

Flight attendants wearing pink Hello Kitty aprons serve themed meal options and children can enjoy fruit, pasta, and ice cream all shaped just like the white bobtail.

All this fun will cost you. Abbamonte says if your trying to fly in Asia on a budget rather than for the experience then chose the Malaysian-based Air Asia.

"I certainly wouldn't fly them (EVA Air) just because of Hello Kitty. I would probably say that's kind of funny or cute. If it was a hundreds bucks cheaper I would fly it, but if it's the same price I wouldn't really care."

Although EVA Airline flights aren't the cheapest among its competitors, it is a well-reviewed and top ranking airliner.

Skytrax a world leading airline review service for flyers gave EVA Air 4 out of 5 stars based on services like check-in, comfort on board the plane, in-flight entertainment, and washroom cleanliness.

EVA Air also ranked 3rd for their cabin staff and 8th among all Asian airliners at the 2012 World Airline Awards.

### **Germanwings**

If you see a yellow tailed plane that looks like a raccoon then your looking at Germanwings' Airbus A320. It's actually supposed to be a bear representing the official animal of Berlin.

This low-cost carrier is a real airline based in Cologne, Germany, which flies to over 90 destinations in Europe, Israel and North Africa.

Germanwings received a 3 out of 5 star rating from Skytrax meaning it's rated "satisfactory" in categories like cabin comfort, onboard catering, and cabin staff service.

"It was a good experience, and like most German things it was very efficient," said Abbamonte.

Since Germanwings is a no-frills airline it makes sense that it ranked lower on amenities like blankets, pillows, and complimentary food because these are rarely available free of charge on flights.

"You know you have to pay for every little thing. So if you wanted a bigger seat or to board first or to have an extra bag then it can be annoying because of extra charges. Germanwings isn't at the top or even close among budget airlines in Europe," said Abbamonte.

However, most customers on Skytrax like the airline's nice sized leather seats and the affordable ticket prices.

One unique feature to Germanwings is its 'Blind Booking'. This is an exciting and affordable way to travel just about anywhere from its four German hubs. Here's how it works: you chose what your looking for on your trip like party cities or cities with the best shopping, the dates you want to travel. The airline provides a list of potential destinations that you could be booked to and you don't find out where you are going until after you book your ticket.

Germanwings is a safe carrier with a young fleet of modern air crafts. According to Airvalid there are no incidents or crashes on record, but the airliner has recently gotten some backlash for downplaying a few scary incidents in the air.

### **Bearskin Airlines**

The bear-clawed logo on the airplane and catchy slogan, 'Let the Bear take you there' will get your attention. This Canadian airlines

offers more than 100 departures daily to 18 destinations in Ontario and Manitoba. Its main hubs are Thunder Bay and Sudbury's Canada.

Despite its unusual name, Bearskin Airlines becomes an obvious choice over other major airliners when flying into Dryden or trying to get direct flights between Canadian cities like Thunder Bay to Sioux Lockout or Sudbury to Timmins.

"I would purchase a Bearskin Airline ticket for a direct flight, but I think most would fly Air Canada if the price was comparable," Abbamonte said.

If you fly Bearskin then pack light and be prepared for a small airplane. Bearskin planes have no overhead storage bins and limited space underneath your seat. You're only permitted one carry-on weighing 13 lbs or less; however, you can check a bag less than 40 lbs for no extra cost.

Most passengers who reviewed Bearskin Airlines didn't like that there was no beverage service or bathroom on board and would have preferred more space in the cabin. Otherwise most reviews online were positive stating that Bearskin Airline's prices were very affordable and flight crews were friendly.

Bearskin Airlines is a safe airline, but like most carriers it's had emergency landings or malfunctioning aircrafts. Since 1995 there are three incidents of concern on record, and one ended with several fatalities, according to Airvalid. Ever since this incident there haven't been any fatal crashes on Bearskin Airlines.

## **Hooters Air**

Yes, believe it or not in 2003 the restaurant chain Hooters joined the airline business. While the airlines is now defunct, this airline deserves honorable mention.

The international chain that bills itself as "delightfully tacky yet unrefined" and known for its scantily clad waitresses, had a brief three-year run shuttling passengers to airports in the U.S. and the Bahamas.

Each flight on Hooters Air came fully equipped with two Hooters girls and flight attendants that entertained passengers with trivia games, sold Hooters merchandise, and assisted with beverage service. This marketing attempt aimed at sports enthusiasts attracted casual and tournament golfers traveling to Myrtle Beach's

100+ championship golf courses.

The inside and outside of the aircrafts also had a Hooters flair. Keeping with the chains traditional colors passengers had large blue leather seats to sit on, and it wasn't hard to miss the blue and orange aircrafts with the Hooter's owl on the tail.

Some were concerned with this fun airline's safety record, but not to worry. Hooters Air was a FAA certified airliner.

Hooters Air certainly built up the Hooters brand with this endeavor, but never became a serious player in aviation. Abbamonte says the airliner's destination list and a marketing campaign towards a bachelor clientele didn't help the perception many have of Hooters. "I think Hooters is viewed as low class."

The airline eventually folded in 2006. Industry analysts said the airliner ran into competition with other low-fair carriers, and rising fuel prices made it difficult for the venture to stay profitable.

### **Tips for flying on unknown airlines**

While it's fun to see how low cost airlines use some imaginative marketing ploys to attract customers, safety should always be a main concern. Here's how to see if who you're flying on is the real deal:

--U.S. airliners have very strict requirements to meet before they can sell or even transport passengers so simply checking the Department of Transportation's website to see which airliners are certified carriers is the best place to start:.

--U.S. airlines "must meet stringent FAA requirements," and "remain in compliance with Federal air safety regulations" so check out an unknown airliner on the FAA's aircraft registry website to find out if its planes meet FAA requirements.

--For airlines that operate outside the U.S. check out the list of carriers that are banned from flying in Europe.

--Foreign airlines that fly into the U.S. also need to meet FAA requirements so see if they are certified by the FAA.

<http://www.foxnews.com/travel/2012/12/19/are-these-airlines-for-real/#ixzz2FaPqEjbH>