

## Shocking tales of Japan's 'idiot parents'

By MICHAEL HOFFMAN

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"She looked, I'd say, in her mid-20s," recalls a cabin attendant of a certain passenger on a Guam-bound flight. "She had her baby with her, and from the moment the plane took off she was totally absorbed in doing her makeup." Her privilege, of course — but "suddenly," the attendant continues, "she got up and began stowing the infant into the overhead luggage bin. 'He's in the way,' she said."

"Idiot parents" is a subject Shukan Bunshun has long relished. The theme has



recurred periodically in its pages over the past few years. It will again, the magazine promises in closing. But here we are at summer's end, the perfect time for a look at idiot parents and their idiotically spoiled (when not sadly neglected) children on their summer holidays.

What would have happened to the infant had the cabin attendant not intervened? Japan to Guam is a long flight. Would the oxygen have sufficed? Fortunately, most of the tales that follow are comic rather than tragicomic — though one more to make us shudder at the thought of the hands into which helpless infancy is sometimes entrusted concerns an 8-month-old and his parents just back from Bali. An airport health inspection found the baby to have a 39-degree temperature.

"Yes," the mother reportedly said, "he was ill when we left, but we went anyway because otherwise we'd have had to

pay a cancellation fee."

Once upon a time, Shukan Bunshun reminds us, the average Japanese first went abroad on his or her honeymoon, typically to Hawaii. Nowadays mere children are seasoned travelers, but sophistication, the supposed byproduct of habitual globe-trotting, has apparently failed to fill the vacuum left by lost innocence.

"Here," said the passenger, thrusting her baby at the cabin attendant and settling back to enjoy the flight in comfort.

"She seemed to think baby-sitting was the crew's responsibility!" fumes the attendant.

A variation on that scenario: A woman presses the call button and hands the answering attendant a baby and a diaper. "Change her, would you mind?"

A pity Shukan Bunshun doesn't tell us how the cabin crew responds to these impositions! "At least she had diapers with her," muses one crew member who evidently is used to worse — namely, young parents who assume free diapers are part of the in-flight service.

Don't suppose all the nation's idiot parents are in the air, though the cramped confinement of a packed international flight does seem to bring out the worst in people. (Changing diapers during mealtime is a final aerial example of the most elementary common sense being flung to the winds.)

There are plenty left behind on the ground. A Saitama travel agent recalls a bus tour on which an elementary-school boy displayed a most unmannerly distaste for the advanced age of the guide. "Who needs an old bat like her?" he piped up — not once but repeatedly. This was bad enough, but the boy's father didn't improve matters by taking up the boy's cause. "Can you change her?" he inquired of a tour official.

To which the official replied . . . ? Didn't Shukan Bunshun think to ask?

"We have this regular customer," says a cabin attendant looking back on 22 years' in-flight experience. "She would fly with her daughter, and at duty-free shopping time she'd buy the girl everything she wanted, everything. Now the daughter, brought up as though no one existed in the world

but her, has a child of her own, who treats his grandmother like a servant. I see a family like that, and I think, 'A child will grow up and raise her child as she herself has been raised.' "

"When it comes to idiot parents," sums up Shukan Bunshun, "the roots run deep." It's not likely the magazine will run out of material any time soon.

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