

Name: Barbara D'Arcy

Profession: Flight Attendant (both international and domestic routes)

Number of years in this line of work: 21 years

Native Language: English

Other Languages: French (Fluent), Russian and Italian (Poorly)

1) What languages do you know? How did you learn them?

As indicated above, I speak French. I was exposed to French at home when I was a very young child. I lived in Taiwan and my Chinese nanny was educated by French nuns and so French was part of my daily conversation and my ear became accustomed to it. Therefore, it seemed only natural to continue studying it later in school. I spent my junior year of college studying at a University of Switzerland and completed my undergraduate degree with a major in French from Trinity University in Washington, DC. I also studied Russian, (the most challenging language I have ever studied), and Italian (the most fun) at Trinity.

2) What is your profession?

I was a flight attendant from 1975 to 1994. I flew both international and domestic routes.

3) Describe a "typical" day as a flight attendant. How do you use your languages in your work?

There is no typical day in this line of work and the ability to speak another language expands the possibility of not only your professional opportunities but the richness of your day to day work *and* personal life.

4) What do you enjoy about being a flight attendant?

I enjoyed the fact that I worked with up to several hundred people in the course of my work day and that every day the group dynamic, weather and location were different and therefore required me to immediately access a whole new set of circumstances to complete my task effectively.

5) What language do you think in?

When I speak English, I think in English. When I speak in French I think in French.

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering French?

Without a doubt, my junior year of study in Switzerland was the point at which I mastered the language. I absolutely believe that you must live in a culture before you can truly understand or speak its language.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career that you may not have had otherwise?

As this is a job based on seniority, speaking another language provides the opportunity to bypass more senior colleagues to work flights whose language of destination you are fluent in. The opportunity to interact on a more personal level with passengers you would otherwise just serve a meal to speaks for itself.

8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would it be? Why?
Without a doubt, I would want to become fluent in Spanish as I believe it is totally necessary to be flexible and marketable in the United States today.

9) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned another language?
Although I enjoyed and applied myself during my college years, I have always learned better and enjoyed learning more when actually acquiring knowledge through action rather than sitting in a classroom. Not knowing another language would have diminished what I could have accomplished and the satisfaction I would have derived from it.

10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak two or more languages?

YES! We may be a “global economy” but we will never be a global culture. Intimate understanding of foreign cultures and language will always eclipse computer skills.

11) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't a flight attendant?

Any career that would deal with foreign cultures and the ability to quickly determine where people “are coming from” and the ability to work with people and resolve the situation.

12) What advice would you give to somebody who wants to be a flight attendant? Are there any specific languages they should learn?

The primary characteristic of anyone interested in this career would be someone who prefers a work schedule that packs the work week into intense extended hours with the benefit of having the same amount of time off. No “9 to 5” here.

Flight attendants have to:

- Deal with jet lag as it suits their individual body
- Be able to be successful and happy in their personal life with a work schedule that does not mesh with the normal work world
- Not let themselves fall into a learning and skills slump, as it is a job that becomes routine over time,

Once again, understanding another language adds to a flight attendant's ability to successfully deal with the above.

13) Any additional information:

My ability to speak another language and the opportunity it has afforded me did not end when I retired from my career a few years ago. In addition to my current life as a fulltime homemaker, I am the French translator for a medical team that goes to a remote mountain village in Haiti yearly. In addition to the translation I do between government officials, I have helped the dentist in his chores in the rudimentary clinic we set up.

A lifetime benefit of knowing another language is being able to truly understand reality from another culture's viewpoint and therefore form more informed opinions and beliefs of your own.