

With the advent of commercial travel by air in the 1920's it stood to reason that passenger needs would be looked after as in rail and sea travel.

In the very beginning young men, the sons of the businessmen who had financed the airlines, were hired as *couriers*. They were responsible for seeing to passenger needs, such as helping passengers aboard the aircraft, assisting with the luggage, serving refreshments, etc. In the U.K., they were called *cabin boys*.

This role continued up to the crash of the stock market in the mid 1920's. With the couriers no longer employed, the responsibility of seeing to the needs of passengers rested with the *copilot*. The copilot was required to assist the pilot in command as well as serve food and drinks to the passengers. In the late 1920's early 1930's, with the uptick in passenger air travel the airlines began to reassess the responsibilities of seeing to passenger needs and the first *stewards* were hired. In 1929, Pan Am, in the USA was the first carrier to have onboard stewards who served food.

Then in the 1930's the Boeing Air Transport and registered nurse Ellen Church worked together to devise a scheme where nurses were hired for three months at a time to travel onboard to look after passengers and quell their fear of flying. She became the first female *stewardess*. The actual origins of the terms '*stewards*', '*stewardesses*', and '*pursers*' titles reflect back to the maritime and rail world.

By the late 1930's, this trial proved beneficial to the airlines and United Airlines, became the first in the USA, to hire female helpers. The *stewardess* responsibilities included attending to those who became air sick—and handing out food and drinks to the passengers.

In the 1940's, during World War II the nurses left the airlines and joined the military. The airlines then began hiring young women, without nursing credentials, to take over.

In the post war 1950's and 1960's, being an air hostess, or air stewardess as it became known, was seen as an elite profession, with very strict conditions. The uniforms were form-fitting, and featured accessories including the likes of hats, high-heeled shoes, and white gloves. As a result of this, a certain glamorous reputation was perceived. In the late 1960s, the fashion started to change to move with the times, and mini skirts and hot pants became more widespread.

Airlines used the stewardess image as a marketing tool to appeal to mostly male passengers traveling for business, selling a provocative and promiscuous look.

Things changed again in the 1970's, with the start of unions, equal rights between men and women, and less discrimination. More males started to join as 'air stewards,' which later changed to 'flight attendant' in the US for male and female employees.

In the 1980's and 1990's, and as more time passed, and conventions changed, airlines adapted to a business-style look and the dress code became slightly more functional. The role of the flight attendant had changed, in that they were being regarded in terms of safety, and not just service and appearance.

Currently, with the introduction of tougher safety regulations, the role of a flight attendant is a more difficult job than it used to be. The modern name for the profession of '**cabin crew**' reflects that their first priority is safety. A current definition of the role is as follows:

“A **flight attendant**, traditionally known as a **steward** (MASC) or **stewardess** (FEM); or **air host** (MASC) or **hostess** (FEM), is a member of the aircrew aboard commercial flights, many business jets and some government aircraft. Collectively called **cabin crew**, flight attendants are primarily responsible for passenger safety and comfort.”