

to fly or **NOT** to fly

Students discuss how Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have impacted travel plans

By MICALA PROESCH
THE BATTALION



Like many Americans this holiday season, Caleb Pagan will not be boarding a plane.

Pagan, a freshman business major who attends community college in Houston, was sitting on an airplane when the second airplane hit the World Trade Center on Sept. 11. It was going to be only his second time in a plane, as he was about to depart from his weekend vacation in New York City and return to Houston. He said it will be a long time before someone could get him back up on an airplane.

"I have personally always been afraid of airplanes," Pagan said. "This fear has definitely increased with the possibility of terrorism in the picture. With the amount of contraband that has made it on to airplanes since Sept. 11, my faith in airline security is extremely shaky, and I do not blame anyone who decides to cancel their travel plans or drive instead of fly."

Traditionally, the Christmas holidays provide students with a break from the monotony of classes and employment. While some students choose to work or gain credit hours during the break, many others take this opportunity to travel, either home to see their families or away on vacation.

However, in the light of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, this year's holiday travelers were given something to think about, and many have expressed concerns and even canceled plans.

Naomi Ramos, a travel agent at Integrated Travel in Houston, said that overall travel is down about 25 percent since Sept. 11, but many people are continuing to vacation, choosing not to let fears of terrorism derail their plans.

"Throughout September and October, there were a lot of people calling in to cancel winter trips," Ramos said. "However, since then, we have had much fewer cancellations and many more people are booking new vacations."

Carissa Liew, a sophomore biology major at University of Texas, was expecting her family to visit her in Houston over Christmas break, yet they have canceled their plans. "My relatives from Malaysia were planning to come

visit us over Christmas," Liew said. "But Malaysia is a Muslim-controlled country, and they are worried about being stopped at the airport, so they are not coming anymore."

While some people have decided not to travel, others have decided to limit their traveling to inside the country because they feel safer within U.S. borders than they would overseas.

"Many people have canceled overseas trips in favor of vacations that are within driving distances," Ramos said.

Other people are not letting threats of airplane safety scare them away from flying. Amy Hays, a sophomore journalism major, is flying to Mount Baker in Washington with her boyfriend's family during the break, and she is confident that the increased airport security measures will keep her safe.

"I am not really scared about flying," Hays said. "While I am a little nervous, I think they have got the security pretty much under control."

For some students, flying on an airplane is not just a means of travel but a mode of transportation. Lenti Smith, a sophomore journalism and political science major, is from Tennessee, and she must fly just to get home over the holidays.

"Flying has always been a regular part of my life," Smith said. "I am not scared to fly home because with the presence of the military in the airports, I feel even safer to fly now than I did before."

Many students who attend Texas A&M are not confronted with Smith's situation, however, and can drive to their homes around Texas without worrying about the commotion in the air. This is comforting, because while many people are choosing to fly again, many others remain hesitant to step aboard a plane.

While the nature of holiday traveling may be slightly different this Christmas, many people are still choosing to go on vacations and get on with their lives. With the most popular winter travel destinations being Hawaii, Mexico and other warm places, people are affirming their desires to travel and enjoy themselves. Ramos confirms this, noting that travel numbers seem to be returning to normal.

"While the airlines have cut the number of flights they have each day, all of these flights are getting filled," Ramos said.

Whether going home for the holidays, flying abroad to visit family or taking an exotic vacation, students hope to find ways to reach their destinations safely.

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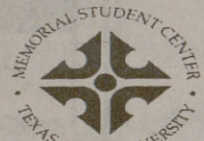
A panel of experts from the General Accounting Office (GAO), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), along with the Assistant Dean of the Bush School will discuss different aspects of homeland security including issues such as Airport security, the probability of future attacks, and allegations the US government ignored warnings given before 9/11/01.

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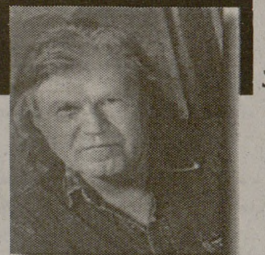
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