

# Travel rituals work like a charm

Superstitions help most of us get over flight nerves, says **Abigail Butcher**

**A**LTHOUGH I fly frequently, my nerves sometimes get the better of me. On a recent flight from Geneva to the UK, turbulence shook our plane and I instinctively gripped my St Christopher necklace. Even before the plane left the runway, I had kissed the silver disc. In fact, I cannot leave Britain without my good luck charm, which bears an image of the patron saint of travellers, and I don't take it off until we get home.

I'm not alone. Some 65 per cent of British adults practise a superstitious act before getting on a flight, according to online travel agency sunshine.co.uk. Many travel with a charm or mascot while others touch the outside of the plane before boarding. Other traditions include ordering the same drink, only flying at certain times or on certain dates and refusing to sit in certain seats.

Of the folk who took a good luck charm, 43 per cent took a soft toy and 27 per cent took jewellery. I'm guessing St Christopher charms are

high on that list. Legend has it that while serving the King of Canaan, St Christopher once carried a child across a river who announced he was Christ after safely reaching the other side.

Tradition states that you cannot buy yourself a St Christopher charm – it needs to be given to you – and my first was given to me by a cherished

***I travelled the world for a decade and always felt that my St Christopher saw me through***

ex-boyfriend when I was 27 and embarking on a trip to Costa Rica. Toby spoke Spanish fluently and, as an extra thought, had the back of the charm engraved with the words: 'Te amo mi corazon', which means: 'I love you my heart'.

It was the most thoughtful thing anyone had ever given me and it



**Wing and prayer:** Plane passengers carry mascots to beat nerves

PICTURE: GETTY

stayed on a silver chain around my neck as I travelled the world over the subsequent decade – from Argentina and Uruguay to Australia, New Zealand, India and China, from skiing in the Alps to racing across the Atlantic on a 50ft yacht through hellish weather that I thought would be the end of me. I always felt that my St Christopher saw me through.

Then, while walking in the New Forest, I lost it. Distracted, I spent hours retracing my steps, searching high and low for my beloved charm that was nowhere to be found.

The trouble with superstitions, rather like buying the same numbers for the lottery each week, is that you can't break them. I was due to fly to Switzerland the following week and the thought of being without my charm made me very uneasy. My parents live near Gatwick and when I parked at their house for my usual lift to the airport, my mum presented me with a small black box. Inside was a shiny new St Christopher, ready and waiting to keep me safe on my trip.

As I put it around my neck, the relief was extraordinary. St Christopher has so far kept me safe and, touch wood, I hope he continues to do so.

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