

COMFORT ZONE



Premium economy improvements are tempting passengers away from business class. Jenny Southan finds out how the airlines compare

With typical long-haul business class costing £3,000 return, having the option of more affordable premium economy seats is certainly appealing. Bridging the gap between economy class and top-tier cabins, premium economy gives passengers added benefits such as queue jumping in the airport and, in some cases, free champagne and lounge access, as well as more space.

These days, most major airlines offer a standalone premium economy product – not just economy seats with extra legroom. This year, American Airlines and Delta are finally installing premium economy cabins, and it's rumoured that some of the Middle Eastern airlines will follow suit. But how much better is the experience than regular coach class? We compare 16 airlines so you can decide...



Clockwise from above: Air Canada; Air France; Air New Zealand

AIR CANADA

Premium economy passengers are fast-tracked through the airport and given a hot towel and welcome soft drink, followed by wine, beer, spirits and "premium" hot meals served on china with proper cutlery and glassware. As with most airlines here, you can check in two cases (23kg each).

The B787-8 cabin has three rows in a 2-3-2 layout (economy is 3-3-3). In my 2015 review (see businessstraveller.com/tried-and-tested), I said: "Premium economy feels spacious with a good amount of legroom (seven more inches than economy), and looks stylish. Seat-back screens (measuring 11 inches – two inches more than in economy) and universal power sockets are available to everybody. Amenity kits contained socks, an eye mask, toothbrush, toothpaste and ear plugs. Footrests made it more comfortable."

WIDTH 18-20in/46-51cm

LEGROOM 38in/96.5cm

RECLINE 7in/18cm

AIR FRANCE

Air France passengers can use Sky Priority channels in the airport, gain access to a lounge for a fee (economy passengers can't), board at will by skipping the economy queue, and get their luggage back quicker on arrival.

The newest seat is found on the carrier's B787. Air France says that it provides 40 per cent more space than in economy, and the fixed-shell design means that you won't encroach on the space of the person behind when you recline. Premium economy passengers are provided with travel kits and there are cleverly designed grooves in the tray table to rest your iPad on (you also get 12-inch built-in screens).

WIDTH 19in/48cm

LEGROOM 38in/96.5cm

RECLINE 130 degrees



AIR NEW ZEALAND

In somewhat of a backward step, the Kiwi carrier's innovative Spaceseat, installed on the B777-300, is to be replaced with a more conventional premium economy seat by November. The product will be standardised across the airline's fleet of B787-9 and B777-200 and -300 planes, the last of which flies Auckland-LA-London. The new seat will be 2-3-2 or 2-4-2. Passengers will continue to get premium check-in, priority baggage and boarding, and onboard amenity kits, meals and drinks, including wine from New Zealand.

WIDTH 19.3in/49cm

LEGROOM 41in/104cm

RECLINE 9in/23cm

ANA passengers can use the carrier's lounge and their checked bags will be fixed with a Star Alliance priority tag



AMERICAN AIRLINES

AA launched its first premium economy product this year on its B787-9s and B777-200s, initially on routes from Dallas to Madrid, Paris, Sao Paulo and Seoul, and Chicago-Paris, for a limited time. By the end of the year it will be available from LA to Tokyo Narita, Auckland and Sydney. Included in the price is priority check-in, security, boarding and luggage, as well as "chef-inspired" meals and alcohol. Passengers can take advantage of spacious black leather seats, noise-reducing headphones, USB ports and amenity kits. Main Cabin Extra will remain.

WIDTH 19in/48cm | **LEGROOM** 38in/96.5cm | **RECLINE** 5-6in/12-15cm

ANA

The checked bags of ANA premium economy customers are fixed with a Star Alliance priority tag. Travellers also have access to the Japanese carrier's lounge. Premium economy on the B777-300ER is in its own 2-4-2 cabin. Legroom is generous, at 38 inches – four inches more than regular

economy – while the seat is 10 per cent wider, at 19.3 inches. The product is also installed on ANA's B787s. Each seat has a legrest, footrest, 10.6-inch touchscreen, power outlet, USB port and connection for Apple devices, plus a reading light at shoulder height. Free sparkling wine is served, while desserts are from the business class menu. Also on offer are ANA special edition wines.

WIDTH 18.4-19.3in/47-49cm
LEGROOM 38in/96.5cm
RECLINE 21-24.5 degrees

BRITISH AIRWAYS

BA's World Traveller Plus cabin comes in two forms, with a more modern product found on the B787, A380 and some B777s and an older one on the rest of the long-haul fleet. The pitch is seven inches greater than in economy, while the width is an inch more. Upholstered in navy padded fabric, the newer seat has a footrest, a headrest with wings and a 10.5-inch touchscreen that can be controlled by a personal handset. Noise-cancelling headphones and

Clockwise from left: American Airlines; ANA; Cathay Pacific; British Airways

an amenity kit with socks, an eye mask, ear plugs and toothbrush/paste are provided.

WIDTH 18.5in/47cm | **LEGROOM** 38in/96.5cm | **RECLINE** 7-8in/18-20cm

CATHAY PACIFIC

On Cathay, premium economy flyers are greeted with a glass of champagne. The newest seat is on the airline's recently introduced A350s, which serve Hong Kong-Gatwick among other routes. Meals are "light and healthy with an emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables". Larger tray tables make working on a laptop easier, while 10.6-inch screens (12.1-inch on the A350) come with noise-cancelling headphones. Amenity kits are also handed out.

WIDTH 18.5-19.3in/47-49cm
LEGROOM 38-40in/96.5-101.5cm
RECLINE 8-9in/20-23cm



CHINA AIRLINES

The Taiwanese carrier offers eight rows of premium economy in a 2-4-2 layout on its B777-300ER aircraft. The fixed-back shell seat features a legrest, a 12.1-inch touchscreen, a water bottle holder, a drinks holder and a USB port. Designer Ray Chen has incorporated Chinese aesthetic touches throughout the aircraft, with the premium economy cabin featuring walls lined with a wood texturing effect.

WIDTH 19in/48cm

LEGGROOM 39in/99cm

RECLINE 118 degrees



Delta has collaborated with hotel brand Westin to supply Heavenly blankets, and with Tumi and Malin and Goetz for the amenity kits

DELTA AIR LINES

Delta will be rolling out Premium Select on long-haul aircraft later this year – before, it only had Delta Comfort+, which was an economy class seat with extra legroom. The new product will have adjustable rests for legs, feet, arms and head, 13.3-inch screens (nine inches in economy) and individual power ports.

The airline has collaborated with hotel brand Westin to supply Heavenly blankets, along with Tumi and Malin and Goetz for the amenity kits. Free Starbucks coffee will be available, along with complimentary craft beer, spirits and wine. Free seasonal meals will be served on Alessi tableware.

Premium Select travellers will qualify for Sky Priority security, boarding and bag delivery. The product will be available to book

on the carrier's new A350 aircraft, to be followed by its B777s, A330s and B767s.

WIDTH 19in/48cm | **LEGGROOM** 38in/96.5cm | **RECLINE** 7in/18cm

EVA AIR

The Taiwanese airline was one of the first carriers to offer premium economy (branded Elite Class). Its product offers USB ports, plug sockets, mood lighting and 11-inch LCD touchscreens. Toiletries by Canadian brand Escentials are also provided, along with pillow and blanket sets. Wine, beer and non-alcoholic drinks are on offer, with meals served on chinaware.

WIDTH 19.5in/49.5cm | **LEGGROOM** 38in/96.5cm | **RECLINE** 8in/20cm

Clockwise from top left: Delta; JAL; Lufthansa; EVA Air

JAPAN AIRLINES

JAL's Sky Premium fixed-shell seat has a generous 42 inches of pitch, a legrest, a headrest with wings, and a privacy divider at head height. The 12.1-inch touchscreen can be controlled via a handheld remote. In-seat power is provided. A significant perk is having lounge access at Tokyo Haneda and Narita, and London Heathrow.

WIDTH 19in/48cm | **LEGGROOM** 42in/106.5cm | **RECLINE** Undisclosed

LUFTHANSA

Lufthansa's seat is not in a separate cabin but, depending on aircraft, is up to an inch wider than in economy, with about four inches more room at the side thanks to a wide armrest and a centre console. ▶



From next month, Qantas will be introducing a new premium economy seat on its B787s



Seats have adjustable footrests, power sockets, a USB port, an 11- to 12-inch screen, and a small stowage area for glasses or a phone. There is no priority boarding or check-in but select lounges can be used for a fee. A “fruity” welcome drink is offered on board.

WIDTH 18-19in/45.5-48cm

LEGROOM 38in/96.5cm

RECLINE 40 degrees

NORWEGIAN

Those flying long-haul with Norwegian will find B787s fitted with five rows of Premium seats arranged 2-3-2. Seat pitch is 46 inches, compared with 31 inches in economy, although seat recline, while greater in Premium, remains minimal. Travellers get lounge access plus fast-track security and boarding. They don't have to pay to reserve seats, and drinks and a three-course dinner and breakfast are served free (you need to pay and order in advance in economy).

WIDTH 19.5in/49.5cm | **LEGROOM** 46in/117cm | **RECLINE** 9-10 degrees

QANTAS

From next month, the Aussie carrier will be introducing a new premium economy seat on its B787s, flying domestic routes to begin with, followed by LA and London. Smartly upholstered in charcoal grey with touches of

“burnt caramel”, the seat reclines into a Z shape with a hammock to support your feet, while a thick pillow slots on to the fixed-wing headrest to cushion you as you sleep. Seatbacks have 13.5-inch screens, plus slots for your own tablet. There are also USB sockets and pods for storing water bottles.

WIDTH 19.5in/49.5cm

LEGROOM 38-42in/96.5-106.5cm

RECLINE 9in/23cm

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

Configured 2-4-2, SIA's new premium economy seat has lots of thoughtful details, such as slots at the base of the central armrest for water bottles, cup holders above, calf and footrests that fold out, two USB sockets per person, and 13.3-inch HD monitors. Take your pick from three meal choices on board, or pre-order a special option from the “Book the Cook” menu. Champagne is complimentary, and fast-track check-in, boarding and baggage handling are rolled in as well. Travellers can stow one piece of checked luggage to 35kg.

WIDTH 18.5-19.5in/47-49.5cm

LEGROOM 38in/96.5cm

RECLINE 8in/20cm

VIRGIN ATLANTIC

One of the originators of premium economy, Virgin's product is still very popular. The seat has 10.5-inch

touchscreens and broad central armrests with a flat section for drinks. Passengers either have footrests or a supportive ottoman cushion behind the bulkhead. When boarding, a glass of prosecco and a newspaper are offered and, later, a choice of post-prandial liqueurs. Amenity kits are provided on night flights. See page 21 for a review of Virgin's B787-9 premium economy.

WIDTH 21in/53cm | **LEGROOM** 38in/96.5cm | **RECLINE** 8in/20cm ■

Clockwise from above left:

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Clockwise from top left: Norwegian; Qantas; Singapore Airlines; Virgin Atlantic