

Flying Business Class once meant receiving little attention, inferior food and a lower level of service than First Class. It was an experience based on expediency for the business traveler, and nothing more. Perhaps your seat would recline a bit more, and flight attendants might provide you with power outlets or exchange batteries.

But competing for scarcer expense account and vacation dollars has prompted the airlines to provide more for less. Nowadays, Business Class passengers often cannot detect any difference from First Class! Virgin Atlantic even invites you to "Get an Upper Class experience at a Business Class fare!"

What are some other advantages of travelling on Business Class flights

- * VIP check-in
- * Extra leg room
- * Opulent airport clubs
- * Meals served on your timetable, not the carrier's.
- * The seats fold down completely flat. Some airlines boast beds up to 6'9" long and shoulder length wide.
- * Suites include a generously sized screen on which to enjoy your in-flight entertainment.

When you're relaxing in the Lounge on a luxurious sofa, you'll forget that you're even in the air. The lounge is a convivial setting where you can chat and make business contacts while you relax. Catch up on the Wall Street Journal, enjoy some tunes or track the plane's progress on special cameras mounted outside.

A dedicated barista attends to your every thirst while on board. Champagne, cocktails mixed to order and rare wine are among the drink choices. The food in Business Class can only be called lavish. Your full breakfast includes hot entrees, fruit juice, baked treats, and tea or superlative coffee.

Enjoy multi-course lunch and supper, with hors d'oeuvres to keep you going in between. Here comes the port and cheese, served on fine china-are you sure you're not in First Class? Peruse a sample menu:

- * Cocktails
- * Hors d'oeuvres
- * Coconut curry chicken and mixed vegetables or beef kabobs with grilled eggplant and potatoes au gratin
- * Salad with your choice of dressing
- * Fresh seafood
- * White chocolate mousse bombe with drizzled vanilla sauce
- * Asian apple strudel with chocolate sauce
- * Assorted cheeses and fruit in season
- * Belgian chocolate

British Airways calls its Business Class Club World, and employs world-class chefs. Club World London City offers a 32-seat Business Class plane on trips to JFK.

Virgin Atlantic has coined the term Upper Class and touts the length of its flat bed. Both airlines are endeavouring to ensure that you arrive refreshed, composed and ready for whatever awaits you upon landing.

Airline discounters, such as CheapoAir and Travel Consolidator sell Business Class tickets for up to 60% off. The carriers themselves are discounting fares by as much as half. However, these are heavily restricted tickets-blackout periods, not refundable, only during non-peak hours, long lead times and minimum stays.

Yes, the fares are lower, but exercise caution when trying to save money. Always double check your fare with the airline itself, and make sure that there are no exorbitant surcharges.