

Ask a travel expert: I've finally scored a business-class ticket. How do I get the most out of it?

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The luxuriousness of business class on many airlines has only increased.

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If you've never turned left instead of right when entering a plane, the experience of flying business class is going to be both exhilarating and depressing: You'll finally see what all the fuss is about – but every other flight in economy is going to feel like you're being punished for a crime you didn't commit.

“Whether you score an upgrade, earn one or pay for it, chances are you'll want to make the most of the moment,” says Niki Chave, customer experience

manager for Air New Zealand.

“That curtain closes and visions of caviar begin.”

Business class is an elite flying experience and, with many airlines forgoing first-class seats on smaller planes, the luxuriousness has increased. Seating is bigger and limited. (You're going from nine or 10 seats across a row to six at most.) Air New Zealand's 777-200 planes, for example, have 26 seats in the business cabin in a one-two-one configuration and three dedicated attendants. Compare that with feverishly trying to get someone's attention in the back of the plane.

“That ratio up front is exactly so that we can provide a certain level of service,” Chave says. “Guests should make the most of it.”

To do so, make use of the business-class lounge before the flight (and after if you need it), extra luggage allowance and priority delivery on arrival and priority boarding. Once seated, asking for an extra cheese tray, a second serving of ice cream or help getting the perfect photo of you taken with your pre-flight bubbly are completely legitimate requests.

Also, make sure you let an attendant know this is your first run.

“I think people don't want to let on that it is their first time, but you should absolutely take advantage when the crew asks if you're familiar with how the seat works,” Chave says.

Lie-flat seats are commonplace in business-class cabins but “I'll do it myself” first-timers may miss out on the memory-foam mattress and turn-down service on Air New Zealand, for example, or the buttons that start in-seat massages on other airlines (Qantas and Etihad among them).

Meals include a better menu, as expected, but you're also paying for the luxury of on-demand service: Summon snacks whenever the munchies strike.

You can also expect a complimentary toiletry bag (usually including socks, an eye mask, ear plugs, hand cream, lip balm and a toothbrush with paste). It's yours to keep when you leave.

And, while not the Ritz-Carlton, the bathroom up front offers a less “at your own risk” vibe. Some planes play light jazz in there and most offer higher-end products for your use. Plus, attendants clean it regularly.

Warning: You'll quickly miss these comforts on your next economy flight. Being steadfast about your point collection and loyal to one airline family (Star Alliance, One World, SkyTeam) will help get you up front again cheaper and faster.

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