



A GOOD FLIGHT'S SLEEP

Airlines elevate the passenger experience via new features and services that promote sleep at 35,000 feet.

By Cassandra Perez

With growing competition in the global industry, airlines are responding to consumer trends and technology with products and services that elevate the passenger experience. In PricewaterhouseCoopers' most recent Tailwinds report, Jonathan Kletzel says, "With growth in expenses and increased competition threatening future profit growth, many airlines find themselves at a crossroads. They can continue to make small incremental improvements, or take bolder steps to become the 'connected airline' of the future." As new onboard upgrade programs launch, passengers can expect lavishness in the friendly skies, including private first-class suites, full-flat

beds in business class, or the latest in in-flight entertainment and connectivity, reports *AirlineTrends.com*.

Among the innovations shaping onboard developments are new features designed to improve mid-flight sleep. These advancements are largely being developed for business and first-class customers. In the *New York Post*, writer George Hobica says, "Transcontinental front-of-the-plane travel is where the money and glam is; it's where airlines invest when they have extra cash," which is why big changes are being seen in the air. This article will explore the innovations airlines have introduced to promote relaxation and serene rest during flight as well as

why the industry is presenting these new options to help passengers sleep.

SUITE DREAMS

In order to attract front-of-the-cabin passengers, airlines appear determined to bring back some glamour to travel with a number of options that have become staples, says Jad Mouawad in *The New York Times*, citing flat beds, fluffy pillows, fancy wines, four-course meals, designer-brand pajamas, and luxurious vanity kits. According to the Global Business Travel Association BTI Outlook (United States 2014 Q3), following several sluggish years, business travel spending in the United States was forecast to grow by 6.8% to \$292.3 billion in 2014 and spending on international outbound travel was expected to grow in volume by 5.6% in 2014, followed by another 6.5% in 2015.

The New York Times reports that airlines typically charge six to eight times as much for business class as for coach on international flights and two to three times as much for first class as for business class. As such, the need for airlines to compete for this higher paying clientele with dazzling upgrades and sleek innovations has never been greater.

Etihad Airways, a national airline of the United Arab Emirates, is one such company that has launched a program to improve sleep quality on long haul flights. In a news release, Etihad Airways chief commercial officer Peter Baumgartner says, “A good night’s sleep is scientifically proven to benefit one’s health and nowhere is this more important than on a long-haul flight. We understand that sleep is an important requirement for our guests, many of whom fly multiple journeys with us each year.”

Virgin Atlantic Airways is another international carrier that has an Upper Class Suite and launched a newer Upper Class Suite for “suite dreams” in business class. These upgraded accommodations

offer spacious suites, an onboard bar, and flat beds. Nik Lusardi, design manager-customer experience for Virgin Atlantic Airways, says, “In recent years we have invested over \$100 million in our Upper Class product so that we can ensure we give our customers a more luxurious and comfortable sleep than ever before.”

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

In the quest to offer customers a unique, restful experience on board, airlines are seeking professional assistance to craft comfortable suites and luxurious amenities. For Etihad Airways’ sleep improvement program, the company worked with a panel of sleep experts from the American Centre for Psychiatry and Neurology (ACPN) in Abu Dhabi to research ways to enhance in-flight sleep.

According to an Etihad Airways news release, the center is staffed by American board-certified aviation psychiatrists and neurologists. The airline received guidance from the ACPN on sleep hygiene and onboard well-being, and has developed comprehensive guidelines for quality onboard sleep.

Virgin Atlantic Airways too conducted research, in its case on how to create its new Upper Class Suite. Lusardi says extensive internal testing with variants of the comfort system together with foam combinations was performed to obtain the best possible comfort. He says, “This was then assessed by an ergonomist and pressure mapped to iron out any hard points that may cause discomfort. Then, the comfort system had to be developed to become part of the complex Upper



(Above) Top quality duck-down duvets are offered in a perfect complement to the Asiana Airlines Airbus A380 First Suite section’s full-flat seats. (Page 14) Virgin Atlantic recently added Boeing 787s with lighting that helps passengers adjust to their destination time zone.

Virgin Atlantic recruited groups of frequent flyers to test the concepts and feed into their development—even allowing some to try out the beds with an overnight stay in our test facility. —Lusardi

Class Suite mechanism.” From start to finish, the Upper Class Suite took 5 years to develop.

In addition, as part of the development process, Lusardi says, “Virgin Atlantic also recruited groups of our frequent flyers to test the concepts and feed into their development—even allowing some to try out the beds with an overnight stay in our test facility.” Overall, as *The New York Times* states, “airlines have realized that offering a real opportunity for a good night’s sleep while aboard has become a competitive tool,” developing world-class innovations for a restful flight’s sleep is an important initiative for a number of global airlines.

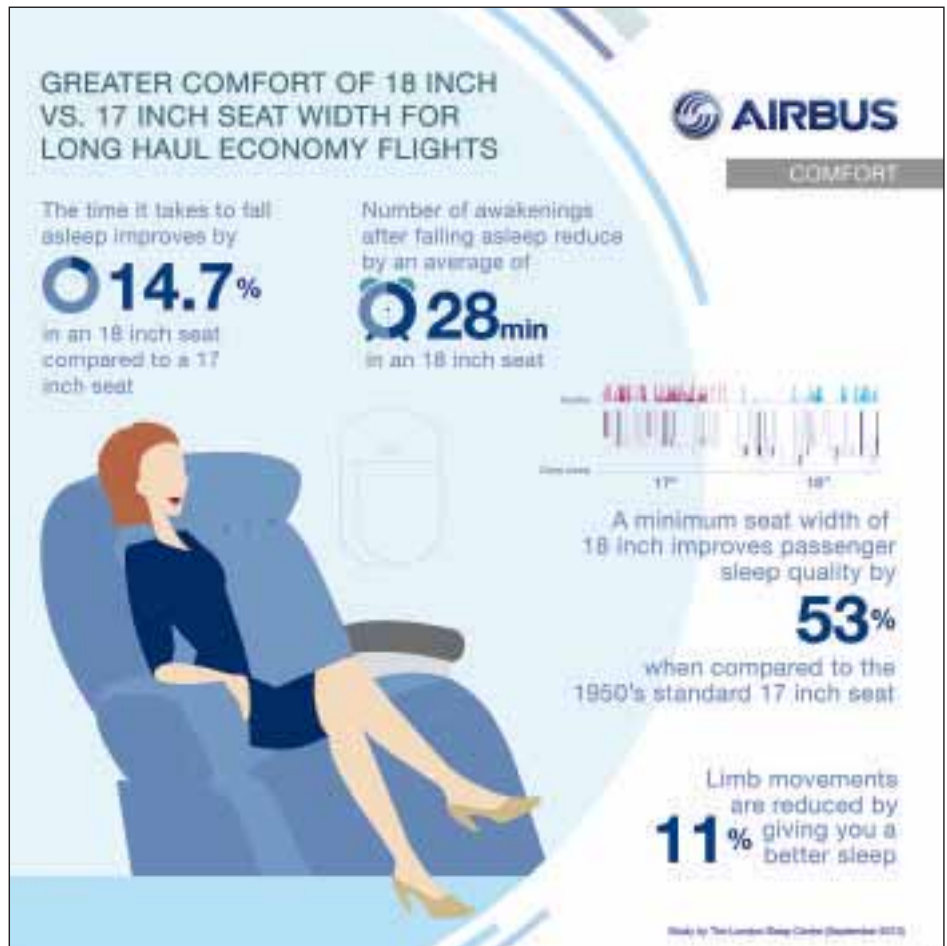
COMFORT IN THE CLOUDS

To provide an extraordinary customer experience and an exceptional flight’s rest, a number of major airline carriers are offering unique touches, spacious suites, and sensory delights for first and business class customers. With higher customer expectations in the air, other airlines are following suit and crafting novel innovations to help clients relax and rest on board. Lusardi says, “For us, it is about always striving to give our customers the best customer experience. Whether you’re flying for business or leisure...arriving at your destination well-rested is a top priority in order to make the most of your trip.”

Airlines are focusing on several areas, including seating, bedding, and home comfort touches such as hot chocolate and herbal teas, to help promote quality sleep. Lusardi says, “Our customers’ product knowledge and expectations are constantly increasing, so we’re always looking to raise the bar on what our products offer and passenger comfort is a top priority.”

SEATS AND BEDS

Spacious and more comfortable seats and beds are one of the most significant areas where major airline carriers are creating improvements for first and business class clientele. The latest generation of business class seats is the most visible sign of the renewed attention to a luxurious in-flight experience. According to *The New York Times*, the standard business-class seats today are “comfortable



Research conducted in 2013 by the London Sleep Centre finds that Airbus’ at least 18-inch-wide seat standard in economy class improved passenger sleep quality by 53% when compared to the 1950s-era 17-inch industry norm.

seats that can be turned into flat beds, not angled ones” and “many airlines now favor seats that have direct-aisle access for passengers, meaning travelers do not have to climb over a sleeping neighbor if they want to get out of their seats in the middle of the night.”

In 2014, Delta Air Lines launched a significant upgrade to its service between New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport and Los Angeles International Airport with the introduction of three Boeing 757-200 aircraft featuring full flat-bed seats in the BusinessElite cabin. On that route and several others, Delta’s Economy Comfort customers also began receiving complimentary pre-set pillow and blanket on their seats, and, after boarding, are offered a sleep kit including eye shades and ear plugs.

In the new Upper Class Suite of Virgin Atlantic, the bed is one of the longest in business class and includes a new comfort system and an extra padded sleep

sheet, according to the Virgin Atlantic website. In addition, the suite features 22-inch-wide seats and a 66-inch-long flat bed. A large portion of Virgin’s clientele are Upper Class customers who are business travelers, and Lusardi says, “Providing our Upper Class customers with the longest flat bed in the sky, as well as extra amenities like a sleep suit to change into to ensure they are comfortable while resting (and don’t wrinkle their suit or dress!), helps them arrive at their destination in top shape for the rest of their journey.”

Etihad Airways launched its program to improve sleep quality this year, and a core part of this is the introduction of luxury all natural bedding by COCOMAT for Diamond First Class passengers. The Athens-based company designed an exclusive multilayered sleep system mattress for the airline’s suites. According to a news release, the airline “aims to enhance the sleep experience by focusing

AIR TRAVEL WITH CPAP DEVICES

With the growing awareness of sleep apnea among doctors and the general public, bringing a CPAP device along for air travel is more common than ever before, according to a Wake Up to Sleep article titled “CPAP Air Travel.” For patients making a trip with their CPAP, carry the device on board and do not check it as luggage, says Jessica Cormier, marketing director of Better Rest Solutions. Accessories should be carried on board as well. “Be ready to show your equipment through security check and make sure that you have printed documentation, preferably the manual, for the SoClean 2 Go,” Cormier says.

Carrying the CPAP can help prevent damage and will ensure the device arrives with the patient at his destination. However, CPAP users should contact the airline prior to travel to ensure the device meets any requirements for carrying such assistive devices, according to *USA Today*. The airline should be contacted at least 2 days before the flight.

Airlines may not be able to provide power sources for the therapy equipment, so travelers should have ample battery power if they intend to use the CPAP while in the air. For international flights, the NSF suggests travelers check with their airline to find out if they can sit near a power source so the CPAP can safely be used. A power cord or adapter may be needed, so CPAP users should also ask their airline what type may be needed.

Travel size CPAP machines are an option for travelers. They can offer flight-friendly features such as integrated battery solutions and extended power cords. Steve Moore, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Human Design Medical, says, “Traveling with a portable CPAP such as Z1 takes the hassle out of traveling.” He cites the Z1’s weight (10 ounces) as an advantage when traveling. Moore says, “The Z1 PowerShell integrates the Z1 CPAP (the Z1 Unplugged) with a lithium ion overnight battery. This is ideal for traveling where there is no power source.”

Passengers preparing for an airline trip should also take a letter from their physician to alleviate any concerns about getting through airport security with a CPAP. A CPAP does not count as carry-on luggage under Federal Aviation Administration regulations, so fliers can still bring a laptop or other personal items if desired.



Virgin Atlantic’s Upper Class Suites include seats that turn into flat beds at the touch of a button.

on the senses of touch, sight, sound, aroma, and taste.”

According to Raymond Kollau of AirlineTrends.com, lower-cost carriers are also upgrading and adding sleep-friendly renovations to its cabins. JetBlue has invested in both business and economy, featuring slim-line seats, and its latest Business Class product features 16 private suites in four rows. Low-cost carrier Skymark, the third largest airline of Japan, has also introduced various renovations for customers, including 114 angled lie-flat business seats on an order of A380 superjumbos and Premium Economy seats with 38-inch seat pitch and 19.3-inch seat width on its new A330s. FlyDubai, a short and mid-haul carrier, has introduced new business class seating featuring soft Italian leather and a seat pitch of 42 inches.

SENSORY TOUCHES

For maximum comfort, major airlines are also providing new services, technology, and products in addition to cozy, sleep-inducing seats and beds. Comforts of home, such as plush bedding and pillows and chamomile tea and hot chocolate, as well as lighting systems designed to relax passengers, are several of the latest airline offerings that aim to give fliers a restful experience.

Turkish Airlines Inc is another international airline carrier offer-

ing sensory improvements designed for restful sleep. The airlines’ newest program, “Sky Illusion,” promises home comfort to business class passengers during extended range flights. A Turkish Airlines news release notes that the “Sky Illusion Sleeping Collection” is designed as a supplementary element to enhance the travel experience and is comprised of a quilt, sleeping pad, sleeping pillow, waist pillow, and slipper. The contents of the set, which are produced by combining aloe vera extracts with soft fabrics, aim to offer comfortable sleep.

The New York Times reports that Japan Airlines is offering a selection of different pillows similar to what is found in many high-end hotels and is also working with a mattress company to develop extra padding for its seats to make onboard beds more comfortable for fliers.

Virgin Atlantic’s most recent aircraft, the 787-9 Dreamliner, features enhancements aimed at relaxing onboard passengers. Lusardi says, “We have focused on special mood lighting throughout all cabins to create a relaxing ambience on board. The lighting changes color throughout the flight to help passengers relax and unwind, fall asleep, and even adjust time zones. To help passengers drift into a deep sleep, ‘silver moonlight’ is introduced to reflect a beautiful moon-lit sky.”

Virgin Atlantic also offers business passengers the option to have dinner in the terminal before boarding, and those who select this option are then assigned seats in the “snooze,” or quiet, section of the cabin, where flight attendants will not disturb them.

As part of the new sleep program launched by Etihad Airways, the carrier provides noise canceling headphones in all three classes to minimize the effects of ambient cabin sounds. In addition, all cabins feature advanced mood-lighting systems to counteract harsh light. Home comforts, such as sleep-time beverage service, will be offered to fliers in all three classes. An Etihad Airways news release notes that in first class, sleep-inducing chamomile tea and a range of malt drinks will be added to the airline’s drinks selection. Additional features offered include sleep suits, unique pillow mist, and pulse point oil in first class and quality blankets, comforters, and pillows for guests in business class and economy class.

Another airline adding features to enhance sleep is SAS, a Scandinavian carrier that hands out a take-out breakfast bag upon arrival for passengers who want to sleep right up until landing at their destination, according to *The New York Times*. Lufthansa has installed humidifiers in the first-class cabin of its newer Airbus A380s, which increase the relative humidity of the cabin to around 25%. CTT Systems, the Swedish manufacturer of the technology, says it promises to “improve sleep, reduce jet lag and tiredness, and alleviate dehydration of the eyes, skin, and linings of the mouth and nose.”

FLYING THE FRIENDLY SKIES

In an increasingly competitive market, airlines are introducing novel innovations and services to enhance the sleep experience of guests and offer an exceptional experience on board. A representative for Delta says the company began its product evolution in 2010 with the announcement of the installation of full-

flat bed seats on all international aircrafts, and new features and amenities have been added over the years. The representative says, “Customer research indicated to us that getting quality sleep during travel on longer flights was something of great value.” The additions and sleep-friendly features of international airlines typically come at a higher cost, but for individuals able to pay higher fares, the reward will be comforts that feel like home and a restful sleep during their onboard journey. **SR**

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