

✈️ UP IN THE AIR

AA adds new premium check-in

American Airlines is launching a new check-in process for its "high-value customers."

AA said that it opened its first "Flagship Check-in" at Los Angeles International Airport. Customers eligible for the service have curbside access to a private facility, where they check in to their flights and check their bags. They also receive immediate access to a designated security line. Customers eligible for the new service are ConciergeKey members, customers of the airline's Five Star Service program, or first class fliers departing Los Angeles on certain transcontinental and international flights. American said it plans to add the check-in process at more airports next year.

AA Boeing 777 Special

First class passengers on AA's Boeing 777 flights between the US and LHR will receive a quilted bed topper, pajamas and slippers. They expect to roll out the service to all international first-class 777 cabins. In addition customers traveling in business class will receive a lightweight blanket, duvet, pillow, slippers and amenity kit.

Smartphone Boarding Pass

In 2007 Continental started testing what a novel technology: allowing passengers to receive an electronic boarding pass on their mobile phones. Four years later, it is finally gaining traction.

Now most of the major carriers offer mobile boarding passes at many airports in the US and some abroad. With a growing number of travelers carrying smartphones, the era of paperless boarding may have finally arrived. American, Delta, Continental and United are the biggest e-boarding champions, offering this option to travelers departing from over 75 airports. Alaska Airlines has introduced it at about 50 airports, and US Airways in nearly 20 cities. JetBlue, Southwest and Virgin America have not yet embraced mobile boarding.

THE SMART MONEY

2012 to see Higher Travel Budgets

Those looking for evidence of a wholesale slowdown in corporate travel won't find it in a Morgan Stanley survey just released, which found the majority of 367 corporate travel buyers polled expect air travel budgets, bookings and fares to grow next year.

Even as corporations gain distance from the financial collapse of 2008 and subsequent recession, the impact remains. Only 40 percent of respondents indicated their travel budgets "are currently back at the peak, pre-financial crisis levels," but an additional 15 percent of respondents expect to reach those peaks next year.

HOTEL NEWS

Marriott expands in China

Marriott International Inc plans to open one hotel every month in China during the next three years.

The US-based lodging company has announced that construction is underway on its 100th hotel in Shenyang. "China is Marriott's most important market outside of the US in terms of hotel numbers," said Simon Cooper, president and managing director Asia Pacific Marriott International. Company brands including Marriott, JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton operate 56 hotels in China. Henry Lee, senior vice-president of Greater China Marriott International, said half of the guests who stay at the company's hotels in China are Chinese. It is also hard to find employees whose English is good enough to work in hotels, he said. "We also have to spend more time in smaller cities to train staff members before opening the hotels," said Lee.

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