

✈️ UP IN THE AIR



First-Class: Above and Beyond

The gap between first class and coach has never been so wide. International carriers are offering private suites for first-class passengers, lay-flat seats, three-star meals and personal service once found only on corporate jets. They provide massages before takeoff, whisk passengers through special customs lanes and drive them right to the plane. Some have bars. One airline has even installed on-board showers. The amenities in the back of the cabin? Sparse.

The airlines are betting that the image of luxury they project for the front helps attract passengers to the rest of the plane. That includes a growing business-class section with offerings once solely the preserve of first class. In recent years, the airlines most aggressive in adding luxury touches to first class have come from Asia and the Middle East.

Dubai-based Emirates introduced personal suites in 2003 and in 2008 installed two showers on its Airbus A380s. AirFrance now has a dedicated first-class lounge in Paris with a spa and restaurant catered by Alain Ducasse and immigration officers come directly into the lounge to check passports,

and passengers are driven to the airplane in a limousine seconds before the doors shut. American carriers were slower to react until recently.

A Boarding Pass on Your Screen

American, Delta, Continental and United are the biggest e-boarding champions, offering this option to travelers departing from at least 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 airlines list e-boarding cities on their Web sites—mostly cities with larger airports—but small airports are getting on board as the TSA and the airlines install equipment to scan travelers' handheld devices. When you check in, you'll see the mobile boarding pass option only if it's available for your departure or stopover city

How does it work? Most carriers offer two ways to get an e-boarding pass: you can choose to have one sent to your mobile device via e-mail or text when you check in online, or you can use an airline app to check in and your boarding pass will appear within the application. The airlines say this option works with most Web-enabled smartphones and iPads.

THE SMART MONEY

2012 forecast

Most business travelers do not expect to cut down on their number of trips next year, according to a Deloitte study. Only 15% of the 1,000 business travelers surveyed in September said they expected to take fewer trips in 2012 than they did in 2011. Almost 63% said they expected their travel levels to remain steady, while 22 percent said they would be taking more trips in 2012.

HOTEL NEWS

InterContinental to launch upscale chain in China

MarketWatch—IHG said it will launch a new upscale hotel chain in China in the next six months and eventually export the brand across Asia Pacific.

The U.K.-based company is the world's largest hotelier by number of rooms and plans to more than double the size of its operations in China, India and the Middle East as traveler numbers are boosted by rising incomes, increased life expectancy and low-cost airlines.

The new upscale Chinese brand, yet to be named, will join new projects in India, where there are only about 150,000 branded hotel rooms.

Staying fit on the road

Business travelers try to eat right and exercise while on the road, and they want a little help from their hotel to keep them on the

right track, according to a survey of travelers' on-the-road habits.

Of those surveyed for Texas-based Omni Hotels & Resorts, 56% said they would like more low-fat options on hotel restaurant menus. When it comes to in-room snacks, 73% said they want healthy snacks and 70% want bottled water available in the rooms. Nearly one-third said they usually pack workout gear but never have the time or energy to exercise. Omni offers "Get Fit Rooms." For an additional \$15 fee, the hotel will furnish the room with a treadmill, two-pound dumbbells, an exercise mat, stretch cords, a bottle of water and a mini radio headset.

Airlines Cut Back, Hotels Step In

You don't have to fly first-class to get V.I.P. treatment at the airport — if you stay at the right hotel.

Hotels are stepping in with new services designed to make the airport experience less stressful. From wardrobe storage to airport concierges, here's a rundown of some of the options being offered:

Airport Concierge: **Peninsula Beverly Hills** hired a staff of six to meet guests at LAX to help them access airline lounges and solve all manner of problems, including securing better seats on planes if available. While there is no charge for arriving guests, departing guests pay \$100 per family for speeding up the security process and access to airport lounges. Other hotels are teaming up with airports to offer similar services, such as Jamaican resorts **Round Hill** and **Island Outpost** at Montego Bay airport, which speeds departing guests through immigration and into a 10,000-square-foot lounge with Wi-Fi, showers, bar, mini-spa and a kids' corner, for \$30 a person. guests of the new

Four Seasons Marrakech who use the hotel's \$74 pickup service are whisked to a V.I.P. lounge to have their passports checked instead of waiting in line at customs.

Luggage Solutions: Leave the sweats at home! Last year, **Westin Hotels & Resorts** began lending guests sneakers and workout apparel to help reduce bulk in carry-on bags. **Fairmont Hotels & Resorts** offers a free similar program with for elite members of its loyalty program or \$10 per stay. Other hotels like the **Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton Chicago** eliminate the need for luggage completely by storing clothes for repeat clientele, at no charge beyond laundering. Guests arrive to a closet full of laundered and pressed clothes. Some hotels have installed luggage weight scale in the lobby and will assist guests in shipping items home to help them keep costs down.

Food for the Plane: Departing guests at **One and Only Palmilla** in Los Cabos, Mexico, order from the Air to Go menu. The **Four Seasons Seattle** introduced a Flight Bites menu last year, and the **Montage Deer Valley** in Park City, Utah has boxes packed with local fare.

A Place to Relax: A growing number of international hotels are adding their own airport lounges for guests who want to freshen up after a long flight or relax before takeoff. Last year, the **Four Seasons Hualalai** opened an airport lounge at Kona International Airport with a wet bar, Wi-Fi, charging stations for electronics and refreshments. In February, **Hilton's three Maldives Resorts** opened lounges at the seaplane terminal of Male International Airport offering showers, Wi-Fi, a children's play room, shoulder massages and a resident chef. The lounges,

stay open until 11 p.m. and are free to guests upon arrival. Departing guests pay \$80 per adult and \$40 per child.

Hotels at airports are also stepping up. For example, **Sheraton Hotels & Resorts** offer half-day rates at its airport properties for travelers with long layovers or delays who want to spend the time in the privacy of a hotel room.

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