



BRITISH AIRWAYS BUSINESS CLASS-ONLY FLIGHT ALLOWS YOU TO BEAT THE QUEUES

News / Airlines



Business-class only flights have, like most things, experienced the highs and the lows.

Ten years ago several carriers emerged offering passengers travelling from European to American hubs low-cost business class comfort.

Sadly the recession prevented Eos, MaxJet and Silverjet – which also briefly flew from London to Dubai – from really taking flight.

In recent years, Hong Kong Airlines' business-class only route to London and Singapore Airlines' direct flight to New York have also been shelved.

Back in 2009 though, **British Airways** took off with a unique product, flying from London's little known London City Airport, in the heart of the capital's financial district, to New York's JFK, taking the carrier's prestigious flight numbers BA001 to BA004 (previously only used by Concorde).

This route utilises two of BA's smallest aircraft, the Airbus A318.

At six years old, the two planes have already accrued more than 9 million miles across the Atlantic. However, the short runway in London City means the plane has to make a fuel stop in Shannon on the way over.

However, there is an advantage – the earlier BA001 flight uses the fuel stop as a way of clearing US immigration in Ireland, allowing the aircraft to land in a domestic terminal in JFK, therefore avoiding the nightmare queues usually associated with entering the US.

In the cabin – unique to the rest of the airline's fleet – all seats are forward-facing, at 25 inches wide, and turn into fully flat 6-foot long beds. There is also OnAir in-flight connectivity, allowing passengers to send texts as well as send and receive emails. Entertainment is provided on especially loaded personal iPads offering 70 hours of entertainment on a 9.7-inch screen.

Dining is unique too, with both lounge and on-board catering provided by Doe & Co. Passengers headed to New York are served an amuse bouche between London and Shannon and a full three-course meal between Shannon and New York. Before landing, guests are treated to afternoon tea, complete with warm scones and jam. On the return, customers can enjoy preflight dining at the lounge in New York and rest during the sleeper service or dine on the aircraft. A warm breakfast is served upon arrival or a takeaway option for those customers on the go.

Prices start at £2,684 (Dh15,104) return.

Q&A

Jonny Clark analyses why some business-class products survive and others fail:

What's the secret to success in this market?

It seems to be in the size of plane used. Small planes, if specially equipped, can travel long distances more cost-effectively, using less fuel, fewer crew and not requiring to fill out the plane with high numbers of premium passengers to make the product work.

Is anyone offering a similar product to BA?

The private jet operator PrivatAir has leased out its 737 business jets to legacy carriers around the world. Operating unique high-yielding routes with extra business class seating and increased flexibility has meant the product has lasted the test of time. Closer to home, Qatar Airways launched a similar product in May this year using one of its A319 aircraft from Doha to London. However, the aircraft was replaced last month with a larger plane to provide increased capacity.

What lounge offerings are available for those on the BA flight to JFK?

For those departing London City, the airline has turned gate 24 into a mini-lounge offering beverages, snacks and free Wi-Fi. The BA Galleries lounge in JFK features an Elemis Spa and preflight dining options. Both airports offer arrivals facilities to freshen up.

What other advantages are there?

There are two flights a day leaving London City for JFK or the reverse route between Monday and Friday, and one flight on Sundays. An advantage of flying from London City is that passengers can arrive and check-in as little as 15 minutes before the flight or 20 minutes for those with luggage.

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