



LUFTHANSA JOINS EU RIVALS IN SPACE-AVAILABLE BUSINESS CLASS UPGRADES

News / Airlines



Lufthansa is the latest European airline aiming to capture an additional bit of ancillary revenue on unsold shorthaul business class seats with a new cash upgrade programme — although, given that the upgrade is applied electronically through the booking management pages of Lufthansa's website, it would actually appear to be a new credit or debit card upgrade programme.

Flyers within Germany can upgrade for €79, while flyers between Germany and other European countries pay €99. (That's the equivalent of US\$89 and \$112 today, respectively, and is around 1.5-2 times the price that British Airways and Air France have been asking recently for their own .) It's a matter of pulling up a booking through the Lufthansa website and checking whether there's an "upgrade" link offered. Of course, Lufthansa will also accept Miles & More award miles for upgrades.

Sorry, Miles & More frequent flyers, you'll be earning miles and status on the basis of your

originally booked fare, but that's a fairly small price to pay for a business seat at an economy price. The original terms and conditions of the tickets will also apply, although Lufthansa does note that "in the event of disruptions to flights, passengers with confirmed and paid-for cash upgrades to Business Class are entitled to the full services and claims for passengers in this travel class."

The business class seats themselves are the same Recaro NEK models that Lufthansa pioneered, and which are one of the most love-'em-or-hate-'em hard products out there. In business class configuration, the middle seat is always left free (marked "Ihre Freiraum" — "your free space") and the pitch is increased from the just-about-acceptable 30" in the back to a reasonably-decent-given-the-seat-thinness 32" in the section of the plane used for business class.

The Lufthansa short- and medium-haul standard is Recaro's NEK seats. The business class food is excellent when Lufthansa tries hard with this entirely delightful mid-afternoon meal on my flight to the UK, but I had an utterly miserable salad on the other. Your mileage, as they say, may vary.

Long a favourite of British Airways passengers and more recently included by Air France, the cash upgrades allow savvy travellers to upgrade an economy fare to a business class seat, with a full meal — including all the services at the airport: business class lounges, priority security lanes, priority boarding, and getting an extra piece of carry-on baggage past the gate agents. Hold luggage, however, is still restricted to whatever your original fare allowed.

The airport services are a key part of the deal, and the lounge access aspect can be particularly good value for passengers with flights later in the day, in order to secure what is essentially a temporary serviced office with wifi, snacks and an open bar.

Of course, the problem for any airline offering this kind of upgrade is ensuring that is available enough to fill seats, but not too frequently or predictably available that canny premium travellers substitute an economy seat plus upgrade for an actual paying business class ticket that they might otherwise purchase. As a taster of the service or a surprise-and-delight perk, it's one thing. If it cannibalises premium revenue — particularly on Eurobusiness flights where prices and service levels seem wildly disparate (in favour of the airlines, of course) — that's another entirely.

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