THE 11 CRAZIEST ELITE AIRLINE PERKS

News / Airlines, Business aviation

Entrance to the cushy lounge, upgrades to business class, priority boarding — those are airline perks for chumps. The real elites — especially those who fly a million miles or more, or generate more revenue for airlines than any other passengers — are collecting perks that the proletariat only dream of.

Here are some of the most mind-boggling perks enjoyed by the high flyers.

1. Go by Private Jet

Delta made news when it announced that select frequent flyers could pay a small fee ($300 to $800) to upgrade from a commercial flight to one of the company's executive jets, which hold a few dozen passengers max. These lucky customers get an email from the airline when the option to upgrade is available.

2. Make Your Connection in a Porsche

Have a tight connection? Members of United's ultra-elite Global Services program can get transferred across the tarmac via Mercedes, and members of Delta's invite-only Delta 360 program can get picked up in a Porsche, right at their plane. These services are only available at certain airports.

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3. Have a Car Waiting for You

Why should the airline only transport you from airport to airport? Emirates provides a chauffeured Range Rover to pick up members of its Invitation Only elite club at home and drop them off at their final destination after the flight.

4. Have a Jumbo Jet Wait for You

British Airways may delay flights up to 30 minutes to accommodate their high-value passengers, according to the website LoungeBuddy.

5. Get Downton-Abbey-Level Personal Attention

Wouldn't it be grand if you arrived at the airport to find Downton Abbeybutler Carson waiting to take your bags, whisk you through security, and settle you in the lounge, where another staffer waits with your favorite cocktail? What if you need someone to run an errand for you?

Members of invite-only programs get this kind of butlering from airline staff all the time. A staff member might meet you curbside with boarding pass in hand and take you right to the front of the TSA line. You might also get to check-in at a separate check-in area from the plebes. According to the Wall Street Journal, running out to the mall to replace a stained shirt is just one way that United Airlines staff have pampered their most elite flyers.

6. Hang Out in a Secret Luxury Lounge

Qantas Chairman's Lounge members aren't just people who fly a lot — they're influencers personally selected by the airline's chairman. Once you're in the club, you can stroll up to frosted glass doors usually marked "PRIVATE" and enjoy an all-day self-serve bar and gourmet food served up at any time. Chairman's Lounge members can also use those ordinary first class Qantas lounges anytime they want, event if they're not flying that day.

7. Get Guaranteed Seating — Event When the Flight Is Sold Out

This perk is more at the rumor level, but they say that if you are a super-elite flyer and your flight is canceled or delayed, the airline will boot a less-valued passenger off a fully-booked flight to make room for you. More widely confirmed is the fact that airlines have dedicated staff tracking elites' itineraries, and will automatically rebook them as soon as a delay or cancellation occurs.

8. Take a Shower

In normal life, most of us don't consider showering a privilege. But at 40,000 feet? Only people willing to pay thousands of dollars per flight or elites who snag upgrades get to suds up. On Emirates A380s, the first class Shower Spa is decked in walnut and marble, has heated floors, and, according to the blog One Mile at a Time, is stocked with "enough amenities to start a toiletry resale business." But for obvious reasons, even an elite flyer can't take a long shower in the air — first class passengers are limited to five minutes of water.

After you've showered and shaved — using the complimentary Bulgari shower kit — you'll be ready to rub shoulders with other elites over a cocktail at the bar of the Emirates first and business class lounge.

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9. Stretch Out

Airlines' luxury first class suites like the ones on Singapore Airlines, where your seat converts to a bed and you have total privacy, have gotten a lot of "ooh"s and "ah"s online. One Mile at a Time explains that you don't have to spend $23,000 to fly in one of these suites; they're actually pretty attainable for frequent flyers with points to spend.

10. Take Home a Luxury Amenity Bag

When my brother was in high school, he and his best friend were almost bumped off an American Airlines flight while on their way to visit me in Paris. Somehow my mother persuaded the airline to bump them to business class instead, and the boys were delighted not just by being served wine onboard, but by the little vinyl pouches containing toothpaste, toothbrushes, and combs.

As nice as those pouches were, they're nothing compared to the Bulgari pouches and leather dopp kits that Emirates gives business class travelers, stuffed with Bulgari-designed lotion and even a pair of PJs. First class female passengers also receive Bulgari perfume in their kits. While these bags aren't reserved for elite frequent flyers, such flyers are a lot more likely to end up in the cabins that get them, because of their upgrade privileges.

11. Drink $1,000 Worth of Champagne

Frequent flyer "macabus" on the FlyerTalk community describes consuming eight bottles of Dom Perignon on a first class journey from Los Angeles to Bangkok, which he estimated was worth more than a grand. You don't have to be an elite flyer to down a lot of champagne in first class, but since the flight attendants know who the elites are, they're more likely to keep your glass full without you having to so much as look up. One Mile at a Time blogger Ben Schlappig even found a bottle of Dom on ice waiting for him in the shower on one flight.

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