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Flying on the Finnair A350 – Airlines as Experience Curators

February 7, 2016 / By Matt Long



A few weeks ago I traveled to Finland to attend a conference and to visit some more rural parts of the country. It was my first time traveling to Finland and I was excited not just for the new cities and natural landscapes, but also for the opportunity to fly Finnair for the first time. As a conference sponsor, they coordinated my flights from the US to Finland but when we started planning no one knew just how lucky I would be. As fate would have it, Finnair decided to show off their brand new plane for a couple of weeks on the route I flew which means that quite by accident, I was one of the first people to fly on the [Finnair A350](#) from New York City to Helsinki. The world of aviation aficionados is complicated, and I know that I'm not as knowledgeable as the top aviation geeks out there. But I do know that I have a fierce love of commercial aviation, not just as a means of conveyance, but as a way to help define an entire trip. Just as the hotel you choose for a vacation matters, so does – at least I believe – the airline. From the class of service you decide to fly, to the onboard amenities and ultimately the comfort of the plane itself, these are crucial factors in making sure that any great adventure starts out on the right foot. Since the A350 is a brand new plane I thought I'd devote some time to sharing what it is, what makes it special and what Finnair has done to customize this new experience for their passengers.



The A350 and Why You Should Care About It

The Airbus A350 XWB (extra wide body) is a new family of long-range jets with new designs for both aerodynamics and engines. It's the first Airbus where both the fuselage and wings are made up mostly of carbon fiber, meaning that it's more lightweight and fuel-efficient – words every airline loves to hear. It does more than just save money of course, that fuel efficiency means that the aircraft is also more environmentally friendly than other planes and the in-cabin comfort is improved as well. The Finnair A350 is quieter than current-generation planes, up to 20%, and a new air conditioning technology means that there is draft-free air management, adjustable temperature zones and lower cabin altitude which all translate into a more comfortable flying experience. At least that's the promise.



The Finnair A350

Airlines work hand in hand with plane manufacturers to develop unique products that are not only to the airline's technical specifications, but which also match the heart and soul of the company. I especially love to see how national carriers, like Finnair, bring elements of their country and culture inside the cabin itself. For many people, flying on a plane like the Finnair A350 is our first introduction to Finnish culture, and it's important that the right tone be set.

A few of the more notable (I think) Finnair customizations include:

- When passengers board the plane, they are greeted by the sight of clouds drifting across a blue sky throughout the cabin.
- The cabin has a fresh Nordic style that is light and spacious. The dynamic ambient mood LED lighting gradually changes to suit the time of day to ease customers into a relaxing flight experience. The lighting can actually create 24 different scenarios, including the Northern Lights. The plane also features large panoramic view windows to allow more natural light into the cabin.
- Because it's an extra wide body, the A350 has more space and wider seats for greater passenger comfort. The Finnair A350 XWB has 297 seats, 46 in Business class, 43 in Economy Comfort and 208 in Economy class. Business class seats convert to fully flat beds. Business class seats are arranged in a 1-2-1 configuration, ensuring direct aisle access. Economy Class passengers sit on slim-line seats that have a 31-32 inch seat pitch, and Economy Comfort seats, located at the front of Economy Class, come with four extra inches of legroom. Seats in Economy class are arranged in a 3-3-3 configuration.
- [Business class](#) passengers, Finnair Plus Gold and Platinum members and oneworld Sapphire and Emerald members enjoy full internet access free of charge, while Economy class passengers can purchase it either by the hour or for the duration of the flight.
- The Finnair A350 even has a signature menu, bringing some of the tastes of Nordic cuisine to its passengers. Business class passengers enjoy meals featuring delicacies like smoked arctic char and wild reindeer and economy class has new and improved meals, including an aperitif service with savory snacks added to the first meal.
- Marimekko designed tableware and textiles throughout the cabin.



What The Experience Was Like

I will write a separate review of the actual flying experience with Finnair, but I did want to add a few notes here about the overall look and feel of the brand new Finnair A350 and of course the comfort during flight. I've been fortunate enough to fly on brand new planes before, and the feeling never gets old. Everything is bright, shiny and new – the colors vibrant and even the crew seems happier than normal. When an airline introduces something brand new like the Finnair A350, there's a lot of pride amongst the employees and this thankfully comes shining through to the passengers. That light and airy feeling is the first thing I noticed though, the ambient light and the Nordic design all coalesced into an environment that was warm and inviting. Almost immediately I was excited for the flight experience ahead of me instead of dreading the long hours in the air. True to expectations, the combination of the larger cabins, the lights and the air all contributed to a relaxing inflight experience where, in a rarity for me, I actually managed to get several hours of sleep. I'll never arrive anywhere feeling completely refreshed, but at least being able to relax and get some sleep gives me a head start on my explorations. Sadly for me this is sometimes all too rare, but being able to sleep during the Finnair flight made a tremendous difference in my overall trip experience.

Most of us all begin an epic adventure by boarding a plane. Where that plane takes us is important, sure, but the process in getting there is just as vital. The [Finnair A350](#) is one of the most advanced commercial planes in the world and this technology does a lot for the company, but it also does a lot for the passenger. It means that we can actually enjoy the flying experience and for once not dread that long flight but embrace it as a fun part of the overall travel experience.