

TRENDING

# Finnair's Airbus A350 on its first ever European flight

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- Finnair's Airbus A350 raises the bar on luxurious perks in business class
- In-flight entertainment screens are 16in in business and 11in in economy
- Eco-smart design brings more than 25% improvement in fuel efficiency

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At a gentle cruising altitude of 40,000 feet, an email pings into my inbox from the office. I switch off my Spotify and put my headphones to good use Skyping my colleagues to get to the bottom of what's happening back on solid ground.

Fortunately, it's nothing serious - and my call instead serves as a perfect excuse to give them a quick panoramic view inside the cabin of the brand new Airbus A380 on its first ever European flight.

Such is the incredible, high-speed connectivity of the A350, even high above the clouds across the Baltic Sea, I'm as contactable as if I were at home in London.



Inside the Business Class cabin, where atmospheric lighting mimics the time of day to help passengers adjust

Above my head, two huge lighting strips on the ceiling pulse and flash in a recreation of the Northern Lights, before switching to a warm, orange glow - part of a system that utilises atmospheric lighting to mimic the time of day, the weather and even the plane's final destination to help passengers adjust during long-haul flights.

Business Class travel has evolved enormously in the past decade, with planes including the Dreamliner introducing new, luxurious technology and layouts to improve passenger experience beyond belief, but from the second I set foot aboard the Airbus A350, it's clear the bar has been raised yet again.

Entering the cabin, my eyes are immediately drawn upwards - not to the lights, but to just how far away the ceiling is. Even at just over 6ft tall, I can raise my arms above my head with room to spare.



The 1-2-1 configuration in its Business Class section, meaning everybody has easy access to the aisle



A zig-zagged position gives Business Class passengers an unprecedented amount of privacy

Aside from making me look like I'm indulging in some form of bizarre yoga routine, it's a feat of design that makes the whole cabin feel so spacious, it'd be easy to forget you're on board an aircraft.

Along either side of the plane, a row of huge windows allow swathes of light to bathe the cabin, projecting blue skies and clouds onto the walls and eradicating the unnatural lighting that causes us to feel drowsy and out-of-sorts on long journeys.

Bigger windows sounds so simple, doesn't it? And perhaps that's the beauty of this new plane - Finnair's A350 isn't about super-luxury, gaudy displays of wealth or extortionately priced on-board 'apartments,' but a carefully designed cabin that makes subtle changes to the flying experience that make a real difference to regular customers.



The screens in are 16 inches in Business Class and have been brought up to date with a swipe screen

As Juha Järvinen, CCO of Finnair, explains when we meet in Helsinki's newly renovated airport: 'We worked for a long time with Finnish design firm dSign Vertti Kivi & Co - who also created the lounges for this airport. We wanted to ensure that this plane retained our Finnish character as well as being the finest plane in the skies.'

'For us, that wasn't about headline-grabbing displays of wealth, because that's not what our customers want. We don't even have First Class any more, just Economy and Business Class, because we believe that everything you'd need is in Business Class. We don't need to go further than that.'

And he believes that these new planes display a uniquely Nordic quality of offering value for money while being completely designed around the customer's needs.

'Look at other Nordic brands like Volvo and IKEA,' he says. 'They're world famous for being practical, well-built and design-focused, while also offering brilliant value for money. That's what we've incorporated into our A350.'



Practical, well-built and design-focused': Juha Järvinen, CCO of Finnair, is proud of the new aircraft

Many of the features on board are what you'd expect from a long-haul flight rather than the sort of advancements you'd write home about, but they've built subtle tweaks and updates that make the experience that little bit more luxurious.

The screens are a whopping 16 inches in Business Class (a still very respectable 11 inches in Economy), but they've been brought up to date with a unique swipe screen that makes them feel like a tablet or smartphone.

And a high-resolution screen means viewing Hollywood blockbusters - or the two crystal clear cameras attached to the plane's fuselage and tailwing - is like watching a regular television.

'We came to the realisation that business travellers today are millennials,' says Juha. 'They're tech-savvy and they expect to be connected, they use swipe screens every day, they have great screens on their smartphones, so why not on an aeroplane? We designed the A350 with them in mind.'

Finnair opted for a 1-2-1 configuration in its Business Class section, meaning everybody has easy access to the aisle and those on the outside have a beautifully positioned chair facing a huge window - perfect for gazing out over the clouds or watching your destination rise below as you come in to land. And their zig-zagged position is such that I feel a level of privacy you wouldn't expect with a fellow passenger sitting just a few feet away.



For those in Economy, a 3-3-3 seating plan puts an end to having to climb across two strangers to get out

For those in Economy, a 3-3-3 seating plan puts an end to having to climb across two strangers to answer a call of nature or stretch your legs - a further example of Finnair's customer-first approach.

But perhaps the biggest advantage of the A350 is its eco-credentials - not something you'd normally associate with huge airliners. But the minute the Rolls-Royce engines kick into action it becomes clear that this plane is incredibly quiet. So much so, that it's a little disconcerting.

As we start to pick up speed along the runway, the A350 kicks out nothing more than a high pitched whine, which leaves me wondering whether there's enough power for us to leave the ground. This is a moped instead of a Harley-Davidson, and it takes some getting used to.

Those engines ensure that the noise pollution isn't just reduced inside the cabin, but outside too, which will be a great comfort to those living beneath busy flight paths.

And once we're airborne, the gentle hum - comparable to a household fan - instantly becomes a soothing backdrop and makes it easier to recline in my full-length, flat bed to enjoy the flight as a constantly changing, filtered air supply sweeps through the cabin.



The Rolls-Royce engines improve the aircraft's eco-credentials; and they're almost disconcertingly quiet

As we begin our descent into London Heathrow, I can't help but wish our flight was a little longer than a two-and-a-half hour hop from Helsinki, which is testament to the incredible design of Finnair's A350.

It's comfortable, hi-tech and designed around providing an incredible customer experience. A perfectly efficient Nordic product.

'We're the Volvo of the skies,' says Juha, before pausing and adding with a smile: 'Actually, I'd like to think we're a bit more exciting than that!'

It really is. Treat yourself for your next long-haul flight - you'll thank me for it.