

Airlines are starting to offer a luxury perk to the masses

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A growing number of international airlines are offering free stopovers so that customers can visit two cities without paying for the extra airfare.

Carriers including Wow Air, Icelandic Air, Finnair, Emirates, and Etihad, all offer lengthy stopovers as a free perk. And in May, Qatar Airways also announced that it is offering complimentary stopovers in Doha through the end of September as part of a summer promotion.

Travelers flying with Qatar can opt to stay in the country's capital for anywhere from five to 96 hours using the same ticket. And the airline is even offering a free transit visa and a free night in select hotels to entice customers to opt to spend time in Doha.

So why are airlines pushing lengthy stopovers as a perk?

Well, there are a few reasons.

For starters, some airlines see it as a way to give themselves an edge over the competition.



Airbus

One Quick Question

Which of the following online luxury fashion retailers have you heard of?

- Net-a-Porter/Mr Porter
- Matches Fashion
- Farfetch
- Shopbop
- MyTheresa
- None of the above

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"Depending on the carrier and the itinerary, the airline may have rather lengthy layovers between flights. So in some cases, the airline is saying let's turn this negative into a positive to compete against airlines that may have better connections, we will offer travelers the ability to stay overnight," Henry Harteveltdt, president and travel industry analyst for the Atmosphere Research Group, told Business Insider.

"This lets passengers rest up, they can have some fun, do a little sightseeing or shopping, whatever they choose to do and then go on their way," he said.

But another reason some airlines are pushing stopover programs is because it can promote tourism in certain areas and potentially boost economic activity.

"In some cases, the local government tourism boards are subsidizing the stopovers. The governments know that if a consumer stays overnight they will spend money at restaurants, shops, and other venues so it boosts the local economy, depending on where you are traveling from," Harteveltdt said.

For example, Qatar Airways partnered with Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) to offer its stopover promotion in Doha.

Regardless of the airlines' motivating factors, a stopover can be great for customers. It lets you squeeze in some extra site-seeing or just get some rest before the last leg of your journey, Harteveltdt said. However, it's best to do some research before booking your flight because each airline has its own policies about how it handles these extended layovers, Harteveltdt said.

"These can be terrific deals and a great value, but be sure you understand all of the terms and conditions and make sure that the free stopover is right for you. These fares may come with added restrictions that affect your ability to stand by or change flights in or out of the hub or the layover airport. So just make sure you do your research first," Harteveltdt said.

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