

Transport, Airports

What It Takes to Build the Perfect Premium Airport Lounge

Colin Nagy, Skift · Sep 05, 2017 11:00 am

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Here are the brands that are innovating and getting the lounge experience right.
— *Colin Nagy*

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As friction is being removed from the check-in process and security with programs in the United States including [Clear](#) and Pre-Check (as well as their local counterparts), travelers are increasingly spending less time at airports before they fly.

But the role of the lounge is still important as a brand differentiator and as a way to coddle premium passengers who are vitally important to revenue. But not all lounges and experiences are created equal, particularly with cost-cuts across the sector. Here's who is doing it well across several areas:

DESIGN

Hands down, Ilse Crawford's re-design of the Cathay Pacific lounges takes the cake from a design standpoint. Her [Pier First lounge](#) at the airline's hub is equally restrained and luxurious. It feels discrete since there's low traffic, and serves as a perfect statement of intent for the airline's ambitions.

LOCAL NUANCE

Lufthansa and Finnair do a great job representing elements of the country's cuisine in their lounges. Even in [New York](#), you can get a nice Bavarian Pretzel and a great German beer, and Finnair's Premium Lounge in Helsinki has local cuisine and even a sauna for connecting passengers, true to the Finns' penchant to detox and chat at the same time.

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FOOD AND BEVERAGE

For those that want to avoid eating at 30,000 feet, here's the best of the best:

ANA First: ANA's new first lounge at [Haneda airport](#) has Teppanyaki black beef burgers cooked to order by the chefs, and a killer sake selection.

Qantas First: One of the best loved lounges in the world (and designed by Marc Newson), the [Qantas F lounge](#) has incredible coffee and a sit-down restaurant inspired by the freshest produce and pitch perfect standbys like a club sandwich.

Amex Centurion: Stateside, the [American Express Centurion lounges](#) get a gold star for having inspired menus for breakfast lunch and dinner. It is nothing too decadent, but rather a nice step up from what most domestic lounges serve.

WELLNESS

[Thai First Class Bangkok](#) and [Etihad's First Class lounge in Abu Dhabi](#) take the cake for wellness. Thai offers a hour complimentary massage, and Etihad has a fully functioning gym, with treadmills, and ellipticals. A wonderful concept that would be more implemented across other carriers.

UNWINDING SPACE

[Turkish Airlines](#) offers both a billiard table and a plush cinema room for its premium travelers in Istanbul, and for those feeling bold (or sufficiently inebriated) a piano in the public space that my brother once tapped out a few bars from "Great Balls of Fire."

PRIVACY AND DISCRETION

Lufthansa lounges in Frankfurt and Emirates First in Dubai allow for direct boarding of the plane, directly from the lounge. It saves time and offers privacy for top tier passengers seeking discretion.

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ASSORTED SURPRISES

The well-designed (though often crowded) [Delta Skyclub at JFK](#) has an open air deck that is pleasant to pass some time watching the tarmac with a glass of wine and a snack. Lufthansa's First lounge in Frankfurt has a cigar lounge, and for those desiring air of the fresher variety, Swiss's newly opened First Class lounge has a beautiful outdoor terrace. And lest we only focus on airline lounges, the newly re-designed [Eurostar lounge at Gare du Nord](#) in Paris was beautifully designed by UK-based architects Softroom and has rotating artwork and knockout cocktails.

Tags: airport lounges, american express, etihad, finnair, lufthansa, new luxury, qantas