



ALL-AMERICAN: American Airlines' (above) with truffle corn salsa
PHOTO © AMERICAN AIRLINES

Classy Cuisine

Airlines take premium-cabin dining to new heights. BY ALLISON VOIGTS

As constant technological innovations make flying more comfortable, the congealed-looking meals and plastic trays introduced by in-flight dining have thankfully become a thing of the past. Some airlines hire celebrity chefs to help revamp their first- and business-class menus; others consult with world-renowned wine experts or offer an onboard coffee house. One even features a bespoke menu cooked to order by a personal chef. We've compiled a sampler of current offerings in premium-class cabins.

BOARDING A FLIGHT as far north as Toronto or Calgary, it can take more than a cup of coffee to warm up — which is why Air Canada spirits away its first-class passengers with a signature cocktail made from Canada's award-winning Iceberg Vodka. Triple-distilled in Newfoundland from pure iceberg water, the ultra-premium liquor is featured in monthly cocktails like the Northern

Lights, made with cranberry juice and Grand Marnier.

In addition to exotic cocktails, the airline prides itself on an extensive selection of Champagne, Old and New World wines (including Canadian reds and whites) and late-bottled vintage Port. And at mealtime, passengers may choose from three menus featuring signature Canadian dishes like roasted black cod with maple glaze, Asian-inspired dishes such as braised beef medallions with hoisin sauce and vegetarian dishes including baked red pepper stuffed with mushroom and pumpkin.

IN 2011, THE READERS of *Global Traveler* voted Alitalia's food the "Best Airline Cuisine" in the world, and for good reason. The Rome-based airline has masterfully married regional Italian ingredients with its in-flight menu. Each season, the dining service in Alitalia's Magnifica business class focuses on two unique regions in Italy, sourcing the ingredients, inspiration and wines from those areas.

Recent menus designed in collaboration with ALMA — the International School of Italian Cuisine — highlighted Basilicata, known for its sausages, and Sardinia, famous for its artichokes and twice-baked bread. A typical meal might include homemade pasta dumplings filled with spinach and Trentino's famous cured ham, turbot fillets in sweet-and-sour sauce and Northern Italian apple strudel. With the May–July menus highlighting Campania and Emilia Romagna, the airline will have featured each Italian region, but passengers can enjoy the project's most well-received dishes in an upcoming "Best of" compilation menu.

AMONG THE MYRIAD challenges presented by in-flight dining is creating a menu that will appeal to the diverse tastes of a global customer base — a challenge American Airlines overcame with the help of Chef Richard Sandoval, whose 20-plus restaurants worldwide charmed audiences with authentic Latin American flavors. "With so many customers flying to destinations all over the world, it's important for me to design cuisine that embodies the flavors of the regions which American serves," he says.

Passengers flying in American's first- and business-class cabins between Europe, Asia and Latin America can choose

from entrées such as halibut with truffle corn salsa, which Sandoval says "has an amazing flavor profile, and the salsa accompanies the subtleness of the halibut to really bring out those flavors." The former *Bon Appétit* "Restaurateur of the Year" will continue to collaborate with the airline to introduce more new dishes to the menu this spring, including a chipotle miso cod with lemon red chili pepper aioli.

WHEN IT COMES TO serving restaurant-quality food at 30,000 feet, who better to transform an airline's service than a world-class catering company? From the menus and beverages to the cabin crew training, Austrian caterer DO & CO has earned Austrian Airlines AirTrax's "Best Business-Class Catering" award for two years running. (The fare on another DO & CO-catered airline, Turkish Airlines, was recently voted "Best Airline Food" in a Skyscanner survey.)

In addition to offering carefully crafted dishes — like stuffed eggplant and walnut pear tart — worthy of its finest New York or Milan restaurants, DO & CO trains an onboard chef to put the finishing touches on each business-class meal. And for that crucial caffeine kick at the end of a long-haul flight, the airline has teamed with Austria's Meinel roasters to offer a "Vienna Coffee House" menu of 11 different espresso drinks.

PAIRED PERFECTION:
Austrian Airlines' food and wine
PHOTOS © AUSTRIAN AIRLINES





Finnair combines Nordic ingredients like fresh herring, forest berries and wild mushrooms with Mediterranean favorites such as pastas, cheeses and olives.



TRIPLE TREAT: Finnair's three meal styles (top to bottom): Wellness and Energy; Chef's Gourmet and Food Lover's Treat
PHOTOS © FINNAIR

WITH THE 2012 OLYMPICS only a few short months away, preparations in London are in full swing. But for some of the city's estimated half a million visitors, the celebration will start before they even touch the ground. British Airways teamed up with Simon Hulstone, head chef of the Michelin-starred Elephant Restaurant, and award-winning chef Heston Blumenthal to create an onboard menu inspired by the 2012 Olympics. The menu, launched in late March, is featured on British Airways' long-haul flights in all cabins.

In first class, the airline continues to offer its sumptuous afternoon tea. Modeled after high tea at The Dorchester in London, it features finger sandwiches, cakes and scones along with fine teas from all over the world. And on flights departing the U.K., first-class passengers can enjoy another British staple: fresh seafood, supplied by Scotland's renowned Loch Fyne company. The "Catch of the Day" is both fished and farmed sustainably and includes salmon, oysters, mussels and halibut.

WHAT DOES \$15,000 BUY on a flight between New York and Abu Dhabi? Among other perks, a personal chef — at least if you're flying Etihad Airways. The U.A.E. airline recently recruited 100 leading chefs from 5-star hotels and top restaurants around the world to serve its Diamond First Class cabins.

At the helm is award-winning chef Thomas Ulbert, who won three gold medals at the IKA Culinary Olympics. With the help of the onboard personal chef, passengers can select premium produce, meats, sauces and sides from a bespoke "Mezoon Grille" menu. Or they can explore a flexible à la carte menu of adaptable appetizers, mains and desserts. The "Taste of Arabia" menu features six courses of Middle Eastern delicacies. The tailor-made dining service launched last fall and is available on all flights offering Diamond First Class.

IF THERE'S EVER A TIME to try reindeer tenderloin, it's in the air above Helsinki (just don't tell the kids). Making use of unique regional flavors, Finnair combines Nordic ingredients like fresh herring, forest berries and wild mushrooms with Mediterranean favorites such as pastas, cheeses and olives. The airline offers business-class diners a choice of three distinct meal styles: "Wellness and Energy," featuring healthy vegetarian dishes; "Chef's Gourmet," offering gourmet meats like roasted lamb or steak; and "Food Lover's Treat," consisting of home-style comfort foods like bratwurst and hearty stew.

Among the world-class wines to have been featured on Finnair flights — which helped the airline top *Decanter* magazine's airline wine list — are Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc 2009 and Château La Pointe 1999. And on the award-winning sparkling wine list, the Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale Brut Vintage 2003 makes a perfect choice before take-off or while polishing off a berry timbale.



UNCOMMONLY GOOD:
Scandinavian Airlines' service

PHOTO: © SCANDINAVIAN AIR LINES

From the Georg Jensen cutlery to the porcelain plates and bowls by Royal Copenhagen, each piece makes a perfect vehicle for Scandinavian-inspired fare such as marinated salmon, beef tournedos and regional cheeses.

ON BOARD JAPAN AIRLINES, food lovers are in luck: The Japanese menu truly is a feast fit for an emperor. Designed by Hiroshi Takami, the fifth-generation head chef at Kyoto's Kyoryori Watakame restaurant, the menu focuses on healthy, seasonal ingredients from Japan's farms and fisheries. Dinner in the airline's first- and business-class cabins begins with thoughtful appetizers like duck breast sushi rolls with Welsh onion — ideally consumed with a premium Isojima sake — followed by steamed rice, tofu, salmon and sole.

Less adventurous diners will be no less satisfied with Chef Seiji Yamamoto's (of Tokyo's Michelin-starred RyuGin Restaurant) Western menu. The first-class service starts with amuse-bouches and hors d'oeuvres such as seared duck with caponata and orange, followed by mouthwatering mains like Welsh lamb with honey and Madeira sauce. And as a special treat, French chocolatier Jean-Paul Hévin this year released the "Arriba" chocolate — a blend of grand cru cacao beans with a hint of vanilla — served exclusively after meals on JAL flights.

IN AN EFFORT to offer a diversified menu for premium passengers, Asiana Airlines seeks consultations from Korea's leading restaurants and food experts. Those sources include the minds behind La Cucina, South Korea's No. 1 Italian restaurant; Chef Edward Kwon, a Korean celebrity chef behind the movement to globalize Korean food; and those at the Institute of Korean Royal Cuisine, who help maintain the tradition of Korean food on flights.

Equally important to the airline is the quality of its onboard coffees and teas. The Asiana Tea Garden serves only environmentally friendly coffees and teas. The service was created in partnership with Rainforest Alliance, a company dedicated to sourcing coffees and teas from farms free of chemicals and insecticides.

IF ANYONE UNDERSTANDS the importance of good design, it's the Scandinavians — which is why Scandinavian Airlines spares no expense in serving its business-class pas-



CHEF'S SPECIALITIES:
South African Airways' cuisine

PHOTO © SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

'I wanted to do dishes that are slightly uncommon. ... Fish and shellfish conjure happy memories for me, so I am partial to those dishes on the SAA menu.'

— CHEF REUBEN RIFFEL

sengers on the very finest Swedish, Danish and Norwegian dinnerware. From the Georg Jensen cutlery to the porcelain plates and bowls by Royal Copenhagen, each piece makes a perfect vehicle for Scandinavian-inspired fare such as marinated salmon, beef tournedos and regional cheeses.

Oenophiles will delight in sipping both Old World wines and challengers from wine experts Oz Clarke and Richard Juhlin's wine list, particularly since every appellation is served in Sweden's legendary Orrefors crystal. Recent selections include Domaine William Fevre Chablis 2006 and Fabre Moutmayou Malbec 2005. Other thoughtful onboard touches include espresso, sandwiches and fruit, available from the buffet bar between meals; and an alternative "Grab & Go" breakfast for long-haul passengers wanting to savor a little more shuteye before landing.

ONE OF SEVERAL airlines focusing on fresh, regional ingredients, South African Airways teamed up with celebrity

chef Reuben Riffel to offer flavorful South African favorites on its business-class menu. Riffel earned his reputation as South Africa's favorite chef in his early 20s at Monneaux Restaurant, followed by Bruno's Brasserie in England and Reuben's Restaurant in his native Franschoek.

The former Unilever "Chef of the Year" says of his inspiration, "I wanted to do dishes that are slightly uncommon. ... Fish and shellfish conjure happy memories for me, so I am partial to those dishes on the SAA menu. I'll never forget Ma's *soutsoek* [salt pike] hanging behind the kitchen door — partly because of its pungent smell, but mostly because we'd snap a piece off after school and have it on hot baked bread with mounds of apricot jam or *moskonfyt* [wine jam]."

Passengers departing South Africa can enjoy Riffel's signature dishes, like pickled kingklip with fennel crème and dhal or lamb rilette and sous-vide lamb loin, with a selection of fine South African cheeses and wines.

