

**ZAGAT**SURVEY®

**2005**

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**INTERNATIONAL  
AIRLINES**

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The reviews published in this guide are based on public opinion surveys, with numerical ratings reflecting the average scores given by all survey participants who voted on each carrier and text based on direct quotes from, or fair paraphrasings of, participants' comments. Phone numbers, Web sites and other factual information were correct to the best of our knowledge when published in this guide; any subsequent changes may not be reflected.

## About This Survey

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Here are the results of our latest *Airline Survey*, covering 55 carriers that fly internationally (a separate report contains the results for 22 U.S. domestic carriers). As a whole, this *Airline Survey* is based on voting by 5,277 people like you – i.e. members of the flying public. Since participants reported taking an average of 4.8 international flights per year, this *Survey* reflects the experiences of passengers aboard a total of some 25,000 international flights per year – or viewed another way, about 70 flights per day.

Of the 5,000-plus fliers who participated in this *Survey*, 64% are men, 36% women; the breakdown by age is 10% in their 20s; 28% in their 30s; 22% in their 40s; 23% in their 50s; and 17% in their 60s or older. They reported that 55% of their trips are for leisure, 45% for business. Our editors have done their best to summarize these surveyors' opinions, with their comments shown in quotation marks. Knowing that the quality of this *Survey* is the direct result of the thoughtful voting and commentary of these participants, we sincerely thank each of them.

On the assumption that most people are eager for quick information about the carriers they are considering flying with, we have tried to keep reviews as concise as possible, and we've created a number of "best" lists at the front of this guide. Note that while we include tops lists for both premium and economy classes of service, the scores displayed with each carrier's review are for economy class, since that's where most people fly; obviously, scores were generally higher for premium class.

This marks the 27th year that Zagat Survey has reported on the shared experiences of consumers like you, covering subjects including restaurants, entertaining, golf, hotels, resorts, spas, movies, music, nightlife, shopping, theater, tourist attractions – and airlines. By regularly surveying large numbers of avid, educated customers, we hope to have achieved uniquely current and reliable guides. We hope you agree.

**To vote in any of our upcoming *Surveys*, just register at [zagat.com](http://zagat.com).** Each participant will receive a free copy of the resulting guide when published. Your comments and even criticisms of this guide are also solicited. There is always room for improvement with your help. Just contact us at [airlines@zagat.com](mailto:airlines@zagat.com).

New York, NY  
November 7, 2005

  
Nina and Tim Zagat

## Ratings & Symbols

### Name, Toll-Free Phone Number & Web Site

<b>Zagair</b> 800-977-9000; www.zagat.com	<b>Zagat Ratings</b>			
	<b>C</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>
	12	10	4	10

A "fly-by-night operation literally as well as figuratively", this "cheapie" charter might suffice "if Greyhound is all booked up", but given planes "older than Moses", seats "salvaged from sunken subway cars" (complete with "subway straps" to accommodate "standing-room-only crowds" caused by "chronic overbooking") and "stale pretzels" flung by "Jurassic"-era flight attendants, critics conclude "I'd rather take a mule"; P.S. "time to upgrade that Web site."

### Review, with surveyors' comments in quotes

**Top Airlines:** Airlines with the highest overall ratings, popularity and importance are listed in BLOCK CAPITAL LETTERS.

**Ratings:** Are on a scale of 0 to 30.

<b>C</b> Comfort	<b>S</b> Service	<b>F</b> Food	<b>W</b> Web Site
12	10	4	10

- 0-9 poor to fair
- 10-15 fair to good
- 16-19 good to very good
- 20-25 very good to excellent
- 26-30 extraordinary to perfection

Ratings shown with reviews are for coach class only.

▽ low response/less reliable

# Top Ratings

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## Top Overall

### Premium

- 27 Singapore Airlines
- 26 Cathay Pacific
- 25 Virgin Atlantic
- 24 Emirates
- 23 ANA (All Nippon)  
British Airways  
LAN Airlines  
Malaysia Airlines
- 22 Continental Airlines  
Japan Airlines (JAL)

### Economy

- 24 Singapore Airlines
- 21 Emirates
- 20 Cathay Pacific
- 19 ANA (All Nippon)  
Thai Airways  
Malaysia Airlines
- 18 Japan Airlines (JAL)  
Virgin Atlantic  
Air New Zealand  
Austrian Airlines

## Top Comfort

### Premium

- 28 Singapore Airlines
- 26 Virgin Atlantic  
Cathay Pacific  
British Airways
- 23 South African Airways  
LAN Airlines  
Continental Airlines  
Emirates  
ANA (All Nippon)  
Qantas Airways

### Economy

- 22 Singapore Airlines
- 19 Emirates
- 18 Austrian Airlines  
Cathay Pacific  
ANA (All Nippon)  
Malaysia Airlines  
Air New Zealand
- 17 Thai Airways  
Virgin Atlantic
- 16 SAS (Scandinavian)

## Top Service

### Premium

- 29 Singapore Airlines
- 27 Cathay Pacific
- 26 Emirates
- 25 Virgin Atlantic  
ANA (All Nippon)  
Thai Airways
- 24 Malaysia Airlines  
Japan Airlines (JAL)  
Air New Zealand
- 23 LAN Airlines

### Economy

- 26 Singapore Airlines
- 23 Cathay Pacific  
Emirates  
ANA (All Nippon)
- 22 Thai Airways  
Japan Airlines (JAL)
- 21 Malaysia Airlines
- 20 Virgin Atlantic  
Air New Zealand  
LAN Airlines

## Top Food

### Premium

- 27** Singapore Airlines
- 24** Cathay Pacific
- 23** Emirates
- 22** ANA (All Nippon)  
Virgin Atlantic  
Air New Zealand  
Malaysia Airlines
- 21** LAN Airlines  
Air France  
Swiss Int'l Air Lines

### Economy

- 23** Singapore Airlines
- 20** Emirates  
Cathay Pacific
- 18** Malaysia Airlines  
Thai Airways  
ANA (All Nippon)  
Japan Airlines (JAL)
- 17** Virgin Atlantic  
LAN Airlines  
Air France

## Top Web Site

- 21** Continental Airlines  
American Airlines
- 20** Virgin Atlantic
- 19** Qantas Airways  
Singapore Airlines  
Emirates
- 18** Cathay Pacific  
British Airways  
Northwest Airlines  
Alaska Airlines

# **International Airlines**

**Aer Lingus**

14 | 17 | 11 | 16

800-223-6537; [www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com)

"Cheers to the flyin' Irish" say fans of this oneworld member that recently repositioned itself as a "low-fares" carrier; "courteous" crews and touches like "Waterford crystal" in business class are pluses, but critics sigh "'tis sad" that "cost-cutting" has taken its toll, citing sometimes "regrettable" food, "unreal" check-in lines and seating that can feel "like being holed up in a Guinness can."

**Aeroflot Russian Airlines**

10 | 9 | 7 | 7

888-340-6400; [www.aeroflot.ru/eng](http://www.aeroflot.ru/eng)

It's "not the airline of the Soviet days" (thank heavens), but while this state-controlled carrier "keeps getting better" – "the smiling lessons are showing" and there are "new planes" and "vodka and caviar" in first class – it's still "hit-and-miss", with some flights reminiscent of a "WWII bombing mission"; though it's one of the few airlines to have improved its ratings, it still trails the pack.

**Aerolineas Argentinas**

11 | 15 | 13 | 10

800-333-0276; [www.aerolineas.com.ar](http://www.aerolineas.com.ar)

"Service makes all the difference" aboard this Argentinean carrier whose crews usually "treat you well" – and even if they don't, they look good in those "cute blue uniforms" – thereby compensating for coach seats that "aren't that comfy"; despite a "convenient schedule" within South America plus flights to NYC, Miami and other locales, this airline doesn't elevate its country's reputation.

**Aeromexico**

14 | 16 | 12 | 14

800-237-6639; [www.aeromexico.com](http://www.aeromexico.com)

A "relatively reliable" option for sojourns south of the border, this Mexican member of SkyTeam boasts a "wide variety of schedules" to "many destinations" (including LA, Miami and NYC), a "radically improved Web site" and "refreshing" service and meals; "friendly" attendants help "take your mind off" "cattle-car" conditions, but the underwhelmed still find it "*nada especial*."

**Air Canada**

14 | 15 | 10 | 18

888-247-2262; [www.aircanada.ca](http://www.aircanada.ca)

Given its near-"monopoly" status, it's no wonder "Canadians love to hate", or at least debate, their quasi "official carrier"; while loyalists see this Star Alliance member as a "solid performer" with "polite", "competent" service, "human-scale seats" and "better-than-average" food, contrarians liken it to "flying in a Greyhound bus" with "outmoded interiors" and "unsmiling", "bureaucratic" crews.

**Air China**

12 | 14 | 12 | 8

800-982-8802; [www.airchina.com.cn/en](http://www.airchina.com.cn/en)

One of "the big three" Chinese carriers, this "state-owned airline", though "not the best, is improving" thanks to "newer, more comfortable planes" with enviable "seating pitch" and "polite" service; yet it's not without faults: "delays", "limited" entertainment and a "strange mix of Chinese and Western" food, plus an enigmatic English-language Web site.

**Air France**

14 | 16 | 17 | 15

800-237-2747; [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com)

"Vive la France!" say Franco-fans flying high on the free-flowing wine ("real champagne") and "better-than-average" food served aboard this "classy" SkyTeam member that recently merged with

KLM; updated premium classes are “*magnifique*” and “individual TV screens” help distract from “cramped” coach quarters, but the Web site can be “moody”, ditto the Lacroix-clad crews, and nostalgists sigh it’s “not as luxe as it once was.”

**Air India** 8 | 10 | 14 | 8 |

800-223-7776; [www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com)

“Economical” fares and “unusually good” Indian food (especially “if you’re a vegetarian”) are the strong points of this carrier linking the subcontinent with the U.S. and other destinations; while defenders say the rest is “better than you might expect”, caustic critics contend that “inconsistent” service, “long delays” and “old” aircraft mean you fly it only out of “necessity.”

**Air Jamaica** 12 | 15 | 13 | 12 |

800-523-5585; [www.airjamaica.com](http://www.airjamaica.com)

“Start your vacation while still in the air” with this Caribbean carrier whose “cheerfully decorated” planes, “pleasant” service and “free champagne” have passengers crooning “let’s get together and feel all right”; while many consider it “the best way” to get to Jamaica, those irked by “free-for-all” check-ins and “frequent” delays suggest “think about swimming – it might be faster.”

**AIR NEW ZEALAND** 18 | 20 | 16 | 16 |

800-262-1234; [www.airnewzealand.com](http://www.airnewzealand.com)

“If you must fly 15 hours in coach”, it doesn’t get better than this “cut-above” New Zealander that’s made a “monumental comeback” in the past few years; a Star Alliance partner flying to LA, SF and other locales, it boasts a “calm, capable” staff, a “comfortable” economy class and “memorable” meals; it’s currently rolling out “reconfigured” premium cabins with “state-of-the-art, lie-flat” seats that make a long haul a lot more likable.

**Alaska Airlines** 12 | 15 | 8 | 18 |

800-252-7522; [www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com)

A “dependable” option for service to Mexico and Canada is how most see this Seattle-based outfit; high points include “personable” attendants who “work hard to make you comfortable” and good “frequent flier perks”, but some find the cabins “cramped” and say the food “needs a lot of work.”

**Alitalia** 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

800-223-5730; [www.alitalia.com](http://www.alitalia.com)

While some say this Italian SkyTeam member has shown “marked improvement” and can be “friendly” and “comfortable”, critics cite *molto* problems, including “huge delays” (“a broken clock is more likely to be on time”), “lost luggage”, “frequent” strikes, “rude” if “*Vogue*”-worthy attendants, a business class that’s “practically the same” as coach and food that “could ruin Italy’s culinary rep.”

**American Airlines** 14 | 14 | 10 | 21 |

800-433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)

This U.S. mega carrier and oneworld member is “better for flying international than domestic”, with routes “all over the world”, “awesome” first-class ‘flagship suites’ on some planes and a “user-friendly” Web site; but downsides include “disappearing” legroom and “no free booze” in coach, “blah” food, “so-so biz seats” and service that “flip-flops” from “efficient and courteous” to Rhett Butler-like – they “simply don’t give a damn.”

**America West Airlines**

12 | 14 | 6 | 15

800-235-9292; [www.americawest.com](http://www.americawest.com)

Offering "basic service for basic fares", this low-cost carrier (which merged with US Airways post-*Survey*) can be "nice for short routes", though "stopping in Phoenix" or Las Vegas en route to Mexico, Costa Rica or Canada can be "a pain"; coach fliers object to having "to pay" for food, but still the experience is "tolerable."

**ANA (ALL NIPPON AIRWAYS)**

18 | 23 | 18 | 17

800-235-9262; [www.fly-ana.com](http://www.fly-ana.com)

"Attention to detail" marks this Tokyo-based Star Alliance member that pleases passengers with "efficient, polite" service, "terrific food" and perks like onboard "wireless Internet"; if some find coach seats sized for "munchkins" they still "come as close to comfort as possible", and first class "cocoon you in luxury" with flat-folding beds that make devotees declare it "better than home."

**Asiana Airlines**

▽ 16 | 21 | 18 | 16

800-227-4262; [www.us.flyasiana.com](http://www.us.flyasiana.com)

"A pleasant surprise" typifies reaction to this Korean carrier (a Star Alliance member) that gets high praise for "fantastic" service that goes "beyond the call of duty"; a few report "cramped" quarters and "aging" interiors, but there are "comfortable sleepers" in some first-class cabins, and "interesting" "traditional Korean dishes" make for a welcome "change from the usual airplane fare."

**AUSTRIAN AIRLINES**

18 | 19 | 16 | 16

800-843-0002; [www.aua.com](http://www.aua.com)

With nonstop flights from NYC and DC to its Vienna hub, this "solid" Star Alliance carrier gets yodels of approval for its "friendly" crews in "flashy all-red uniforms", "tasty" meals and "immaculately clean" cabins; but the gemütlich vibe doesn't soothe critics who cite comfort that varies by aircraft and "annoying" charges for food and drink on shorter flights within Europe.

**bmi**

15 | 16 | 12 | 17

800-788-0555; [www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)

"Good prices", "upbeat" service and "convenient" destinations make this Heathrow-based Star Alliance member "not a bad option", especially for "short-haul European" jaunts (it also serves a few U.S. cities via Manchester); an "onboard chef" turns out "excellent meals" in transatlantic business class, but cognoscenti claim the only thing that sets business apart on other routes is "the curtain between the cabins."

**BRITISH AIRWAYS**

16 | 18 | 14 | 18

800-247-9297; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)

The "Brits know how to do it right" declare fans of this "very civilized" oneworld member; sure, coach can be "cramped" but even it has some "style" ("personal TVs", "edible food") and 'premier economy' is a "big plus"; add in "accommodating" service, an "excellent" Web site and "fantastic flat beds" in business and first and you've got a transatlantic "standard-bearer" that "beats the hell" out of most U.S. competitors.

**CATHAY PACIFIC AIRWAYS**

18 | 23 | 20 | 18

800-233-2742; [www.cathay-usa.com](http://www.cathay-usa.com)

"There's no better" option for long-haul trips to Hong Kong and beyond than this "Rolls-Royce" of carriers, a oneworld member

known for its “gracious”, “pampering” service (No. 2 among international airlines) and first class that epitomizes “ultimate luxury”; “excellent” entertainment options and “incredible” airport lounges are pluses, and if quibblers contend coach could use more “legroom” and the “food isn’t special”, more advise “save up your money or miles” to experience “flying as it should be.”

**China Airlines**

14 | 16 | 14 | 10

800-227-5118; [www.china-airlines.com](http://www.china-airlines.com)

Taipei is “just a nap away” from the West Coast on this Taiwan-based carrier that also serves much of Asia; “well-trained” crews “do their best to keep you comfortable” and fares can be “cheap”, which helps compensate if “some planes are less than luxurious” and both the food and Web site leave something “to be desired”; N.B. there’s no scheduled service to mainland China.

**China Southern Airlines**

12 | 12 | 8 | 5

888-338-8988; [www.cs-air.com/en](http://www.cs-air.com/en)

China’s largest carrier “gets you there” “just fine” in a fleet of “modern planes”, but when it comes to anything beyond “basic” transport, it has “a long way to go”; crews “try hard” but service and amenities are “mediocre” and some cite “uncomfortable seating” akin to “a bus in rush hour”; savvy travelers upgrade to business because it “hardly costs more than economy.”

**CONTINENTAL AIRLINES**

15 | 17 | 14 | 21

800-525-0280; [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)

The “go-to guys” for many road warriors, this SkyTeam member is viewed by many as the “best U.S. carrier for overseas flights” and comes close to the world’s elite with its “first-rate” BusinessFirst class, featuring “super” seats and details like “sundaes made to order”; a “thorough” Web site and “reliable” service are pluses, and even coach is “decent”, especially if you land a plane with “seat-back TVs.”

**CSA Czech Airlines**

12 | 15 | 12 | 11

800-223-2365; [www.czechairlines.com](http://www.czechairlines.com)

The Prague-nosis is good for this Czech member of SkyTeam judging by praise for its “efficient”, “committed” service and “bang-for-your-buck” business class where you’re “treated royally”; still, the food draws mixed reviews and there are scattered reports of “cranky” crews and “no room to move”, with skeptics contending it’s “not quite up to international quality.”

**Delta Air Lines**

11 | 13 | 10 | 18

800-221-1212; [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)

The “Big D” gets a “solid” B from graders who say it’s “trying harder” but can still be “very trying”, at least in coach, where “cost-cutting” showed even pre-Chapter 11 in things like “no free drinks”, “tight seating” and “college dining hall” food; its BusinessElite class scores better thanks to “big, comfy seats”, but they’re “not as sleepable” as some and service varies from “excellent” to “strained”; overall, this SkyTeam member will “get you across the ocean”, but don’t count on a “joyride.”

**EI AI**

13 | 17 | 15 | 13

800-223-6700 (in NYC: 212-768-9200); [www.elal.com](http://www.elal.com)

“More safety precautions than Fort Knox” make for “peace of mind”, if not peace and quiet (“toddlers screaming”, “everyone

wants to talk to you – or fix you up with their sisters”) aboard this Israeli carrier linking Tel Aviv to Chicago, LA, Miami, NYC and other locales; service varies and the “crowded” economy class is “not the most comfortable”, but the food’s “quite good” – and “kosher to boot”; overall, it’s “showing great potential” since its privatization.

**EMIRATES**

19 | 23 | 20 | 19

800-777-3999; [www.emirates.com/usa](http://www.emirates.com/usa)

Ranked No. 2 overall in the international economy ranks, this Dubai-based, NYC-linked up-and-comer inspires coach clients to wonder “am I in business?” thanks to “excellent service”, “wow”-inducing “personal entertainment” systems and repasts that taste a lot better than typical airline food; nitpickers claim premium classes vary depending on “seat quality”, but at its best, it’s like a “seven-star hotel in the sky” and makes you feel like “an honored client” – or even “an emir.”

**EVA Air**

▽ 18 | 19 | 18 | 13

800-695-1188; [www.evaair.com](http://www.evaair.com)

This Taiwanese transporter with service to the West Coast and Newark was a “pioneer” of the “different economy classes” concept and earns high praise for its “excellent-value” ‘Evergreen Deluxe’ cabins offering “more legroom” than regular coach (the latter, alas, “comes up short” on comfort); “excellent food” and “friendly service” win points, but fashionistas fret “those green-and-orange uniforms have to go.”

**Finnair**

16 | 17 | 14 | 15

800-950-5000; [www.finnair.com](http://www.finnair.com)

Expect “Scandinavian style all the way” aboard this Finnish flier, a oneworld member that links NYC to Helsinki and beyond; with “efficient” service, “slick” interiors (“like a flying Ikea”) and “better-than-average” food, it’s “straightforward” yet “distinctive”; beefs about “old-school” business-class seats may be quieted by plans to install flat-bed recliners on long-haul flights by early 2006.

**Iberia**

11 | 12 | 11 | 12

800-772-4642; [www.iberia.com](http://www.iberia.com)

Defenders say this Spanish carrier (and oneworld member) does a “good job” on “European short hauls” or transatlantic flights from JFK and other U.S. cities; but while they report “no problems”, we hear “no *olé*” from critics who see red over “delays” and cancellations “without an explanation”, crews who veer from “enchanting” to “frosty” and baggage handlers who’ve “turned losing luggage into an advanced science.”

**Icelandair**

15 | 19 | 14 | 17

800-223-5500; [www.icelandair.is](http://www.icelandair.is)

Though “not the fanciest”, this Icelandic carrier is an “efficient way to get to Europe” from several U.S. gateways; “great fares” are a plus and you’re generally “treated well” by chic attendants whose “pillbox hats” create a “flashback to ‘50s” elegance; you might also “learn more about Iceland than you ever needed to know”, especially if you opt for a deal that includes a stopover in Reykjavik.

**JAPAN AIRLINES (JAL)**

15 | 22 | 18 | 15

800-525-3663; [www.japanair.com](http://www.japanair.com)

Even “15-plus hours” aboard this carrier joining Japan with several U.S. cities can fly by thanks to “high-tech entertainment systems”

and “ridiculously good” service that “overrides” the main gripe: seating that can be “tight” “if you’re over 5’11””; meals are “diverse and not half bad” and first class approaches “world-class”, so despite a gripe or two about “expensive” fares, most advise “take off your shoes, relax and enjoy the flight.”

**KLM Royal Dutch Airlines**

14 | 17 | 14 | 17

800-225-2525; [www.klm.com](http://www.klm.com)

Now merged with Air France, this Dutch carrier (partnered with SkyTeam and Northwest) is perhaps “not what it used to be”, but fans insist it does a “very good job” on flights to and within Europe, with special kudos for its “fair deals”, “cool” entertainment systems and the “little Dutch houses full of gin” handed out in business class; however, service and food get mixed marks and some find quarters “cramped” – maybe no surprise from the land that thinks “wooden shoes are comfortable.”

**Korean Air**

11 | 16 | 15 | 13

800-438-5000; [www.koreanair.com](http://www.koreanair.com)

This Seoul-based carrier gets good marks for its “kind flight attendants” who provide especially “attentive” service in premium classes; “great deals for Pan-Asian fares” and more than “decent” Korean eats are further benefits, but some planes “could use a major makeover” and a few report that it can be “hard to redeem mileage” from SkyTeam partners or “pick seats online.”

**LAN AIRLINES**

16 | 20 | 17 | 15

866-435-9526; [www.lan.com](http://www.lan.com)

Boasting “efficient”, “pro service”, “modern aircraft” and “lots of amenities”, this “very competent” Chilean carrier (and oneworld member) has many calling it “Latin America’s most reliable airline”; touches like “individual TVs” and “very good” wines compensate for a “tight fit” in economy, and premium classes can be a “real pleasure” thanks to “personalized” attention, “good food” and “reasonably roomy” quarters.

**LOT Polish**

▽ 15 | 16 | 12 | 12

800-223-0593 (in NYC: 212-789-0970); [www.lot.com/english\\_usa.htm](http://www.lot.com/english_usa.htm)

“No longer the horrible Eastern European airline” of the Iron Curtain era is the word on this Polish Star Alliance member that’s “perfectly acceptable” if “unremarkable”; expect reasonable “spaciousness” aboard modern aircraft, and if some say the food needs an overhaul, at least they “still feed you and make an effort.”

**Lufthansa**

15 | 18 | 15 | 17

800-399-5838; [www.lufthansa-usa.com](http://www.lufthansa-usa.com)

“The stereotype” about “German efficiency” holds true for this “run-by-the-rules” Star Alliance member whose crews are “professional” if not always “warm enough” (“smile, please!”); economy cabins vary from “comfortable” to “knees-in-the-throat” tight and some feel the food “needs help”, ditto the entertainment systems, but hit a flight with “wireless Internet” access and those “amazing” new business seats and you may find it “wunderbar.”

**MALAYSIA AIRLINES**

18 | 21 | 18 | 13

800-552-9264; [www.malaysiaairlines.com](http://www.malaysiaairlines.com)

“What flying used to be like” sigh fans who call this “punctual” Malaysian airline “a pleasure”, “particularly for long hauls”, thanks

to “friendly” attendants” and “comfy”, “young” planes (“pick any movie” or video game to play on your personal screen); hub Kuala Lumpur’s “superb” airport is a plus as are “state-of-the-art” first-class cabins with “excellent” food, so even if the Web site can “frustrate”, most surveyors find it “swell” overall.

#### Malév Hungarian Airlines

▽ 14 | 16 | 12 | 6

800-223-6884; [www.malev.hu](http://www.malev.hu)

The few surveyors who know Hungary’s national airline mostly regard it as “surprisingly good”, citing “pleasant” crews, “full meals” and “low-cost fares to Eastern Europe”; but while some flights have “extra legroom” others are “cheek-by-jowl”, and you might encounter “chaotic” check-ins and a sometimes “nonfunctional” Web site.

#### Mexicana

13 | 16 | 13 | 14

800-531-7921; [www.mexicana.com](http://www.mexicana.com)

Surveyors are at a Mexican standoff over this south-of-the-border-based airline: some pronounce it “*bueno*”, praising “warm”, “helpful” crews, “good fares” and “decent food”, while others call it a “cattle-car operation” with “cramped seating”, “difficult” check-ins and a “confusing”, “limited Web site”; average it out and you get modestly priced “basic transport, nothing more or less.”

#### Northwest Airlines

12 | 13 | 10 | 18

800-225-2525; [www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com)

The coach experience on this Minnesota-based SkyTeam member (now in Chapter 11) “really depends” on whether you’re on a comfy “new plane” with “personal video screens” or are “sandwiched into” an “ancient” aircraft (“DC-10s only a little younger than the Wright brothers”) with “subpar A/V” and service; but if you “bite the bullet and opt for business”, “it’s another world”, featuring recliners with “shaded pods” and “awesome” entertainment.

#### Olympic Airlines

10 | 10 | 9 | 7

800-223-1226; [www.olympicairlines.com](http://www.olympicairlines.com)

Greece’s national carrier can “get the job done” and may even be “on time” and “friendly” – which strikes some as “amazing, given the financial problems it faces”; but detractors who cite “old”, “cramped” aircraft, attendants who “act like they’re just hitching a ride” and a Web site that “doesn’t offer e-ticketing” say it merits “not even a bronze medal” since it lags in this *Survey*.

#### Qantas Airways

16 | 18 | 16 | 19

800-227-4500; [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)

Making “long hauls to Oz” “bearable”, this Australian oneworld member offers the “laid-back charm” of “cheerful” crews and the lie-down charm of “heavenly sleeper seats” in updated premium cabins; “seat-back” video screens (“even in coach”), “unusual” menus, “great” “Aussie wines” and an “easy-to-navigate Web site” are bonuses, but we also hear a few reports of “tired old” planes and “little legroom” in economy.

#### SAS (Scandinavian Airlines)

16 | 18 | 15 | 17

800-221-2350; [www.scandinavian.net](http://www.scandinavian.net)

“Typically Scandinavian” – i.e. “as sturdy and reliable as a Volvo” – this Star Alliance member boasts “luxuriously fitted” craft in which “even economy” offers personal video screens and “perfect” Net access, plus “appealing food” and a “little extra legroom” (perhaps

Nordic types “tend to be taller?”); still, premium sections are only a “little better” than coach and a “temperamental” Web site makes online booking “tricky.”

**SINGAPORE AIRLINES**

22 | 26 | 23 | 19

800-742-3333; [www.singaporeair.com](http://www.singaporeair.com)

Rated No. 1 Overall in this *Survey* – as well as Tops for Comfort, Service and Food – this “Secretariat of airlines” will “spoil you for any other” thanks to “100 on-demand movies”, “perfectly attentive” “eye-candy” flight attendants and “phenomenal meals” – and that’s just in coach (“I can’t wait to upgrade”); indeed, this Star Alliance partner’s premium cabins are so “heavenly” (think advance-ordered gourmet cuisine and “fresh orchids” in the loos) that many “feel sad when it’s time to deplane.”

**South African Airways**

15 | 16 | 14 | 14

800-722-9675; [www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)

“Surprisingly friendly and efficient” flight attendants along with “delicious wines” help make the “long flight” from JFK to Johannesburg “not bad” at all on this South African carrier; though some blast “smaller-than-usual seats” and a Web site that “seems to be down a lot”, business-class travelers report a “true luxury experience.”

**Swiss International Air Lines**

16 | 18 | 14 | 17

877-359-7947; [www.swiss.com](http://www.swiss.com)

No surprise, the Swiss national airline “runs like clockwork” – “organized”, “precise” and “always reliable” – due to “caring” staffers who “speak every language imaginable”; other pluses include “creative onboard perks” (like “great chocolate”, natch), an “easy-to-use Web site” and a “roomy” first-class cabin; N.B. a post-*Survey* merger with Lufthansa may outdate scores.

**TACA**

12 | 14 | 11 | 11

800-400-8222; [www.taca.com](http://www.taca.com)

Arguably the “cheapest” way to get around the Americas, this Salvadoran carrier has proponents who praise its “newer aircraft” and “accommodating” attendants and don’t mind “paying extra for food”; however, critics contend “delays” make it “unreliable”, hence the lighthearted nickname “Take-a-Chance Airlines.”

**TAP Air Portugal**

14 | 14 | 13 | 11

800-221-7370; [www.flytap.com](http://www.flytap.com)

This Lisbon-based Star Alliance member gets mixed reviews: fans tout “better-than-usual” meals, “leather seats” in economy and “relaxed” crews who “seem to actually care”; but foes disparage “cramped” quarters, “entertainment systems that predate the airline industry” and interiors that look “a bit shabby – until the booze kicks in.”

**THAI AIRWAYS INTERNATIONAL**

17 | 22 | 18 | 15

800-426-5204; [www.thaiair.com](http://www.thaiair.com)

“Thai-riffic” flight attendants “bring graciousness to new heights” on this “civilized” Thai member of Star Alliance, where coach passengers “feel almost human” thanks to “bigger-than-normal” seats and “delicious” Siamese eats; equipment gets mixed reviews, however, with some citing an “aging fleet” with “no individual entertainment” screens, and a Web site that can be problematic for some bookings.

**Turkish Airlines**

15 | 16 | 15 | 12

800-874-8875; [www.flyturkish.com](http://www.flyturkish.com)

Economy fliers find this “middle-of-the-road” Istanbul-based carrier a “real surprise”, with “friendly” (if “uninspired”) service and “very good” free food and alcohol en route to its “many Middle East destinations”; despite a “tired” interior, rudimentary Web site and “uncomfortable” premium seats that seem “no different from coach except for the price”, it’s still “ok for the short haul.”

**United Airlines**

14 | 14 | 11 | 18

800-241-6522; [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)

Its “unmatched international network” and “good mileage program” can pave the way for “smooth” journeys aboard this U.S. vet that boasts a “brilliant” economy-plus section (“five extra inches of legroom” make a “big difference on long hauls”) and “ample”, “fully reclining” “cocoon” in first class; nevertheless, this Star Alliance member’s fiscal woes are evident: “worsening” food, attendants “smiling through clenched teeth after losing their pensions” and coach seats that come close to defining “cruel and unusual punishment.”

**US Airways**

12 | 13 | 9 | 15

800-428-4322; [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)

Though this Star Alliance partner is “decent” enough, its recent “financial struggles” have “taken a major toll”; employees are “trying harder – and need to” – yet service remains “hit-or-miss” and some report “snacks unworthy of a nursery school” and “luggage slowdowns”; while “online check-in and boarding passes save time”, that’s not enough for skeptics who’d “sooner swim.”

**Varig Brazilian Airline**

15 | 17 | 15 | 13

800-468-2744; [www.varig.com](http://www.varig.com)

With more than 2,100 aircraft serving 130-plus countries and a “clear” Web site featuring “bargain” fares, this Brazilian behemoth makes it easy to use its “excellent” frequent flier program (it’s also a Star Alliance member); once you’re aboard, “friendly” flight crews “take pretty good care of you”, perhaps to compensate for “packing you in” to “older planes” with “uncomfortable seats” and subpar gadgetry; still, “you could do worse.”

**VIRGIN ATLANTIC**

17 | 20 | 17 | 20

800-862-8621; [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com)

“Yeah, baby!”: on Richard Branson’s “exuberant” carrier, “cheeky” crews host a “party in the sky” featuring “cool goody bags” and personal video screens with a “robust movie selection” – even in coach – while the “red-carpet treatment” in ‘upper class’ supplies the “best sleep” around thanks to “lay-flat seats”, massages and pajamas; spoilers say the Web site’s “buggy” and declare that all the “hype” doesn’t compensate for the “pack-’em-in-like-sardines” philosophy in economy.