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JULY 2025



Cathay Pacific: *An Aria Above and Beyond.*

Story by SIMONE CHELLINI
Photography by LORENZO GIACOBBO

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Edelweiss
Flying 'Weiss'ly'



SHYAM VIMALKUMAR - ZHR



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DEPARTING SHOT





During the last week of April and the following days (at least until this issue's press date), Newark Liberty International Airport once again became a flashpoint in America's ongoing aviation crisis. Equipment failures at the radar sector responsible for managing the airport's air traffic left radar screens blank and communication lines dead, forcing controllers to temporarily stop directing aircraft. Thousands of passengers were delayed. Flights were grounded, and United Airlines—the airport's largest tenant—responded with a drastic decision: to cut service from Newark indefinitely.

"We have no other choice in order to protect our customers," said United CEO Scott Kirby on May 2. It's a stunning indictment of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) handling of what is arguably the most congested and complex airspace in the nation.

But the truth is that this latest debacle was no surprise—and certainly no fluke. It was the outcome of years of poor planning, systemic underinvestment, and shortsighted decision-making by the FAA, especially in relation to its controversial plan to move radar operations from New York Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) on Long Island to a center in Philadelphia. That transition, which took place in 2023, was supposed to ease staffing and operational issues. Instead, it has done the opposite.

As *The Air Current* (TAC) detailed in its investigation, *The long and uncertain road to fixing America's most snarled airspace*, the FAA was warned—internally and externally—that the transition to Philadelphia could trigger serious radar reliability issues. Nevertheless, the agency pushed forward and, by September 2024, those fears were realized when radar systems failed over Labor Day weekend. Controllers were forced into 'stop traffic' mode, as they were unable to see or communicate with planes. "The FAA acknowledged the problem but promised a fix in 'months,'" TAC reported. Yet, internal documents showed that a permanent solution could take five years.

The consequences have been staggering. By November, several controllers cited traumatic stress from ongoing equipment failures. The inability to talk to Pilots—a controller's most basic function—left some feeling powerless and exposed. They took medical leave under workers' compensation protections, further straining an already depleted workforce. After the latest failure, TAC confirmed that trauma-related leave had spiked again among Newark-based controllers.

These staffing shortages are not unique to Newark. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted in a 2023 report, "Air traffic control facilities are facing critical staffing shortfalls nationwide, with many locations operating below the FAA's own identified minimum safe staffing levels." But the New York/Newark airspace, with its overlapping flight paths and massive volume, amplifies these issues to breaking point.

What makes the FAA's mismanagement particularly frustrating is how preventable much of this was. Unlike natural disasters or pandemic disruptions, radar failures and staffing shortages stem from decisions made—or not made—by federal leadership. The radar decision, in particular, was a gamble that prioritized short-term reorganization over long-term resiliency. Now, passengers are paying the price.

It's naive to think of this as a New York-area problem; in reality, it's a national warning. If one of the country's busiest and most economically important airports can fall victim to repeated outages and critical understaffing, it's only a matter of time before others do too. What happens at Newark today could be coming to Atlanta, Chicago, or Los Angeles tomorrow.

The FAA must immediately prioritize both short-term fixes and long-term reforms. That means investing in resilient radar infrastructure, addressing the root causes of controller burnout, and—above all—listening to the front-line personnel who have been sounding the alarm for years.

Failing to act decisively now risks making American airspace not just inefficient—but unsafe.

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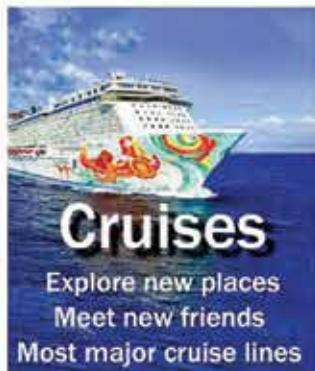
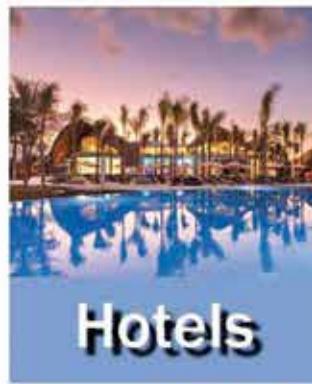
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ON THE COVER

A Cathay Pacific Airbus A350 elegantly cuts through the cloud-veiled skies of Hong Kong, soaring just above the crown-like spire of the IFC (International Finance Centre) Tower. This moment of near-mythic alignment captures aviation and architecture locked in a fleeting ballet above one of the world's most vertical cities. The layered mountains loom beyond, adding drama to the urban theatre, while the aircraft — sleek and resolute — symbolizes Hong Kong's spirit of progress, resilience, and global connection.

PHOTO LORENZO GIACOBBO

 airwaysmag



The Airbus A380 flyover of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in 2007.

PHOTO: Airbus



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① CLEMENT ALLOING - TLS



② JOE G. WALKER - BFI



③ ALLEGIANT AIR - PGD

① DELTA AIR LINES

**AIRBUS A350-941
F-WZNK (N527DN) MSN 720**

Commemorating its centennial year in 2025, Delta Air Lines (DL) unveiled a second special edition livery on a new Airbus A350-900. At 100 years old, DL stands as one of the three largest airlines in the US and one of the most profitable in the world.

② GLOBAL X AIRLINES

**AIRBUS A321-321
N530FL MSN 1153**

Global X Airlines (G6) has received its eighth Airbus A321. The airliner, originally delivered to the late British Midland Airlines (BD) in 2000, will support G6's expanding operations, with work for the US government, sports teams, casinos, tour operators, and airlines.

③ ALLEGIANT AIR

**AIRBUS A320-214(WL)
N197NV MSN 7063**

Allegiant (G4) unveiled a special addition to its fleet—a one-of-a-kind livery designed by, and for, the airline's employees. The catchy design, displayed on the tail and fuselage of an AirbusA320s, one of six Allegiant aircraft featuring a special livery.

④

ALASKA AIRLINES

**BOEING 737-990
N302AS MSN 30017 LN 596**

Alaska Airlines (AS) said farewell to its first-ever Boeing 737-900, which also happens to be the first of the type ever built. The airliner was retired on April 8 and flown to Pinal Airpark (MZJ) in Arizona for storage.

⑤

RUTACA AIRLINES

**BOEING 737-3Q8
YV3063 MSN 26311 LN 2681**

Venezuelan carrier Rutaca Airlines (5R) has unveiled its second-ever *La Vinotinto* soccer team-themed livery. It has been applied to a Boeing 737-300 set to transport the team for World Cup qualifiers and league matches. It follows a similar 737-200 livery introduced in 2006.

⑥

AIRBUS INDUSTRIE

**AIRBUS A380-841
F-WWOW MSN 1**

The first-ever Airbus A380 is flying again for the first time since 2022. According to Airbus, the aircraft performed a series of test flights intended to certify “the latest developments that keep the A380 in-service fleet flying at the highest standards of safety and reliability.”



④ BRANDON FARRIS - SEA



⑤ RUTACA AIRLINES - CBL



⑥ CLEMENT ALLOING - TLS



7 BART LEKEUS BRU



8 BART LEKEU - MST



9 DIRK GROTHE - HAM

7 AUSTRIAN AIRLINES

**AIRBUS A320-214
OE-LBN MSN 768**

In cooperation with the Expo Office of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Austrian Airlines (OS) unveiled an Airbus A320 marking this year's Expo, which is taking place in Osaka, Japan, until mid-October.

8 ANIMAWINGS

**AIRBUS A220-300
YR-CHR MSN 55316**

Animawings (A2) has applied its complete standard livery to its two Airbus A220 in service since December 2004. The Romanian carrier plans to take delivery of four more of the type between 2025 and 2026, all leased from Azorra Aviation.

9 EUROWINGS

**AIRBUS A320-214(WL)
D-AEWM MSN 7259**

Extending its longstanding partnership with Borussia Dortmund for another two years, Eurowings (EW) has unveiled a new livery in the colors of the German soccer team. The so-called 'Team Airbus 2.0' replaces the first iteration of the livery, in service since 2016.



10 DIRK GROTHE – XFW



11 BART LEKEU – BRU



12 BART LEKEU – BRU

10 WIZZ AIR UK

**AIRBUS A321-271NY
D-AZXU (G-XLRA) MSN 11631**

After Iberia (IB) and Aer Lingus (EI), Wizz Air UK (W9) is set to become the third customer of the Extra-Long-Range variant of the Airbus A321. The new airliner will be deployed on W9's latest route from London Gatwick (LGW) to Jeddah (JED) in Saudi Arabia.

11 SUNEXPRESS

**BOEING 737-8EH(WL)
TC-SPY MSN 35842 LN 3639**

SunExpress (XQ) is promoting the latest spinoff of the Smurfs movie on one of its Boeing 737-800s. The colorful design features characters from the popular series painted across the rear half of the fuselage and the tail.

12 KM MALTA AIRLINES

**AIRBUS A320-251N
9H-NEE MSN 11366**

KM Malta Airlines (KM) has applied 'Explore More Culture' titles to one of its Airbus A320neos, promoting the rich and vibrant offerings of the Maltese islands.



13 BART LEKEU - BRU



14 DIRK GROTHE - HAM



15 DANIEL SANDER - AMS

13 BRUSSELS AIRLINES

AIRBUS A320-214
OO-SNM MSN 2003

Brussels Airlines (SN) introduced its newest Belgian Icon dedicated to the Brussels Atomium, a notable city landmark. According to the airline "The Atomium [livery] celebrates the nation's spirit of creativity, innovation, and pride."

14 GP AVIATION

BOEING 737-446
LZ-CRI MSN 28832 LN 2953

Swiss ACMI and charter specialist GP Aviation applied their standard livery to the second of their three Boeing 737-400s. The design features enlarged titles and logo in dark blue on the forward fuselage and engine nacelles, complemented by a large, stylized wing motif on the tail.

15 CORENDON DUTCH AIRLINES

BOEING 737-9
PH-CDQ MSN 66347 LN 8802

Corendon Dutch Airlines (CD) has introduced *Sweet Louise*, the world's first aircraft wearing a tattoo-like livery. Designed by tattoo artist Henk Schiffmacher, the striking 2,150sq ft (200m²) tattoo wraps the fuselage in classic nautical imagery, including a heart-shaped pirate symbol on the engine.

16

AIR CAMBODIA

**AIRBUS A320-232(WL)
XU-353 MSN 7434**

Since January 1, Cambodia Angkor Air (K6) has been rebranded as Air Cambodia. The Asian country's flag carrier has three Airbus A320 family aircraft and five ATR 72s serving 14 destinations from Phnom Penh International Airport (PNH).

17

VIETJET AIR (OPB AVION EXPRESS)

**AIRBUS A320-232
LY-MLI MSN 3771**

VietJet Air (VJ) has leased two Airbus A320s from Lithuanian ACMI operator Avion Express. The low-cost carrier, the country's first privately owned airline, serves 19 domestic and 42 international destinations from Tan Son Nhat International Airport (SGN) and Noi Bai International Airport (HAN).

18

SKY ANGKOR AIRLINES

**AIRBUS A320-232
XU-729 MSN 3743**

Sky Angkor Airlines (ZA) has leased a second-hand A320 from Carlyle Aviation Partners. Before arriving at ZA, the airliner, first delivered in 2008 to Jetstar Airlines (JQ), had served with half a dozen airlines in Asia, Middle East, and Latin America.



16 JAVIER RODRIGUEZ - BKK



17 JAVIER RODRIGUEZ - BKK



18 JAVIER RODRIGUEZ - BKK

▼

PHOTO NEWS

Ralf Kurz
CONTRIBUTOR

Southwest Dis-Effect

Today's Southwest Airlines (WN) is not your dad's Southwest Airlines. The vaunted "Southwest Effect" of lore no longer exists, and hasn't since the merger with AirTran. Now, the activist investor group Elliott Investment Management—which is installed firmly in the Southwest boardroom—is on the warpath for more profits from the chronically slow-to-change, plodding Dallas-based carrier.

ANYWHERE YOU LOOK

around Southwest (except in its headquarters hallways and open spaces where its once-quirky and fast-paced history resides) the only relic from the past are the uniforms, although I'm betting those will get changed out eventually. Southwest has already announced assigned seating, premium seating, and—brought back on a more full and permanent scale—red-eye flights.

But the biggest and most loudly opposed change is the free checked bags policy. Since the airline began, in 1971, passengers were always allowed free checked bags. It was part of

the foundation and backbone of Southwest. Back then, though, all airlines did that. Charging for checked luggage did not really start until PEOPLEexpress came on the scene in 1981, but didn't catch on in the US until the mid-2000s, when airlines began "un-bundling" extras like checked bags, in-flight services, carry-ons, etc. During all this time, Southwest had stuck to its guns and kept checked bags free. It became its mantra and advertising cornerstone. One more thing in which Southwest differed from the US 'Big 3' (American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines), and from the low-cost carriers

(LCCs) offering seats at bin bottom prices. This (along with getting lucky on several fuel-hedging programs) kept it in the leader spot amongst the LCCs. I have to admit that it was the sole reason I flew with them several times in the last few years.

Ever since Elliott took control, I heard masses of employees, passengers, and random curiosity cravers gnashing their teeth over how Elliott is going to destroy Southwest, how they're just another investor shark like Carl Icahn, or an 'airline destroyer' like Frank Lorenzo (which I disagree with), and how Southwest is heading right for

Chapter 11 bankruptcy or, worse, total shutdown. Calm down, emotions never pan out when clear, rational thinking is far easier to digest.

First off, that is not how Elliott works—nor does any activist investor group, if I'm being honest in regard to those with which I am familiar. Also, I would not be so quick to lump Elliott in with the likes of a Carl Icahn or Ivan Boesky or other such 1980s junk bond raiders. For the most part, the type of activism that Elliott employs is akin to how Kirk Kerkorian ran MGM or Western Airlines back in his day. Kerkorian got into MGM and Western people who knew what to ask for, how to get it, and implement it for the betterment of the entire company. Were there controversial moves along the way? Absolutely. You can take that to the bank. If said changes worked, and the company grew out of its predicament, Kerkorian (and now Elliott in this case) stayed. If they didn't, Kerkorian steadily shrunk his positions in the companies until he was out. I have a hunch; this

is the same type of outcome we will see with Elliott.

Corporate Raiders like Carl Icahn were far more heavy-handed. The companies he broke up in the 1970s through the turn of the century were torn up piece by piece and those chunks then sold off (think TWA's entire network out of London-Heathrow, sold to American Airlines, or XO System's Wired Technology Division) solely for the short-term cash profits for the shareholders and, of course, himself.

Also, I wouldn't lump Elliott in with Frank Lorenzo and Texas Air either. With hindsight, Lorenzo, no matter how reviled he is to a lot of old timers in the industry, ended up saving Continental Airlines not only from itself, but from the grave in the early 1980s, despite all the union turmoil and chest-beating. When his Texas Air bought Eastern Airlines out and cannibalized it, it was for the benefit of Continental, and also to fund the eventual war with Eastern's overfed machinists' union. That years-long ego trip by the EAL peasantry cost

them their jobs and livelihoods. That is not what is happening at Southwest. There has been a large layoff, yes, but, when you consider that Southwest was a tad overstaffed for its size and network, this was more of a right-sizing of staffing levels. Akin to what America West Airlines did in 2003 by axing almost 94 administrative positions from its Tempe, Arizona Headquarters (among which I was one of the unlucky ones). All of the changes that have been announced thus far will no doubt make Southwest a more competitive entity in today's marketplace. Sadly, it has come with a percentage of high-value flyers jumping ship (between one and two million milers, corporate travelers with contracts that make them book the highest Business Select fare, etc.). Will they come back? Only time will tell, but loyalty just doesn't seem to have the cachet it once had, especially in the airline industry.

Right now, there's a lot of noise from all sides about these changes, and competitors are noticing. Especially from a certain Frontier Airlines out of Denver. They are taking massive broadside shots at the changes made to Southwest's checked bags policy by offering (for a limited time, of course) free checked bags, free carry-ons, free assigned seats, and free flight changes for journeys beginning from May 28, 2025 (coincidentally, the day when Southwest is set to institute its new policy). I would like to think of this as poetic justice, as it was Southwest that invaded Denver (in the process, abandoning Salt Lake City, which it had built up into a sizeable focus city after the 1994 merger with Morris Air) exactly 24





hours after Frontier had filed bankruptcy back in 2005. Sour grapes, perhaps? Will we see other airlines take potshots at Southwest's expense? Possibly. I wouldn't be surprised to see the gargantuan Delta or long-time Dallas-based rival American Airlines start sweetening offers up to entice people to jump the Southwest ship. Will it affect my thinking when booking a flight domestically? Not so much. I have only used them when I could not find a suitable schedule

on my beloved Alaska Airlines or with Frontier or United.

I support the idea, which many people share, that Southwest is now becoming just another airline in the United States, but this is not the end game so many are thinking it is. Is it a drastic, possibly draconian change to the very foundation and fabric of Southwest? Yes. Very much so. Will it kill Southwest? Hardly. In the short term, we will see its stock price hemorrhage a bit as

the changes come into effect and take hold, and everything settles down for both the airline and its Board of Directors (which was also slashed by two seats). Long term... well, your guess is as good as mine, and I won't begin to speculate, but the Southwest of old is, by and large, gone for good. What once was mis-labelled as the 'Original' Low Fare Airline (sorry Southwest, that was PSA in California), is now just another Boeing 737 operator that will get you from one point to another. 

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CATHAY PACIFIC'S BUSINESS CLASS

Story **SIMONE CHELLINI**
Photos **AUTHOR, UNLESS NOTED**

SINGING THE PRAISES OF A NEW ARIA:

Cathay Pacific's Aria is a beauty. As I learned on a recent Hong Kong-to-London flight, CX's latest Business Class cabin product deserves to be ranked among the world's best.

Founded in 1946 by Roy Farrell and Sydney de Kantzow, Cathay Pacific has established itself over the years as one of the most recognizable airlines in the world. A founding member of the oneworld alliance, the airline is finally back on its well-established track of excellence after several years of turbulence.

HOWDY, DALLAS!

Our airline review starts in Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), where I boarded Cathay Pacific's second-ever flight from that airport to Hong Kong (HKG). Previously served by American Airlines (AA) and suspended

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the new route marks Cathay Pacific's sixth destination in the United States and the eighth in North America.

Flight CX876/875 is now Cathay Pacific's longest flight by distance, connecting Hong

Kong to American Airlines' primary hub, the third busiest airport in the world. The hub also hosts the oneworld alliance headquarters (and, more modestly, those of Airways magazine). The new route enables passengers traveling from South and Central America

View from the Sky Bridge at Hong Kong International Airport featuring part of the Cathay Pacific fleet. The spot offers some unique plane spotting views on the departing traffic, as well as HKG's new terminal.

to continue to Asia and vice versa, providing the extensive connectivity once dreamt of by Cathay Pacific's founders.

Roy Farrell Jr., son of Cathay Pacific Founder Roy C. Farrell, and also a Texas native, commented on the milestone.

"My father was fearless, dreamed 'Texas big' and would let no obstacle stand in his way," he said. "His ultimate vision was to create an international airline that flies throughout Asia and to the US, which is clearly demonstrated in its namesake, Cathay Pacific."

Decades later, that vision is now a reality. At the airport, I was escorted by Ricky Ahmed, DFW's Airport Operations Manager, on board the beautiful A350-1000 that would operate the 16-hour 40-minute trip back to Hong Kong. The route would take us over Canada, then north of

❷ The Cathay Pacific A350-1000 flying the airline's second-ever commercial flight from Dallas-Fort Worth to Hong Kong, waiting at its gate in DFW.

❸ Four pilots for this ultra-long-haul flight, including Captain Tad Hazelton, Airbus A350 and A330 senior captain, who flew the inaugural service on April 24 to DFW.

Alaska, before flying over Russia and Mongolia, until approaching mainland China and Hong Kong, landing at the early hour of 04:09 local time.

On board, the cabin product in Business Class is the green-upholstered Safran Cirrus III, arranged in a 1-2-1 layout. The entire front section of the aircraft is dedicated to Business Class, with 46 seats providing direct aisle access, lie-flat beds, and plenty of legroom to stretch on this ultra-long-haul journey. Despite its age, this remains one of my favorite seats in the skies. The in-flight experience matched my expectations of one of the world's best airlines: elevated dining, a professional and attentive crew, a vast selection of movies and TV series, complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi, luxurious amenity kits and bedding, and much more.

Despite ongoing political uncertainty, Cathay Pacific is betting on North America; this summer, the airline will operate more than 110 weekly nonstop flights from Hong Kong across its trans-Pacific network,

which now includes New York (JFK), Chicago (ORD), Boston (BOS), Los Angeles (LAX), San Francisco (SFO), Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), Vancouver (YVR), and Toronto (YYZ).

After our flight, we sat down with Chris van den Hooven, Cathay Pacific's (CX) Senior Vice President, Americas. Chris has an almost 40-year tenure at Cathay Pacific.

The North American network is not the only geographical

area of expansion for Cathay Pacific. The airline has announced three new routes in Europe—Rome Fiumicino (FCO), Munich (MUC), and Brussels (BRU), accelerating its ambition to serve 100 destinations worldwide.

"We're delighted with the success of our recent European expansion," Van den Hooven said, calling it "a testament to Cathay Pacific's commitment to increasing global connectivity to Hong Kong and beyond."



To support its network growth, Cathay Pacific counts on an order book for 21 B777-9s, 30 A330-900s, and 14 A321neos. The A330-900 was a relatively straightforward choice: the airline is one of the few in this part of the world that does not fly any of the Boeing 787 family aircraft. While, since the beginning of the year, rumors have circulated in regard to a sizeable aircraft order, the airline has confirmed nothing. Like all other customers, Cathay Pacific is not oblivious to Boeing's delivery delays concerning the B777-9, which is set to debut in 2027.



4



5

Class lounges, covering most of Terminal 1. The Business Class lounges include The Wing, The Pier, and The Deck, all offering the signature noodle bar. The signature dishes are also available in the two First Class lounges, together with an elevated tasting experience at The Pier First, in collaboration with Mott 32.

4 5 The A350-1000 engine and winglet shining bright during a beautiful sunrise. The aircraft is powered by two Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-97 engines, producing 97,000lb of thrust. The same engine will power the upcoming A350F, and Cathay Pacific has ordered up to 26 units.

"Cathay Pacific maintains flexible fleet planning to adapt to manufacturer delivery schedules," Van den Hooven said. "Cathay Group has close to 200 aircraft on order, including more options. We've optimized our existing fleet deployment and maintain close coordination with Boeing."

AT THE AIRPORT

Following my arrival from DFW on the longest flight I had ever taken, I spent a couple of days exploring Hong Kong. Few cities in the world scream 'aviation' as much as this Asian

megalopolis. From Kai Tak to the new three-runway system at Hong Kong Chek Lap Kok, the city is working hard to resume pre-pandemic traffic levels.

In 2024, the Cathay Group, comprising Cathay Pacific and HK Express, carried a combined total of more than 28 million passengers, a 30.7% year-over-year increase. Cathay Pacific recorded a significant increase in premium travel demand.

The airport experience in Hong Kong is nothing short of exceptional. Cathay Pacific offers three Business Class and two First

The Pier First could be the object of a separate 2,000-word article. The lounge has enjoyed an outstanding reputation for years, and it was easy to see why. From massage treatments to à la carte dining, exclusive drinks, and sleeping and shower rooms, it's worth traveling to the airport as early as possible to make the most of your time here. The lounge is private and stylish, resembling a luxury hotel. I spent some quality time here between flights, enjoying the signature mocktails the airline offers, including the famous Cathay Delight, and indulged in fine dining before flying back home.



A Cathay Pacific Boeing 777 stands poised on the tarmac under the night sky, its powerful GE90 engines gleaming under floodlights.



6 The Safran Cirrus III arranged in a reverse herringbone pattern on board the Cathay Pacific A350-1000. The front section of the aircraft is entirely dedicated to business class, with 46 seats in a 1-2-1 layout.

7 Cathay Pacific became the second operator of the Airbus A350-1000, taking its first delivery in June 2018. Today, the airline operates 18 units, and the type is configured 46/32W/256M

8 A Cathay Pacific Boeing 777-300(ER) taxiing under the Sky Bridge



A NEW ARIA

In October 2024, Cathay Pacific unveiled its new cabin product for the Boeing 777-300ER, the long-haul workhorse for many of its destinations in Oceania, Europe, and North America.

I experienced the new Business Class product, the Aria Suite, on my way back home from Hong Kong to London Heathrow. Cathay Pacific flies five times daily to the British capital, and the last flight, CX255, was the first long-haul connection to get the retrofit.





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I boarded B-KQH, a 2013-built Boeing 777-300ER, at Gate 7, in front of The Deck lounge. The aircraft is equipped with two equally-sized Business Class cabins totaling 45 seats. The Premium Economy product has also been revamped with 48 Recaro R5 seats, 10 more than the configuration it replaces.

At door 1, Cathay Pacific has integrated art installations, along with a refreshed galley and lavatory layout. Sleek and modern, the cabin perfectly transmits the sense of 'quiet luxury' the airline strives for.

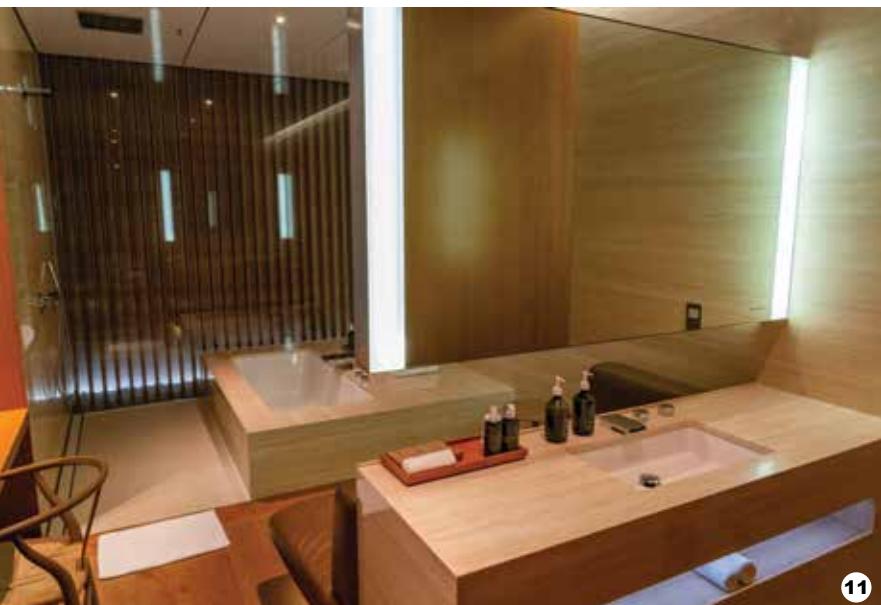
I found my window seat, 22A, at the end of the second Business Class cabin, which was fully packed on this flight. My first impression was beyond positive: the seat is a notable improvement in not only aesthetics but also functionality.

At my seat, I found the Bamford amenity kit, a bedding kit, dining and beverages menus, headphones, a bottle of water, and a comfortable pillow. After a welcome drink,

⑨ The Cathay Pacific A350-900 taking off from Hong Kong

⑩ The entrance to The Wing, First lounge, with some of the traffic in the reflections. The lounge is immediately after security controls

⑪ The Wing, First, offers a unique amenity: a fully stocked cabana, where passengers can relax for up to 90 minutes



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12 Cathay Pacific's second First Class lounge, The Pier, First, is one of the best in the world. The area feels more like a luxury hotel than an airport, with all the amenities one could expect from such a high-end lounge

13 The Pier, First, offers exclusive dining options, including a collaboration with Mott 32 which offers a separate tasting menu, complete with amuse bouche and drink pairing. The world-class service matches the rich dining offer

14 Cathay Pacific business class lounges are famous for the signature noodles bar, which is also available in First Class areas. The signature dishes are some of the most iconic in the aviation industry, and a delicious start to any flight.



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we powered into the night for our 14-hour flight to London, admiring the takeoff from the onboard cameras.

Shortly after takeoff, complimentary Wi-Fi was made available to Business Class passengers; this worked brilliantly throughout the whole flight, reaching speeds as high as 30Mbps. Supper service soon started with an aperitif. I tried one of the Cathay Signature mains available on flights from Hong Kong. The braised beef ribs with port wine were tender and flavorful, and paired superbly with the wines on board. Besides the standard beverage list, Cathay Pacific offered a special wine list featuring vintages from lesser-known producers. I decided to skip the cheese and dessert service to focus on some much-needed rest.

Before going to sleep, I explored more of the Aria Suite. The in-flight entertainment immediately stood out for its dimensions and resolution. At 24", the panel boasts a sharp 4K definition for what is now the best Business Class IFE (in-flight entertainment) screen in the world, which can be controlled via touchscreen or a remote found on the side of the upper storage bin.

The console is roughly twice the size of that found in the previous cabin design, optimizing the space that was previously lost due to the IFE swivel mechanism. It houses a wireless charger and a secret storage compartment for phones or passports. Underneath is another touchscreen panel, which controls the lights and the seat's position.



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15 Our Boeing 777-300(ER) taking us to London Heathrow resting at gate 7, in front of The Deck lounge. The aircraft has been retrofitted with Cathay Pacific's new cabin, which has been operating on the CX255 for several months as the first long-haul destination



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16 The Aria Suite redefines taste and elegance in the skies and improves on the product it replaces. It represents a great integration of design and technology, elevating the in-flight experience

The large tray table is stored underneath the IFE screen. A portion of it folds towards the passenger, its junctions neatly concealed and seamlessly integrated into the cabin's design.

One important addition is the privacy door. This is automatically locked for taxiing, takeoff, and landing to ensure safety. During cruising, the lock is released. The door can be closed, granting excellent privacy from anyone walking along the aisles, even though the suite is already quite private thanks to its large walls and the fact that all seats face away from the aisles.

The in-flight entertainment selection is truly exceptional. Cathay Pacific has added a 'search' function to its interface to browse the thousands of available titles, as well as a nicely designed landing page for seat and light controls. The most 'viral' integration, however, is a screen that displays the usage of the lavatories, communicating which ones are free in real time.



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17 The Aria suite provides 24" 4K displays, wireless chargers, Bluetooth connectivity and plenty of smart functions both in the IFE and seat. For example, a separate seat control panel is made available once the seat is reclined. The hard product is complemented by attentive service, great dining options and all the amenities you'd expect from a world-class airline

After reclining my seat, making the bed, and closing the privacy doors, I noticed another panel to control the seat and lights when lying down, another thoughtful design detail. I woke up almost nine hours later—the longest and most comfortable sleep I had ever had on an aircraft.

A couple of hours later, breakfast service started, and I opted for the shrimp and pork dumpling noodle soup from the all-day dining menu. We landed in London Heathrow on time, enjoying a spectacular view of the British capital.

Cathay Pacific has put in a great deal of work and attention to ensure that, despite the

pandemic's complexities, its products remain competitive. The new Aria Suite is the perfect example of integrated design and functionality. The materials, colors, and technology all work together to elevate the flight experience, which now stands on the global podium. The Aria Suite is a sleek, future-proofed experience in the skies and easily ranks among the best seats in the world.

Cathay Pacific remains committed to the ultra-premium market. As Chris van den Hooven told us, the airline aims to be "one of the world's greatest service brands." And, coming soon, he said: "CX will launch a new First Class experience in 2026."





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18 A mattress and blanket are provided, and after making my bed and closing the new privacy door, I was able to sleep for almost nine hours without interruption, a record for me



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19 The amenity kit is from Bamford and contains all the inflight essentials. The case comes in four different colours and is designed for passengers to reuse after the flight.



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20 The GE90 powering us on this flight as sun started to rise above eastern Europe.

21 Cathay Pacific is waiting for the new Boeing 777X, which will be delivered with a new First Class product as well as the Aria Suite. For now, the A350 and B777-300(ER) are the backbone of its long-haul network, which will include 100 destinations before the end of 2025.

22 Early morning in London, before the city wakes up for yet another busy day

23 Breakfast service, complete with an espresso coffee. I opted for one of the options from the all-day dining menu instead of the multiple breakfast ones.

24 Lines of widebodies in Hong Kong as seen from the Sky Bridge

25 Approaching Dallas-Fort Worth, Cathay Pacific's latest destination in North America and a true global hub.

STARLUX: SHINING BRIGHT IN THE COSMIC SKIES

Story and Photos
SIMONE CHELLINI



1 A stunning sunset over the Pacific as we made our way to Tokyo.



2 The spacious and comfortable QANTAS Business Class Lounge in Hong Kong offered plenty of seating.

3 Clear signage at the boarding gate in Hong Kong made the process smooth and hassle-free.

Taiwan is already home to two world-class airlines known for their exceptional service: the national carrier, China Airlines, and the privately owned EVA Air. So, it came as quite a surprise in 2016 when news broke that a third major airline would be launched by none other than the son of the former chairman of the Evergreen Group; the parent company of EVA Air. Even before its first flight, this ambitious startup (later named Starlux) made headlines by placing large aircraft orders with Airbus, including the long-haul A350, signaling bold intentions from the outset.

Starlux officially took to the skies on January 23, 2020, with its inaugural flight from Taipei to Macau using a brand-new Airbus A321neo. Early reviews



were glowing, with praise focused on the airline's premium service and attention to detail. However, just two months later, operations were brought to a halt due to the global outbreak of COVID-19. Despite this major setback, Starlux persisted. Flights gradually resumed, and although there was initial skepticism about the airline's future, it steadily expanded its fleet and network.

In April 2023, Starlux launched its first transpacific route to Los Angeles (LAX) using its new-

ly delivered Airbus A350-900s. This marked a turning point, and the airline has since continued its expansion across Asia and North America, adding destinations such as San Francisco (SFO) and Seattle (SEA), and forming a strategic partnership with Alaska Airlines. The airline has also announced its intent to join the Oneworld alliance—further signaling its global ambitions.

Despite its emergent history, Starlux has built a loyal following and earned glowing reviews from aviation bloggers and the

press alike. With all this in mind, I decided it was time to experience the airline for myself. I booked a one-way business class ticket from Hong Kong (HKG) to Tokyo Narita (NRT) via Taipei (TPE); a route pair only recently added to Starlux's network in May 2024.

I arrived at Hong Kong International Airport (Chek Lap Kok) on a sweltering summer morning, ready to check in for my journey. The Starlux counters were easy to locate, and I reached them just as the staff were putting the finishing touches in place. Being second in line, I was promptly called over to one of the two business class desks with a warm, "Good morning, sir." After a smooth document check, I was given two boarding passes decorated with delightful Snoopy-themed artwork a playful touch that also appeared on the Qantas

4 The sleek Starlux A330-900neo awaiting boarding at Hong Kong International Airport.

5 The QANTAS Lounge in Hong Kong provided us with a breathtaking view of the apron.

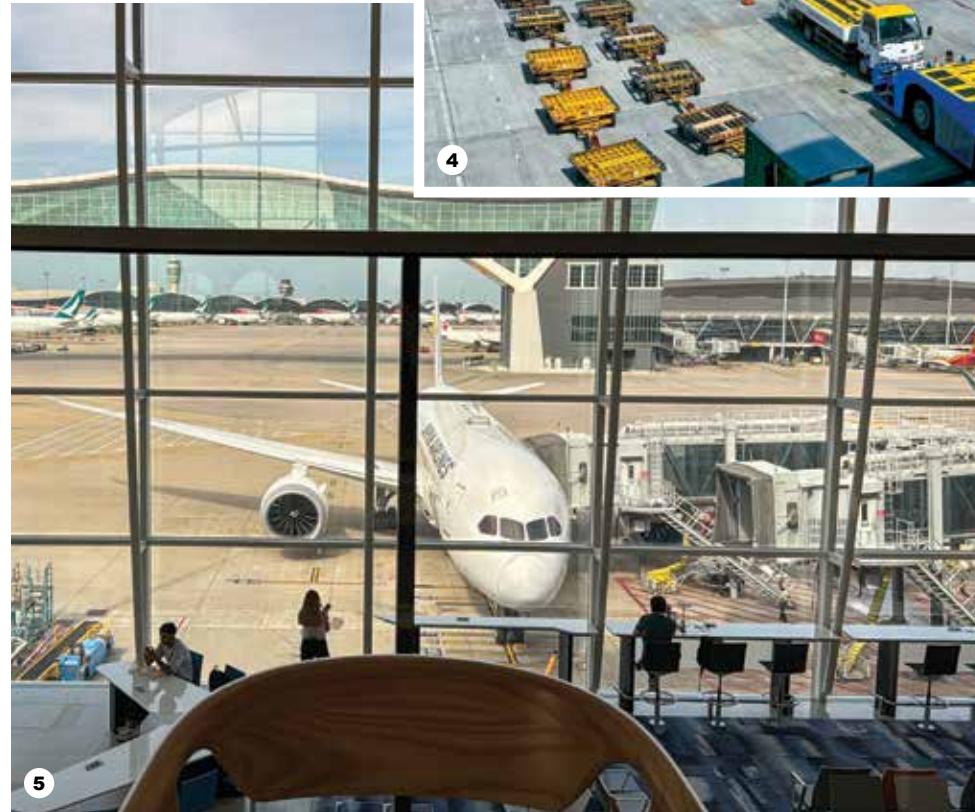
Lounge invitation. With a cheerful "Thank you for flying with Starlux," I made my way toward security and immigration. Despite the morning crowd, the process was efficient, taking no more than ten minutes.

The Qantas Lounge is conveniently located just past immigration. I was greeted by a friendly lounge agent who welcomed me with a smile. Since it was still early and no Qantas departures were scheduled for

the morning, the lounge was nearly empty, making it easy to find a comfortable spot. I headed straight to the buffet, which featured a generous spread: scrambled eggs, sausages, pastries, yogurt, fresh fruit, and noodles. One highlight was a dim sum cart, elegantly wheeled around by a staff member, offering freshly steamed delights. Everything was fresh and of excellent quality. I chose a seat by the window, where I enjoyed a peaceful view of the apron, sip-



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ping tea and watching aircraft glide across the tarmac.

Knowing that our gate would be a bit of a walk, I left the lounge about 30 minutes before the scheduled boarding time and took a leisurely stroll toward Gate 40. No matter how many times I visit Hong Kong International, its architecture never fails to impress. Opened in 1998, the terminal remains one of the most striking and efficient in the world. When I reached the gate, I was greeted by the sight of Starlux's sleek Airbus A330-



900neo gleaming in the morning sun - a stunning aircraft. Although boarding was listed for 10:05 a.m., the process began a few minutes early, with business class passengers invited to board first.

I was greeted at the aircraft door with a beaming smile by a warm and welcoming set of flight attendants, one of whom personally escorted me to my seat 7A. The A330neo's 28 business class seats, designed by Safran (Sky-lounge Core), are arranged in a staggered 1-2-1 configuration, offering direct aisle access for every passenger. My seat felt roomy and thoughtfully laid out, with a side table featuring a built-in wireless phone charger. In the side storage cubby, a pair of decent noise-canceling headphones were already waiting.

Within a minute of settling in, a cheerful flight attendant came by to introduce herself, offering a warm towel and a welcome drink which was a refreshing guava and passionfruit pressed juice. The towel was perfectly



6 Starlux's A330neo features the Safran Sky Lounge seat for its regional business class—a well-designed and stylish option.

7 Snoopy made a fun appearance on several Starlux amenities, including the in-flight entertainment welcome screen.



heated, and the juice was sharp, fresh, and invigorating. Menus were already placed in the seat pocket, but since I had pre-ordered the tapas option online a few days prior, I already knew what to expect for the meal.

As boarding continued, it became apparent that the business class cabin would be lightly loaded today - fewer than half the seats were occupied. The same flight attendant who welcomed me earlier, returned, crouching beside my seat with a friendly smile. She confirmed my tapas selection, and offered me a drink, recommending one of the airline's signature cocktails. I decided to try something new and went with the "Bi Luo Chun Galaxy," a unique gin and tea based cocktail.

Once boarding was complete, the captain made an announcement that we'd be delayed about 20 minutes due to congestion. The crew offered a refill of my juice while we waited, which I happily accepted. Although the door closed five minutes before our scheduled departure, the pilot soon informed us that our



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takeoff slot had been pushed back by 30 minutes due to air traffic. As we waited, another friendly crew member approached with a tray of adorable Snoopy x Starlux branded playing cards. “How about a souvenir to remember your flight with us today?” she offered. Naturally, I couldn’t resist.

At 10:55 (20 minutes past our scheduled departure) we finally pushed back, accompanied by Starlux’s whimsical Star-Wanderers safety video. Filled with animated space characters and cosmic themes, it was a refreshing and playful take on pre-flight safety – a welcome change from the typically dull and procedural videos seen on many other airlines. Following a rather lengthy 25-minute taxi to Runway 25L, we roared into the

cloudy Hong Kong sky.

With just 70 minutes of flight time ahead, the crew jumped into action as soon as the seat-belt sign was switched off. Within 15 minutes, a crisp white tablecloth was laid on my tray table, followed shortly by my pre-ordered meal and cocktail. The presentation was impeccable; you could tell it had been thoughtfully arranged in the galley. Even the butter and chocolate were precisely placed so the branding faced me, a small but telling detail.

I started with the “Bi Luo Chun Galaxy” cocktail, a gin and tea-based drink that, while visually appealing with a single large ice cube, tasted a bit bland. Still, I appreciated the attention to detail in presentation. Two warm,

fluffy bread rolls were served on the side, and they tore apart perfectly soft, fresh, and comforting.

The tapas plate, while a little sparse, offered a variety of textures and temperatures. The singular curry prawn was warm and flavorful, and the turnip cake was equally satisfying. The cold rolled chicken, while tender, lacked seasoning and was forgettable. Notably absent was the duck that had been listed on the menu; in its place was a ginger-chili sauce, which I repurposed as a dip for the chicken. Dessert, a steamed pumpkin sticky rice milk pudding, turned out to be a delightful surprise. Despite not typically enjoying Chinese desserts, I found it refreshing and yes, I licked the bowl clean.

❸ Business class was arranged in a private 1-2-1 configuration, offering both comfort and seclusion.

❹ Departing from Hong Kong never disappoints—breathtaking views all around.

❶ A refreshing guava and passionfruit welcome drink, served with a warm towel before departure.

❷ The crew offered me this thoughtful Snoopy-themed goodie bag as an apology for a catering mishap.

❸ The entrance to the Starlux Galactic Lounge in Terminal 1 of Taoyuan International Airport.

❹ While compact, the Starlux Lounge had ample seating and a comfortable atmosphere.

As I finished my meal, the captain announced our descent would begin in ten minutes. The same flight attendant who had been serving me returned to clear my tray and offered tea or coffee. I requested green tea, which was delivered within minutes, along with a piece of chocolate and another warm towel—another example of the attentive and efficient service.

While I was enjoying the view outside, I was taken by surprise when the lead flight attendant knelt beside my seat and addressed me by name. “I’m so sorry about the catering mishap and the missing items,” she said



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sincerely, remarkable considering I hadn’t said a word to the crew about it. “It appears some items weren’t properly loaded, and I’d like to personally apologize on behalf of myself and the crew.” I reassured her it wasn’t an issue at all, and that what I’d been served was still very good—especially for such a short flight.

She then handed me a small, branded gift bag adorned with

Starlux and Snoopy designs. “Please accept this as a token of our apology. I’ve filled it with chocolates, sweets, and some small Starlux souvenirs.” I thanked her profusely for the unexpected and generous gesture. “Appreciated” doesn’t quite capture it—inside the bag were not only treats but another set of playing cards, a Snoopy postcard, and a Starlux inflatable A350 aircraft. A thoughtful and

memorable end to an already impressive flight.

After that thoughtful gesture from the crew, we were asked to take our seats for landing. We touched down smoothly on Runway 23R at Taoyuan International Airport, approximately 30 minutes behind schedule. A 15-minute taxi followed, as we made our way to our assigned stand at Terminal 2. One unique aspect of Starlux’s operations is that the airline uses both Terminal 1 (primarily used by China Airlines) and Terminal 2 (home to EVA Air), which can mean a bit of a walk when connecting between flights. I checked the nearest flight information display, which confirmed that my onward flight to Tokyo Narita (NRT) would be departing from Terminal 1. With that in mind, I set off on the trek across the airport to visit the Starlux Galactic



including roasted salmon with hollandaise, and a Japanese tonkotsu miso ramen. Not being particularly fond of pork, I opted for the only Asian dish without it, the 'steamed monascus glutinous rice with vegetable meat floss.'

The dish arrived in just over five minutes, giving me time to grab a chilled bottle of water from the fridge. The fragrant, slightly sticky rice paired well with the savory, salty topping, offering a unique yet satisfying combination. As the lounge gradually emptied, I wandered over to the buffet to explore the offerings.



There were several hot dishes, from a Western-style seafood risotto and potato gratin, to Asian options like Japanese pork stew and handmade bao. It all looked delicious, but not wanting to overindulge before the next flight, I settled on a small slice of cheesecake and a cup of tea.

Feeling refreshed after some downtime in the lounge, I decided to head to the gate about 20 minutes before the posted boarding time. After a leisurely walk, I arrived at Gate A9's lower level, where I spotted B-58303—a 2022-delivered Airbus A330-900neo—being prepped for our flight to Tokyo Narita. Boarding began right on schedule, with passengers needing special assistance invited first, followed by business class, which had its own dedicated boarding lane.

I was warmly welcomed at the aircraft door by one of the friendly flight attendants, who promptly escorted me to seat 8K—the last row in the business class cabin on the right side. Within moments, I was offered the now-familiar guava and passionfruit mixed pressed juice, along with a warm hand towel. Shortly after, a flight attendant named Sally introduced herself as the crew member looking after me on our journey to Tokyo. She kindly asked me to review the menu and let her know when I was ready to place my order.

Once I had finished my juice, Sally returned with a bright smile. “I see you’ve pre-ordered the Hutong Yakiniku steak online. What would you like to drink with that? We’re offering a special sake available only on our flights to Japan. Would you like to try it?” While the offer was tempting, I opted for the Sci-Fi Cosmos cocktail—a blend of gin,



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14 A delicious serving of monascus glutinous rice with vegetable meat floss—one of the lounge's local specialties.

15 A typical bustling afternoon at Taoyuan International Airport, Terminal 1.



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blue curaçao, and tonic water—along with a can of Coca-Cola. Sally beamed. “Excellent choice. Would you like to try some boba tea afterward? It’s our signature drink.” I let her know I couldn’t have dairy, to which she immediately offered, “Would you like it with black tea instead? I can make that for you.” Her thoughtful accommodation was hard to turn down, so I gratefully ac-

cepted. After confirming that I preferred to dine after takeoff, she wished me a pleasant flight and encouraged me to reach out if I needed anything during the journey.

As with my previous flight, the business class cabin was lightly loaded; less than half full. The boarding door closed, and we pushed back a full ten minutes



ahead of schedule, accompanied by the charming animated StarWonderers safety video. Once the tug disconnected the ground crew gave us a friendly wave-off—a gesture reminiscent of Japanese airport customs—we began a smooth ten-minute taxi to Runway 23L. Moments later, the twin Rolls-Royce engines came to life, and we surged into the sky.

Due to adverse weather in the area, the crew was instructed to remain seated for the first 30 minutes after takeoff until we had cleared the clouds. As soon as the seatbelt sign was turned off, the cabin crew sprang into action, preparing the meal service in the galley. Within minutes, Sally returned with my Sci-Fi Cosmos cocktail and the Coke. The drink was pleasantly refreshing and definitely an improvement over the gin and tea cocktail I had on the earlier Hong Kong flight. Not long after, my meal tray arrived, beautifully presented in a style reminiscent of a traditional bento box.



I began my meal with the Takoyaki, a flour-based octopus ball which, while tasty, couldn't quite rival the versions found on the streets of Tokyo. Alongside it were two pieces of rolled eggs stuffed with rice, imitation crab, spinach, and carrots. As a sushi lover, I found these little bites hit the spot perfectly. Next to them was a refreshing

daikon and carrot salad tossed in a sesame ginger dressing; light, crisp, and full of flavor. The tray also featured a clear broth soup with tofu and fish balls, which surprised me with its depth and umami-rich taste.

The highlight, however, was the Hutong Yakiniku main dish; a juicy ground beef patty served with crispy rice cakes, stir-fried

16 An incredible dinner tray, crafted in collaboration with Hutong Yakiniku, a Taipei-based restaurant.

17 A delightful caramel custard paired with boba iced tea—an unexpectedly fantastic dessert combo.

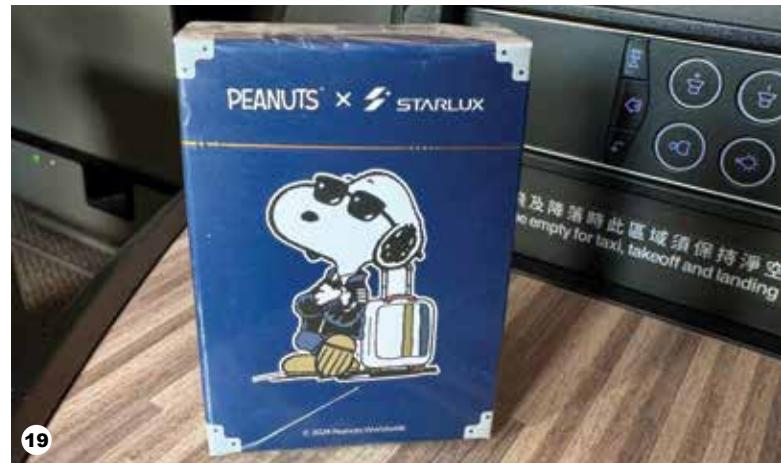
18 19 Starlux offers all business class passengers a set of playing cards—a charming and thoughtful memento.



18

vegetables, and a soft-boiled egg. The beef was tender and seasoned beautifully, and the accompanying bowl of mushroom rice was rich and savory. The vegetables still had a satisfying crunch, a rarity on most flights where they're often overcooked. Kudos to Starlux for replicating restaurant-quality food at 35,000 feet is no easy task, but they absolutely delivered here.

Once I'd finished, Sally returned to clear the tray and asked if I was ready for dessert. I gladly said yes. A few minutes later, she brought out a small tray and smiled, "I included some fresh fruit which I thought you might enjoy something light." Just as I was admiring the perfectly set caramel flan, she returned with my black tea boba, her eyes beaming. The flan was silky smooth with delicate hints of vanilla, and the fruit was crisp and refreshing. But the star was the boba; the blend of chewy



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pearls and fragrant black tea was phenomenal. I was so glad Sally encouraged me to try it. When offered tea or coffee afterward, I had to politely decline as I was simply too full to enjoy anything else. Moments later, another flight attendant passed by with a tray of Snoopy playing cards. "Would you like a souvenir from today's flight?" she asked warmly. How could I say no?

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, I finally explored the Starlux in-flight entertainment system. It was sleek and intuitive, though the Western content was a bit limited. Still, it was more than enough for a short regional flight, and I hope there's a broader selection aboard their A350 fleet. I watched a few shows to pass the time as we hit patches of light

turbulence, causing the seatbelt sign to come on intermittently.

During one of the calmer stretches, a flight attendant came by to check on any awake passengers. I asked for a cup of sencha green tea, but due to the seatbelt sign still being on, she could only serve cold drinks at that time. I settled for a glass of water, which was delivered in seconds, complete with a smile. Not even ten minutes later, once the seatbelt sign turned off, she was back with the hot cup of sencha. The attentiveness of the Starlux crew was truly exceptional as every detail felt intentional and thoughtful.

Before I knew it, the captain announced the start of our de-

scent. The crew passed through the cabin one final time, offering hot towels and a tray of assorted candies. "Take as many as you'd like; there is no need to choose just one," Sally encouraged. She thanked me warmly for flying with Starlux and genuinely asked for any feedback I had. Minutes later, the cabin was secured, and we gently touched down on runway 16L. We taxied past Terminal 3 and came to a stop at a quiet Terminal 2, nestled between an Emirates A380 and a Qatar Airways 777.

I was wished a heartfelt goodbye at the door and stepped into the terminal with a smile. Since I had no checked baggage, I was curbside in mere minutes, bringing this memorable Starlux journey

to a smooth and satisfying close.

As you might have guessed, my first experience with Starlux left a strong and positive impression. Is there room for improvement? Absolutely. But what the airline currently offers is something many well-established global carriers could only aspire to.

Let's start with what I consider their greatest strength: the staff—particularly the cabin crew. They were warm, engaging, and consistently went above and beyond to ensure every passenger felt looked after. One standout moment was when they noticed a mismatch with the menu, and without any prompting from me, came over to apologize with a thought-

②0 The flight path for our journey from Taipei (TPE) to Tokyo Narita (NRT) this evening.





ful bag of goodies. That level of proactive service recovery surpasses even many world-class airlines. Their attention to detail was equally impressive—after initially being unable to serve my green tea due to turbulence, the crew remembered and brought it over as soon as the seatbelt sign was turned off, without me having to ask again.

The food was another highlight. Despite the mix-up with my first meal departing Hong Kong, the overall quality and flavors were top-notch. I also enjoyed the offerings in the Taipei lounge, which provided a comfortable and well-curated pre-flight experience.

The seat on the Airbus A330neo also exceeded expectations. Considering it's marketed as a regional product, it offered impressive comfort, with soft padding and ample space. I'd be more than happy to fly long-haul



23



in it.

That said, no airline is perfect, and there are a few areas where Starlux could improve. The in-flight entertainment system, while modern and user-friendly, could benefit from a larger content library—especially when it comes to TV shows. Additionally, the lounge I visited felt a bit cramped, though I understand the 'Galactic' lounge in Terminal 2 offers more space.

As Starlux continues to grow, I hope it maintains the high service standards it has already set. Fellow Taiwanese carriers EVA Air and China Airlines rank among the world's best, and Starlux has clearly positioned itself as a strong competitor. I genuinely wish them continued success and will be cheering them on enthusiastically from the sidelines.



24

① The in-flight entertainment system had a solid movie selection—plenty to keep passengers engaged.

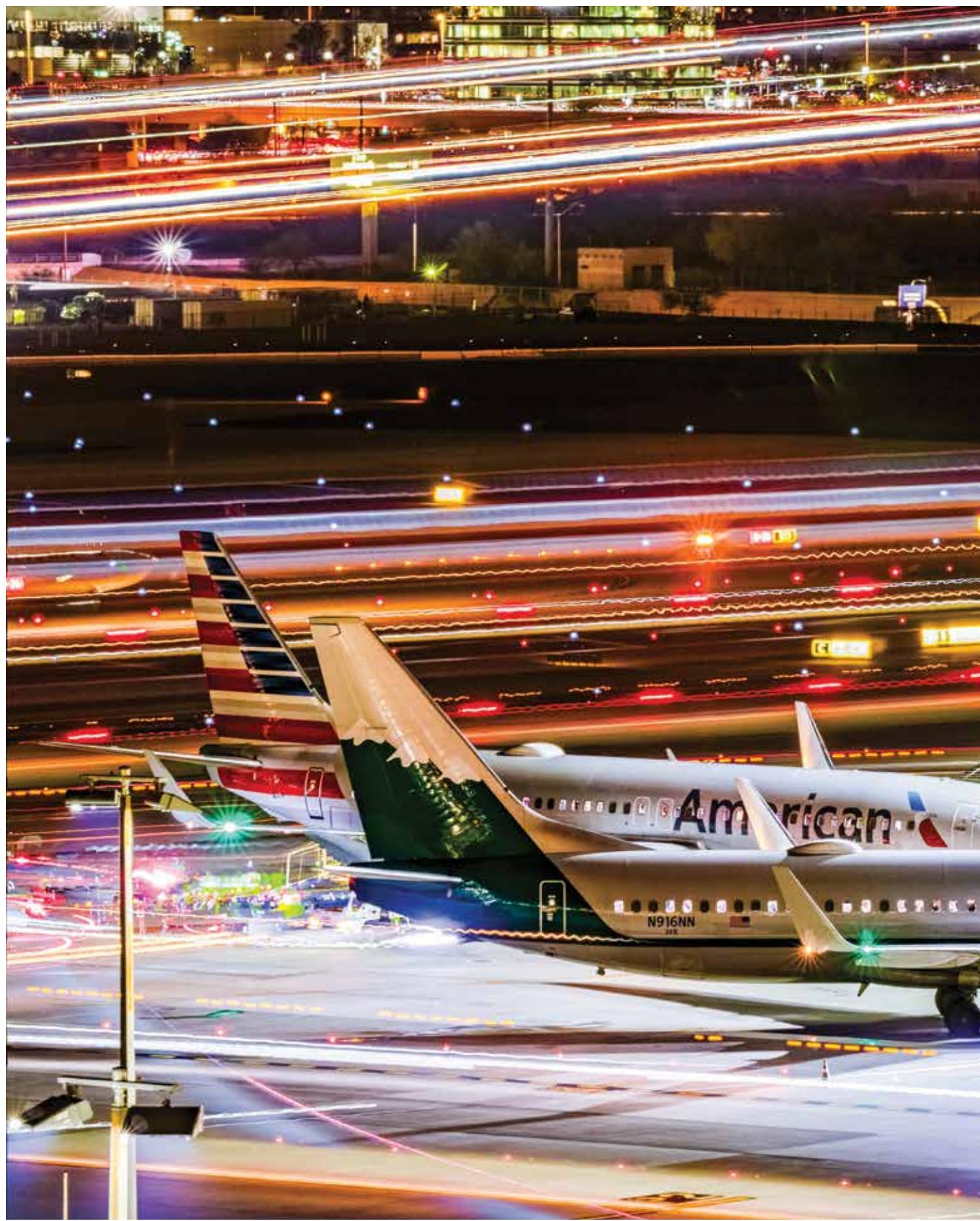
② The serene business class cabin aboard Starlux's A330neo. With light loads on both flights, the experience felt especially exclusive.

③ A magnificent view of the Rolls-Royce Trent 7000 engines soaring over the East China Sea.

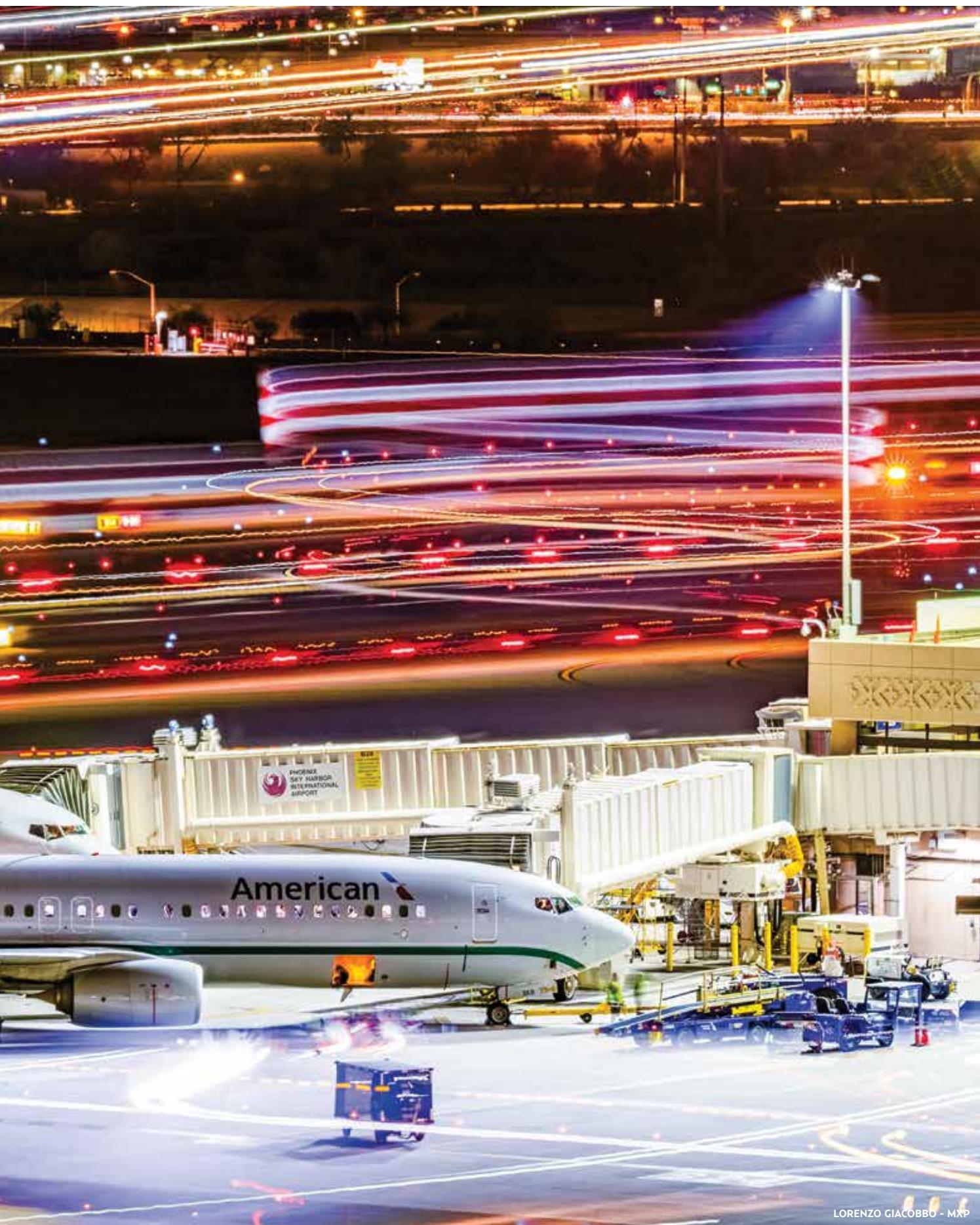
④ My sencha green tea, served shortly after takeoff—a calming and elegant touch.

Reservation	7	Seat	9
Check In	9	Ambiance	9
Lounge	7	IFE	7
Boarding	8	Crew	10

THE CENTERFOLD



THE CENTERFOLD



LORENZO GIACOBBO - MXP

AIRWAYS SPECIAL

THE RISING NIGHT OF KOREAN AIR

Story & Photos

ENRIQUE PERRELLA



As South Korea's national airline prepares to merge with Asiana Airlines, it introduces an entirely new corporate identity, fleet, lounges, and inflight services to the public.

¹ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas hendrerit lorem et est ultrices tristique.

KOREAN AIR (KE), soon to merge with Asiana Airlines (OZ), is making one of the most ambitious transformations in recent aviation industry history.

The Seoul-based flag carrier will see its workforce grow from 20,000 to nearly 29,000 employees, its fleet size increase from 150 to almost 240 aircraft, and a complete overhaul of its corporate image, aircraft livery, and inflight product portfolio.

In March, Korean Air unveiled a sweeping rebranding, its first major redesign in over four decades. It features a modernized Taegeuk symbol, a refined logotype, and a sleek new livery.

The unveiling took place during 'Rising Night', an exclusive gathering at Seoul Gimpo International Airport (GMP), where a Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner was introduced as the first aircraft bearing the new identity.

In addition to its new look, the airline has introduced a range of new inflight products, including a revamped menu for First and Business Class, crafted by renowned Seoul-based chef Seakyeong Kim, new amenity kits, and bedding and loungewear for premium passengers.





❷ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas hendrerit lorem et est ultrices tristique.

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❹ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas hendrerit lorem et est ultrices tristique.

The merging of Korean Air and Asiana is expected to be completed on January 1, 2027. Meanwhile, the two carriers are anticipated to operate in tandem during the transition period.

However, as the leadership at Korean Air told Airways during an exclusive visit to its headquarters at GMP, this magnitude of operational upscaling presents not only opportunities but also intricate challenges that go beyond fleet and route integration. Over the past four years, the airline has navigated regulatory hurdles and made internal adjustments while striving to maintain operational excellence and market competitiveness.

The histories of both Korean Air and Asiana highlight the high stakes of this merger. Each airline has significantly contributed to South Korea's role in global connectivity, bringing distinct strengths, corporate cultures, and challenges to the table.

When completed, the merger is expected to reshape the Asian aviation landscape and enhance Korean Air's competitiveness on the global stage.

GROWTH AND RIVALRY

Founded in 1969, Korean Air has long been a pillar of South Korean transportation and a symbol of national pride. Over the decades, it has grown from a modest domestic airline into an international powerhouse, connecting South Korea to destinations worldwide.

The airline has weathered economic crises and shifts in industry demand while building a reputation for excellence in service, safety, and innovation.

In the late 1980s, Korean Air faced a competitive shift as South Korea opened its skies to new entrants. Asiana Airlines, founded in 1988, emerged as a formidable rival, differentiating itself with a strong emphasis on customer service and a rapidly expanding international network.

The rivalry between the two airlines fueled innovation and growth. Both carriers facilitated South Korea's international business, tourism, and cultural exchange.



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In recent years, however, rising fuel costs, fluctuating demand, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced airlines worldwide to rethink their strategies. For Korean Air and Asiana, a merger presented a solution—a bold move to create a single, more resilient carrier capable of competing in the global market.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The journey toward this merger has been anything but straightforward. Korean Air faced rigorous scrutiny from regulators in South Korea and abroad, including in Europe and the United States, where authorities raised concerns about market concentration and consumer choice. Despite these obstacles, Korean Air remained committed to completing the merger, recognizing its transformative potential.

As the merger nears completion, two key figures in Korean Air's leadership—Kenneth Chang, Chief Marketing Officer, and David Pacey, Executive Vice President of In-flight Service and Lounges—are driving the airline's transformational efforts.



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Chang favors a hands-on leadership style. His career is marked by initiatives aimed at enhancing the customer experience through technological advancements and exceptional in-flight service.

"Mergers in the airline industry are inherently challenging," Chang said. "But,

with Korean Air and Asiana, we have a unique opportunity to build something that's greater than the sum of its parts."

Chang envisions the merger not as a mere operational adjustment, but as a chance to redefine Korean Air's role in global aviation. By expanding its fleet, routes, and workforce, the

airline can better serve domestic and international travelers with a broader range of options and more competitive service.

"It's not just about adding planes or routes," he said. "It's about creating an airline that meets passenger needs while staying true to our values and commitments."

Pacey, meanwhile, is reshaping Korean Air's look and feel by reimagining its hard and soft products. Drawing from a background at Hyatt Hotels, Pacey prioritizes creating meaningful passenger experiences both in the air and on the ground.

"In today's competitive landscape, it's about more than just service," he said. "It's about building connections that resonate."

The American hospitality veteran has introduced culinary innovations, such as a dining program crafted with Chef Kim. Passengers can savor authentic Korean dishes, such as the timeless bibimbap, alongside vegan options that reflect evolving dietary preferences. Complementing this is a curated wine list by 2019 World Sommelier Champion Marc Almert.

"The menu that we have today in our lounges and onboard will be completely revamped," Pacey said. So, do expect to see changes, all the way from the china we use to the ingredients and presentation."

On the ground, Korean Air's lounges are being transformed to strike a balance between relaxation, productivity, and cultural immersion. Major expansions at Incheon International Airport (ICN) and forthcoming renovations at New York JFK and LAX aim to create luxuri-



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ous spaces with wellness zones, Korean noodle bars, and locally inspired live cooking stations.

"The goal is to make every passenger feel a sense of belonging and exclusivity," Pacey said.

A UNIFIED VISION

As part of the merger, the combined carrier will operate a heavily diverse fleet, including Airbus A220s, A321neos, A330s, A350s, A380s, and Boeing 737s, 747s, 777s, and 787s. Moreover, Korean Air is expecting the delivery of 50 Boeing wide-bodies—including 20 777-9s and 20 787-10s—and 33 Airbus jets, including 27 A350-1000s and six A350-900s.

These new wide-bodies, once delivered, are expected to be fitted with Korean Air's all-new Prestige 2.0 Business Class cabin, already available on the carrier's Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners. This new cabin product is expected



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to replace the current Prestige Business Class available on all the other wide-bodies.

As the new aircraft begin to arrive, Korean Air is trying to accelerate the retirement of its oldest planes, as well as of its Boeing 747-8 and Airbus A380 fleet. However, as the airline's CEO, Walter Cho, told Airways, these retirements might be postponed. "We should have already received many wide-bodies from Boeing," he said, referring to the delayed Boeing 777-9 that the airline has on order. "Because of those delays, we might even consider keeping the 747-8s longer, and even giving them a fresh coat of paint with our new livery."

Having sold five of its passenger 747-8I aircraft to the US-based aerospace and defense company Sierra Nevada Corporation (SNC) for US\$671 million, Korean Air currently operates a fleet of six 747-8I passenger jets and seven 747-8F freighters. That unexpected sale represented a departure from



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the airline's earlier plans to keep all its 747s in service until 2031.

The sale of these planes was particularly noteworthy given their next intended role: SNC plans to repurpose the aircraft as part of a US\$13.08 billion contract to develop a new fleet of Survivable Air Operations Centers (SAOC). These planes will replace the aging E-4B 'Doomsday' planes, which currently serve as the US military's airborne command centers in emergency and wartime scenarios.

Built on the older Boeing 747-200 platform, the E-4B can ac-

commodate up to 111 people and is designed to maintain communication and operational capabilities even during catastrophic events. The transition to the newer 747-8i model reflects advancements in technology and the enduring utility of the jumbo jet for specialized missions, even as its role in commercial aviation diminishes.

Back in Korea, both airlines will phase out their Airbus A380s by 2026, marking the end of an era for Korean Air, which has long been synonymous with the grandeur of quad-engine aircraft. However, it also

signals the beginning of a new chapter focused on efficiency, sustainability, and modernity.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Korean Air and Asiana Airlines have to carry out significant work in their human resources and commercial departments. Integrating the distinct corporate cultures of the two airlines presents a formidable challenge.

"Korean Air and Asiana have very different company DNAs, much like the differences between red states and blue states in the US," Chang said.

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One of the primary challenges is ensuring that employees from both airlines can collaborate effectively to provide a seamless customer experience. "You don't want passengers on the same flight to have different experiences simply because the flight attendants come from different backgrounds," he said.

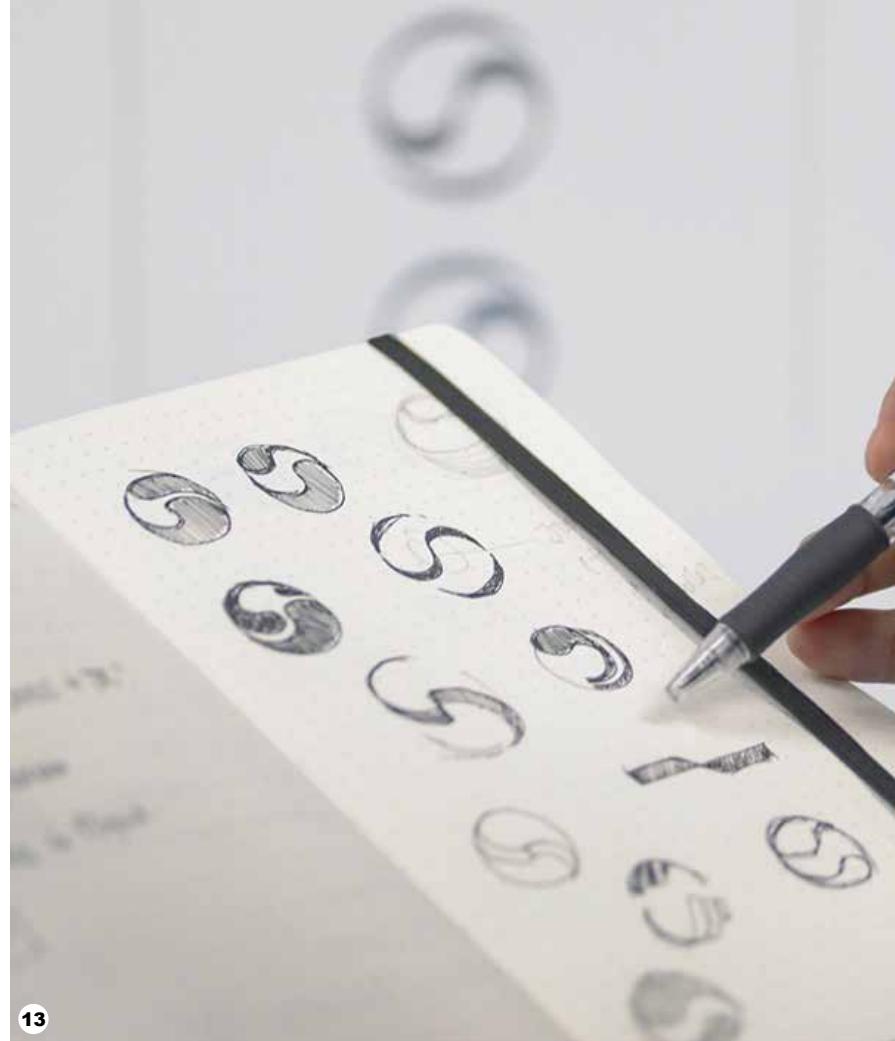
As Chang elaborated on the vision behind the airline's redesign, he explained that the new image holds deep cultural significance. "At the heart of this transformation is a deeper, more refined shade of blue for the iconic Taegeuk symbol," he said. "This was inspired by the swirling ribbons of Korea's traditional Sangmo dance, reflecting both movement and heritage."

The updated logotype features fluid curves reminiscent of Korean brushstrokes, harmonizing tradition with a contemporary aesthetic. More than a visual refresh, the modernization is in line with Korean Air's ambitious plans for the future.

"As a unified Korean Air, we aspire to transcend transportation by forging connections between people, cultures, and the world above us," the CEO stated.

Once Asiana is fully integrated, Star Alliance will lose its presence in South Korea, leaving SkyTeam as the leading airline alliance in the country. At the same time, Korean Air's joint venture with Delta Air Lines is expected to gain traction, particularly on flights between South Korea and Delta's hubs in the US.

"Merging two airlines involves more than just cost synergies;



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ASIANA

Aircraft Type	Total	Avg. Age
Airbus A321	23	6.4 years
Airbus A330	15	15.3 years
Airbus A350 XWB	15	5.4 years
Airbus A380	6	9.7 years
Boeing 747	12	21.1 years
boeing 767	2	27.6 years
Boeing 777	9	16.9 years
Total	82	12.8 years

KOREAN AIR

Aircraft Type	Total	Avg. Age
Airbus A220	10	6.5 years
Airbus A321	13	1.2 years
Airbus A330	19	19.6 years
Airbus A380	7	12.1 years
Boeing 737	23	14.5 years
Boeing 747	18	11.8 years
Boeing 777	46	12.2 years
Boeing 787 Dreamliner	18	5.0 years
Total	154	11.3 years

it's about creating a combined entity that can redefine the industry," Chang concluded.

A MODEL FOR GLOBAL CONSOLIDATION

The merger promises to strengthen Korean Air's position as a leading global carrier. With nearly 240 aircraft at its disposal, the airline will increase frequency and capacity on high-demand routes, particularly in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. The combined entity's scale and operational efficiency will position it to compete with some of the world's largest airlines.

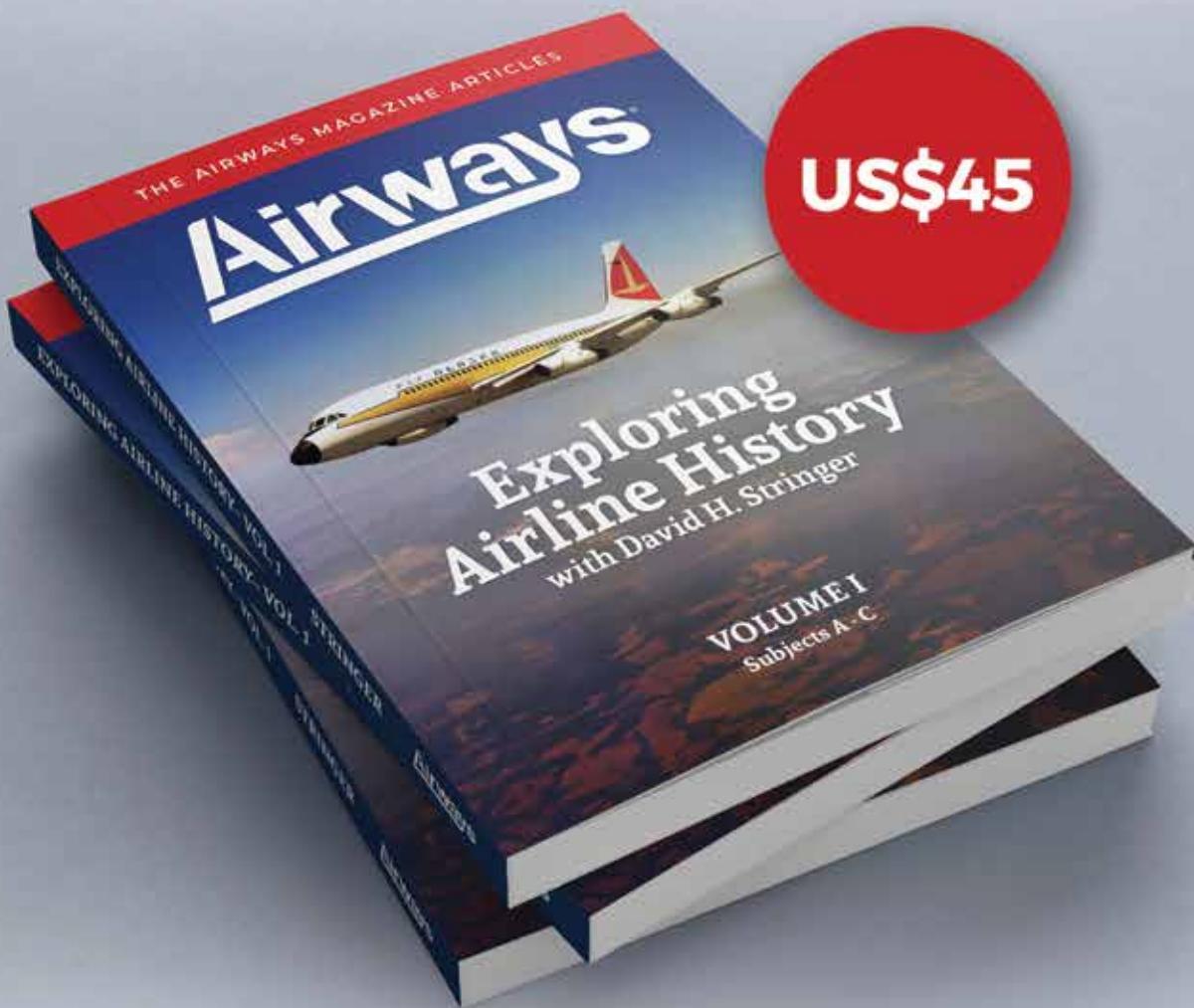
"This merger is a transformative step for both Korean Air and South Korea's aviation industry," Chang said.

The transformation will not only strengthen South Korea's aviation sector but also serve as a model for successful consolidation in a competitive global market. Under Cho's vision, the new Korean Air will be nothing less than "the world's most loved airline"—in a future where it will set new industry benchmarks and earn a place in the hearts of travelers worldwide. 

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With David H. Stringer



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OZARK AIR LINES

PART THREE

UP THERE WITH THE BIGGEST!

Story **DAVID H. STRINGER**

Photos **AS NOTED**



OZARK AIR LINES entered the 1970s as a much different carrier than it had been in 1960. With a modern fleet of DC-9s and FH-227Bs, the company was receiving more authority from the CAB to operate nonstop between the larger cities on its system, once again blurring the line between a local service carrier and a trunk airline. In 1970, Ozark began flying nonstop between St. Louis and Minneapolis/St. Paul, between St. Louis and Des Moines, and between Des Moines and Chicago. The airline was also operating charters for major league baseball and football teams.

It was a far cry from DC-3 days, when the airline had once put a caricature of a hillbilly on the cover of its timetable. In its 20th anniversary year, Ozark was offering full First-Class service aboard its DC-9 jets. In 1971, the airline introduced a new slogan, "Up there with the biggest!"

Thomas L. Grace, Ozark's President and Chairman of the Board, who had led the company into the jet age, passed away in July 1971. Edward J. Crane, executive vice-president and treasurer of the airline, and a company employee since 1951, took



Grace's place as president. He would remain at the company's helm until its demise in 1986.

On August 1, 1970, the airline inaugurated seasonal service to Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. It would be the last of the typical, small Midwestern airports that Ozark would add to its network.

As the decade progressed, the company sought permission to eliminate more and more of its smaller stations, which had been the original reason for its existence. In 1974, when Ozark

filed to terminate service at Clinton, Iowa, and at Owensboro, Kentucky, the company complained that the stations were producing only 3.9 and 5.2 passengers per departure respectively. Those would have been considered exemplary boarding figures in the 1950s! In addition to terminating service at Clinton and Owensboro, Ozark dropped Kirksville, Missouri, and Galesburg and Sterling/Rock Falls in Illinois from its route map. Service to these cities was replaced by third-level carriers, the new breed of airline that was filling in for the locals.

① DC-9-34 N936L departs St. Louis-Lambert Field (STL) on a sunny April day in 1985.
// PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION



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Even though the company had active route applications on file with the CAB, the next new station would not be added to the system until 1976, when Detroit became an Ozark city.

The airline continued to develop service within its established network, adding more nonstop routes between city pairs while steadily increasing the number of DC-9s being added to its fleet. As with all of the local service carriers during this period, Ozark had to work hard for its share of the passenger market. Innovations such as internationally-themed Flair meal service and wine tasting flights brought attention to Ozark's cabin service. These elaborate meal and snack presentations had to be delivered and picked up a lot quicker on Ozark's shorter segments than if they had been offered aboard the generally longer flights of a trunk carrier.

In 1972, the company began to remove First Class cabins from its DC-9s, turning instead to a single Standard Class configuration, which Ozark referred to as 'Comfort Class'.

In 1973, a strike by the company's mechanics, represented by the Air Line Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA), shut the airline down for 73 days. It would not be the last time that Ozark was grounded by a labor dispute. Shortly after the strike was settled, Ozark suffered its only accident that resulted in loss of life to passengers. On July 23, flight 809 – an FH-227B operating between Nashville and St. Louis via Clarksville/Hopkinsville/Fort Campbell, Paducah, Cape Girardeau, and Marion/Herrin – crashed while on final approach to St. Louis in a thunderstorm. Of

OZARK AIR LINES

Up there with the biggest

ready-ref timetable

MARCH 1, 1972

NICE GOING!



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the 44 aboard, 37 passengers and the Flight Attendant perished.

Ozark's 25th anniversary celebrations of 1975 included modernization of the company's ticketing and gate areas with new colors: bittersweet orange and royal blue.

The carrier boarded its 30 millionth passenger on May 19, 1975. Then, just two and a half years later, on December 16, 1977, the 40 millionth customer was welcomed aboard.

Deregulation

After President Jimmy Carter appointed Alfred Kahn, a pro-deregulation economist from Cornell University, to head the Civil Aeronautics Board, it was just a matter of time before Congress would pass a bill to eliminate regulation—and



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phase out the CAB altogether. Ozark would have to gear up to compete under a completely new set of rules.

Ozark's management team was vehemently opposed to the concept of deregulation. An editorial in the Go-Getter News warned that, should deregulation become a reality, airlines would fly wherever they wanted and go after the larger markets. The opinion piece forewarned that smaller and less-profitable markets would be abandoned, jobs would be lost, and airlines would go bankrupt. As it turned out, many of those predictions would prove accurate.

On June 1, 1978, Philadelphia became an Ozark station. This was the last addition to the airline's network before the Airline Deregulation Act was signed into law by President Carter on October 24.

Ozark's expansion under deregulation started out in an orderly fashion. Atlanta was added to the route map on December 1, 1978. The company also jumped into the Florida market — a natural destination

for Midwestern vacationers — by inaugurating service to Orlando, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami on December 15.

On April 1, 1979, Houston (Hobby) was welcomed to the system followed by Little Rock and New Orleans, a tourist destination with many years of commercial ties to St. Louis. Taking advantage of the new liberalities offered by deregulation, service to Little Rock was quickly dropped after enplanements proved disappointing.

In Washington, DC, Ozark's operations were transferred from Dulles Airport to Baltimore-Washington International (BAL, which became BWI in the fall of 1980) in an effort to capture traffic from both cities. Shortly afterwards, on July 1, 1980, Ozark began nonstop service from St. Louis to Washington National Airport (DCA).

Unlike some other airlines, Ozark seemed to be meeting the challenges of the new environment by expanding in a conservative, yet methodical and disciplined manner.

❷ FH-227B N4218 was photographed by Jeff Burch at Chicago-O'Hare (ORD) in October 1972. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

❸ An assortment of luggage destination tags from the mid-1960s illustrates the nature of Ozark's business as a local service airline. Many of these cities would be dropped from the airline's route map in the 1970s and '80s. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

❹ DC-9-15 N969Z is seen at Chicago-O'Hare in this 1973 photo. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

❺ The slogans "Up there with the biggest" and "Nice going!" grace the cover of this 1972 system timetable. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

❻ DC-9-15 N968E, sporting an experimental livery, was photographed at St. Louis in 1973. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION



7 Douglas Aircraft Co. was noted for producing striking in-flight images of its products prior to delivery. DC-9-31 N976Z is the subject of this photo.

// ERIC TRUM
VIA PROCTOR-
LIVESEY-THOMAS
COLLECTION

8 FH-227B N4229 was photographed by Glennon Kidd in March 1975.

// PROCTOR-
LIVESEY-THOMAS
COLLECTION

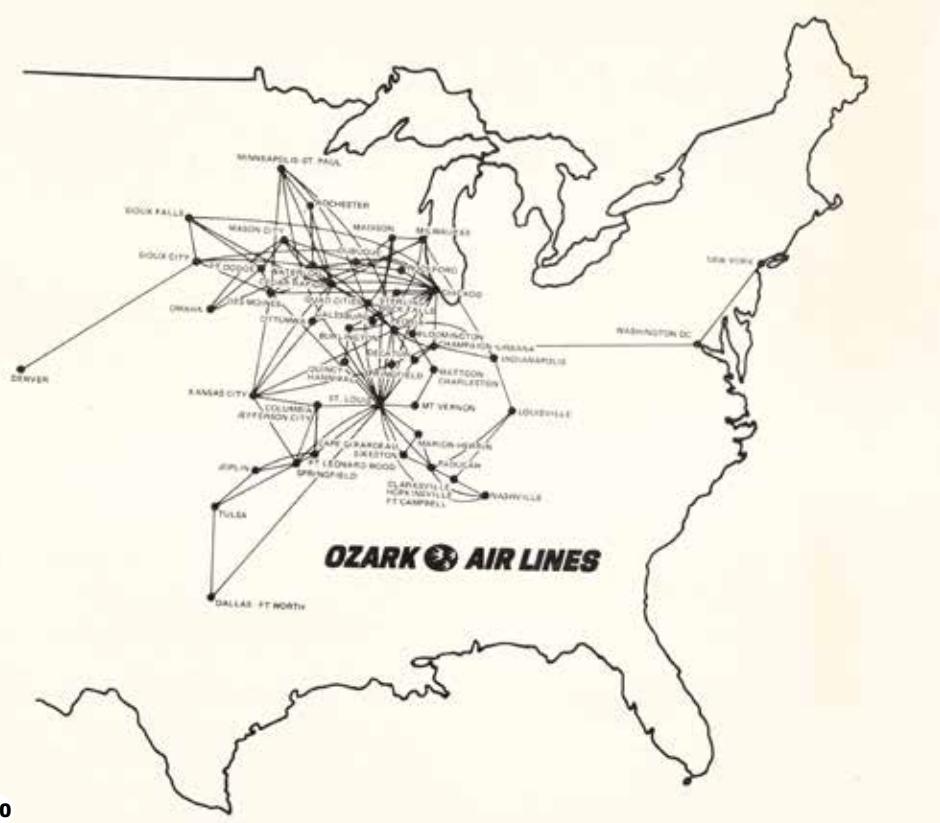
9 Ozark system timetables from 1974 and '75. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION



But, sadly, on the other side of the coin, Quincy and Bloomington, Illinois—both Ozark stations since 1950—were eliminated. And Mattoon/Charleston, Illinois; Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; Ottumwa, Iowa; and Clarksville, Tennessee/Hopkinsville, Kentucky, all disappeared from the Ozark route map, as did Paducah, Kentucky, which Ozark had served since 1951.

Mt. Vernon, Illinois – which had welcomed Ozark service in 1962 with all-day festivities that included entertainment and a ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring the Governor of Illinois, a state senator, a congressman, and 10,000 members of the public in attendance – was now abandoned by the Three Swallows. ‘Local service airline’ was no longer a designation that appropriately described Ozark. The term ‘regional airline’ had come into use as a more fitting characterization.

On Christmas Eve 1978, Arthur G. Heyne, the last of Ozark’s four founding fathers, passed away in St. Louis after a long illness. He was 80 years old and had witnessed Ozark’s growth from that very first day on Chestnut Street in 1943. Now Ozark was heading in a new direction—forced, some would say, by circumstances beyond its control—to turn into an entirely different type of air carrier. The new direction was made obvious by the fact that Ozark operated its last FH-227B flight on October 25, 1980, leaving the company with a fleet of 30 DC-9-30s, two DC-9-30LRs, and seven DC-9-10s. Only airports with runways long enough to



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accommodate DC-9 operations would be receiving Ozark service in the future.

Meanwhile, all was not well on the labor front. In 1979, the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) shut the airline down with a 53-day strike. Shortly after recovering from that work stoppage, Ozark's operations were again brought to a halt in 1980 with a 38-day strike by mechanics. In order to generate cash while the Flight Attendants were on strike, the company sold its two factory-fresh Boeing 727-200s, having never put them into service.

10 Ozark's 1976 route map, two years before airline deregulation would take effect. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

11 FH-227B N4233 on final approach into St. Louis. Ozark would retire its last FH-227 in 1980. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

In the summer of 1980, after the mechanics' strike had been settled, President Crane's message to employees in the Go-Getter News emphasized that everyone within the airline needed to work together. The company had been losing money, the country was in the grip of a recession, and the airline had survived a takeover attempt by an independent investor. Passenger boardings were below forecast.

But, in his holiday message to employees at the end of 1980, Crane expressed cautious optimism that the worst of the financial crisis was behind. And, for the time being, it was.

1981 proved to be the most profitable year in Ozark's history. San Antonio, Sarasota/Bradenton, and Ft. Myers all became Ozark destinations in 1981. The company installed lightweight passenger seats, adding 2 additional rows to all of its DC-9-30s, bringing the seating capacity on each aircraft to 110, while the DC-9-10s continued to pack in 80 customers. St. Louis broke its own boarding record three times on three different days during the Thanksgiving holiday period in November 1981, enplaning 5,975 passengers at Lambert Field on Monday, November 30.

The company continued to spread its wings, adding Las Vegas, Norfolk, and Cleveland to the system in 1982. Service was reinstated at Omaha, which the company had abandoned two years before after serving the city for 21 years. The June 1, 1982 timetable proclaimed "Now Serving Omaha!", as if Ozark's presence there was a totally new experience.

When San Diego was added to the network, the airline with the Three Swallows truly became a transcontinental carrier. Ozark was no longer in business to feed passengers to other carriers. Now its goal was to feed passengers to itself through the St. Louis hub. By the end of 1982, Ozark had 102 daily departures scheduled from St. Louis. Sadly, service was terminated at more of the airline's traditional cities: Dubuque, Burlington, Mason City,



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and Fort Dodge, Iowa; Rockford, Decatur, and Marion/Herrin, Illinois, and Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The company also pulled out of markets that had once been synonymous with Ozark: Chicago to Peoria and Chicago to Springfield, Illinois. President Crane was making his prediction about deregulation from several years before come true: smaller and less-profitable markets were being abandoned.

The Rio Grande Valley, served through Brownsville, Texas, became Ozark's next destination on December 15, 1982. The company purchased two DC-9-40s from Toa Domestic Airlines of Japan, bringing the fleet total at the end of 1982 to 45 Douglas DC-9s.

In the deregulated environment, Ozark was now competing head-to-head with the airlines it had once exchanged passengers with. There were no longer protected territories and traditional markets. Almost every carrier had followed the hub-and-spoke model and the marketplace had become a contest in which each

OZARK AIRLINES
System Timetable
Effective Dec. 15, 1979

OZARK AIRLINES
System Timetable
Effective December 15, 1980

Expanded Service
to Miami and
Ft. Lauderdale

SunShip Service
To Florida

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airline tried to attract the same passenger. Ozark was attempting to entice customers traveling from Baltimore to San Diego, or from Cleveland to Las Vegas, to fly all the way with the Three Swallows via a connection at the St. Louis hub; those passengers had several alternatives with other airlines offering the same level of service via their own hubs. Frequent flier loyalty programs and discount fares became the tools used to attract passengers. Ozark's frequent flyer scheme, introduced February 1, 1983, carried the rather awkward title of Ozark's Executive Travel Dividend Program (ETD).

The domestic airline industry became a game of survival of the fittest. If a company could not survive, the inevitable outcome was merger or bankruptcy. Ozark also had the disadvantage of competing with another strong player at its own hometown hub: Trans World Airlines (TWA). Having two airlines center their domestic operations in a market the size of St. Louis was a recipe for trouble.

In 1983, Crane remarked that he was confident that Ozark "can coexist with TWA, and we have proven our ability to compete". He noted that, of the 46 airports served by Ozark from its St. Louis hub, TWA also served 25 of them. In the same address, he stated that Ozark was more interested in going it alone than in pursuing a merger and, answering an employee's question about the possibility of changing the company's name, he responded that the only potential change he could foresee would be the possibility of becoming Ozark International Airlines.

The realignment of Ozark's system was reflected in the

12 Ozark ordered two Boeing 727-200s, which were completed and sat ready for delivery at Boeing Field in Seattle. To generate cash during a 53-day Flight Attendant strike in 1979, the 727s were sold without ever seeing a day in Ozark service.

// PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

13 With the onset of deregulation, Ozark jumped into Florida markets in a big way, as evidenced by these 1979 and '80 timetable covers. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

14 15 16 A new livery was created for the 727s, but the tri-jets never entered service. However, the new paint scheme transferred well to the DC-9 fleet as evidenced by these photos.

// PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

17 Ozark's route map five years after the launch of deregulation. Very few traces are left of the company's roots as a local service airline. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

18 19 Two views of DC-9-34 N928L. After retirement of the FH-227Bs in 1980, Ozark's fleet consisted entirely of DC-9s. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

20 The cover of Ozark's April 24, 1983 system timetable attests to the fact that Ozark now wanted to transport Midwesterners all the way to their sun and fun destinations instead of turning them over to TWA in St. Louis. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

21 Equipped with 80 passenger seats after a retrofit in 1981, Ozark's DC-9-15s continued to serve alongside its 110-passenger DC-9-30s and the new 152-passenger MD-80s. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION



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April 24, 1983 schedule, which left only 16 daily departures from Chicago-O'Hare. The next development was introduction of the Executive Express, an hourly nonstop service between O'Hare and Lambert Field. All of the other nonstops from Chicago were eliminated. The Windy City was now just a spoke from St. Louis, and the Chicago crew domicile closed on July 1, 1983.

On July 28, 1983, Ozark placed an order with McDonnell Douglas for four new MD-80s (previously referred to as DC-9 Super 80s), each equipped with 152 passenger seats. Sanford N. McDonnell, CEO of McDonnell Douglas, stated that he was pleased that two major St. Louis-based companies - McDonnell Douglas and Ozark - were continuing their long relationship and he noted that



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Ozark was the largest exclusive operator of DC-9s in the world.

Reduced fares and rising expenses kept the break-even load factor (load factor required before profitable operation is achieved) going up until it reached 60.6% in 1983. This was compared to an actual load factor of 59.1%. Crane stated that "cost controls must be tighter," and "we



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cannot continue to spend more money than we make." Through the efforts of both management and employees, Ozark wound up posting profits for 1983 and 1984.

In 1983, C.E. Meyer, Jr., president of TWA, Ozark's biggest competitor, told his employees that "time is running out on us. Higher costs, especially employment costs, are eating us alive." Like so many other airline executives, Ozark's management team was repeating the same message: "Salaries and wages must remain competitive, and work rule changes must be considered in this ever-changing industry." People Express and other low-fare carriers were challenging the established airlines and the harsh realities of the deregulated industry were starting to take their toll.

Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem and Jacksonville were added to the Ozark system on April 29, 1984. Also, that year, Ozark Holdings was formed as an umbrella company for expansion opportunities. Ozark Air Lines became a subsidiary of the holding company and baseball legend Stan Musial was elected to the board of directors.

Ozark's first two MD-80s arrived in June 1984 and were immediately leased to American Airlines. They came back to Ozark in December, in time for the busy winter travel season. The first stations to receive MD-80 service from St. Louis were Tampa/St. Petersburg, Orlando, Miami, Las Vegas, and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

On April 15, 1985, Ozark inaugurated service to Lincoln, Nebraska, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. These would be the last two stations added to the Ozark route map.

Meanwhile, finishing touches were being put on the new Southeast 'D' Concourse at Lambert Field. When it opened for business, it provided Ozark with a state-of-the-art airport complex for its hub operation. The concourse, along with Ozark's other facilities at Lambert, was dubbed AIRPLEX, and the company now had 22 gates available for exchanging passengers among its flights.

On July 1, 1985, Ozark entered into an agreement with Air Midwest, a third-level carrier, to feed passengers from smaller stations to the company's St. Louis



22 Originally referred to as the DC-9 Super 80, Ozark's first MD-82 entered service in 1984. At the time, Sanford N. McDonnell - CEO of McDonnell Douglas - noted that Ozark was the largest exclusive operator of DC-9s in the world. PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

23 In 1985, Ozark entered into an agreement with Air Midwest, a commuter carrier, to provide feed from smaller stations to Ozark's St. Louis hub under the banner of Ozark Midwest. A Swearingen Metro II wearing full Ozark Midwest livery was photographed at Decatur, Illinois. PHOTO: DEAN SLAYBAUGH VIA PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION. TIMETABLE: DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION



hub starting October 1. Operating under the banner of Ozark Midwest, the operation fulfilled the very function that Ozark had once provided for other carriers. In a striking example of changing times, all service into Springfield, Illinois, once an Ozark bastion, was now turned over to the commuter carrier.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

In 1985, two things happened that would change everything for Ozark: Southwest Airlines, the low-cost carrier that did not follow the pack, entered St. Louis, going right into the St. Louis - Chicago market,

among others. Then, through a hostile takeover, Carl Icahn gained control of TWA. Icahn went to work reducing labor costs at TWA and reducing passenger fares, making it a more formidable competitor.

Ozark was forced to meet new challenges. The first half of 1985 was profitable, but the company began to lose money heavily in the second half. Cash flow was critical and, in December, Crane approached the unions at Ozark, proposing profit-sharing and stock ownership in exchange for wage concessions. It was all happening a little too late in the game.

An image of the Ozark Airlines System Timetable for October 1, 1985. The cover features the Ozark Airlines logo at the top left and the text "System Timetable Effective October 1, 1985". Below the logo is a small inset photograph of an Ozark airplane on the tarmac. The main body of the timetable is a dark green background with white text and a large "Introducing Ozark Midwest!" section in the center. The number 24 is visible in the bottom right corner.

OZARK'S TWIN OTTERS



While Ozark was advertising its place among the biggest, it also took on a new challenge at the other end of the spectrum.

Air Illinois, a commuter airline operating under a different set of rules than the full-fledged air carrier certificate held by Ozark, moved into the Springfield, Illinois-to-Chicago market, challenging Ozark in the heart of its own territory.

To counteract the threat and match Air Illinois' level of competition, Ozark leased three 19-passenger DeHavilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter STOL (short take-off and landing) aircraft from Mackey Airlines of Ft. Lauderdale. On March 15, 1972, Ozark placed them into service with nine daily round-trips between the Illinois capital city and Meigs Field, Chicago's downtown airport. These flights were in addition to the company's regular operation between Springfield and Chicago O'Hare.

The flights to Meigs Field ended the following year. Several reasons have been given for the failure of this service. Among them was the reality that Ozark had to comply with stricter standards for aircraft operation due to its FAA Part 121 certificate, resulting in flight delays that did not affect the commuter carrier. The fact that Ozark's Pilots were compensated at a higher rate of pay has also been cited. But perhaps the real reason for the operation's lack of success was simply oversaturation of service in the market.



owned by Stan Musial, to consider the proposal. Although Crane insisted that "it was not a bang-bang decision,"—meaning that it had not been made in a hurry—the board accepted the offer. It was announced to the public in February 1986. Ozark employees wondered why their company, which had been profitable for several years, should now be up for sale. Ozark management felt that TWA and the low-cost carriers would crush Ozark if the company tried to remain independent, so they took advantage of an offer that might not be made a second time.

Icahn merged Ozark into TWA and got rid of the Three Swallows, the green paint, and the name of a company that had been associated with Midwestern states for so many years. The official merger date was October 27, 1986. On that day, the eradication of Ozark began. Ozark Air Lines disappeared into Icahn's TWA, an airline that would meet the same fate when it merged with American Airlines 15 years later.

Ozark's successful rise from a four-DC-3 operation to a national airline with a fleet of 50 jets was the result of the dedication and hard work of its loyal employees. There is a bond among former Ozark staff who are proud to have been employees of the great "little" airline that was "up there with the biggest". ☰

The author would like to thank R. Dean Denton of St. Louis for sharing his vast archive of Ozark material, including a near-complete set of employee newspapers, copies of original company documents, and memorabilia spanning the entire Ozark era from 1943 to 1986.

Dean has become a custodian of Ozark's legacy and, thanks to his efforts, the company's history will be preserved for future generations.

25 MD-82 N951U was photographed with thrust reversers deployed at St. Louis in August 1985. PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION



NORTHWEST AIRLINES HISTORY LIVES ON... IN A HOTEL (CHECK IT OUT!)



THE NORTHWEST AIRLINES

History Center is located at the Crowne Plaza AIRE Hotel in Bloomington, Minnesota. My wife, Cathy, and I became aware of it while watching an episode of *Expedition Unknown*, hosted by Josh Gates. He was looking for information concerning a Northwest DC-4 flight from 1950; so, he was in the right place.

While Cathy and I live in Minnesota, we have visited the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, the San Diego Air and Space Museum, the Charles Lindbergh Museum and Home, and the Commemorative Air Force Minnesota Wing Museum. I am confident you see a flight pattern here.

One of the first things we noticed upon entering the Northwest Airlines History Center was a poster reading, “100 Years of Flight: A Look Back at NWA’s History.” In the “Early Years” portion (1926-1941), it mentions Charles ‘Speed’ Holman becoming NWA’s first Pilot. He had signed on after winning the National Pulitzer Air Race two years earlier. In 1929, NWA operated the first night air mail. Amelia Earhart observed NWA’s 1933 ‘proof of the pudding’ flight to convince officials that the routes via the northern tier were feasible during wintertime.

“Wartime” (1941-1945) notes that nearly half of NWA’s fleet was appropriated by the US Army for war duty. NWA and the Mayo Clinic jointly designed the oxygen mask adopted by the military; it played a crucial role in the war’s outcome.

“An Era of Expansion” (1945-1954) details NWA’s first transcontinental flight from

Seattle to New York on June 1, 1945. The airline's first flight to Asia took off on July 15, 1947. "Nyrop and the Jet Age" (1954-1976) features a photo of Donald W. Nyrop, who was elected president of NWA in 1954 and served until 1976. In 1963, NWA took delivery of 707-320s to become the nation's first all-fan jet operator. In 1972, it introduced the DC-10 into the fleet.

"Deregulation, Europe and Merger" (1977-1986) notes that NWA commenced service across the Atlantic to Europe in 1979. On July 29, 1986, the government approved NWA's acquisition of Republic Airlines, creating the nation's fourth-largest airline. Also in 1986, NWA's 60th-anniversary year, its leadership moved into a new World Headquarters in Eagan.

"Financial Crisis and Recovery" (1987-2000) says that NWA took delivery of two new glass cockpit aircraft, the B747-400 and A320, in 1989. In 1991, NWA and KLM launched a joint service—the world's first airline alliance. The airline added the A319 to the fleet in 1998.

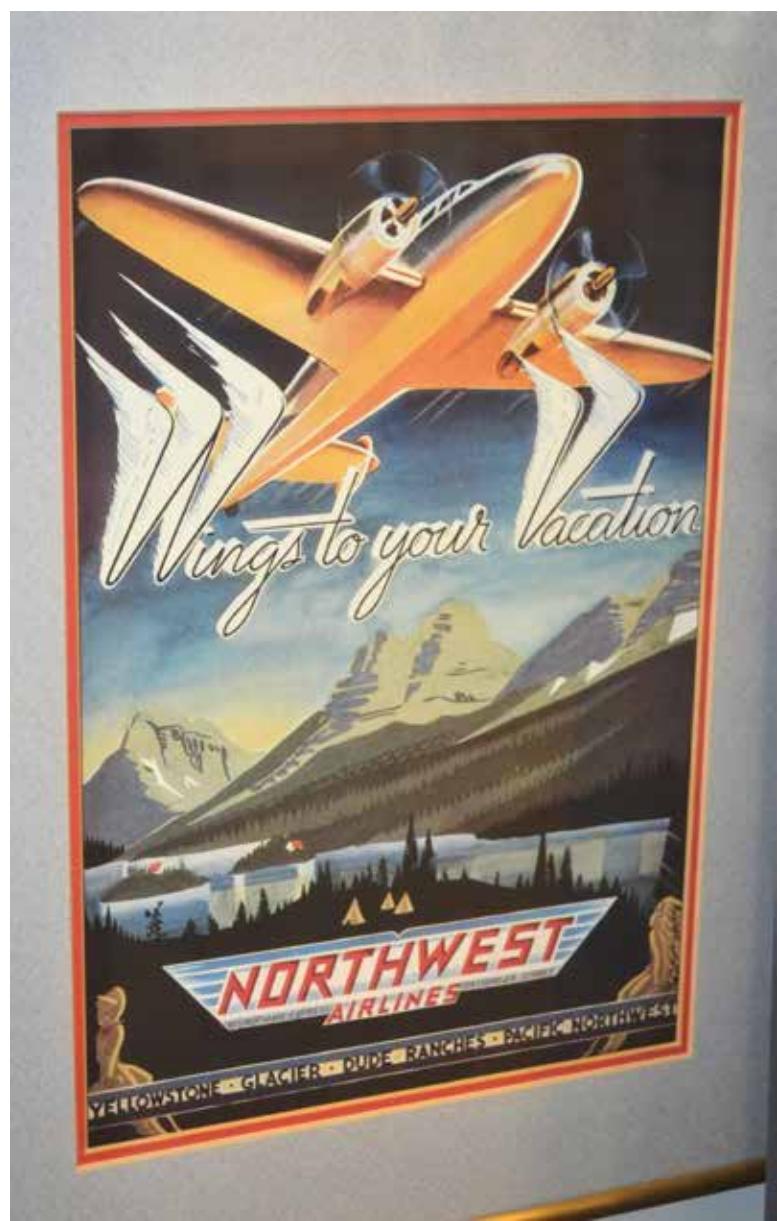
"September 11, 2001, and the Road Back" states that air travel was permanently changed by the terror attacks of 9/11. The following two years saw many reductions in the NWA workforce. In 2000, NWA took delivery of its first wide-body Airbus, the A330, which introduced new passenger amenities and was the first aircraft to wear a new NWA logo and paint scheme. On April 15, 2008, Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines announced a merger. That created the largest airline in the world,

with 786 aircraft. Northwest Airlines disappeared, leaving an impressive legacy.

As my wife and I made our way through the hotel, we noticed a variety of Northwest Airlines displays in the hallways. As we approached the front door of the History Center, we met Bruce Kitt, the Collections Manager. His encyclopedic knowledge of everything in the center added significantly to our visit.

A brochure available at the Northwest Center has a very informative 'Did you know?' section. The first bulleted item states, "In the 1940s, Northwest Airlines built and operated an air bridge to Alaska, allowing materials and equipment to get to Europe and Asia that made the difference during World War II." I had not been aware of that and found it historically significant.





When Northwest was founded, on September 1, 1926, its initial business focus was on transporting mail for the United States Postal Service. It began passenger service in 1927. It made its first international flights—to Winnipeg, Canada—the following year. By 1939, Northwest operated five flights a day from Chicago to Minneapolis. By the spring of 1948, NWA was using three types of aircraft: the 44-passenger DC-4, the 21-passenger Douglas DC-3, and the 36-passenger Martin 2-0-2.

The NWA History Center has an extensive collection of aircraft models and related memorabilia. The first model that caught our eye was a DC-3 that was sitting next to a Convair 580 (Cathy and I once worked in San Diego, where the Convair Division of General Dynamics was located, and are familiar with their aircraft). Rounding out that group of models is a Boeing 757.

What we saw next was something new to both of us, our first viewing of a ‘grandmother’ clock. The History Center’s Bruce Kitt told us that this clock, which is smaller than a ‘grandfather’, had been presented to NWA’s first Pilot, Holman. Among the small models that caught our eye was a Stinson Detroiter SB1. That was the plane that got Northwest off the ground in 1926. Also in that display area is a Sikorsky S-38 from 1931.

Cathy and I have a wicker peacock chair in our home, so wicker is just fine with us. In that vein, our visit to the Northwest Center gave us our first look at wicker seats from a 1929 Ford Tri-Motor. You don’t see those





every day. Next to them were a pair of seats closer to our time, two First-Class Business ones from an Airbus A330-300. Cathy and I had also never seen those before. Let's just say that the headroom area goes back a considerable distance.

As our tour continued, we saw a 747-51 electrical system and information card. Despite having visited many aircraft museums, this was the first we had seen. The Flight Engineers Electrical Systems Training Panel for the Boeing 747-51 doesn't lack for moving parts and pieces. After World War II, the Civil Aeronautics Administration mandated that cockpits of larger aircraft (the DC-6, DC-7, Boeing 377, Lockheed Constellation, L-88 Electra, the first and second generations of larger jets such as the Boeing 707, 727 747-100, 200, DouglasDC-8 and DC-10, and the Lockheed L-1011) be configured to accommodate a third crew member, the Flight Engineer, who was responsible for monitoring and controlling the aircraft's engines and complex electrical, fuel, and hydraulic systems. As a retired aerospace engineer, this sounds to me like a full day on a short flight. Over the years, advancements in computer technology and capability brought about the return of the two-person flight crew.

Close behind was something we found interesting, a Northwest Orient gong. Although there was a hammer on top of it, Bruce Kitt gave it a slight tap with one finger, producing a nice sound. A mannequin of a Flight Attendant, appropriately wearing Northwest attire, was within an arm's reach of the





gong. The well-stocked display cases contained a variety of uniforms, books, maps, and an impressive assortment of small-scale models of Northwest aircraft. A Northwest Airlines "Wings To Your Vacation" poster caught our eye. It showed a two-engine prop plane flying over snowcapped mountains, with Yellowstone, Glacier, Dude Ranches, and the Pacific Northwest listed as destinations.

I asked Bruce about one of the models, and he told me it was a Stinson Detroiter SB-1 biplane, Northwest's first aircraft. Nearby was a Sikorsky S-38 from 1931. As with the other models, the detailing was impressive. Not all of the models were small-scale. Among the larger ones was a Lockheed L-188 Electra. One side of the fuselage was made of clear Plexiglas, affording a great view of the interior. Another large-scale model was a Boeing B-377

Stratocruiser, which, like all the others, was meticulously detailed.

Although Cathy and I had seen an extensive array of aviation-related items in the museums we had enjoyed visiting, the Northwest Airlines History Center was the proud owner of the first Barbie doll Flight Attendant we had ever seen. That's just one way to let you know that, if it's about Northwest Airlines, you'll probably see it at the History Center. ☺

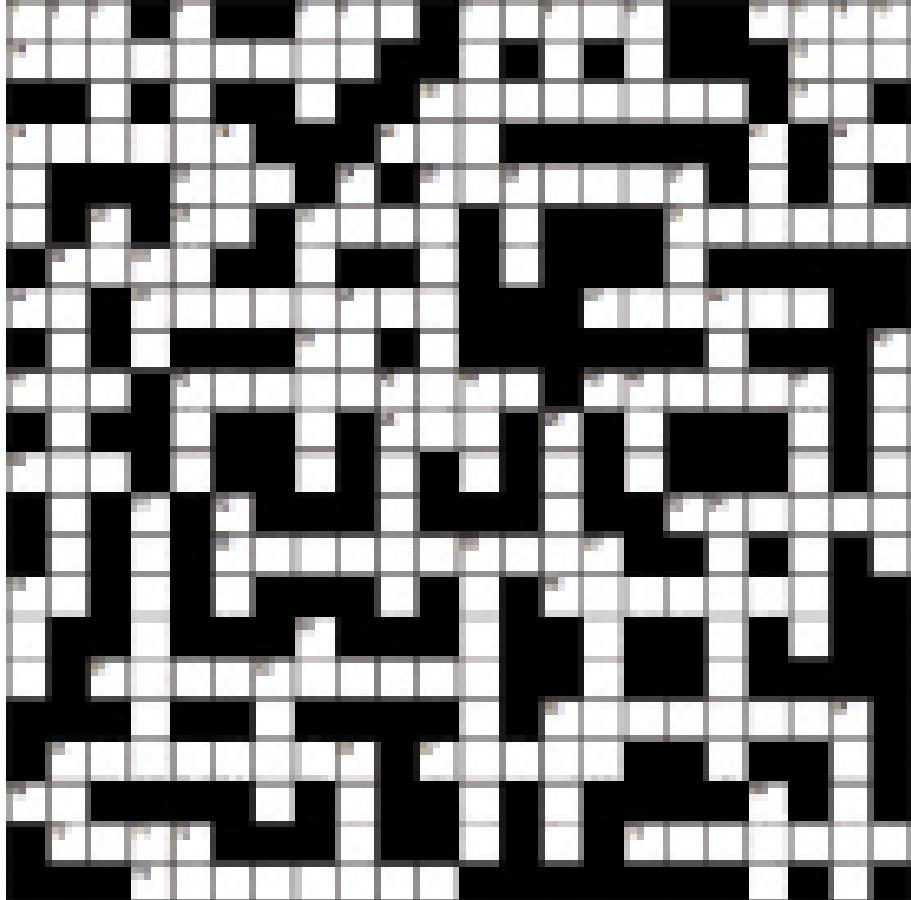
CROSSWORD

Across

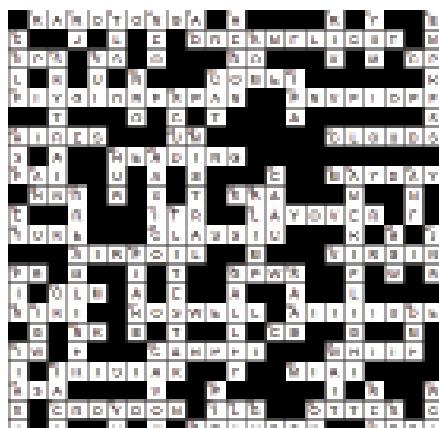
1. Flamingo International Airport
5. Crew resource management
7. A person who flies an aircraft
10. Location of Juancho E. Yrausquin Airport
14. East Germany flag carrier
15. Bob Hope Airport
16. Less than the speed of sound
17. XiamenAir IATA code
18. VLM Airlines callsign
20. Vertical portion of the tail
22. Ukraine International Airlines IATA code
23. Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport
25. Returning to the ground
29. Finnair IATA code
30. Cabo Verde Airlines
31. Russian low-cost
32. Brazilian Blue
34. ...AL Israel Airlines
35. Aircraft control surface used to climb or descent
37. Air... VFW 614 Operator
39. National Airlines iATA code
41. Pakistan International Airlines
42. 31, 32 and 41 series
45. America West callsign
48. Airline Transport Pilot
50. Reggio Calabria Airport
53. Come Fly the Friendly Skies
55. Defunct Italian carrier (2012-2014)
58. Iran Air IATA code
59. Ypsilanti-based American cargo carrier
61. Largest airport in Russia
63. Flies in the air
65. Empennage and wings are attached to
67. Airline term for revenue per unit
68. Unaccompanied Minor
70. Short take-off and landing
73. Industry term for 'airline'
74. Miami Air callsign

Down

1. Royal Brunei IATA code
2. Nauru Airlines IATA code
3. National Transportation Safety Board
4. Bob... former American Airlines CEO
5. Cancún International Airport
6. Varig IATA code
7. Uruguayan deceased carrier
8. McCarran International Airport
9. Turin Airport
11. ...Air, formerly Airborne Express
12. Offloaded from a flight
13. Aerolineas Argentinas IATA code
16. British all-Business Class airline (2006-2008)
18. Rejected Takeoff
19. Plane's place
21. Number of persons on board an aircraft
24. South African Airlines IATA code
26. Non-directional beacon
27. Ground Proximity Warning System
28. Asiana Airlines IATA code
30. Period of time spent between flights
32. An adjustable aneroid
33. Quetta International Airport
36. Transport Aérien Transrégional
38. Tail end
40. Indonesia's flag carrier
42. Japan Airlines
43. Add-on qualification to a pilot's licence
44. Auxiliary power unit
46. Aircraft on Ground
47. KLM, Korean Air and Alitalia belong to
49. Ceiling and visibility OK
51. Where duties and taxes are collected
52. Cleveland Hopkins International Airport
54. Destinations an airline flies to
56. Defunct Nigerian carrier
57. Navigational Aid
58. Localizer and glideslope
60. THAI Smile IATA code
62. Aerodynamic force
63. Air Line Pilots Association
64. Building for Air Traffic Control
65. Flight Management System
66. easyJet callsign
69. Talagi Airport
71. Boliviana de Aviacion IATA code
72. LIAT IATA code



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