

PIE IN THE SKY

If the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, the airlines are wooing the trans-Atlantic commuter in a big way with a lavish selection of gastronomical delights. Faced with losses worldwide of a staggering \$2.7 billion, due largely to the recession and the Gulf War, they have been going to extraordinary lengths to win customers and keep them.

Flying sounds exciting, but a seven hour trip across the Pond is enough to send the erstwhile adventurer to sleep. Airlines advertising is devoted heavily to creating the impression that for the seven or so hours you spend on the flight, you'll be having a ball instead of counting sheep. Bargain basement Virgin Airways, run by hero and self-publicist Richard Branson, has invested heavily in seat-back videos in the Economy Class; others have brought in top chefs to seduce the clientele. Most people would rather eat a good meal than watch a video nasty, so to see what the eight regular carriers flying between London and New York offer in the way of trans-Atlantic cuisine, we have compiled the *Flyer's Good Food Guide*.

British Airways has revealed that it has booked ten famous chefs to staff its Concorde flights this Christmas, but as a round trip on the solid gold albatross costs a staggering £5030, one would rightly assume that this entitles the gold star business traveller to nothing but the best. Let's take a look at what tasty morsels they and the rest of the London to New York carriers have to offer.

BRITISH AIRWAYS: CONCORDE

Flight No BA0001 departs from Heathrow at 10.30am and arrives at JFK Airport at 9.20am. No, it doesn't arrive an hour and ten minutes before it leaves, that's due to the time zones! At a mere 3hrs 50 minutes this is by far the fastest way to fly.

A typical morning meal on Concorde is a selection of canapes with champagne, mango and citrus fruit, a brunch prepared by first class chefs Anton Mosimann and Franz Klemper consisting of scrambled egg and asparagus pancake, summer pudding, a selection of cheeses, coffee and chocolates.

Drinks on Concorde are complimentary, passengers also receive a free gift each, which will typically be a pen and pencil set or a silver picture frame. There are no discount seats on Concorde, (except children, 50%, infants 10%) which carries 100 passengers, but a day return costs a mere £4,156! The flight provides 32 seats for smokers.

BRITISH AIRWAYS: BA175

The 11am flight from Heathrow to JFK is Flight No BA175. Fares range from £3,870 first class to £2,122 Club and £1,180 World Traveller Class or WTC, (Economy Class). Also available is Apex at £499 and Promotion Apex at £299. Travel time is 7 hrs 35 mins. BA offers a fine selection of meals from chef Michael Roux. First class passengers can eat up to eight courses, with a choice of four entrées including vegetarian dishes prepared by Dorchester chef Willi Elsener. Club Class passengers have a choice of four courses, while even Economy has three. Typical meals are:

WTC Beef hotpot with mushrooms with one entrée.

Club Class: Salmon and sushi, lobster and monkfish fricassée with root vegetables, apple chatelaine with cheeses followed by coffee, chocolates and liqueur.

Air India: The word that best describes Air India is eclectic: east meets west; Asian films, an in-flight magazine in Hindi and English and a subtle blend of Indian and European food. Flight NOA1111 departs from Heathrow at 1pm daily arriving at JFK at 3.50pm. First class full fare is £3,870, Club Class £2,122 and Economy Class £618. Economy Class has a four course menu with a choice of three entrées or a five course vegetarian menu. Club Class has a four course menu with a choice of four entrées and an eight course vegetarian menu. Special diets - diabetics, Kosher and Kaddawi can be catered for but require advance notice.

Typical selections are

Economy: leg of lamb and red pepper sauce entrée; Club Class: Chicken tikka makanwala and Rasmalai pudding, coffee with liqueur.

First class: hors d'oeuvres with mixed salad and caviar, clear chicken soup with asparagus tips, stuffed quail with Savoy cabbage and goose liver, cheeses, cherry liqueur parfait and cherry ice cream.

KUWAIT AIRWAYS

No alcoholic drinks on this Moslem airline! but Economy Class still offers a four course selection with seven in first class. A first class ticket for flight No KU101 departing from Heathrow 3.40pm Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday will cost you £3,870; Economy Class a mere £666; Apex £629. There is no Business Class. During the 6hr 35min flight you can get stuck into lamb and vegetable korma main course in Economy Class while in First Class you will typically dine on Arabic hors d'oeuvres with fried aubergine, consommé, a three lettuce seasonal salad and a soft drink as part of a seven course feast. Special tastes can be catered for, but should be mentioned at the time of booking. The flight has 34 first class seats and 346 in economy class.

VIRGIN

The airline which brought trans-Atlantic travel to the people has an appreciably lower fare scale than other airlines. Upper Class passengers pay £2,122 and are offered a complimentary economy ticket on a subsequent flight. Economy Class is £398, Apex £299 and a Late Latesaver a mere £259 when booked within three days of travel. Flights depart daily at 4.30pm arriving at 7.10pm. A typical Upper Class meal consists of vegetarian salad with leek, thyme seasoning and filo pastry, individually made summer pudding, selection of cheeses, coffee with chocolates and liqueur.

American Airlines, United Airways and Continental are the three US carriers. Continental flies from Gatwick to Newark; United flies to Newark as well as JFK. Fares are as follows:

American Airlines: First £3,870, Business £2,122, Economy £538; Apex £299, Promotion Apex £349.

United Airways: First Class £3,870, Connoisseur (Business Class) £2,122, Economy £578.

Continental: First Class £3,870, Business £2,122, Economy £538.

United Airways offer a four course meal in Economy Class and Connoisseur Class First Class has an eight course meal with choice of entrées or a quicker "Executive Pacesetter". Fare is distinctly Anglophile, but includes beluga caviar, radicchio salad and Japanese lobster salad.

American Airlines has a three course Economy Class menu plus entrées, while Business Class offers four courses or a quicker "Executive Meal". First Class has a nine course menu. Typical selection from Business Class include warm roasted nuts, roulade of sole with asparagus tips, New York steak, cheese and fruit, berry tart and port followed by coffee, chocolate and a liqueur.

Continental serves a three course Economy Class meal with a choice of two entrées *subject to availability*. Business Class has a five course menu with a choice of three entrées while First Class has a seven course menu. Both Business and First Class include champagne, cocktails and canapes while Economy Class has complimentary wine and beer.

A typical First Class meal will be champagne and a canape, parfait of foie gras in chicken mousseline, Kentish seasonal salad with walnut vinaigrette, lemon sorbet and roast rack of lamb with mint and garlic sauce.

