

[Print](#) [Close](#)

Airplane Food So Good it Belongs in a Cookbook

By Paul Eisenberg

Published September 19, 2010 | FoxNews.com

If I told you that an airline recently came out with a book called "To Serve Fliers" I'd hope the "Twilight Zone" fans among you would shriek in mock horror that "It's a cookbook!" because, in fact, it is.

To be clear, the actual book title is "Above & Beyond, A Collection of Recipes from the Singapore Airlines Culinary Panel." The panel is ten of the world's top chefs that regularly school the airline's chefs about "the special requirements of catering at high-altitude conditions" where evidently "robust, flavorful foods work best, such as comforting braises and refreshing chilled dishes."

ADVERTISEMENT

These dishes, all of which have been served on board Singapore Air flights at one time or another, have included braised ox cheeks with buttered young vegetables, a surf & turf with scallops and short ribs, cold lobster, and an artichoke salad topped with fresh black truffles. The latter dish is from three Michelin-starred chef Gordon Ramsay, who'd likely have some choice words about the food the rest of us fliers are served.

Absent a critique from "Hell's Kitchen" overlord Ramsay, I looked to some frequent fliers for those choice words, and the news is not all bad. As you might expect, a lot of the good food is near the front of the plane as well as beyond U.S. airspace. "My best meals [have been] flying in the front of the cabin and on international airlines. You can't beat them," says perpetual flier and JohnnyJet.com founder John E. DiScala. "However, most international carriers serve free food even in coach and on short flights."

While this rule of thumb bears out, there are some bright spots in coach that go beyond sodium-laced processed treats and Delta's buttery Biscoff cookies (for the record I'm a fan of both). Here now, some flier meal reviews, arranged by airline, which may alter how you think about airplane food.

Air France

"I do find the international airlines offer a more nutritious and balanced meal compared to the domestic airlines," says registered dietitian and frequent traveler Kate Scarlata who flew coach earlier this year from Boston to Paris on Air France and was served a free meal including "a low-fat entrée [of] grilled chicken, salad, yogurt [that wasn't] overloaded in sugar, fresh cut-up fruit, and a small cheese and cracker plate. The flight attendants also passed out fresh baguettes."

Frequent flier Hiren Patel got a comp upgrade this year to first on a Paris to Houston flight. "One of the great things about first class dining on Air France is that they will prepare your meal for you whenever you want," and after sipping some bubbly for a few hours he selected from the menu an appetizer that included foie gras. "I do not have much experience with foie gras, so all I can say is that I was pleasantly surprised. Living in Texas, however, means that I do know my steak. I ordered a medium rare beef tenderloin for my main course. I can say that it was almost as good as the steaks I have eaten at my two favorite Houston steakhouses. Not quite as good, but almost." He was reminded of this steak on a KLM business class flight from Houston to Amsterdam, where after sampling some lobster tail and claw he and his wife ordered the beef "and it was a solid effort at premium steak, but it fell short of the first class steak from Air France and well short of nice steakhouses. I would say it was on par with a steak from Chili's, which is not necessarily a criticism."

British Airways

Flying coach on the airline from Rome to London, DiScala recalls that he "sat next to a pasty-white young English guy who didn't say a word until he ordered a tea and a brandy with his sandwich. Food and beverage are free on BA, which is very cool especially on such a short flight. Sandwich choices were either ham and cheese or cucumber with soft cheese and the flight attendants passing them out were extremely pleasant. I went with the cucumber and cheese and a spot of tea."

Cathay Pacific

On a Cathay flight from LAX to Narita, Japan with a stopover in Hong Kong, Michael Volpatt was able to fly first class by using mileage. "The ticket normally costs \$17,000 -- and I jumped at the chance. When we got on board they served us Krug Champagne and really did not stop serving it to us until we got off. The seats were so huge that my two friends were able to dine with me at my seat -- they set up a small table in my pod. The meal started with Beluga caviar -- an enormous scoop, which probably cost \$500. It was velvety and delicious and was served with tasty toast points. We moved on to a crab bisque that was also creamy and delicious." Since he was flying to Narita, Volpatt was also able to order a Japanese Kaiseki meal with eight courses, one of which "was a stuffed quail with soba noodles, rice, and miso."

Continental

Patel has flown coach from Newark to Delhi several times on Continental and notes that he has "always found coach class non-vegetarian options to be a poor choice, mostly because the meat tends to be rubbery, and overall, I find the food to be bland." Opt for the Indian vegetarian meal, he says, which on this flight he recalls had "a paneer curry, and a mixed vegetable dish. "The consistency of the paneer was true to what paneer's consistency should be, and the curry and mixed vegetable dish had just enough spice and flavor."

Two fliers independently praised Continental's take on osso bucco. Volpatt had it in business first on a San Francisco to Newark flight, noting that "when the veal is on the menu I always order it. The meat literally falls off of the bone," a comment echoed by Marisa Valbona, who was served the veal in first class added that it "rivalled some I had just enjoyed at a top restaurant in La Jolla."

Delta

DiScala's favorite paid meal recently was an \$8 Todd English turkey sandwich he got from the food cart while flying Delta from LAX to JFK. Frequent Delta flier Mike Hawker has traveled every week this year since late February and has tried most of Delta's first class meals, including the chicken with polenta. The airline has several variations of this meal, Hawker says. "The chicken is very hit and miss. I have had it where it had been very good for airplane standards. I have also had it so bad that it seems to grow in my mouth with every chew I had. Moving on to the salad, all I can say is that it's typically wilted greens with a cup of greasy vinaigrette dressing. The fruit is not good. For some reason it always tastes like it's carbonated, it's the strangest thing."

Etihad Airways

Flying business class on Etihad from Brussels to Abu Dhabi, DiScala says "the food being offered was ridiculous. First of all, I passed on having one of the main à la carte entrées, which were poached lean chicken breast, grilled Arabic spiced fish, roasted baby lamb, or wild mushroom risotto. Instead I had one of their many "kitchen anytime" choices: a steak sandwich with roasted cherry tomatoes and red onion jam. One thing that's not on there is the fresh bread, which was three different kinds baked in the same loaf."

Qantas

Flying premium economy from New York to Sydney, actor and comedian Jim Dailakis says "not only was I incredibly comfortable, but the service [was] impeccable [and] the food was definitely something I didn't expect to eat on an airline, recalling that he "had a baked salmon with pasta. It tasted like restaurant food. Not perfect, but I didn't get that sickly feeling after consumption. They also had a wonderful smoked salmon baguette which was quite delicious."

United

Meghan Lee is a fan of the United \$6 snack box. "I get the 'healthy' one with tuna [and] pita chips," she says. And David Cumpston is also an aficionado of the airline's buy-on-board meals while traveling year-round between SFO and various destinations. "The wraps aren't as good as the salads, since there's so much tortilla involved in the wrap that I pull off and throw away," adding that "the snack boxes still make me want something different [and] better, as none of the boxes' different selections really bowl me over with happiness." Lee perhaps came closer to that happy place when she got a surprise upgrade to first on the airline's SFO to Lihue route and was served "an egg scramble with chorizo, along with fruit and yogurt. The eggs weren't gooey or overdone and the chorizo was nice and spicy, just how I like it. It helped to be eating with nice silverware, napkins, and a mimosa to wash it down."

 **Print**  **Close**

URL

<http://www.foxnews.com/leisure/2010/09/17/airplane-food-good-belong-cookbook/>

[Home](#) | [U.S.](#) | [World](#) | [Politics](#) | [Health](#) | [Business](#) | [SciTech](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Video](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Sports](#) | [Leisure](#)

[Careers](#) | [Internships - FNCU](#) | [Fox Around the World](#) | [RSS Feeds](#)

[Advertise With Us](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email Newsroom](#) | [Topics](#)

This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. © 2010 FOX News Network, LLC. All rights reserved. All market data delayed 20 minutes.