

## AAA Corporate Travel Newsletter

December 14, 2009

### Continental goes cashless for in-flight transactions

Continental Airlines is the latest carrier to switch to a no-cash policy for in-flight purchases. The new policy took effect last week after several months of testing. Continental flight attendants are equipped with hand-held card readers that will accept major credit and debit cards for in-cabin purchases of alcoholic drinks and headsets on all Continental mainline flights.

However, cash will still be accepted for duty-free purchases on international flights, and on service to and from China, Continental said. Cash will still be accepted on flights of Continental Express, Continental Connection and Continental Micronesia, although those services are expected to go cashless in the first quarter of 2010, the airline noted.

*Executive Travel SkyGuide e-Alert, December 7, 2009*

### New York cracks down on 'taxi hustlers' at JFK, LGA

Any time you've flown into New York's LaGuardia or JFK airports, you might have waded through an annoying crowd of taxi, Town Car and limo drivers offering you a ride into the city. Well, those crowds might be getting smaller now that New York officials have started a crackdown on the practice. Representatives of the Queens District Attorney's Office, Port Authority Police and NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission recently announced the arrest of 18 persons at the two airports for illegal solicitation of ground transportation.

What's more, the state's legislature recently passed a law boosting the penalties for that crime to up to 90 days in jail and/or fines up to \$1,250. The officials said that of the 18 persons arrested in the recent sweep, one tried to run from police and another had 12 previous arrests on 23 charges, including 14 felonies. Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said that many visitors to New York are unfamiliar with ground transportation options, and are often scammed by the illegal drivers waiting in the terminals, "charged exorbitant fees to be driven even the shortest distances." "With the new law in place," added Port Authority Chairman Anthony Coscia, "our enforcement has increased and taxi hustlers should be forewarned: This is the end of the road."

*Executive Travel SkyGuide e-Alert, December 7, 2009*

### ATL debuts mini-rooms for napping or working

A company called Minute Suites ([www.minutesuites.com](http://www.minutesuites.com)) has opened its first airport facility at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Located in Concourse B at Gate 15, the small (7 by 8 feet) rooms are available for rental, at rates of \$30 an hour. Rooms are equipped with a daybed sofa, pillow and blankets for sleeping; a sound masking system in each room minimizes exterior noise, and guests can use the in-suite alarm clock or request a wake-up call. In addition, the rooms come with an HDTV that also provides Internet access as well as a link to the airport's flight display network. Each room also has a desk, phone and office chair. The rooms can be reserved in hourly segments through the company's web site.

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### Sugar Bowl packages offered by Provident Travel



For Sugar Bowl package information, visit Provident Travel's website at [www.providentvacations.com](http://www.providentvacations.com). They are offering a three-night charter air and land package, a land-only package (provide your own transportation to New Orleans) and a same-day charter air package. Provident Travel is the group and incentive travel division of AAA.

## Airlines charging more for that sought-after seat

As airlines continue to reduce the number of seats they offer on domestic routes, flights are getting fuller. For business travelers whose companies insist they fly in coach, that means finding a more comfortable seat on an aisle or in an exit row is becoming harder.

And just as surely, industry experts say, airlines are finding new ways to charge for the privilege of escaping a dreaded middle seat in the back of a crowded economy cabin. There are rows with more legroom near the front, roomier exit rows in the middle, and aisle seats. All have a price, it seems, but what you pay can vary widely by airline and by your status on a particular carrier.

Frontier Airlines is the latest airline to create what is effectively a subclass within coach. In November, Frontier reconfigured its layouts to give those sitting in the first four rows 36 inches of seat pitch (the distance from one point on a seat to the identical spot on the seat in front), up from 33 inches. It charges \$15 to \$25 for the so-called stretch rows. But since the airline did not change the total number of seats in coach, that means that fliers sitting in the rest of the cabin are getting less legroom — as little as 31 or 30 inches, according to some reports.

The general concept is not new. United's Economy Plus and Jet Blue's Even More Legroom programs offer rows with as much as four inches of additional legroom in the front of the plane. Fees depend on the length of flight. United, for example, charges between \$9 and \$109 for the top fee for a long run like Los Angeles to Tokyo. AirTran also charges \$20 for exit-row seats.

Of course, fliers who have elite status on an airline usually do not have to pay for the best coach seats. USAirways Choice Seats program is typical. The airline opens up a handful of prime spots 24 hours before departure, typically aisle or window seats near the front. Passengers checking in online are given a shot at securing one for fees that range from \$5 to \$30 a flight segment, depending on the length of the flight. But there is no charge for high milers. On average, USAirways sets aside about 12 percent of its capacity for the program, according to Morgan Durrant, a spokesman for the carrier.

Still, when Delta Air Lines tried to introduce a similar program after it acquired Northwest, which had its own choice seats plan, it was inundated by complaints from its elite "medallion" fliers, who were accustomed to getting a chance at those spots well in advance of departure for no charge. Delta later backed off and does not charge for premium spots in coach. But for most airlines, the fees are a moneymaker. JetBlue figures customers paying for more legroom will generate \$65 million this year, said Marty St. George, senior vice president for marketing.

Even Southwest Airlines, which has made a point of proclaiming its independence from fees, has joined in. The airline does not assign seats, and, much like a bus, passengers typically board on a first-come, first-served basis and sit wherever they want. But travelers who paid its higher-price "business select" fare could already board ahead of the masses.


Several months ago, Southwest allowed some passengers to pay \$10 for the right to board ahead of the crowd — but after "business select" and elite frequent fliers. Those traveling on the lowest discount fares are not eligible for the perk.

Foreign airlines are experimenting with seat fees as well. British Airways said recently that it would begin allowing fliers to reserve specific seats well in advance of flight time, beginning at \$16 a flight, and up to \$90 for business-class customers (only first class and full-fare fliers are exempt). Customers still can get an assigned seat at no charge, one day before departure.

*NYTimes.com, December 9, 2009*

## ATL opens consolidated car rental center

Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport last week cut the ribbon on its new consolidated rental car center, which is now used by all rental companies operating at the airport. All rental transactions are now handled at the new facility, as are all car pickups and returns. The rental car center is accessible via the airport's new ATL SkyTrain, an elevated conveyance that links the passenger terminal to the rental car center. The ride takes five minutes, and trains operate every three minutes during peak periods. During off-peak hours, trains run about every 10 minutes. The trains make an intermediate stop at the Georgia International Convention Center before arriving at the rental car center. Passengers arriving at ATL should proceed to the luggage pickup areas and look for signs directing them to the



SkyTrain, which is accessible via an escalator outside the west end of the terminal. The airport estimates that the SkyTrain will be able to carry more than 10,000 persons per hour along its 1.5 mile railway. With the debut of the SkyTrain, rental car shuttle buses will no longer operate at the airport.

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## Save When You Shop This Holiday Season!

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