

Guide: How to BUY and FLY

American Airlines



Scott Stewart – Community Flights

[American Airlines](#) is now the largest airline in the world, and with such a wide network, you'll likely come across an American Airlines flight in your search results. So, what advantages/disadvantages does American Airlines have compared to other airlines?

Tips for Traveling on American Airlines

In this step-by-step guide to flying American Airlines, I'll go over how to book and what to expect onboard American Airlines.

What to Know Before You Buy with American Airlines (AA)

- American is a Oneworld Alliance Member
- Caution: Know the operating carrier to determine air ticket policies and rules
- A Legacy Carrier – American has good re-routing options and more robust schedules should a flight be delayed or cancelled.
- (AA) has more favorable carryon bag policies in Basic Economy than United. American allows Full-size carryon + Personal Item

[American](#) is a member of the [Oneworld alliance](#), which includes airlines such as [British Airways](#), [Cathay Pacific](#), [Iberia](#), [Latam](#),

[Qantas](#), and [Qatar](#). American also has codeshare partners with other airlines such as [Interjet](#), [Fiji Airways](#), and [Seaborne Airlines](#). These agreements allow American to expand its large network even further and sell tickets to almost every corner of the globe.

Make sure to read the flight details closely and look for who the **operating carrier** is on any flights you purchase. Policies pertaining to baggage and elite benefits among others may differ depending on the operating airline.

In the U.S., many shorter flights are often operated by small regional carriers that are either subsidiaries of American or contracted by American to fly short flights. While all the branding will make it seem like the crew and airport staff are American Airlines employees, sometimes these staff members are merely contractors who may be working flights for other airlines as well.

Due to these partnerships, American has many options to re-route passengers when cancellations occur or in times of irregular flight operations. **If prices are similar, it's better to book a flight with American** instead of an ultra-low-cost-carrier like Allegiant or Frontier, which may have very limited flight schedules and could cause you to get stranded if things go awry.

Basic Economy vs Main Cabin on American Airlines

- American offers Basic Economy–US/Canada–Mexico–Central America–Caribbean–Europe although there are some exceptions where only main cabin fares are offered. On the website their fare options are clearly displayed.
- You CANNOT pre-reserve seats (standard seat or preferred location) for a \$Fee (*Varies*) with Basic Economy Fare until inside 48 hours of departure except for Transatlantic where you can pay a \$Fee for a standard pre-reserved seat.

- You must book on initial purchase, the Standard Economy “Main Cabin” fare to have access to purchasing pre-reserved seats to other destinations including larger Main Cabin Extra seats and to have the ability to upgrade.
- American Basic Economy-Seats assigned at check-in/Last to Board Aircraft/ Full-size + Personal Item/Check bag fees apply to both Basic and Main Cabin Fares except for Transatlantic Main Cabin Fares that include 1 checked bag. No flight changes allowed with Basic Economy Fare and no Upgrades from Basic Economy.
- The Exception to American Basic Economy not allowing flight changes or cancellations once booked is Europe. Flights to Europe in Basic Economy can be changed for a \$Fee + Fare Difference...which Delta and United don't offer with their basic economy fares.

What about Frequent Flyers and Elites in Basic Economy

- AAdvantage and Oneworld Alliance members, retain priority boarding & full-size carryon in Basic Economy.
- AAdvantage members and certain AAdvantage credit cardholders retain complimentary checked baggage allowance but mileage earning will not be the same for Basic Economy tickets. AAdvantage credit cardholders still have to pay a checked bag for all non-US/Canada tickets.
- AAdvantage members will earn 50% of Elite Qualifying Miles (EQMs) and Elite Qualifying Segments (EQSs) on American.
- Basic Economy is a good fare for you if you are able to travel extremely light, won't upgrade, don't care about pre-reserved seats and will only bring a small bag onboard.

WHO AMERICAN'S BASIC ECONOMY FARE WORKS BEST FOR...

American's [Basic Economy](#) fare may be best for flyers looking for the absolute lowest price flights who are willing to adhere to the restrictions. If you prefer an experience that features pre-reserved seats and you want the ability to change your ticket for a \$Fee + Fare

Difference and don't mind paying a little more, it may be best to buy a standard American Economy fare (**Main Cabin**) on your initial purchase (*Remember...you can't upgrade a Basic Economy Ticket*).

To compete with the growing low-cost carriers, American now sells a **Basic Economy** fare on many routes. You'll find this type of fare on domestic U.S. flights and flights to/from Canada, Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Europe. Not all routes to/from these regions have Basic Economy fares and if you're traveling to/from Alaska, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, or Panama, you don't have to worry about Basic Economy restrictions for now since all Economy fares will be the standard Main Cabin Economy option on these routes.

The main restrictions for Basic Economy tickets on American are that you will not be able to choose a specific seat for free, you'll board in the last boarding group, and you are not eligible for upgrades. The restrictions are slightly different for itineraries that include flights to/from Europe. For European flights, you can pay a fee to choose a seat during booking. For all other flights, you may choose a seat for a fee starting 48 hours before departure. Of course, if you don't want to pay a fee, you'll be assigned a random seat assignment for free upon check-in. All Basic Economy fares do include the same standard sized carry-on bag plus a personal item as Main Cabin Economy fares.

Possibly the biggest drawback of a Basic Economy ticket for domestic flights and short-haul international flights to/from Canada, Mexico/Central America, and the Caribbean is that ticket changes are not allowed outside the 24-hour risk-free cancellation period, not even for a fee. This means if you can't take your flight or wish to change dates, you'll simply have to eat the cost and buy a new ticket.

If your ticket includes flights to/from Europe, you'll still be able to make ticket changes for a fee plus the fare difference on American. The ability to change a Europe ticket is a nice perk that its top competitors Delta and United do not offer for this type of fare.

Checked bags for domestic and short-haul international flights will cost the same \$30 each way whether you hold a Basic Economy ticket or a Main Cabin Economy fare. For European flights, the first checked bag will cost \$60 each way for Basic Economy, while a Main Cabin Economy fare includes one free checked bag. The difference in price varies between the two economy fare types by route, travel dates, and specific sales. We recommend you always compare the fare prices before you purchase your ticket and choose according to your specific travel needs and budget.

BASIC ECONOMY FARES FOR AADVANTAGE PLATINUM AND SOME OTHER FREQUENT FLYERS...

It should also be noted that Basic Economy fares will only earn 50% of Elite Qualifying Miles (EQMs) and Elite Qualifying Segments (EQSs) on American. This can be a hindrance if you are trying to earn elite status. Elite members of the AAdvantage frequent flier program will still retain boarding and checked bag privileges when traveling on a Basic Economy ticket and certain AAdvantage credit cardholders still get one free checked bag on flights within the U.S. and Canada. However, these cardholders will still have to pay a checked bag fee for all other international routes when traveling on a Basic Economy ticket.

How to Buy a Flight with American Airlines

- You can buy on 3rd party sites and Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Expedia & Orbitz
- We recommend also considering metasearch sites like Momondo which show multiple and more obscure 3rd Party web fares and sometimes offer lower rates than via American's website directly.
- Obscure 3rd Party web fares can sometimes be hundreds of dollars less than what you find on American (*Usually International Travel*)
- Caution – Obscure 3rd Party Sites – Often charge extra change fees and are sometimes not as transparent with fare rules and change conditions in addition to adding a middle-man into your air travel purchase.

- If the price difference is minimal we recommend you go with a well-established online travel agency or book directly with American.
- American's web site doesn't utilize a flexible date search option to help speeding up the finding of low fare date combinations from the home search position (*We recommend you search specifically for American on [Google Flights](#) to narrow down low fare travel dates*).
- The American search display gives the option to choose between Basic Economy, Main Cabin, and the Premium Business or First Class, cabins based on what the operating aircraft and destination has available. There is a separate search option that can be triggered to filter fare results by Lowest Fare or Flexible (*Refundable/Changeable*).
- For Premium Economy on US Flights you need to book via the Main Cabin Economy Fare and then add + [Main Cabin Extra](#) on the choose your seats screen when you cycle through the booking process. Main Cabin Extra may NOT always be available on all flights and unlike Delta with Comfort + (*A version of Premium Economy*) you do not see the total price early in the booking process.
- American now offers [Premium Economy](#) specifically on some of its International flights where you can see early in the search/process the total rate.
- Note: Choose your Seat comes up after you enter Name and contact details.
- The cost of Main Cabin Extra will vary by markets and travel dates.

Main Cabin Extra offers:

- Extra Legroom (Up to 6 Inches)
- Preferred Boarding with earlier overhead bin access
- Complimentary beer, wine and spirits
- Complimentary entertainment

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American has been known to remove its fares from some popular third-party booking sites in the past, but currently, you should be able to find flights on American when searching most booking sites. It's a good idea to compare multiple travel sites to ensure you're finding the best options and prices available.

Don't forget to "Join", "Like" and "Follow" the Premium Facebook Page for your origination to see all the air deals we send out so you can find out when prices drop. Email us here at scott@communityflights.com and let us know your origination if you are not yet a premium member for the Facebook page access. We'll share how you can become a premium member having access to ALL your origination cities flight deals.

Booking a flight on American is very straight forward.

After choosing your dates, you'll be given the option to choose Basic Economy, Main Cabin, or Premium cabins (*Business/First or Premium Economy – on some International Flights*). If you choose a Basic Economy fare, a pop-up will ask if you're sure you want to accept the restrictions. If you choose a Main Cabin Economy fare, you'll be able to choose a standard seat for free \$0 during booking (*If one is available to pre-assign*). Fees may still apply for premium seating (*Preferred location*). Preferred and premium seating is NOT available for purchase with a Basic Economy fare.

On the payment screen, you may see an option to hold the fare on select routes. This allows you to hold the price for 24 hours without payment if you want to think about your plans for a day before purchasing. Some routes may also have an extended hold option, where you can [hold the fare](#) for an extended time period for a non-refundable fee. Not all routes will have these options and you'll still be able to cancel for free within 24 hours of booking if you booked at least 2 days prior to departure.

Travel Insurance

American doesn't offer an option during its booking process to purchase insurance. We do recommend comparing travel insurance plans via [Squaremouth](#) to see whether purchasing travel insurance makes sense for you. On International Flights and with higher cost tickets you may want to consider this purchase. If you need to be air ambulated out of another country this can get very pricey which can be abated or eliminated with travel insurance.

Check-In and Boarding an American Airlines Flight

- Online Check-in 24 hours prior to departure to 45 minutes prior
- Domestic check-in at least 45min prior to departure
- International check-in at least 60 min prior to departure.
- NO Online Check-in for Basic Economy passengers not checking in bags.
- Basic Economy Passengers board last.

[Online check-in](#) is available starting 24 hours and up to 45 minutes prior to departure (90 minutes for international flights). You can also check-in from an airport kiosk or a counter at the airport. To avoid long check-in lines, it's best to check-in either online or at a kiosk before entering any queues to check any bags.

You must be checked in and have your bags checked at least 45 minutes prior to departure for domestic flights (60 minutes prior for international). Certain airports may require you to be checked in earlier and this information will normally be provided with your ticket and confirmation information.

Most flights start boarding 30 – 50 minutes prior to departure and the boarding gate closes 10 minutes before departure. Make sure you are at the boarding gate on time, because once the paperwork is filed and the door is closed, no more passengers will be allowed onboard.

ConciergeKey members are boarded first followed by First Class and active U.S. military personnel. After First Class, American allows its elite status members to board followed by travelers who purchased priority boarding, Main Cabin Extra passengers, and eligible AAdvantage credit card members. Finally, after general boarding groups, Basic Economy passengers will be boarded last.

If the flight is full, it's likely that the last passengers to board will have to gate check any large carry-on bags to their final destination. Also, keep in mind that some smaller regional jets cannot fit larger carry-on bags inside the cabin so it should be expected to gate check larger bags on these types of aircraft. If you gate-check on a regional aircraft, you'll likely be able to claim your gate-checked bag at the jet bridge upon exiting the aircraft.

The American Airlines Inflight Experience

- \$0 – Light snacks, non-alcoholic drinks and entertainment (*Most Flights*)
- On domestic & short-haul international flights premium snack boxes/light meals available for purchase.
- Comp meals available on long-haul international flights.
- Comp meals between Dallas (DFW) and Hawaii and some Transcontinental flights.
- Beer and wine also \$0 on Dallas/Hawaii flights and long-haul international flights.
- Spirits for a \$fee on most flights except transpacific flights \$0.
- Free live-tv on select flights.

- Average seat pitch of 31 inches in economy although it can vary slightly from aircraft to aircraft. It can be as small as 30 inches on some flights.
- Buy Economy Plus for up to 6 more inches of pitch.
- Business Class offers spacious seating/premium meal service.
- [Wifi](#) is available on select flights for a \$fee from \$10.
- [Power](#) Most of our planes have AC power outlets; those with DC power are being converted.

Once onboard an American Airlines flight, you'll receive a standard flying experience complete with free snacks, non-alcoholic drinks, and entertainment options on most flights. Premium snacks and beverages may be purchased onboard domestic and short-haul international flights. Due to a wide range of aircraft, not all flights will have entertainment options and the really short flights may not have time to offer in-flight beverage service.

If you're flying on a long-haul international route, you can expect a complimentary meal to be served. American also offers complimentary meals to Economy passengers on flights between Dallas (DFW) and Hawaii, and on select transcontinental flights between New York (JFK) and both Los Angeles (LAX) and San Francisco (SFO). Beer and wine are also included on Dallas/Hawaii flights and long-haul international flights. Spirits require a charge on most flights except certain transpacific flights.

To keep you entertained, American offers free live TV on select flights and a large library of prerecorded movies, TV series, and music on its seatback screens. American also offers Wi-Fi internet access for a fee, which will vary depending on your flight. Economy seats have a standard seat pitch around 31". Of course, due to the wide range of aircraft that American utilizes, the seat pitch can vary slightly depending on the flight. Make sure to research your aircraft

on [SeatGuru](#) to find information on seat pitch and what entertainment options will be available on your specific flight.

Main Cabin Extra seats may be booked on select flights if you'd like a little extra leg room and other perks like free drinks and priority boarding. There are also other premium cabin options with lie-flat seats on certain flights, which leisure travelers are likely only able to enjoy by accumulating frequent flier miles or credit card points. Whichever way you fly American, you'll experience standard legacy airline service onboard.

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