

What you need to know: COVID-19: Airline seat capacity policy

August 28, 2020

As part of their efforts to keep travelers safe, some airlines are social distancing passengers by keeping a number of seats free on flights; typically, the middle seat is kept free. This report details what airlines are doing and includes information on those that have not announced the adoption of such measures.

Asia Pacific

Major airlines

Airline	Seating adjustment
Air New Zealand	For a short period, initially from August 13 until August 16, seating will be allocated to allow an empty seat between customers traveling alone. The airline will allow families and companions to continue traveling together, with no spacing between passengers.
ANA	No announcement
Cathay Pacific	As part of its Cathay Care wellbeing commitment, the airline will block off seats “wherever possible.” ¹
Garuda Indonesia ²	To maintain social distancing on board, a seat is left empty between each passenger.
Japan Airlines (JAL)	Until June 30, JAL introduced a temporary restriction on seat assignments to allow more personal space onboard. As a result, certain seats were unavailable for reservation. The restriction did not apply to some aircraft and routes nor to First and Business class on international flights.
Philippine Airlines ³	When flights are not full, seats are allocated in a way that maximizes personal distance between passengers.
Qantas	From April, Qantas and Jetstar kept the middle seat free. ⁴ This policy ended in June with the introduction of the Fly Well program, which states “the aircraft configuration, including the seats and galley, act as a natural barrier, and people are not seated face to face.” ⁵
Singapore Airlines	While there is nothing indicating the airline is keeping seats free, it has introduced dedicated seating zones onboard to separate transit passengers from non-transit passengers. Passengers must remain in their designated zone. ⁶
Virgin Australia	Wherever possible, Virgin Australia will try to keep a seat empty between passenger traveling alone.

¹ [Cathay Care](#)

² [Garuda Indonesia](#), Preventive Action

³ [Philippine Airlines](#), PAL redefines the normal flying experience

⁴ [News.com.au](#), June 4, 2020

⁵ [Qantas](#), Fly Well, On board the plane

⁶ [Singapore Airlines](#), Precautionary measures

Other Asia Pacific airlines

Airline	Seating adjustment
Bangkok Airways	This Thai regional airline pre-allocates seats onboard to ensure safe distances between passengers. ⁷
FlyPelican	Seat allocation procedures at this Australian regional airline ensure social distancing within the aircraft. Where possible there will be a free seat between passengers not travelling together.
Regional Express	While authorities do not consider social distancing to be necessary on board, this Australian regional airline will try to allocate alternating occupied and unoccupied seats (unless passengers are traveling together) ⁸
Royal Brunei Airlines ⁹	Seats are allocated to maximize available cabin space. Middle seats will only be allocated where necessary.
Vistara	Indian full-service airline allows passengers to book an adjoining seat at an equivalent fare. ¹⁰

Low-cost carriers

Airline	Seating adjustment
GoAir	Through its GoMore fare option, this Indian carrier allows passengers to buy two seats per person in order to keep the adjacent seat free. Keeping the middle seat free is only available for passengers seated in the first two rows.
IndiGo	From July 24, under its “double seat bookings” promotion, IndiGo passengers can pay to ensure the adjacent seat is kept free. The second seat will cost up to 25% of the normal price. ¹¹
Jetstar	No announcement from Australian low-cost carrier
Jetstar Asia	From April 21, all flights operate with a reduced number of passengers to allow for safe distancing on board. It is not clear if this policy remains in place today.
Lion Air ¹²	Where possible, Lion Air will seat passengers, who are not part of a family or group traveling together, at a distance from other passengers. To support this, the airline has reduced maximum capacity on some aircraft.

⁷ [Bangkok Airways](#), Practices to ensure safe travel
⁸ [Regional Express](#), Coronavirus Safety Information
⁹ [Royal Brunei Airlines](#), Flying with us
¹⁰ [Conde Nast Traveller India](#), July 17, 2020
¹¹ [Times of India](#), July 17, 2020
¹² [Lion Air](#), August 5, 2020

Europe

Major airlines

Airline	Seating adjustment
Air France	On practically all flights, low load factors mean Air France is able to observe physical distancing. ¹³
British Airways	No announcement
Iberia	Where occupancy levels permit, passengers are seated to ensure maximum distance between them. Iberia notes that EASA has determined that it is not necessary to leave an empty seat between passengers.
KLM	Whenever possible, KLM creates as much space as possible around passengers by keeping seats empty.
Lufthansa	In the #WeCare section of its website, Lufthansa makes no mention of leaving any seats free on its flights.

European low-cost carriers

Airline	Seating adjustment
EasyJet	While mask wearing is mandatory, easyJet has decided not to block off the middle seats on its aircraft. ¹⁴
Eurowings	Passengers can pay extra to keep the middle seat empty, throughout the entire cabin, on all flights within Europe. Subject to availability, passengers can block seats for a fee starting at €18 (US\$21) per flight.
Norwegian	No announcement
Wizz Air	Seat allocation takes social distancing guidelines into consideration wherever possible. ¹⁵ Passengers may be directed to seats by cabin crew to support social distancing onboard.

Other European airlines

Airline	Seating adjustment
Aer Lingus	No announcement
Alitalia	As recently as mid-June, all flights were operated at half seat capacity to comply with Italian regulations on social distancing. This measure is no longer mentioned in Alitalia's Flying Safely details. ¹⁶
Austrian Airlines	Passengers are required to social distance in the cabin where possible. The airline will not leave seats free on full flights.
Brussels Airlines	No announcement

¹³ [Air France](#), By your side at all times

¹⁴ [Skift](#), May 21, 2020

¹⁵ [Wizz Air](#), Information & Services

¹⁶ [Alitalia](#), Flying Safely

Other European airlines (continued)

Airline	Seating adjustment
CSA Czech Airlines	Seating capacity permits gaps to be maintained between passengers in Economy Class. The middle seat is always left empty in Business Class. On aircraft with a two-seat configuration, there will always be only one person seated per pair of seats
Finnair	Staff review seating at the gate and will socially distance passengers where possible. Families can continue to sit together.
SAS	While onboard, SAS will do its best to seat passengers across the cabin, to create as much space as possible between them. ¹⁷
TAP Air Portugal	No announcement

Latin America

Airline	Seating adjustment
Copa Airlines	Where possible aisle seats in the last three rows are left unoccupied for the comfort and safety of passengers queuing for the toilets and passengers seated near the queue.
GOL	As part of its standard offering, passengers flying on the Brazilian low-cost carrier can already purchase an extra seat.
Sky Airline	Chilean low-cost carrier Sky Airline blocked center seats to ensure physical separation until August 1.

Middle East

Airline	Seating adjustment
Emirates	No announcement. Airline president Tim Clark has described leaving middle seats vacant as “neither economically viable nor sustainable.” ¹⁸
Etihad Airways	Etihad has made some changes to its seat maps so that, where possible, there’s more space between passengers. ¹⁹
Gulf Air	Bahrain airline ties to modify seat arrangements when possible
Qatar Airways	No announcement
Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia)	In economy class on domestic flights, the adjacent seat will always remain unavailable to ensure social distancing.

¹⁷ [SAS](#), SAS Safe Travel

¹⁸ [Gulf Business](#), June 1, 2020

¹⁹ [Etihad Airways](#)

North America

Canada

Airline	Seating adjustment
Air Canada	A policy to block adjacent seats in Economy Class expired after June 30, 2020. ²⁰ Air Canada now notifies Economy Class passengers if a flight is nearing capacity. This is by email before the flight, or an announcement at the gate before boarding. ²¹ Passengers can explore other options if preferring more space onboard, including selecting another flight at no charge.
WestJet	WestJet’s safety program includes a limit on seats onboard its aircraft, although families travelling together can still sit together. ²² The airline ended a policy of blocking the middle seats at the end of June.

U.S. airlines

Airline	Seating adjustment
Alaska Airlines	Until July 31, Alaska Air Lines is blocking middle seats on all flights and is capping capacity at 65%, although groups wishing to sit together can request this by calling reservations. ²³
Allegiant Air	Passengers are asked not to book the middle seat, unless it is to keep family members together. Once on board, crew members may move passengers to provide additional distancing where possible. Customers concerned that a flight may be too full to accommodate social distancing can ask to be notified if a booked flight exceeds 65% capacity. ²⁴
American Airlines	Capacity on flights limited to 85% until June 30. From July 1, flights can be completely sold, but travelers will be advised of full flights and allowed to move to less crowded flights without charge when available. ²⁵
Delta Air Lines	Middle seat left free in all cabins until January 6, 2021, unless passengers are travelling in a group of at least three people. ²⁶ Aisle seat blocked on one side on aircraft with no middle seat until October 31, 2020. First Class cabins also restricted to 50% capacity until this date. Delta will switch to larger aircraft or add flights on routes with rising demand. Delta One cabins on widebody aircraft sold at full capacity from October 1, 2020, as seats are designed with more space and privacy built in.
Frontier Airlines	No announcement
Hawaiian Airlines	Airline prevents the booking of middle seats to provide more space onboard. Depending on load factors, seating may be adjusted at the gate to maximize spacing and meet weight and balance restrictions. Guests preferring to sit together should speak to an airport agent.

²⁰ [Business Travel News](#), June 29, 2020

²¹ [Air Canada](#), Service offering changes, June 30, 2020

²² [WestJet](#), Safety on board

²³ [Business Travel News](#), June 9, 2020

²⁴ [Allegiant Air](#), Going the distance for health and safety

²⁵ [Business Travel News](#), June 26, 2020

²⁶ [Business Travel News](#), August 20, 2020

U.S. airlines (continued)

Airline	Seating adjustment
JetBlue Airways	<p>Through October 15, JetBlue is limiting the number of seats on sale. Middle seats are blocked on larger aircraft, while most aisle seats are blocked on smaller aircraft. Cabin crew proactively review seat assignments to ensure as much personal space as possible. JetBlue has also created buffer zones around all cabin crew jump seats.</p> <p>To ensure physical distancing, passengers can book adjacent seats, marking as “empty seat” when providing traveler details during booking.²⁷ These seats may be next to, in front of or behind the traveler. All remaining unsold seats are available for purchase as extra seats, priced at the same fare as the seat occupied by the traveler.</p>
Southwest Airlines	<p>Middle seats are being kept open through at least September 30. If traveling together, customers are still welcome to sit together.²⁸</p>
United Airlines	<p>As part of its social distancing efforts, United has adjusted its seat selection systems to avoid seating customers next to each other, except when travelling together.²⁹ It does not guarantee the middle seat will be left free. United also aims to alternate window and aisle seats when seats are two abreast only.</p> <p>Until June 30, United allows customers booked on flights expected to be close to full capacity to rebook on a different flight to receive a travel credit. This option is also available at the gate, if more than 70% of customers have checked in.</p>

Note

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and the situation is changing on almost an hourly basis. The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at August 28, 2020. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report? Please email sales@adelmantravel.com to share your thoughts.

²⁷ [JetBlue](#), Flying with us

²⁸ [Southwest](#), Promise

²⁹ [United Airlines](#)