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ALL-AMERICAN: American Airlines' halibut with truffle corn salsa
PHOTO: © AMERICAN AIRLINES

Classy Cuisine

Airlines take premium-cabin dining to new heights. BY ALLISON VOIGTS

As constant technological innovations make flying more comfortable, the congealed-looking meals and plastic trays introduced by in-flight dining have thankfully become a thing of the past. Some airlines hire celebrity chefs to help revamp their first- and business-class menus; others consult with world-renowned wine experts or offer an onboard coffee house. One even features a bespoke menu cooked to order by a personal chef. We've compiled a sampler of current offerings in premium-class cabins.

BOARDING A FLIGHT as far north as Toronto or Calgary, it can take more than a cup of coffee to warm up — which is why Air Canada spirits away its first-class passengers with a signature cocktail made from Canada's award-winning Iceberg Vodka. Triple-distilled in Newfoundland from pure iceberg water, the ultra-premium liquor is featured in monthly cocktails like the Northern

Lights, made with cranberry juice and Grand Marnier.

In addition to exotic cocktails, the airline prides itself on an extensive selection of Champagne, Old and New World wines (including Canadian reds and whites) and late-bottled vintage Port. And at mealtimes, passengers may choose from three menus featuring signature Canadian dishes like roasted black cod with maple glaze, Asian-inspired dishes such as braised beef medallions with hoisin sauce and vegetarian dishes including baked red pepper stuffed with mushroom and pumpkin.

IN 2011, THE READERS of *Global Traveler* voted Alitalia's food the "Best Airline Cuisine" in the world, and for good reason. The Rome-based airline has masterfully married regional Italian ingredients with its in-flight menu. Each season, the dining service in Alitalia's Magnifica business class focuses on two unique regions in Italy, sourcing the ingredients, inspiration and wines from those areas.

Recent menus designed in collaboration with ALMA — the International School of Italian Cuisine — highlighted Basilicata, known for its sausages, and Sardinia, famous for its artichokes and twice-baked bread. A typical meal might include homemade pasta dumplings filled with spinach and Trentino's famous cured ham, turbot fillets in sweet-and-sour sauce and Northern Italian apple strudel. With the May–July menus highlighting Campania and Emilia Romagna, the airline will have featured each Italian region, but passengers can enjoy the project's most well-received dishes in an upcoming "Best of" compilation menu.

AMONG THE MYRIAD challenges presented by in-flight dining is creating a menu that will appeal to the diverse tastes of a global customer base — a challenge American Airlines overcame with the help of Chef Richard Sandoval, whose 20-plus restaurants worldwide charmed audiences with authentic Latin American flavors. "With so many customers flying to destinations all over the world, it's important for me to design cuisine that embodies the flavors of the regions which American serves," he says.

Passengers flying in American's first- and business-class cabins between Europe, Asia and Latin America can choose

from entrées such as halibut with truffle corn salsa, which Sandoval says "has an amazing flavor profile, and the salsa accompanies the subtleness of the halibut to really bring out those flavors." The former *Bon Appétit* "Restaurateur of the Year" will continue to collaborate with the airline to introduce more new dishes to the menu this spring, including a chipotle miso cod with lemon red chili pepper aioli.

WHEN IT COMES TO serving restaurant-quality food at 30,000 feet, who better to transform an airline's service than a world-class catering company? From the menus and beverages to the cabin crew training, Austrian caterer DO & CO has earned Austrian Airlines AirTrax's "Best Business-Class Catering" award for two years running. (The fare on another DO & CO-catered airline, Turkish Airlines, was recently voted "Best Airline Food" in a Skyscanner survey.)

In addition to offering carefully crafted dishes — like stuffed eggplant and walnut pear tart — worthy of its finest New York or Milan restaurants, DO & CO trains an onboard chef to put the finishing touches on each business-class meal. And for that crucial caffeine kick at the end of a long-haul flight, the airline has teamed with Austria's Meisl roasters to offer a "Vienna Coffee House" menu of 11 different espresso drinks.

PAIRED PERFECTION:
Austrian Airlines' food and wine
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