

## ULTIMATE COMFORT ABOVE THE CLOUDS by Nick Malgieri



May 1: The month started with a bang – complicated negotiations for a new book contract, deadlines that seemed to arrive every 10 minutes, and a couple of short trips out of town that swallowed up every other available minute of free time. Throughout those frenetic weeks my thoughts often strayed to my mid-May trip to Thailand with a week's stop on Zurich on the way back, and my first flight on the new Airbus 330-300 between JFK and Zurich. I had read about the new plane on the SWISS website and was eager to experience the comfort of the new SWISS business class air cushion seat, a first in worldwide aviation. Moreover it can adjust to a totally lie-flat bed that can also utilize the air cushion feature. The new A330-300 now makes 6 flights a week between JFK and Zurich in each direction, with more slated to be added to the route as soon as more planes are ready to go. By 2011 all the long-haul flights from North America to Zurich will be serviced by this plane.

May 12: As soon as I stepped into Terminal 4 at JFK I started to relax. Gratified to see that there was only one passenger checking in for business class, I was about to push my luggage cart into the line when a uniformed SWISS employee motioned me over to the first class check-in counter. During peak check-in times, there is always someone to facilitate the process for all passengers, no matter which class of service they may have chosen for their flight. A few minutes later I was on my way to the lounge for a relaxing hour before my flight.

JFK's SWISS business class lounge has a buffet of hot and cold food available for passengers who want a meal before boarding so that they can maximize sleep time on the flight, an option I usually take. This time though, there was a new menu of specialties from chef Daniel Jann from Canton Schwyz in central Switzerland, so I waited to have the on-board meal. After a drink in the lounge, I headed to the gate. Security screening at Terminal 4 is a breeze since they have a business/first line that gets you through the process in a few minutes. A short walk to the gate and I boarded effortlessly through the priority line. My seat turned out to be a single one, another new feature of the A330-300. The business class cabin has the seats arranged in a 2-2-1 and 1-2-1 configuration, allowing single passengers the option of a stand-alone seat if they wish. I settled in and immediately began making a list of various stops during the day-long layover in Zurich before my flight to Bangkok the following night.

The flight: First of all, the seat itself is a dream. I would say that it's more like a first-class seat (and it's certainly better than any first-class seat I've ever had on another airline), but of course, SWISS has taken first class accommodations several steps higher too, so this luxurious seat is now the norm for business class on long-haul flights. Right now, the A340 planes with the former style of business class seat are being retrofitted with the new model, too.

After a light meal I was ready for sleep. I couldn't wait to try the new completely lie-flat air cushion bed, but the truth is, I don't have much to report: I fell asleep as soon as I lay down and awoke about an hour before landing in Zurich, just in time for a delicious breakfast. What a treat – I usually don't sleep well on planes, so having 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep left me refreshed and alert for a quick train ride into the city, lunch with a friend, and some shopping for friends in Bangkok. Heading back to the Zurich airport in the early evening I was struck by the fact that I didn't feel at all as though I had taken a transatlantic flight the night before – it was pure comfort above the clouds.

Next month: Zurich to JFK on the new A330-300.

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