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Airport Lounges: Home Away From Home

Airport lounges transform into luxurious getaways for travelers in transit

by [Susan Finch](#) | Class Act 2013



Photo: Etihad Airways' Diamond First Class lounge at Abu Dhabi International Airport © Etihad Airways

Enduring long airport layovers often means turning a fast-food tabletop into an office or killing time at the duty-free shop. But long layovers are no longer a reason to sacrifice comfort.

More and more business travelers are looking to airport lounges as a home away from home. Airports around the world are responding to the call by transforming lounges into state-of-the-art getaways complete with personal assistants and comfortable beds in private cabanas. Instead of waiting to check in at the hotel, use your layover as a chance to get some sleep in a private suite, get a haircut or massage and enjoy a hot meal prepared by a celebrity chef.

SETTLE INTO [VIRGIN Atlantic Airways'](#) Clubhouse at London Heathrow and ask for a haircut or manicure before taking a dip in the circular hydro-spa pool. Reserved for Upper Class passengers and Flying Club Gold members, the 12,000-square-foot lounge offers private cabanas complete with hotel-style rooms to catch a nap on a daybed or step into a hot shower stocked with toiletries. The lounge even offers complimentary pajamas so you don't have to wear a soiled pair from a well-traveled suitcase.



Virgin Atlantic Airways' spa at London Heathrow © Virgin Atlantic

Travelers who've been on the road for a week or even months at a time benefit from clothes pressed during a nap, hot showers or specialty drinks from the Grey Goose Loft. And if you need to buckle down and bury your head in work, look for the healthy supply of computer terminals and printers tucked into a far corner. There's also plenty of seating in this spacious lounge with oversized windows facing the runway. Those headed through New York should stop by the JFK Clubhouse, which offers nearly identical amenities as its London Heathrow twin.

AT FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL Airport, [Lufthansa's](#) First Class Lounge doubles as its own terminal at a staggering 11,840 square feet. A dedicated personal assistant escorts guests through passport and security control before heading to a lounge full of plush leather armchairs, sofas and daybeds. Ask your personal assistant to arrange for a daybed for a nap, serve one of 80 brands of whiskey or premium spirits and help select a meal. Like most luxury lounges, the Lufthansa First Class Lounge offers hot showers, but frequent flyers needing extra creature comforts may be surprised by a full-sized bathtub complete with bath salts to enjoy while sipping a glass of Champagne. There's even a rubber ducky to take home as a keepsake.

If you're tired of setting up shop on a cramped airport table, ask for one of the lounge's special office units arranged on a two-level gallery. The layout offers a discreet, quiet space for work and phone calls and comes with all the necessities like a large desk, a telephone, a netbook connection and electronic hookups. Ideal for meetings on the road, some units can also be closed with glass doors. After a long, hard day at work and relaxing in the lounge, guests may choose to be escorted right to the plane in a Porsche or a Mercedes.

GUESTS SKIP PAST the long lines and head to the exclusive check-in desk at the [Thai Airways](#) First Class Lounge at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport. A golf cart whisks travelers to private bungalows for spa treatments including full-hour body massages, foot massages, and neck and foot rubs. Semiprivate living rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis for a more intimate setting to indulge in a quiet drink or a casual meeting.

If you need to squeeze in a meeting on the road, first-class passengers can inquire about one of two VIP rooms for extra privacy or one of the six private corners in the lounge. The dedicated business space proves especially convenient for longhaul travelers who need to set up presentations and meetings. And guests with family can also take advantage of the family room with kids' activities to keep the little ones occupied while the adults return calls or relax over a glass of Champagne.

TRAVELERS TAKING their kids on the road for weeks at a time will find refuge in the dedicated staff nannies at [Etihad Airways'](#) Diamond First Class Lounge at Abu Dhabi International Airport. Kids unwind with books, toys and TV shows in a brightly colored family room with an attentive staff. Meanwhile, parents indulge in a complimentary treatment from the Six Senses Spa. Customized treatments take 15 minutes to an hour or more for facials, foot detox and scalp massages.

If you're passing through the airport every week or two, skip the dry cleaning at your hotel. Lounge staff can press your clothes and polish shoes to a shine in time for a meeting in the business center. Macs, printers and all the usual necessities like broadband Internet access are also readily available once you're fully relaxed from a spa treatment and hot meal.

IF YOU HAVE THE OPTION to pick a home airport base, make it Kuala Lumpur International Airport. With a glass-enclosed rainforest and a lounge with a tranquil river running through it, you can't find a more exotic setting on a layover. [Malaysia Airlines'](#) Platinum Suite lounge is reserved for the carrier's high-tier frequent flyers and comes with a personal assistant, meet-and-greet service for all Malaysia Airlines international flights, a putting green and a fine-dining menu. There's also a Kids Corner offering TVs, art supplies, toys, pint-sized tables and chairs, crafts and diaper-changing areas.

Though first-class passengers lounge in the lap of luxury, those with business- or economy-class lounge passes enjoy comfortable sofas and chairs, tasty food options and a business center with dedicated meeting space for traveling teams.

REGARDLESS OF THE CLASS of your ticket or airline, guests can access [Qatar Airways'](#) Oryx Lounge at Doha International Airport and use the conference room, business center with PCs, shower facilities and smoking room. But first- and business-class passengers can also indulge in the Premium Terminal for dining options ranging from deli treats to fresh, handrolled sushi while relaxing in massage chairs.

Like other airport lounges, Doha offers privacy rooms with beds to allow travelers to catch up on sleep before heading to the business center and private meeting rooms. But unlike most airport lounges, the Oryx Lounge has a 24-hour clinic where travelers who forgot their medications or are running low on a prescription can get a quick refill.

STEP INTO [CATHAY Pacific's](#) The Pier at Hong Kong International Airport for a decadent travel experience and local fare including freshly handmade Japanese noodles from its popular Noodle Bar. Private shower suites open at 6 a.m. for early-morning business travel and offer handheld or rainfall showerhead options. The shower's back wall features embedded river rock, providing a spa-like aesthetic.

Guests at The Pier's First Class Lounge get more than just a place to catch a nap. Skip your hotel altogether and snag one of the six Day-Break rooms including a private TV, an armchair, a wake-up call and waiter service. While the Business Class Lounge doesn't offer the same privacy, both lounges boast Personal Living Spaces that offer spacious work areas to spread out and relax.

GET BACK IN TOUCH with nature and step into the [Qantas](#) International First Class Lounge at Sydney Airport, where a vertical garden features more than 8,000 plants growing out of the wall. The lounge offers a Payot Paris day spa, Sony PlayStations and portable games for a quick fix.

Business travelers can settle in the separate business center with 11 work stations complete with a plasma display and plenty of PCs. But what makes this lounge unique is its own traditional library stocked with books for travelers needing some quiet time; allow yourself to settle in with a good book.



Finnair's Via Lounge at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport © Finnair

FINNAIR'S VIA LOUNGE at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport is designed around the home-away-from-home mentality, offering space to rest and work in peace and quiet. Guests needing a comfortable work space can choose from three cubicle-style layouts with an iMac and wireless charging system. Forget your charger? Request an adapter from reception and connect it to your phone, then place it on the PowerKiss button on the desk to start charging.

Travelers will also find all the usual perks like beer, wine and a buffet, with floor-to-ceiling windows facing the tarmac for an inspired view while working. After wrapping up work, wander into the living room, grab a book and ask reception for a pair of cozy wool socks.

WHETHER YOU'RE ON the road for a week or months at a time, take advantage of airport lounges as a place to recharge and relax in an environment where hospitality is at your fingertips. Who knows? With luxury amenities, customized massages and cozy beds, airport lounges might look better than home.