



NEWS

# A First Look Inside American Airlines' Boeing 737 MAX 8

**JT Genter**  
Nov 29, 2017

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The Boeing 737 MAX is the latest build of the most successful aircraft of all time. The [first was delivered to Malindo Air in May 2017](#), just under 50 years since the first-ever 737 entered service. Six months later, a total of eight airlines have already taken delivery of the new single-aisle jet, which looks much like its predecessors but offers exceptional, double-digit fuel savings largely thanks to new engines. Southwest, the launch customer, wasn't the first airline to take delivery of the new aircraft type, but at least it was the [first US airline to get the keys to the MAX](#).

97

American Airlines was the [second US airline to get the 737 MAX](#), taking delivery in late September of its first of 100 aircraft it ordered. (They're all MAX 8 variants – the jet comes in four sizes, from MAX 7 to MAX 10, seating up to 200-plus passengers.) But, the world's largest airline waited to take its second delivery before launching revenue flights – perhaps to avoid the embarrassment Southwest suffered when its [first 737 MAX broke down after its first revenue flight](#).

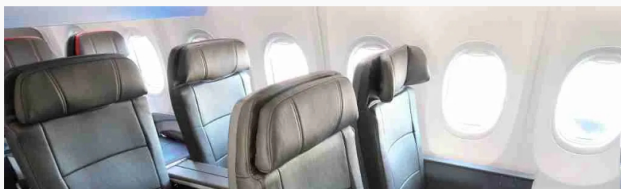


[Beginning November 29](#), both aircraft (registration N324RA and N304RB) were placed into service between Miami (MIA) and New York City's LaGuardia (LGA). The three-hour, 1,097-mile flight just scratches the surface of what the aircraft is capable of doing; the MAX 8 can fly almost four times as long nonstop with a full load. Perhaps the airline wants to see how the [30-inch pitch seats](#) and [lack of in-flight entertainment screens](#) go over with passengers before putting it on longer flights.

The honors of the first American Airlines 737 MAX 8 to fly customers went to the second-delivered aircraft, registration N304RB, fleet number 3RB. Before the inaugural flight, I got a chance to tour the cabin. Here's a look inside.





Although American Airlines chose to keep the same number of first class seats (16) on its 737 MAX as its other Boeing 737s, the first class experience is certainly a downgrade. AA elected to install the same seats you'll find on an [ever-growing number of its long-haul aircraft](#) as premium economy.





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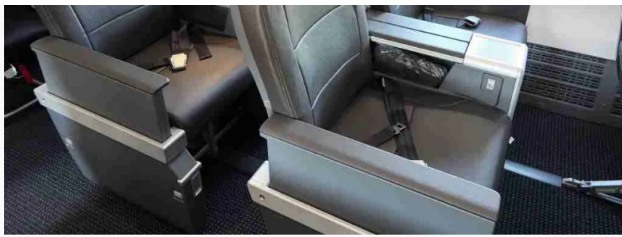
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Arguably, these seats aren't even up to the level of premium economy. Instead of [38-inch pitch that you'll find in premium economy](#), American Airlines has 37-inch pitch in first class on the 737 MAX. Also, there are no in-flight entertainment screens. There are power plugs in the storage well under the center armrest, but these suffer from the [same angle issue that you'll find in AA's premium economy](#).



In order to maximize the number of seats on the aircraft, American Airlines chose not to install a bulkhead between economy and first class. Instead a simple, partially-opaque divider hangs from the overhead bins. For those in the rear of first class, this means you aren't going to feel the "normal" separation from economy. Also, for those sitting in the last row of first class (row 4), it means that your seat might be kicked by those in the front row of economy.



Reversing its decision to install some economy seats with 29-inch pitch, American Airlines [cut the number of Main Cabin Extra seats from 36 to 30](#). This is a bummer for [American Airlines elites](#), who already have a slimmer chance of getting an upgrade (16 first class seats and 156 economy seats on the 737 MAX vs. 16 first class seats and 144 economy seats on the 737-800) who now have to battle for fewer MCE seats.

There are just three rows of Main Cabin Extra at the front: rows 8-10. You'll get just 33 inches of pitch in these seats. While that's three more inches than economy, that's the tightest Main Cabin Extra legroom you'll find on American Airlines' fleet.



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The issues don't stop there: an entire overhead bin over row 9 and 10 is blocked to hold equipment. That side of the cabin only has two overhead bins for the three MCE rows, meaning half of the overhead space is blocked.



The row with the most pitch in the plane is actually row 8, which is the first row of economy. There's a whopping 40 inches between row 8's seatback and first class row 4's seatback. That's three more inches of pitch than you'll find in first class.

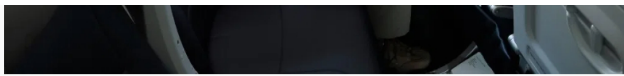


Apart from row 8, the exit row seats (row 16 and 17) provide the most amount of room on the plane with a generous 38 inches of pitch.



But, the real pain is in the back of the plane. Standard economy seats have just 30 inches of pitch. Because of the narrow seats, 30 inches of pitch isn't bad on legroom. I've seen a [6'4" man sit in these seats](#) without his knees mashed up against the seat in front. However, there's no substitute for pitch when it comes to personal space. And, I experienced first-hand how cramped these seats can feel, having turned down an upgrade to first so I could fly the inaugural in a 30-inch pitch seat.





Instead of installing in-flight entertainment screens, seats in economy class are fitted with tablet holders. That's right, [American Airlines 737 MAX is BYOD \(Bring Your Own Device\)](#). Thankfully though, you don't need to be prepared with downloaded content. Entertainment is available streaming to devices. And, while these are technically tablet holders, they adjust to hold any size device you may have.



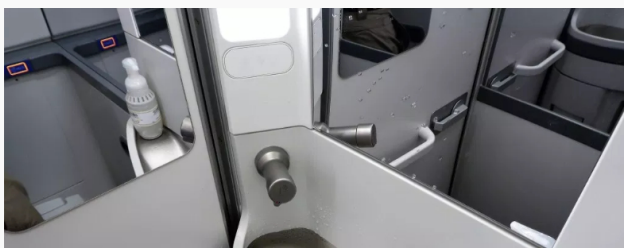
Each economy seat has a USB power plug located near the tablet holder and a universal power plug under the seat in front.



If you like looking out the window, there's definitely two rows to avoid: row 12 and 13. At least it's easy to remember that 13 is an unlucky number for views.



But perhaps the worst aspect of the plane are the bathrooms. Fitting 172 seats into a Boeing 737 — with 16 of those being first class — leaves practically no room for bathrooms, galleys, or really anything. The two economy bathrooms — which are supposed to serve 156 passengers — measure just 24 inches wide. The narrow sink combined with high-powered water stream make spraying water on yourself and the bathroom an inevitability.







### Bottom Line

AvGeek-wise, the Boeing 737 MAX 8 is a wonder. Passenger-wise, the American Airlines 737 MAX 8 is a horror. AA installed premium economy seats as first class seats and thin and flimsy slimline seats in economy. First class pitch isn't generous and – with few exceptions – it gets worse the further back you go. Sadly, the 737 MAX 8 isn't a bird that American Airlines flyers will want to seek out.

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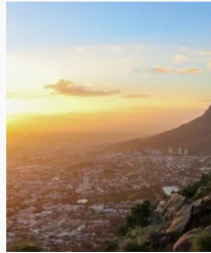


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Allen · 2 years ago
American Airlines race to the bottom, You are lucky they don't anesthetize you on the plane and take one of your kidneys.
11 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



AndruskenN · Allen · 2 years ago
American is already at the bottom. They are working on going subterranean.
7 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Dubno · AndruskenN · 2 years ago
You should try RyanAir. They make AA look good, and that takes some doing.
^ | v · Reply · Share >



JT Genter · Dubno · 2 years ago
Except Ryanair actually has more pitch on its 737 MAX than AA:
https://thepointsguy.com/20...
2 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Jason Lewis · Dubno · 2 years ago
True, but RyanAir is a ULLC; AA is "supposed" to be a "full-service" airline.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Low Key MSer · 2 years ago
Under the seat in front in economy you'll also find pretzel pieces
10 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



AnonymousWhistleBlower · 2 years ago
JT, thank you for the great article. I think everyone needs to understand that with American Airlines, the shareholders come first, then the company executives, then the unions. The passenger comes last and gets to pay for it all.
6 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



JT Genter · AnonymousWhistleBlower · 2 years ago
You're welcome! Thanks for the praise... and seemingly accurate analysis.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Hunter Cook · AnonymousWhistleBlower · a year ago
Seems more like it goes execs > shareholders = unions > pax. The stock price is about what it was in early 2014 (while the market overall is much higher) and they don't seem to be doing the rank-and-file employees any favors either.
^ | v · Reply · Share >



AA · 2 years ago
737 MAX Pitch in First: 37"
777-300 Pitch in MCE: 36"
737 MAX Pitch in MCE: 33"
Ex-US Airways A321 Pitch in Economy: 32"
6 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



JT Genter · AA · 2 years ago
Crazy numbers, aren't they?
4 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



DTMD · 2 years ago
Was weighing possibly paying to renew my platinum status (\$1299). Considering the biggest perk will be complimentary main cabin extra "upgrades", no thanks! Will shift my flying to Delta.
6 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



James · 2 years ago
What a sad excuse for a plane.
5 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



AndruskenN · James · 2 years ago
Great plane. Horrible configuration, as anyone should expect from the worst airline.
8 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Gary Rambo · James · 2 years ago
The aircraft is amazing. AA wants to squeeze as many seats as possible into it, thus degrading the experience for everyone. It's not the plane; it's the airline. Southwest does not have first class, but the economy seating in their MAXs is 32 inches and the seats are wider.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Austin Paul Thomas Speaker · Gary Rambo · 2 years ago
Actually the seat width is the same because it's the same seat. But it's very telling that Southwest has 175 total seats on their MAX 8s, all of which are economy, and American has 172 total seats, which includes both first class and extra space economy. Unless you're in one of the aforementioned products, you're in for a rough ride.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



PHL777 · 2 years ago · edited
Is there anything to like about 737s from a passenger viewpoint? The cabin is narrow, the seats are narrow and the windows are down by your elbows. I hate 737s. Flying them on short routes is tolerable but I had a 5.5hr leg on one and wanted to jump out.
4 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



conflict · PHL777 · 2 years ago · edited
Ugh 757s are even worse. I avoid and look for Airbus.
New 737s might be quieter? thats about it.
^ | v 1 · Reply · Share >



PHL777 · conflict · 2 years ago
757s do suck as well. I put my mom on a 757 from Raleigh to Paris 3 months ago. At least she's short! Boeing needs to bring on the NMA ASAP.
^ | v · Reply · Share >



vbscript2 · PHL777 · 2 years ago · edited
I don't mind the 757 at all for short domestic flights, but, yeah, single-aisle airplanes



aren't fun on trans-Atlantic routes unless you're up front on one of the configurations that has flat-bed seats.

Especially when flying up front, I prefer the 757 over the 321 due to being able to board from the 2L door instead of having to use 1L. Even when flying in the back, though, it makes boarding and deplaning easier.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**PHL777** → vbscript2 · 2 years ago

That is true. But unfortunately, most people travel as coach passengers and if you've ever flown a mid/long-haul in the back of a 757, it's not, "fun." I think Airbus would have a better shot at "replacing" the 757 if they had a full size 2L door though, so good point.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**vbscript2** → PHL777 · 2 years ago · edited

The 321 does have a 2L door that is large enough for boarding, but it's so close to the engine that most airlines don't want to use it for boarding, as they don't trust the jetway operators to not bump into it. That would be very, very costly, even by airline standards. And potentially dangerous if no one noticed before flight. The only way to fix that problem would be to actually lengthen the aircraft or at least move the location of the 2L door, which is a major fuselage redesign that seems quite unlikely to happen. The 757 has enough clearance to use it safely, though.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**threebillie** · 2 years ago

oh hell to the nawh.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**conflict** · 2 years ago

"Boeing or not going" fanbois around?

This is why I look for Airbus planes on my domestic flights.

4 ^ | v · 1 · Reply · Share >



**JT Genter** → conflict · 2 years ago

Well, the plane is excellent. The cabin arrangement is the problem - and it's not Boeing's decision.

7 ^ | v · 1 · Reply · Share >



**conflict** → JT Genter · 2 years ago · edited

They're cramped from cockpit to cabin. Excellent in terms of squeezing every last bit of range and capacity out of an airframe because no one thought of a 757 replacement.

They've turned a regional jet into a ...not. I'm talking about economy as well. In first....anything but an A319 and I'm good.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Marco** → JT Genter · 2 years ago

But the A320 cabin is about seven inches wider.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**PHL777** → JT Genter · 2 years ago

I wouldn't call any 737 excellent from a passenger's perspective. The fuselage is just too narrow when cramming that many people into a plane that was designed for 2-3 hr short hops. Though, I'm sure it's excellent from an operator's economic perspective.

2 ^ | v · 1 · Reply · Share >



**FlySkyHigh** → conflict · 2 years ago

I've heard more than one pilot refer to Airbus as "scarebus".

^ | v · 2 · Reply · Share >



**Dubno** → FlySkyHigh · 2 years ago · edited

There is no measurable difference in the safety stats of Airbus versus Boeing.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**conflict** → FlySkyHigh · 2 years ago · edited

I've heard more than one pilot remark on how cramped the cockpit is in a 73.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**therealdeal20** → conflict · 2 years ago · edited

As a Captain at a competitor airline and having flown in many flight decks, the 737 is excruciatingly tight and the flight deck is highly unrefined. It is a good performer but has reached the limits of comfort for certain. The Airbus is exceptionally quiet and has room for two extra pilots in the flight deck, including all the bags that they bring. Very comfortable.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**JC** · 2 years ago

I truly believe AA management is responsible for so many of the changes ruining the flying experience. They do it to the clients so it's no surprise they will do it to their employees. I just returned from an AA RT flight on the new AA 737 Max 8. AA states that passengers want to BYOD (Bring your own device) for entertainment. That could not be more out of touch with the truth. I sat in Economy and then Business on return. These seats were so uncomfortable it's ridiculous. No more in-flight screens behind the seats and no more headphones. Sit back, relax enjoy your meal and entertainment? Not even in business class can you do this on this plane. If you bring your laptop to use as your device to watch something entertaining while you eat, you better put it away when the meal arrives. How can you possibly have a laptop on the tray while you eat? It's the dumbest and most uncomfortable set up. Why did AA change the Airbus planes that usually ran this route for these packed like sardines planes? Why did they order planes without the very in-seat entertainment so many passengers seek out? Because of the additional profit it will bring in per additional 12 passengers they can cram into the plane. On both my flights, two AA flight attendants stated how they disliked the plane and working on them. One actually said "it is like we are becoming Spirit Airlines". They also have no idea why AA would say people want this version more than the previous. Both stated that the new planes seat 12 extra passengers in coach and they are literally one on top of the other. I have 17 flights lined up this year with AA through June. I am actively changing over to another airline after June. Executive Platinum or not, this is inferior quality.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Jason Lewis** · 2 years ago

Random thoughts . . .

1) While I would hope AA reads this (and other blogs like it), and takes these comments to heart, I am fairly confident they (the "corporate powers that be") won't bother, and even if they do, nothing will change.

2) As with a number of other comments herein, I, too, PREFER to fly on Airbus 320 "family" of planes versus the Boeing 737 family, whenever possible. I can only hope that Boeing, too, reads these comments and takes them to heart. Not much they can do, of course, regarding the narrower fuselage; not much they can do regarding the WAY an airline (in this case, American) wants their planes outfitted

not much they can do regarding the VOT on airline (in this case, American) wants their planes updated. But, a boy can dream . . .

3) The more and more I read about airlines either "ripping out" or choosing not to install IFE systems, the more curmudgeonly I get and the older I feel. NOT EVERYONE HAS A TABLET! And not everyone loves viewing video on a tiny smartphone screen. (God, I miss Virgin America already!)

4) Fortunately I am NOT "wedded" to American Airlines. Between my wife and I, we have a combined total of 2,025 miles, so who gives a \*\*\*\*? Clearly American doesn't want our business, and I'm perfectly content to let those miles disappear . . . same thing with United (461 miles between us). And the only reason I have a little over 6,000 miles with Delta is that their miles never expire! (Haven't flown them since March 2004!)

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Kevin** · 2 years ago

Are people that wedded to IFE systems? What in the world did they do during flights before IFE systems came into existence?

Just bring a book, newspaper or magazine to read while you are flying. The constant need to be watching something on a screen baffles me.

3 ^ | v · 2 · Reply · Share >



**Hunter Cook** → Kevin · a year ago

While I rarely use the IFE, it's certainly better to have the option than not. On the other hand, the BYOD streaming works very well now, and with an added tablet holder I'd be satisfied. The commitment to put power at every seat is nice, as is not having the big box taking up under-seat space. If it has knock on effects like generally-improved wifi and/or slightly reduced fares (both highly questionable of course) then I figure it's a good trade.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Bruno Chiarini** · a year ago

Avoid like the plague.

Similar seat to International premium economy, but:

- 1) No food rests
- 2) Significantly less leg room
- 3) Padding in the back rest seems to be non-existent. Could feel the metal bars in my lower and upper back.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Hunter Cook** → Bruno Chiarini · a year ago

I think the food rests are inside the armrests.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Tariq Babieh** · 2 years ago

I will stick with the MD-80 until they are retired.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Emiliano** · 2 years ago

Here's the behind the behind the scenes look

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**JT Genter** → Emiliano · 2 years ago

It's a wild JT sighting!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Marathon OG** · 2 years ago

Just flew Virgin Atlantic to London on the A340-600. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience in 2-4-2 cabins with room to stretch your legs under the seat in front of u. And I'm 6'2" ordered dinner off a menu and awesome complimentary liquor selection. Never going back to AA transatlantic.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Manuel Sepulveda** · 2 years ago

do they give you free aspirines to prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis?.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Daniel Taylor** · 2 years ago

Great... to bad AA is the only airline to service my regional airport. Man I wish I could switch to another airline.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**vbscript2** → Daniel Taylor · 2 years ago

On a positive side, if your airport is so small that it's only serviced by American, they're unlikely to be flying an airplane this big there anyway. Probably just small regional jets.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



**Daniel Taylor** → vbscript2 · 2 years ago

Thats true. They only fly small Embraer aircraft. The only airport it services is DFW and then from there you go to your destination. So the majority of the time you pretty much have to fly AA to your final destination unless you are willing to pay a lot of money. Doesn't leave much choice in airline.

^ | v · Reply · Share >



**conflict** · 2 years ago

Whats the seat with 0 Fee a chater space. Im more interested in space between me and the seat



what's the seat width? For a shorter person I'm more interested in space between me and the next person...

Airbus's (and the MD88/90/B717 planes) seem to have a bit wider seats all around.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Carry Bean** · 2 years ago

Dougie-baby Parker should have to fly in a middle seat in the back for 6 months.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Zach** · 2 years ago

I assume in row 8 you can now store your bags in the seat in front of you? Although only two seats... that will get awkward.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Brian Wu** · 2 years ago

The B/E Aerospace Meridian seats in Economy are the same ones you'll find coming to United's 737 MAX 9s, though its reasonable to assume United will add a little bit more legroom for its customers stuck in the back.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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