



HAPPY DAYS IN ECONOMY

The Boeing 747-100 main deck lounges flown in the 1970s by airlines such as Pan Am and Continental were a special passenger experience

Amid great fanfare, the Boeing 747-100 was introduced into commercial service by Pan Am in January 1970. But during the early part of the decade airlines found it difficult to fill their aircraft due to problems relating to the economic recession and the first oil crisis. Between October 1973 and March 1974 oil prices quadrupled, and all industrial sectors were directly affected.

To address the challenge of unused cabin space in its jumbos, in 1971 Pan Am tested an innovative marketing concept in B Zone: an economy class convertible lounge with fore- and aft-facing seats certified for use during take-off and landing. Depending on the specific route, day of the week and time of day, these seats could be sold or made available free of charge for lounge access.

Other airlines moved ahead with creative marketing programs, such as Continental with its 'pub'. Vern Alg, formerly senior manager for interiors engineering at Continental Airlines explains, "On the main deck of its B747-100s, Continental installed a stand-up bar, complete with brass rail, where crew served drinks and organized wine tastings. Economy passengers could circulate or sit at elegant cocktail tables – or just stand at the bar and enjoy



PHOTO: AMERICAN AIRLINES/COURTESY OF THE PAN AM MUSEUM FOUNDATION

See the
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issue of *Aircraft
Interiors* to read
more about Pan
Am's 'dining in
the sky'

destination-themed snacks. Even after its B747s were retired, the pubs continued to fly on Continental's DC-10 fleet until the early 1990s, when they were removed during the airline's BusinessFirst conversion."

American Airlines developed glamorous economy class lounges featuring an ethnic menu of snacks, and even positioned a Wurlitzer electric organ near the back of the aircraft, presided over by a keyboard entertainer who led group singalongs.

In 1972, with a focus on premium-class revenue streams, Pan Am reconfigured B Zone to enable first-class passengers that were seated in A Zone to eat 'at table' (dining reservations had to be made in advance).

Advertisements proclaimed (referring to the pre-jet era): "There was a time when we were the only airline with dining rooms in our planes. And now we're the only one with them again."

The legendary dining service became immensely popular on the B747-100s and, in 1973, it was extended to the upper deck, replacing the exclusive first-class cocktail lounge. In 1979 Pan Am refurbished B Zone as a quiet area for

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frequent and business travelers. This pioneering upgrade was the forerunner of the airline's iconic Clipper Class, the first branded, dedicated business-class cabin in aviation history.

For those passengers who preferred not to participate in the delights of the main deck lounges, there were other options. Economy class seats had flip-up armrests, so for the price of an economy-class fare it was possible to stretch out comfortably across three or four seat positions and snooze contentedly for the duration of the flight. Ah, yes, those were the glory days of flying! ✪

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Continental Airlines "Pub" Lounges



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Pan Am B Zones



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