

# Getting There is Half the Fun - Chicago to Fiji -

Its not easy to get to Fiji using frequent flyer miles. But one thing I appreciate about booking with American Airlines is that their agents work very hard to get you where you want to go. An award seat in economy might be easier, business can be difficult.



I had an instance in 2008 trying to get home from Australia where nothing would come up for the agent. I remember him saying "Nothing is available, but let me try something."

Then he started to work segment by segment. I'll never forget that routing where I had to change planes four times: Sydney - Auckland (with a forced overnight) - Honolulu - Seattle - Chicago. Quite a ride, but he got me home!

The same thing happened when I needed to book air to Fiji to join a trip with Undiscovered Destinations, a UK company. Not easy. Though Fiji Airways (partner with American) has a direct flight from Los Angeles, no award seats were available. The agent said it is a popular route with honeymooners and long married couples on anniversary trips. But then she said "let me try something," and she went to work segment by segment.



And that is how I landed in first class on Cathay Pacific's Chicago to Hong Kong route with an overnight in Hong Kong, then continuing to Fiji in business class on Fiji Airways the next day. Yes, it is about 8500 miles and 12 hours out of my way, but she got me here.

First class is always a treat and from what I've heard, more so on an Asian airline. I don't mean to wax on about this, but I thanked every person who ever let me put their restaurant dinner on my credit card (you know who you are!), every car dealer who let us charge a new car, and every store that takes Visa, Mastercard and American Express. It is those points that got me in this seat.

The waiting experience at O'Hare is so-so. Cathay Pacific doesn't have a dedicated lounge, so they use the Air France lounge. It is small, crowded and their food isn't very good. Luckily I didn't have to spend too much time there -- just enough to have a cup of coffee, and to snatch a few granola bars.

Cathay Pacific's Boeing 777-300ER has six seats (they call them suites) at the front of the plane.

As you board, you are escorted to your seat and a few things are pointed out -- each of which I promptly forgot as I was so amazed at the spaciousness. Each suite has four windows, a 36-inch wide seat with plenty of space all around and its own closet with hangers and enough room for all the carry-ons you can drag on board. No need to ask some kind bystander to help you hoist your carry-on over your head as the personal closet (located in the space behind the TV) is easily accessible.



Three flight attendants are dedicated to us six people. On my flight it was Serrion, Mary Ann and Jan. And cute little Jan was assigned to me. As soon as I sat down, I was asked what I wanted to drink and it came with the warm mixed nuts you usually get when a flight is an hour underway. After reaching altitude, Jan brings me a menu with the great information that I can order anything I want, when I want, and in any order from the menu of lunch, snack and dinner choices. Fabulous!

The appetizer is caviar (they serve the whole tin) and champagne, followed by lobster salad, mushroom soup, then a beef filet so huge I couldn't finish it. You even get your own bread basket!

Then then she asks me if I am ready for the chicken dish!

A bit of a miscommunication here. I thought I was ordering for both lunch and dinner, but Jan thought my choices were for the same meal. Glad we got that straightened out!

A Welcome Card is signed by the crew and cute little Jan gave me restaurant recommendations at Hong Kong airport, including what to order.



In my effort to get on Hong Kong time (a 13 hour difference) I thought I should try to get some sleep, even though it was only 6pm. I am offered jammies - which I love. By the time I get back from the washroom, the bed has been made up with a mattress pad, comforter and several pillows.

Sleeping doesn't come easy. We fly the polar route and there is turbulence. I probably slept on and off for 3 hours total then thought I should get up and try to stay awake the rest of the flight.

After reading a bit, I order fresh berries along with fried dumplings as a snack. Both wonderful.

It is scheduled to be a 16 hour flight, but due to a good tailwind, we make it to Hong Kong in 15. This is one of the few times in my life that I was sorry to see a flight end so soon.

I had booked the Hong Kong Airport Hotel and it is an easy inside walk from the terminal to reception.



The next afternoon I board Fiji Airways for a 10 hour flight to Nadi, Fiji. Business class isn't full and I have an empty seat next to me. The Fiji experience starts right away with flight attendants in colorful patterned uniforms, Fiji Water is freely distributed and even their amenity kit is a keeper!

With this great start to this trip to the Pacific, I know the rest of trip will be wonderful!

