

Kit or misses?

Dominic Keith weighs up the case for amenity kits

PHOTOGRAPHS PIXEYES

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I must admit that I'm an amenity hoarder. One of our cupboards at home is literally overflowing with all the inflight pouches and airline loungewear I've collected over the years. It has frequently threatened to end my marriage, but, at least for now, the kits are staying.

For those unfamiliar with the term, amenity kits is the official name for those nifty pouches and cases handed out by airlines in premium cabins – particularly on long-haul routes. These typically contain a range of items for inflight use, which can range from a dental kit to eyeshades, toiletries or a branded pen. As is the case with most amenities that airlines offer, the quality can vary significantly.

My collection comprises several duplicates, which always make great gifts for overnight visitors in need of a toothbrush, skincare and eye mask. The pouches can also be handy for storing items like pens and cables in drawers at home, or used to transport things like chargers, cables and earbud cases on your next trip abroad. Small and flimsy kits can even double as purses for loose change on a beach holiday.

That said, amenity kits are a divisive topic. They are loved by many, but criticised by others who see them as wasteful and useless. Are such kits trash or treasure?

LUXURY LINE-UP

Inflight amenities have been a part of air travel since the 1950s, when airlines like Pan Am and TWA would offer passengers

across all cabins cotton balls to muffle the sound of the aircraft engines, along with chewing gum to help ease ear pressure during take-off and landing. As time went on, and flights got longer, further items were added to the mix – including razors, sewing kits, combs and nail files. Other items disappeared: today's casual trainer-clad passengers have little need for a shoehorn. In my view, the more goodies the better!

It was not until the 1980s that amenity kits evolved into the state we find today – limited-edition pouches formed by partnerships with fashion houses and skincare brands. Collaborations often extend to showcasing local artists and products, too. Great examples include Finnair's long-standing partnership with local design house Marimekko to create vibrant cases, Cathay Pacific's collaboration with Hong Kong-based brand PYE for first class pyjamas, and Japan Airlines' link with Shiseido skincare for its first class kits.

Some airlines change their kits every few quarters or so – others keep the same collaboration for years. Qatar Airways, for instance, has successfully partnered with Diptyque for the past three years. (I myself possess 48 of the kits and counting.) Cathay Pacific, meanwhile, recently renewed its partnership with British brand Bamford for its latest first class kits.

Obviously, individual airline budgets play a crucial factor when deciding on the look and contents of an inflight kit.

While certain no-frills pouches in premium economy can be produced for as little as US\$2 a pop, higher-quality business and first class versions with significantly better materials and toiletries can reach US\$40, according to supply chain executives.

Among the higher-end kits, I'm a fan of Emirates' well-stocked first class pouches in collaboration with Bvlgari, featuring 30ml Bvlgari fragrance bottles as well as a deodorant stick – an item missing from the kits of most airlines (and one that will surely make you more popular among fellow travellers).

In recent years, there have been a flurry of exciting luxury partnerships in the amenity kit world. EVA Air has introduced new Giorgio Armani-designed business class kits, with outbound passengers treated to a black pebble-grain hard case with the designer-branded coin purse inside, while inbound passengers receive a vintage-style bag and matching key tag. Etihad has also partnered with Giorgio Armani and ESPA for its kits.

Delta Air Lines, meanwhile, has teamed up with fashion house Missoni for its Delta One business class passengers. These amenity kits sport the luxury brand's recognisable textured zig-zag pattern on the exterior, while contents include Grown Alchemist skincare products, a bamboo toothbrush, →

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Emirates' first class amenity kit, featuring products by Bvlgari



ETIHAD (FIRST CLASS)

- 1 Giorgio Armani Pyjamas
- 2 ESPA Nourishing Lip Treatment
- 3 Earbuds
- 4 ESPA Restful Pulse Point Oil
- 5 ESPA Rest and Recovery Night Balm
- 6 ESPA Hydrating Spa Face Mist
- 7 Slippers
- 8 ESPA Positivity Hand & Body Lotion
- 9 Toothbrush and toothpaste
- 10 Eyemask



**CATHAY PACIFIC
(FIRST CLASS
MEN'S KIT)**
1 Eyemask
2 Bamford lip balm
3 Bamford
moisturiser
4 Earplugs
5 Bamford face mist
6 Waken Daily Care
30ml mouthwash
7 Bamboo
toothbrush
and toothpaste

→

toothpaste, an eye mask, ear plugs, socks and a pen. Over at China Airlines, its partnership with Moschino marked the fashion house's first-ever cross-industry partnership with an airline, with four unique designs available across the carrier's business and premium economy cabins – complete with exclusive luggage tags.

FANCY FINDS

Teaming up with luxury brands for amenity kits is not a new phenomenon. Back in the day, premium passengers were treated to popular Rimowa-designed kits on airlines including Lufthansa, Thai Airways, ANA and EVA Air. Sadly, these mini hard-case kits are nowhere to be found these days.

Instead, a whole new industry has sprung up: online trading for these now-elusive collectors' items. Start a search on eBay and you'll find various sellers marketing the mini Rimowa hard cases at about US\$150 including shipping.

For rarer or older kits including a Thai Airways Rimowa case in gold, or a Thai Airways first class pouch with La Mer branded skincare, offers can reach a hefty US\$500. Price tags even surpass US\$1,000 for business class kits from Russian carrier Aeroflot, while further vintage finds include a SAUDIA hard-case amenity box from the early 1970s for US\$68 – still fully stocked with its original contents, including a full-size piece of soap, nail clippers and nail scissors.

There are some pieces in my own collection, however, that I would never dream of parting ways with because of the fond travel memories they evoke. These 'special' kits are kept neatly in their original wrappings at the very back of the closet, away from prying eyes.

Such prized possessions include a colourful collection of Thai Airways and Lufthansa first class Rimowa cases, old Cathay first class bags in collaboration with Zegna, vintage Emirates pouches, and quite a few vintage United Airlines kits, including from the early 2000s when the carrier still offered first class.

A MIXED BAG

There is an argument to be made that amenity kits are quite a wasteful perk – and something we could easily abandon for environment's sake. To avoid disappointing collectors, however, airlines have introduced a number of environmentally friendly options.

In 2019, Virgin Atlantic introduced its sustainable 'Goodie Bags' in its Upper Class and Premium cabins. These amenity kits are crafted from responsibly sourced and FSC-certified recyclable kraft paper, saving the airline 945 tonnes of plastic per year compared to its previous kits. Inside you'll find products such as a bamboo toothbrush, recycled paper pens and aluminium tubes – plus REN Clean Skincare toiletries. The airline also collects any unused items from amenity kits to make up future pouches.

When ANA rolled out its premium kits in partnership with UK-based ETTINGER last year, the carrier stressed that the pouches were crafted from natural cotton canvas and recycled materials, with the cosmetics made from organic materials grown on a recycling-oriented farm that does not use pesticides or chemical fertilisers.

DESIGN DEBRIEF



Business Traveller chats with Addy Ng, creative director, design and products (amenities and sleepwear) at deSter, a leading provider of food packaging and serviceware concepts to the aviation and food service industry.

How long have you been designing amenity kits and was this always your dream job?

It's been more than 15 years since I joined the industry. I came from a fashion design background and was designing luxury handbags. I have always been designing for fashion or luxury brands and creating collections of accessories for their retail networks. But in moving to designing amenity kits and sleepwear for airlines, I get to work with so many brands and customers, understanding them and curating one-of-a-kind products, presenting our stories and getting to see them onboard. I am still as excited to work on every project as I was on my first day. I think I am one of the lucky few who gets to do what I love on a daily basis.

How many kits have you designed or collaborated on?

I'm proud of all the amenity kits and sleepwear I have put onboard over the years. You can find my designs on more than 50 airlines across the globe – in all different classes. Going forward, you can look forward to testing our new Lufthansa amenity kits for the Allegris launch.

From start to finish, how long can it take for a new kit to hit the premium cabins?

A lot of projects can take up to three years before they are onboard. We work with different airline teams, from marketing to procurement, to make sure we cater to all their needs. Finding the right brand, designing, sampling, curating and fine-tuning all the products can take months. Then we need to get the final sign-off from the airline and the brand before production, which could take anything from six to 12 months.

Do customers give you creative leeway?

As to what goes into the kits, there is a lot of research done by the airlines as well as by consultancy firms. There are passenger questionnaires and other data showing what items are most popular and what is most often left behind. I have worked with so many airlines and they are all very different.

Are budgets constrained?

Some are strict on their budget while others might be willing to pay more for a truly original concept. Usually, the Middle Eastern carriers have the highest budgets and more items in their amenity kits.



And until several years ago, Singapore Airlines did not offer amenity kits in business class, despite being regarded as one of the world's most premium carriers. Instead, individual products were made available upon request. SIA has since changed tack and now offers amenity kits (in collaboration with New York-based perfumery brand Le Labo), however, these remain on a request-only basis as part of the airline's ESG programme. This seems like a sensible way to avoid unnecessary wastage while still elevating the passenger experience. But most airlines still prefer to proactively offer them so passengers are aware of their existence and can decide for themselves.

When disembarking the aircraft on my most recent flight between Hong Kong and Europe, I still found myself surprised at how many people left the amenity kits behind. I resisted the urge to grab and add them all to my collection at home – my closet isn't big enough! **BT**

ABOVE
The 1985 Delta
amenity kit