As Airline Satisfaction Climbs to Record Highs, Line Blurs Between Low-Cost and Traditional Carriers, J.D. Power Finds

Alaska Airlines Ranks Highest among Traditional Carriers for 12th Consecutive Year; JetBlue Airways and Southwest Airlines Tie for Highest Rank among Low-Cost Carriers

COSTA MESA, Calif.: 29 May 2019 — Is this the golden age of air travel? According to the J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study, released today, a combination of newer planes, better ticket value and improved customer touchpoints have driven overall satisfaction with airlines to its highest point in history, up 11 points (on a 1,000-point scale) from last year’s record-setting performance. The surge is driven by significant improvements among traditional carriers, while satisfaction slowed with low-cost carriers.

“Airlines continue to deliver on the operational side of air travel,” said Michael Taylor, Travel Intelligence Lead at J.D. Power. “New technology investments have dramatically improved the reservation and check-in process. Fleets are newer and travelers generally feel that they are getting great value for their money. These improvements have been most profound in the traditional carrier segment, where customer satisfaction has climbed considerably.

“While low-cost carriers have historically had the highest levels of customer satisfaction in our study, due to a strong sense of value for money among customers, that line is starting to blur as traditional carriers improve their services and operations,” Taylor added. “The one area where both traditional and low-cost carriers can still improve, however, is in in-flight services. It continues to be the lowest-ranked factor in the study, as many airlines still struggle with in-flight entertainment, connectivity, in-seat power and food service.”

Following are some of the key findings of the 2019 study:

- **Record-high customer satisfaction**: Overall satisfaction with airlines increases 11 points to 773, continuing an eight-year trend of satisfaction improvement.

- **Improvement driven by traditional carriers**: This year’s significant gains in customer satisfaction are driven by the traditional carriers, whose segment satisfaction score improves 22 points from 2018. The low-cost segment—while still having higher overall satisfaction than the traditional carrier segment—declines 6 points from 2018, thus driving a segment convergence in satisfaction.

- **Tech investments in reservation and check-in systems pay off**: The reservation and check-in experiences are the most satisfying portions of the airline experience, driven by investments in digital check-in technologies, self-service kiosks and a concerted effort among airlines to improve the efficiency of the pre-flight process.

- **In-flight service remains a stumbling block**: In-flight services, such as seatback entertainment, food service and Wi-Fi continue to be the lowest-ranked part of the air traveler experience. Specific in-flight amenities that have the greatest positive effect on customer satisfaction are fresh food, seatback games and seatback live television.
Study Rankings

Among traditional carriers, Alaska Airlines ranks highest for the 12th consecutive year, with a score of 801. Delta Air Lines (788) ranks second and American Airlines (764) ranks third.

Among low-cost carriers, JetBlue Airways (817) and Southwest Airlines (817) rank highest in a tie. For Southwest, this is the third consecutive year at the top of the J.D. Power ranking.

Among Canada-based airlines, Air Canada (729) saw its customer satisfaction score decline 5 points from 2018. WestJet (758) saw its score increase 11 points but remains below the low-cost carrier average.

The North America Airline Satisfaction Study, now in its 15th year, measures passenger satisfaction with airline carriers in North America based on performance in seven factors (in order of importance): cost and fees; in-flight services; aircraft; boarding/deplaning/baggage; flight crew; check-in; and reservation. The study measures passenger satisfaction among both business and leisure travelers and is based on responses from 5,966 passengers who flew on a major North American airline between March 2018 and March 2019. The study was fielded from April 2018 through March 2019.


See the online press release at http://www.jdpower.com/pr-id/2019078.

Join the conversation on social media using #AirlineStudy and follow J.D. Power on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

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NOTE: Two charts follow.
Traditional Carrier Satisfaction Index Ranking

(Based on a 1,000-point scale)

- Alaska Airlines: 801
- Delta Air Lines: 788
- American Airlines: 764
- Segment Average: 763
- Air Canada: 729
- United Airlines: 723

Source: J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study℠

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2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study℠

Low-Cost Carrier Satisfaction Index Ranking
(Based on a 1,000-point scale)

JetBlue Airways 817
Southwest Airlines 817
Segment Average 793
WestJet 758
Spirit Airlines 711
Frontier Airlines 702

Source: J.D. Power 2019 North America Airline Satisfaction Study℠

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