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A confusing airline name, but this business class is excellent

Andrew Cornell
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The airline: China Airlines

- **Route** Taipei to Melbourne CI57
- **Frequency** Four flights weekly (increasing to five from October 28)
- **Aircraft** Airbus A350-900
- **Class** Business; seat 1K, window
- **Flight time** 9 hours, 10 minutes



Taiwanese carrier China Airlines is increasing flights to Australia. ISTOCK

Checking in

Transferring from Seoul – where check-in was seamless, albeit open only two hours before departure – the secondary security check in Taipei is quiet and perfunctory and pops me out near the main lounge in Terminal 1. It's one of the best lounges in Asia: spacious, comfortable leather couches, full bar and local noodles on offer. But my flight leaves from Terminal 2, a 25-minute walk away. The lounge there has similar offerings but is smaller and not as relaxing. With a long layover, I spend most of my time in Terminal 1.

Baggage

For business, two checked bags up to 32 kilograms each and two carry-on bags (up to 7 kilograms) plus a personal item. On my outbound flight from Melbourne, I had my carry-on weighed at check-in and one bag was too heavy, but the supervisor quickly waved me through.

Loyalty scheme

China Airlines' Dynasty program is part of SkyTeam, whose members include Delta Air Lines, Garuda and Vietnam Airlines. The airline also has a codeshare partnership with Qantas, so if your flight has a QF flight number you can earn Qantas points and status credits. I join the Dynasty program and, while the app is a pain to set up, it is very efficient with check-in and meal choices.

The seat

The business class cabin is in a 1-2-1 configuration.

The A350-900 has China Airlines' best business cabin with a staggered 1-2-1 layout. My front-row seat (1K) puts me at the back of the business queue for deplaning as there's no second airbridge in Melbourne for the pointy end. The seats are a little narrow with 22 inches (56 centimetres) width, but very comfortable and convert to a 78-inch (198 centimetre) flatbed. I sleep well. The cabin apparently includes a small lounge between business and premium economy – which I fail to notice being up the front cabin. A new amenity kit by Marc Jacobs with skincare products from the Danish brand FRAMA has just been introduced. Slippers come separately. The best item is a multi-adapter charging cable. Business has its own toilets.

Entertainment + tech

The seat is equipped with multiple charging points and the 18-inch (45-centimetre) screen pivots to provide the best view. It's an HD touch screen with a separate, user-friendly remote. The noise-cancelling headphones provided are excellent. The English-language entertainment choice is not the widest but there are plenty of classics, a few recent releases and an HBO selection. The Asian range is broader with plenty of highly rated films and TV shows.



The amenity kit with a multi-adapter charging cable. ANDREW CORNELL

Service

Taiwan is noted for its friendly people and efficiency and the in-flight service is exactly that. Prompt responses, engaging and as flexible as they can be with requests. They are very good with recommendations on how to spend my Taipei layover – though there is a limit to how many food venues and cosmetic shops I can visit! They give me a friendly wave in the terminal, too, which is a nice touch.

Food

Business class dining. ANDREW CORNELL

With the near-midnight departure – and after excellent beef noodles in the lounge – a full dinner service seems excessive but the choice of dishes is enticing. An appetiser, salad, soup and choice of soy-braised chicken, seared tomahawk pork chop and Boston lobster with braised wagyu in a curry sauce are offered, and I plump for the lobster and beef. The beef is excellent and the lobster slightly chewy but the mild curry sauce is very good. China Airlines typically offers a choice of one traditional Chinese, one Western and one Taiwanese dish. Meals can be pre-ordered on the app. Breakfast, more timely given the late morning arrival, is welcome, and I opt for congee with an array of intriguing side dishes such as steamed pork patty and dried shrimp loofah. The Western choice is muesli, cheese bread and fruits.

Sustainability

China Airlines has an array of sustainability initiatives centred on net-zero emissions by 2050, fleet modernisation, sustainable fuel and recycling. It also supports biodiversity and community programs in Taiwan.

One more thing

With the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, China Airlines is gaining a higher profile as an alternative route provider to Europe with extensive connections across the continent. The addition of an extra Melbourne-Taipei flight from October supports that.

The price

From about $4800 for business class, Melbourne to Taipei return.**

The verdict

Despite the name, it is a Taiwanese carrier, not mainland Chinese, and overall more comparable to Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines. With no suitable direct flight for my Korean trip, I saw China Airlines as a good bet. It was. Excellent service, the latest business cabin, high standard and interesting food. A seamless experience. The one letdown is the lounge in Melbourne, which is a shared Aspire lounge and a step down from airline-specific lounges.

Our rating out of five

★★★★½

The writer flew at his own expense.

**For more information about air travel and sustainability, see iata.org*

***Fares are based on those available for travel three months from the time of publication and subject to change.*

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