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## Delta to End Middle Seat Policy, Extend Ticket Validity

Business Travel News - March 31, 20

Delta Air Lines has mapped out its plans for an expected boost in travel demand over the next few months, including an end to its capacity-control measures, a faster track to elite status and extended expiration dates for ticket vouchers.

Delta's policy of blocking middle seats now will expire on May 1, marking the end of the carrier's status as the sole remaining major U.S. carrier holding to the policy beyond premium cabins. CEO Ed Bastian said that 65 percent of travelers who flew Delta in 2019 expect to have at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine by that date, which provides "the assurance to offer customers the ability to choose any seat on our aircraft."

At the same time, Delta announced extensions of ticket expiration dates and loosened requirements to earn elite frequent-flyer status this year.

All tickets that were set to expire this year as well as all tickets purchased this year now will expire on Dec. 31, 2022. This is in addition to the extension Delta gave last year for tickets bought during the onset of the pandemic, which already had been extended to the end of 2022. Tickets typically expire one year after purchase.

SkyMiles members, meanwhile, on April 1 will begin earning premiums on status points to enable them to earn elite states with less travel. All members get a 50 percent bonus on Medallion Qualification Miles,

Medallion Qualification Segments and Medallion Qualification Dollars for Delta-operated flights, and that bonus is upped to 75 percent for travelers buying tickets in premium cabins. Rewards travel for the first time will count toward status as well

Delta has plans to add some new food and beverage options as well over the next few months. On April 14, the carrier will begin offering 7.5-ounce cans of soda and a new snack offering that includes healthier options such as almonds and Clif Bars to Economy passengers on domestic and short-haul international flights. The carrier also is restoring coffee and tea service and is adding pre-made and canned cocktail options for travelers, such as old-fashions and margaritas.

Hot food options will return for Delta One and First Class passengers on select transcontinental flights in June, and Delta will begin serving fresh boxed meals to First Class travelers on other domestic routes in early July.

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