

## Airlines still offer fliers fine wine as a high-class amenity

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By Steve LaBadessa for USA  
TODAY

Most airlines have eliminated meals, free pillows and magazines. They've reduced snacks to a miniature bag of pretzels.

But there's one frill many refuse to skimp on in their cost-cutting drive to be profitable: wine.

The world's airlines annually buy about 4.3 million gallons of wine, and some spend at least \$15 million on wine each year, the airlines and wine experts estimate. Some airlines pour wine that retails for \$50 to \$220 a bottle. And some employ consultants or sommeliers and require flight attendants to take courses to improve their wine knowledge ...

... Premium passengers are served the better-quality wines for free. Coach passengers, however, usually receive lesser-quality wine and pay five or six times what the airline paid for it ...

USA TODAY gathered the wine lists of 33 airlines with U.S. flights and asked wine expert Dan Berger to evaluate them ... "I'm impressed with what many airlines are offering," says Berger, who evaluated all wines, champagnes and ports for October-through-December flights. "There wine lists show creativity and forethought."

... Berger says he's "astounded" by the wine lists of Qantas and Air New Zealand on flights to and from the USA. He ranks Qantas No. 1 and Air New Zealand no. 2 of the 33 airlines wine lists.

*... Top-quality wines - provided free to coach passengers on Qantas - include 2008 Brokenwood Cricket Pitch Cabernet Merlot Shiraz ...*