

# Being A Plus-Sized Professional

---

*I've been a plus-size girl my whole life - it's simply how I'm built, but I was never going to let that hold me back in my career.*



**DESIREA  
CALVILLO**  
AUTHOR



I recently had the opportunity to virtually meet a group of plus-size people from all over the country. In sharing our life experiences with each other, I discovered that many of them had never flown before. They've never traveled beyond their home state. Many were working hourly positions that they had little to no interest in. When I asked them why, each said they were afraid to because of their size. Meeting me and hearing about my professional life and how I used to fly nearly every week for work, they asked how I did it. Not just how I traveled but how did I handle working in corporate America as a plus-sized woman of color.

I've been a plus-size girl my whole life - it's simply how I'm built, but I was never going to let that hold me back in my career. I'm not afraid to ask for a chair without arms when I go to a sales or customer meeting if I'm physically uncomfortable. If the company is asking for t-shirt sizes, I have no issues saying I need a 4xl, and it's not listed as an option on the form. Throughout my 20 years in my STEM career, never has anyone had the audacity to hold me back in my career because of my size. My talent and my personality are what people focus on. It just takes a bit of confidence.

So, I wanted to offer a few pointers on air travel. I believe once you get over that initial fear of flying while plus-sized, a whole new world can open up to you that you never thought you had access to. There are two things to consider when traveling by air when you're plus size: airline policies and airplane design.

## Airline Policies

When it comes to domestic US travel, the most plus-size-friendly Airline is Southwest Airlines. Their customer of size policy states that if a customer of size is roughly over 250 lbs or would encroach on the neighboring seat with the arms down, then a second seat must be reserved. The second seat is free of charge and can be reserved in the following ways.

- Purchase two tickets when you originally book your tickets. For the second ticket, use your name and replace your middle name with XS. This will automatically be converted into the extra seat boarding passes, and you'll be able to pre-board with the reserved seat pass. After you have completed your full booking, you will submit a form to customer service with your confirmation number simply asking for a refund for the 2nd seat under the customer of size policy. They will then fully refund the second seat.
- Purchase one ticket as normal, then contact customer service by phone to have them add the second seat to your reservation. You will not have to pay upfront for this ticket. Not all agents have experience doing this, so sometimes, this may take a long time.
- Purchase one ticket as normal. On the day of your flight, arrive 30 mins earlier than required. This would typically be 90 mins before your flight instead of 1 hr before your flight. You'll have to go to full-service instead of the quick bag drop-off area at the check-in counter and request an extra seat. Waiting until this point could cause issues if the flight is full.

For all other domestic US travel, if you will encroach on the neighboring seat, you are required to purchase a second seat, and you will have to pay for it. It is often less expensive to fly business class or first class to get a bigger seat.



## Airplane Design

Airplane design is key to knowing what to expect when flying. A great resource for this is [SeatGuru.com](http://SeatGuru.com). While each Airline may have its own policy for pricing, they all tend to use roughly the same plane manufacturers (i.e. Airbus and Boeing). For example, the Airbus 330-300 Layout 2 flown by Air Canada is the most accommodating airplane. Each Premium Economy seat is 24" wide (typical coach seats are 17"-18").

The next best option for economy international travel is Virgin Atlantic Premium Economy on the Boeing 787 and the Boeing 747. These seats are 21" wide, which is only 1" less than Upper Class (but the Upper-Class seats fully recline into a flat bed, while Premium Economy are regular recliner seats).

If you have the funds, business class is the way to go for long-haul international travel. For example, Hong Kong Air's Airbus A350-900 Layout 1 comes with 42" wide seats that fully recline to a flat bed.

So, don't let your size stop you from traveling. You too can travel the world, and you don't have to deprive yourself from professional opportunities that require travel. You just have to do your research. Search "customer of size policy" on your chosen airline's website to get the most up-to-date information, as these policies can always change at any time.



## Resource Links

- SeatGuru.com
- Airbuss 330-300 Layout 2:  
[https://seatguru.com/airlines/Air\\_Canada/Air\\_Canada\\_Airbus\\_A330\\_V4.php](https://seatguru.com/airlines/Air_Canada/Air_Canada_Airbus_A330_V4.php)
- Boeing 787: [https://seatguru.com/airlines/Virgin\\_Atlantic\\_Airways/Virgin\\_Atlantic\\_Airways\\_B787-900.php](https://seatguru.com/airlines/Virgin_Atlantic_Airways/Virgin_Atlantic_Airways_B787-900.php)
- Boeing 747: [https://seatguru.com/airlines/Virgin\\_Atlantic\\_Airways/Virgin\\_Atlantic\\_Airways\\_B747-400\\_LGW-1.php](https://seatguru.com/airlines/Virgin_Atlantic_Airways/Virgin_Atlantic_Airways_B747-400_LGW-1.php)
- Long-haul international travel: [https://seatguru.com/charts/longhaul\\_business\\_class.php](https://seatguru.com/charts/longhaul_business_class.php)
- Airbus A350-900 Layout 1:  
[https://seatguru.com/airlines/Hong\\_Kong\\_Airlines/Hong\\_Kong\\_Airlines\\_Airbus\\_A350-900.php](https://seatguru.com/airlines/Hong_Kong_Airlines/Hong_Kong_Airlines_Airbus_A350-900.php)