

How To Select Seats On United Airlines

Direct answer: If you booked **United Economy or above**, standard seat selection is **free** and you can choose at the moment of booking. If you booked **Basic Economy**, you cannot select a seat for free at any point — seats become available for purchase from roughly **seven days before departure**, and if you do not buy one, United assigns a seat automatically at check-in.

Extra-legroom **Economy Plus** seats are paid for most travellers and free or discounted for MileagePlus Premier members, with the benefit varying by tier.

The system is straightforward once you know which fare you are holding. The problems arise when travellers assume Basic Economy behaves like ordinary Economy — particularly families, who can find themselves split across the cabin. **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can check what a specific fare actually includes before you commit.

What each fare gets you

Fare	Standard seat selection	Economy Plus	Changes
Basic Economy	Paid, from about 7 days out	Not available	Not permitted domestically
United Economy	Free at booking	Paid	No change fee, fare difference applies
Economy Plus	Included	Included	No change fee
Premium Plus	Included	N/A	No change fee
Business / First / Polaris	Included	N/A	No change fee

Selecting a seat step by step

- 1 **Choose your flight and fare.** The seat rules are set here — this is the decision that matters.
- 2 **Reach the seat map** during booking, or afterwards via My Trips on united.com or the United app.
- 3 **Read the map's colour coding.** Standard seats included in your fare, Economy Plus seats at a charge, and unavailable seats are distinguished visually.
- 4 **Check the aircraft type.** United operates 18 different aircraft types and the same route can use different equipment on different days. Layouts vary.
- 5 **Select and confirm.** On Economy and above there is nothing further to pay for a standard seat.
- 6 **Re-check about 24 hours before departure.** Aircraft swaps reassign seats without warning, and better seats often open as elite upgrades clear.

That final step is the one most people skip and the one that most often produces a better seat. When Premier members are upgraded out of Economy in the day before departure, the seats they vacate — frequently Economy Plus and forward aisles — are released.

Basic Economy in detail

United's Basic Economy is among the more restrictive versions in the U.S. market, and seat selection is only part of it.

No free seat selection at any stage. Seats can be purchased from about seven days before departure, priced by route and seat. Otherwise United assigns one at check-in, and you take what you are given.

No Economy Plus. Basic Economy fares are ineligible for extra-legroom seating entirely, whether paid or through status.

No full-size carry-on on domestic routes. Personal item only. Bringing a full-size bag to the gate costs \$65 — a \$45 bag fee plus a \$25 gate handling charge.

Boards last. Basic Economy is Group 6, the final boarding group, which in practice means limited overhead space even for a personal item.

No changes on domestic itineraries after the 24-hour window, and no same-day standby or same-day confirmed changes.

No mileage earning for general members, and no credit toward Premier Qualifying Flights.

Children under 12 can be seated next to the first adult listed on the booking, but other members of the party may be separated.

The honest summary: Basic Economy is priced for a solo traveller with one small bag, no flexibility and no preference about where they sit. For anyone else — families, anyone with luggage, anyone whose plans might move — the step up to standard Economy usually costs less than the workarounds.

Economy Plus: what you actually get

Economy Plus is **not a separate cabin**. It is standard economy seating with additional legroom, located in the forward section of the economy cabin and in exit rows. You get the same seat width, the same service and the same recline — more space in front of your knees, and an earlier position for disembarking.

Pricing varies by route length and seat position. Short domestic hops are modest; transcontinental and long-haul segments cost considerably more.

Premier members get it free or discounted, with the amount of complimentary access varying by tier and by how far in advance it can be selected. For a frequent United flyer, this is one of the more tangible status benefits.

Is it worth paying for? On a short flight, rarely. On anything over about four hours, or if you are tall, it is one of the better-value paid upgrades in the U.S. market because the price sits well below a cabin upgrade while delivering the thing most people actually want.

Premium Plus is different again — a genuine premium economy cabin with wider seats and enhanced service, sold as its own fare rather than as an add-on.

Choosing a good seat, not just any seat

Once you know what you are permitted to pick, the question becomes which seat is worth having.

Exit rows frequently offer the best legroom on the aircraft and are usually within Economy Plus. Trade-offs: seats may not recline, armrests are often fixed, and you must meet the safety requirements.

Forward aisle seats get you off the aircraft fastest, which matters on a tight connection.

Bulkhead gives legroom in front but no under-seat storage during taxi, takeoff and landing, and a narrower seat where the tray table sits in the armrest. Also where bassinets are fitted on long-haul.

Over the wing is the smoothest position in turbulence and among the quietest — a good choice for nervous flyers, at the cost of an obstructed view.

Last row typically has limited recline, lavatory and galley proximity, and is last off.

Rear of the aircraft on a lightly loaded flight often has the most empty middle seats. On a flight that is not full, a rear row can give you more actual space than a paid seat further forward.

Never a bulkhead or exit row if you are travelling with a pet — no under-seat stowage, and exit rows are prohibited.

United's boarding order affects your seat choice

United uses a seat-position boarding system in economy that is worth understanding, because it interacts with where you sit.

Groups 1 and 2 cover premium cabins, Premier members, Star Alliance Gold and eligible cardholders. Then **Group 3 boards window seats, Group 4 middle seats and Group 5 aisle seats**, with Group 6 for Basic Economy.

The practical consequence: if you book an aisle seat in standard Economy without status, you board in Group 5 and overhead space near your row may already be gone. A window seat in the same cabin boards two groups earlier. If overhead space matters more to you than aisle access, that is a real consideration.

Sitting together as a family

United allows children under 12 to be seated adjacent to the first adult on the booking, but this does not guarantee the whole party sits together, and on Basic Economy other members may well be

separated.

What actually works:

- **Book Economy or above**, not Basic Economy, and select seats immediately at booking
- **Book everyone on one reservation** so the system treats you as a group
- **Choose seats as early as possible** — availability only shrinks
- **Check again 24 hours out** when upgrades clear and seats open
- **Ask at the gate as a last resort**, politely and early rather than at boarding

Relying on other passengers to swap at boarding is not a plan. Someone who paid for an Economy Plus aisle is under no obligation to trade it for a middle seat further back, and increasingly will not.

Changing your seat after booking

Seats can be changed free of charge at any point on Economy and above, through My Trips on united.com or in the app, subject to availability. Moving into Economy Plus after booking is possible and charged at the prevailing rate.

Two things to expect:

Aircraft swaps reassign seats. If United changes the aircraft type, the seat map changes and your assignment may move. You will usually be reassigned automatically to something comparable, but "comparable" may not mean what you chose. Check your seat after any schedule change notification.

Paid seats and cancellations. If United cancels the flight, a paid seat charge should be refundable or reaccommodated. Ask rather than assuming it happens automatically.

Upgrades and how they interact with your seat

Seat selection and upgrades are separate systems that affect each other, and it is worth knowing how.

Complimentary Premier upgrades clear automatically on eligible domestic itineraries, by status tier and in a window before departure. If you clear, your economy seat is released — which is why good economy seats often appear in the final 24 hours.

PlusPoints, held by higher Premier tiers, can be applied to request upgrades on longer and international routes. Requests sit on a list and may clear anywhere from days before departure to the gate.

Paid upgrade offers appear in My Trips and sometimes at check-in, priced dynamically. Whether they represent value depends entirely on the number offered on the day.

Basic Economy is ineligible for upgrades of any kind, complimentary or paid, regardless of Premier status. This is worth restating because it surprises status holders who book a cheap fare and

expect their tier to rescue them. It does not.

Practical consequence: if you are on an upgrade list, do not agonise over your economy seat, because you may not keep it. If you are definitely staying in economy, check the map in the final 24 hours once upgrades have cleared.

Where to get help

Contact	Number	Best for
Travel reservations and fare comparison	1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)	Checking what a fare actually includes before booking, comparing Basic Economy against standard Economy total cost, arranging seats together for a family
United Airlines Reservations	Published on united.com	Seat changes on a United ticket, Economy Plus purchases
MileagePlus service centre	Published on united.com	Premier Economy Plus access
United accessibility desk	Published on united.com	Accessible seating and assistance

Frequently asked questions

Is seat selection free on United Airlines? Yes, standard seat selection is free on United Economy fares and above. Basic Economy has no free seat selection.

When can Basic Economy passengers choose a seat on United? Seats may be purchased from about seven days before departure. Without a purchase, United assigns a seat at check-in.

Can Basic Economy passengers use Economy Plus? No. Basic Economy is ineligible for Economy Plus, paid or complimentary.

How much does Economy Plus cost? It varies by route and seat, from modest on short domestic flights to considerably more on long-haul segments. Premier members receive complimentary or discounted access depending on tier.

Is Economy Plus a separate cabin? No. It is standard economy seating with extra legroom in the forward economy section and exit rows.

Will United seat my family together? Children under 12 can be seated next to the first adult on the booking. To keep a whole party together, book Economy or above on one reservation and select seats at booking.

Why did my seat change? Most commonly an aircraft swap. Check your assignment after any schedule change.

Which boarding group do I get? Economy boards by seat position — windows in Group 3, middles in Group 4, aisles in Group 5. Basic Economy boards last in Group 6.

Can I change my seat for free after booking? Yes on Economy and above, subject to availability. Economy Plus moves are charged.

The takeaway

Seat selection on United comes down to one decision made at booking: **which fare you buy**. Economy and above gives you a free standard seat immediately and the option to buy Economy Plus. Basic Economy gives you no seat choice without paying, no Economy Plus, no full-size carry-on domestically, last boarding and no changes.

For a solo traveller with a backpack, Basic Economy is a perfectly rational purchase. For a family, anyone with luggage, or anyone who might need to move a flight, the fare difference to standard Economy is usually smaller than what the restrictions end up costing.

Two habits pay off repeatedly: check the **aircraft type** before choosing a seat, since United flies 18 of them, and check again **24 hours out**, when upgrades clear and better seats quietly appear.

If you want to know what a specific fare includes before you buy — or need several seats together on a busy flight — **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can sort it out in one call.