

Airline Pilots Salary - How Much Do Pilots Make?

Nearly all pilots choose the career because of their love for flying, but the above-average pilot salary is a nice bonus.

But if you're considering becoming an airline pilot, you're likely wondering, "how much do pilots make?"

In this post, you'll learn what a pilot salary looks like and discover just how much you could earn as a commercial airline pilot.

Right now is one of the best times in history to become a pilot. Pilot salaries have been increasing year after year as more and more people are flying and fewer people are entering this job field.

Whether you're still in high school trying to choose a career or later in life considering a career change, an airline pilot career may be a great option for you.

How is a Pilot's Salary Calculated?

Airline pilots don't necessarily get paid a "salary". Instead, pilots are paid per flight hour. As of August 2020, the average airline pilot salary in the United States was \$102,851. But if you're researching this as a possible career there is a lot more to consider than just the national average.

In order to ensure pilots are not overworked, airline pilots are limited to 1,000 flight hours per year. With that information and the pilot's hourly rate, you can find out what your maximum earning potential is for an airline pilot's salary.

It's important to note that there are other benefits to working for an airline beyond the pilot salary, but we'll get into that later.

Factors That Determine Airline Pilot Salary

Just like any other career, an airline pilot salary varies depending on a variety of factors. Each airline sets its pay rates based on the contracts it signs. These rates may be based on many different inputs.

Years of Experience

Years of experience is a key factor in the hiring of all commercial pilots, not just airline pilots. While the hiring at the airlines is based on experience, the offers for compensation are set by the contracts the airline has signed with their

pilots. In relation to other commercial airline pilot opportunities, experience may dictate the amount of pay you are offered.

For example: A small corporation is looking to hire a commercial pilot for their multi-engine airplane and has two pilots pursuing the same job. One flew 5 years for a banner tow company in an American Champion Citabria, and the other was a contractor for 5 years and has flown a variety of single-engine and multi-engine aircraft. The contractor will likely receive a higher offer as he/she has flown in a wider variety of aircraft and has more overall experience.

Total Flight Hours

As mentioned earlier pilot salaries are paid on an hourly basis, specifically per flight hour. Logically this means that pilots who fly monthly schedules with higher flight times are going to get paid a larger amount.

Aircraft Type

The airlines pay their pilot's different hourly rates depending on which aircraft they fly. As a general rule, the larger the aircraft, the higher the hourly rate.

You get to pick your monthly schedule of hours as well as the airplane you fly based on your seniority number (which is a very important aspect of being an airline pilot) As your seniority number improves, you have more say in which aircraft and schedule you fly.

Airline Pilot Salaries

Major Airline Captain Salaries

All pilot salaries listed below are based on flying 1,000 hours per year and are an approximation based on available information. Note that airline pay changes regularly.

A commercial pilot salary will vary based on the aircraft they fly. Where available, we've included the plane associated with the listed pay.

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 12
Air Canada	A320	\$190,000	\$198,000	\$211,000
<u>American Airlines</u>	A320	\$255,000	\$263,000	\$278,000
<u>Delta Airlines</u>	A320	\$251,000	\$260,000	\$274,000
Frontier Airlines		\$191,000	\$216,000	\$254,000
Hawaiian Airlines	A321	\$245,000	\$253,000	\$267,000
JetBlue Airways	A320	\$240,000	\$252,000	\$275,000
Southwest Airlines	737	\$241,000	\$253,000	\$274,000
Spirit Airlines	A320	\$189,000	\$214,000	\$252,000
United Airlines	A320	\$260,000	\$268,000	\$283,000

Major Airline First Officer Salaries

Most major airlines are hiring first officers from a regional airline. As you can see, these pilot salaries start out quite low and in many cases, they start lower than the captain pay at the regional airlines. So pilots who make the jump are taking a small pay decrease.

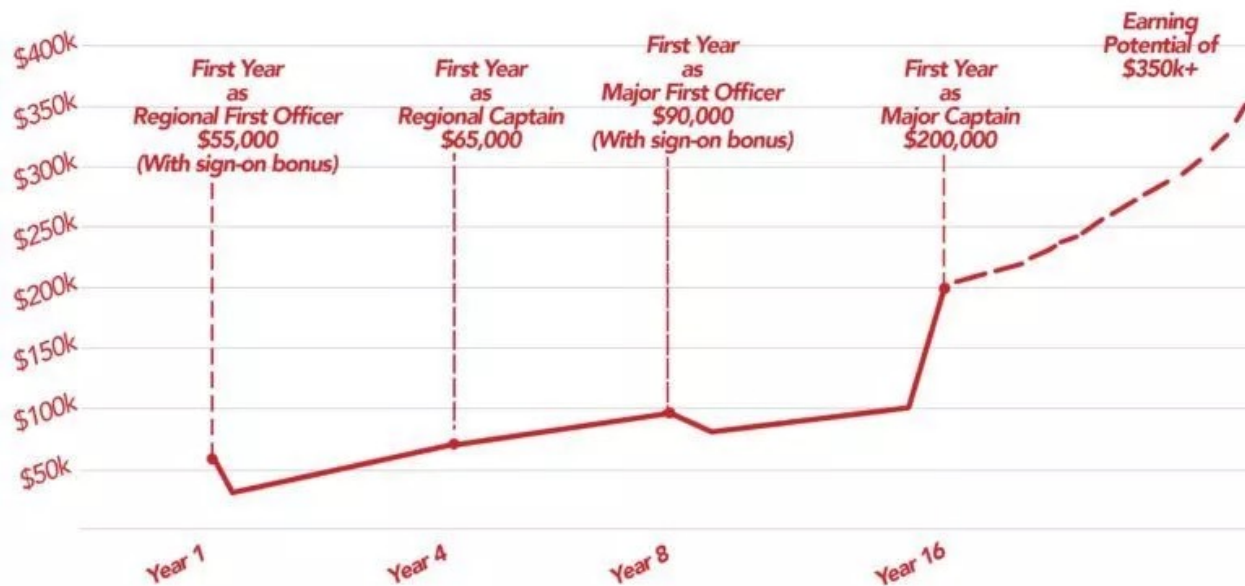
In the past few months, many major airlines have started announcing bonuses for pilots who move from a regional carrier to a major so the pilot salaries listed under year 1 in the table below will likely increase significantly in the next couple of years for most major airlines.

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 12
Air Canada	A320	\$56,000	\$109,000	\$140,000
American Airlines	A320	\$90,000	\$169,000	\$190,000
Delta Airlines	A320	\$92,000	\$166,000	\$187,000
Frontier Airlines		\$58,000	\$134,000	\$168,000
Hawaiian Airlines	A321	\$36,000	\$157,000	\$186,000
JetBlue Airlines	A320	\$92,000	\$162,000	\$185,000
Southwest Airlines	737	\$84,000	\$164,000	\$191,000
Spirit Airlines	A320	\$59,000	\$133,000	\$167,000
United Airlines	A320	\$91,000	\$172,000	\$193,000

Pilot salaries posted above do not include sign-on bonuses or other benefits.

Commercial Pilot Salary – A Timeline

It goes without saying – pilot salaries are at their lowest at the beginning of your career and highest towards the end. Before beginning your path towards a career as an airline pilot, it's important to understand how much you will be making throughout your entire career.



The figures above are based on averages across different airlines but can give you a good idea of the airline pilot salary you can be expecting as your career progresses. It's also worth noting that the timeline above is stretched out a little longer than what some would experience.

With the current pilot shortage the world is experiencing, some pilots have found the move from a regional airline to a major airline even faster.

For example, prior to Covid many regional airline pilots made it to the majors after only 3-5 years.

You probably noticed that at a couple of spots on the graph, pilot salaries drop, particularly when you jump from being a regional airline pilot to a pilot for a major airline. This does not necessarily mean you get a drop in pay.

As an incentive for pilots to start at a new airline, sign-on bonuses are sometimes distributed. You would technically earn more money during your first year due to that sign-on bonus.

Sample Airline Pilot Salaries for Regional Airlines

Regional Airline Captain Salaries

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 12
Air Wisconsin	CRJ200	\$71,000	\$81,000	\$100,000
Endeavor Air	CRJ200	\$89,000	\$97,000	\$114,000
Envoy Air	CRJ700	\$85,000	\$93,000	\$108,000
Horizon Air		\$81,000	\$92,000	\$111,000
Mesa Airlines	CRJ900	\$67,000	\$76,000	\$93,000
Piedmont Airlines	ERJ 145	\$76,000	\$83,000	\$96,000
PSA Airlines		\$85,000	\$94,000	\$108,000
Republic Airways		\$90,000	\$99,000	\$116,000
Skywest Airlines	CRJ200	\$75,000	\$84,000	\$103,000

Regional Airline First Officer Salaries

Few pilots remain first officers at the regional airlines for very long. Most will become a captain at a regional airline within a few years and then from there, move to a major airline. This is why some pilot salaries aren't listed for year 5 and beyond.

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 8
Air Wisconsin	CRJ200	\$37,000	\$49,000	\$53,000
Endeavor Air	CRJ200	\$52,000	\$66,000	\$68,000
Envoy Air	CRJ700	\$51,000	\$57,000	
Horizon Air		\$48,000	\$59,000	\$62,000
Mesa Airlines	CRJ900	\$36,000	\$39,000	\$43,000
Piedmont Airlines	ERJ 145	\$50,000	\$56,000	
PSA Airlines	CRJ	\$51,000	\$57,000	\$57,000
Republic Airways		\$46,000	\$55,000	\$58,000
Skywest Airlines	CRJ200	\$46,000	\$59,000	\$62,000

Current Airline Bonuses

- **Endeavor Air** offers a \$10K training completion bonus.
- **Envoy Air**, as an affiliate with American Airlines, offers more than \$150k in their bonus package for those who are eligible. This includes a \$15k signing bonus for all new pilots, a \$30k bonus for those that upgrade to

captains, a \$70k flow bonus to American Airlines, and an additional \$50k bonus paid at flow, earned pro-rata with qualifying hours over two years. In addition to these, Envoy offers \$10k near captain entry, a \$7.5k type rating bonus, and a \$15k bonus for direct entry captains.

- **Horizon Airlines** has a pilot development program where they will give private pilots a stipend of \$12.5k while they get their training done. They also have a new hiring bonus of \$5k – \$17.5k, depending on the plane you are flying and up to \$50k in bonuses for experienced pilots.
- **Mesa Airlines** offers a \$20k sign-on bonus for all new hires, with an additional \$10k for all simulator instructor positions.
- **Piedmont Airlines**, an additional affiliate with American, offers the same \$150k+ in bonuses for their pilots as Envoy.
- **PSA Airlines**, another affiliate with American Airlines, offers the same bonuses as Piedmont Airlines and Envoy Air.

Do Airline Pilots Receive Signing Bonuses?

At this time most regional airlines give out signing bonuses to attract commercial pilots due to the pilot shortage. Bonuses may vary based on the pilot's experience. We've seen bonuses ranging from \$5,000 to over \$15,000.

For example, if you already have a type rating for one of the aircraft you'd be flying the airline may give you a bigger signing bonus since they don't have to spend as much money training you.

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Commercial Airline Pilot Benefits

Pilots enjoy plenty of benefits aside from the pay. Especially during times when the industry is strong and, airlines are struggling to compete with the other airlines to bring qualified pilots to their airline.

Free Travel

Most airlines allow their pilot's free travel on flights that have empty seats, including a seat for a friend or family member.

Many pilots use these free trips to explore the world or to simply visit friends and family regularly.

Per Diem

Airline pilots receive a very attractive per diem on top of their hourly wage. This amount is to cover your expenses while on trips. Often, the amount is larger than what you spend so could add to your annual income.

Healthcare and Insurance

To remain competitive with the other airlines, most companies have very attractive healthcare and life insurance benefits for their pilots.

Bonuses

While bonuses are not guaranteed in any business, in the good time's airlines will offer sign-on bonuses to be competitive in hiring. Others offer yearly profit sharing based on the airline's income as well as other contractual agreed-upon amounts.

Do Airline Pilots Make More with Overtime Pay

Overtime pay is available at many airlines. When an airline needs to ensure a flight happens they will offer anywhere from 100% to 300% (or more) to get pilots to pick up the job.

At this time in 2021, this is an incredibly common occurrence. And with no end in sight for the pilot shortage, this will likely continue for years to come.

So when looking at the pilot salaries above, remember that isn't all you could earn. Your earnings could climb significantly higher with overtime pay.

How Long Can an Airline Pilot Work?

In the United States, the FAA requires an airline transport pilot to retire at age 65. This doesn't mean you can't be a pilot after 65, it simply means you can't hold an ATP. While some pilots do retire at 65, others continue to work as charter pilots, flight instructors, or any of the other commercial pilot jobs listed below.

Do Airline Pilots Belong to Unions?

Most airline pilots belong to unions in the United States. These unions negotiate pilot salaries and other benefits. There are a few major airline pilot unions including [Air Line Pilots Association](#), the [Allied Pilots Association](#), and [Southwest Airlines Pilots Association](#).

Pilot Salaries for other Commercial Pilot Jobs

Flight Instructor

Many pilots will work at a flight school as an instructor as their method of gaining their FAA-required minimum hours, but some love it so much they choose to become a career flight instructors. A career instructor can expect a pilot salary anywhere from \$40,000 to \$75,000 annually.

Many instructors will go on to work as chief flight instructors for a flight school where your salary can go even higher.

Cargo Carrier

In terms of pay, cargo pilot salaries are probably the most competitive with commercial airlines.

The pay structure for cargo pilots is very similar to that of major airline carriers.

Cargo Airline Captain Salaries

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 8
Air Transport International	767	\$147,000	\$234,000	\$255,000
Atlas Air	767	\$92,000	\$160,000	\$172,000
FedEx Express	767	\$276,000	\$310,000	\$326,000
Kalitta Air		\$154,000	\$244,000	\$266,000
Southern Air	767	\$142,000	\$160,000	\$196,000
United Parcel Service		\$50,000	\$312,000	\$329,000

Cargo Airline Pilot First Officer Salaries

Airline	Plane	Year 1	Year 5	Year 8
Air Transport International	767	\$83,000	\$151,000	\$181,000
Atlas Air	767	\$87,000	\$108,000	\$137,000
FedEx Express	767	\$81,000	\$193,000	\$226,000
Kalitta Air		\$116,000	\$162,000	\$193,000
Southern Air	767	\$87,000	\$108,000	\$137,000
United Parcel Service		\$50,000	\$200,000	\$212,000

Charter Pilot

Charter services offer private flights to businesses or individuals. A charter pilot needs to have a professional attitude as they will be dealing with clients even more directly than pilots flying for airlines.

The salary is higher than most time-building jobs, with the average charter pilot salary in the US earning approximately \$75,000.

Charter Pilot Captain Salaries

While there are quite a few small charter airlines across the United States, here are a few of the larger operations that post their pay publicly. These charter airlines typically fly large jets which is why their pay closely resembles airline pilot pay.

Airline	Year 1	Year 5	Year 8
iAero Ways	\$168,000	\$178,000	\$192,000
Miami Air International	\$96,000	\$116,000	\$163,000
Omni Air International	\$192,000	\$248,000	\$270,000

Charter Pilot First Officer Salaries

Airline	Year 1	Year 5	Year 8
iAero Ways	\$90,000	\$98,000	\$100,000
Miami Air International	\$47,000	\$83,000	\$98,000
Omni Air International	\$118,000	\$154,000	\$184,000

Corporate Pilot

A career as a corporate pilot is similar to a career as an airline pilot in many ways.

It’s a very competitive job, you will likely need a high number of hours to be considered, and you are typically flying larger turbine aircraft.

The differences are of course the number of passengers, the type of aircraft you are flying, and where you will be flying. Many may consider corporate pilot as more attractive than airline pilot due to the more consistent schedule and locations.

You will likely not be required to move as you would early in your career as an airline pilot.

A corporate pilot salary may start out around \$60,000 annually (first officer) but has the potential to earn \$180,000 or more as they gain more experience and stay with a corporation longer.

Stunt Pilot

For the extreme thrill-seekers, aerobatics might be a fun career for you. Aerobatic pilots, or stunt pilots, perform in aerial shows, compete with other aerobatic pilots, and train pilots in aerobatic flight.

The pay of stunt pilots varies tremendously, but the median earnings of this job pay between \$50,000 and \$70,000.

It is a very difficult career to break into, and you will need to be passionate about the job in order to break out.

Tour Guide

The job of a tour guide could be for you if you enjoy small groups and consider yourself a people person. The job is location-dependent and can vary greatly in hours.

You could be doing a lot of hours during peak season, and be earning very little during the off-season, so this gig isn't for everyone. Average earnings are around \$52,000 annually.

Banner Towing

Like instructing, most who tow banners are using the job as a way to build hours. The pay is similar to instructing and can range from \$20-\$50 an hour.

Crop Duster

One of the more unique and niche commercial pilot jobs on this list, a crop duster (also known as "Aerial Applicator" or "Agricultural Pilot") is a pilot that uses aircraft to aid in agricultural care.

They may apply pesticides, fertilizers, or even plant seeds using their aircraft. This job requires not only aviation training (commercial rating) but agricultural knowledge.

You will need to be knowledgeable on different types of pesticides and fertilizers, and familiar with agricultural practices. If you are able to overcome this knowledge hurdle, you are rewarded with a job that can pay higher than \$100,000.

How Much Do Pilots Make – Conclusion

How much a pilot earns each year largely depends on how much time they are able to fly. As we've outlined in this article, as an airline pilot moves from First Officer to Captain and from a regional airline to a major airline their salary continues to increase. If you want to maximize your airline pilot pay, your goal should be to become a captain at a major airline.