China Southern completes FAI of A350 flagship Business Class with Thompson VantageXL+ seats



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China Southern Airlines (CSN) has announced the successful completion of the First Article Inspection (FAI) for the Business Class seating, cabin monuments and branding panel system of its next-generation A350-900 flagship aircraft. The three-day inspection was conducted at Thompson Aero Seating's facility in the United Kingdom and coordinated by China Southern's Future Cabin Studio, bringing together global industry partners including Thompson Aero Seating (UK), Airbus (France), ACS UK (UK), SPI (USA) and Tangerine (UK).

The successful completion of the FAI marks a major milestone in the development of China Southern's next-generation flagship cabin product, moving the program from design and development into the pre-production phase. It lays a solid foundation for final product qualification and subsequent series production, the November 16 press release said.

Global launch customer for VantageXL+

As the global launch customer for Thompson Aero Seating's VantageXL+ Business Class seat, China Southern has developed a distinctive dual-zone Business Class configuration for its A350-900 flagship aircraft, featuring a total of 28 Business Class seats. The forward cabin features four exclusive, enclosed Business Class suites, physically separated from the aft Business Class cabin by full-height partitions. Each suite is equipped with a 32-inch ultra-high-definition entertainment screen, complemented by a spacious dedicated lavatory area, an adjustable privacy partition and a bespoke companion seat. Together, these features create an exclusive private space in the sky, designed for

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relaxation, personal interaction and business engagement.

The aft Business Class cabin features 24 seats in a staggered 1-2-1 configuration, providing every passenger with direct aisle access and an individual privacy door. Each seat also features an adjustable reading light and dedicated storage compartments. When fully reclined, the seat provides a bed length of up to 195 cm, offering enhanced comfort for sleeping, working and relaxing on long-haul international journeys.

28 months of development

The A350 cabin represents a flagship product developed through 28 months of dedicated work by China Southern's Future Cabin Studio. Starting with a comprehensive understanding of the passenger journey, the programme focused on four key dimensions: seating comfort, sleep quality, working efficiency and the overall sensory experience.

Extensive product development and iterative optimization were undertaken throughout the program. Key ergonomic parameters, including seat-back contours, headrest angles and armrest heights, underwent 12 rounds of anthropometric assessment and full-scale product evaluation, ensuring an effective balance of comfort, functionality and aesthetics within the available cabin space.

For the interior design, China Southern partnered with British cabin design consultancy Tangerine for the first time, establishing a new design philosophy for its next-generation cabin: "Oriental Grace, Delightful Flight." The concept brings together the richness of Oriental cultural heritage and contemporary international design language, creating a distinctive cabin environment that reflects China Southern's brand identity. A bespoke, handcrafted kapok flower emblem serves as a distinctive visual centerpiece, reinforcing China Southern's brand recognition and creating a signature cabin design symbol.

Sean Cui, Head of China Southern Airlines' Future Cabin Studio, said, "Over the past 28 months, we have worked tirelessly to develop this next-generation flagship A350 Business Class product. From the initial concept sketches to today's successful first article inspection, every curve, every material and every detail of the cabin space has been carefully considered and refined through close collaboration with our global partners.

"Our ambition is to offer passengers much more than a Business Class seat. We want to create a living space in the sky where they can work with ease, rest in comfort and connect with others naturally. This is an important step in strengthening China Southern's premium travel experience and brand competitiveness, as well as a meaningful opportunity to bring a world-class cabin product developed by a Chinese airline to the international market."

Weiwei He, Design Director at Tangerine, said, "We are delighted to have been deeply involved in China Southern's next-generation flagship cabin programme. Throughout this collaboration, our shared ambition has been to bring together the depth of Oriental cultural heritage and contemporary international aesthetics, allowing passengers from around the world to experience both the distinctive character of China Southern and the quality of world-class design from the moment they step on board."

Global expertise delivers flagship cabin

The successful progress of the A350 cabin program reflects China Southern's commitment to integrating global aviation expertise and managing complex international partnerships, the press release said.

Thompson Aero Seating is responsible for Business Class seat development and manufacturing;

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Tangerine leads the cabin interior visual identity and passenger experience design; SPI provides the in-flight entertainment system integration solution; ACS UK supports airworthiness engineering and testing for associated cabin components; and Airbus provides aircraft interface, engineering expertise and programme coordination support.

Andy Morris, Chief Commercial Officer at Thompson Aero Seating, said, “We are proud to be working with China Southern on this important program and look forward to seeing these seats take to the skies across its A350 fleet, bringing an outstanding Business Class experience to passengers around the world.”

China Southern’s next-generation A350-900 aircraft are scheduled to begin delivery in the second quarter of 2027. The flagship Business Class product will initially be introduced on key long-haul international routes from Guangzhou to Europe, Australia and New Zealand, bringing passengers an enhanced travel experience through innovative design, superior comfort and a distinctive brand identity.

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