

Here's how the coronavirus will change Emirates first, business class

Covid-19 takes a little lustre off flying in Emirates' first class and business class. , May 21 2020

With Emirates restarting selected flights this week, we're now seeing signs of how the coronavirus will impact service for business and first class flyers.

A set of guidelines distributed to Emirates cabin crew and sighted by *Executive Traveller* demonstrates how Covid-19 is taking some of the shine off Emirates' premium travel experience.

Some of those changes are specific to the Gulf carrier's Airbus A380 fleet, which currently remain grounded and could be slashed by as much as half as the airline right-sizes itself to suit heavily reduced demand.

"We have just got to accept that in the next year or two, perhaps a bit longer, demand for air travel is going to be tempered in many respects," Emirates president Sir Tim Clark has suggested.

"What emerges from this will be in my view almost perhaps 20 or 30 per cent less than what we were experiencing prior to the coronavirus kicking in."

Read more: "The A380 is over" declares Emirates president

No showers or cocktail bar

The premium experience of the Airbus A380 will be heaviest hit.

The two onboard showers dedicated to first class passengers have been closed, although it's not clear if the suites themselves will remain open for use as a bathroom or changing room.

Emirates has turned off the tap in its indulgent first class showers.

Review: Emirates Airbus A380 first class 'shower spa'

The spacious business class bar and lounge at the rear of the A380's upper deck will also be roped off to preserve social distancing as well as reduce touchpoints which could help the coronavirus spread. The same will apply to the small 'social area' at the front of the first class cabin.

The A380's swish cocktail bar and lounge is now closed.

RAs previously reported, Emirates was deep into planning a "third generation" of the inflight bar and lounge area before the coronavirus struck. This layout would have had even more seating than the current second-gen design, plus clusters of AC and USB outlets around the tables.

Changes to the first class welcome

With the aim of minimising interactions with passengers "for social distancing purposes", Emirates has issued its first class cabin crew with the following instructions:

- "Purser/cabin supervisor to greet High Value Customers at the aircraft door during boarding only."
- "Warmly welcome customers – it is not required to escort customer to suite/seat, including IO's" (IO is the exclusive 'Invitation Only' tier of Emirates' Skywards frequent flyer program)
- "You're not expected to help customers stow their hand luggage. Only small hand bags are allowed in the cabin."
- "Politely inform customers to hang their jackets in their individual wardrobe (fully enclosed private suites) and suite wardrobe (private suite)."

Also set out in Emirates' email to flight attendants: "crew are not required to make customers beds".

Dine on demand

Emirates' popular 'dine on demand' menu will still be offered, freeing passengers up from a regimented meal service schedule and letting them choose what they want to eat at a time that suits them.

Dine on demand stays, but the way you dine, snack and drink is set to change.

However, all service will now be done on trays: the appetiser and main course will be served on one tray, with the dessert, cheese and fruit selection on another tray.

Most food will come pre-plated, and photos in the document showing how those meals will look leave something to be desired.

Bread and crackers will be served wrapped in plastic, cutlery will also come in its own envelope, and the variety of wine carried on each flight will also be reduced.

The at-seat minibar will be stocked as usual but the snack basket will be swapped for an on-demand service.

Likewise, snacks usually offered in the first class social nook will now be available in a prepared 'snack box'.

No free WiFi, live TV

Complimentary unlimited WiFi, previously a perk for all first and business class passengers – along with Emirates Skywards Platinum and Gold members in economy – has been axed, as has the "first two hours or 20MB free" offered to all economy passengers.

In the short term, if you want Internet access during your Emirates flight you'll have to pay US\$10 for 150MB or US\$16 for 500MB.

Free WiFi has been switched off, so why not take a nap?

Live TV channels have also been removed from Emirates' inflight ICE entertainment system.

"When Emirates was flying a full fleet we were able to purchase data in bulk, which made offering a free WiFi service feasible even though the airline still subsidised the service with millions of dollars every year," a spokesperson for the airline said.

Likewise, the Live TV service "comes with significant data and licensing costs, but we invested in it as part of overall our inflight customer experience. With fewer global sporting events at the moment, LiveTV has much reduced value."

"Like all airlines, we've had to adapt our inflight offering to the current situation, but we are monitoring developments closely and look forward to resuming these popular services when practicable."