

## **Largest Airline in the Middle East: A Case of Emirates**



Source: pixabay (2018)

### **Background**

Founded in 1984, Emirates is the flag carrier of the United Arab Emirates and also one of the largest international airlines in the world (Emirates, n.d.). Headquartered in Dubai, the airline operates 269 aircraft between 158 destinations in 85 countries (Routes, 2024). For many years, the airline has built a reputation for its exceptional service and commitment to deliver the best in-class products across all classes.

Emirates' First Class offers an unparalleled luxury travel experience. Passengers enjoy spacious private suites with sliding doors for maximum privacy, plush, fully flat beds with high-quality linens, and a choice of pillows for restful sleep (Emirates, n.d.). The in-flight dining experience includes unlimited caviar and Dom Perignon champagne, earning the title of "Best First-Class Onboard Catering in the Middle East" (Emirates, 2024). Emirates also pioneered in-flight showers and on-board lounges firsts in commercial aviation, enabling First Class passengers to freshen up mid-flight and relax with premium beverages served by dedicated bartender (Emirates, n.d.).

Aiming to meet the market demand for affordable luxury, Emirates introduced its highly-anticipated premium economy class in 2022 (Emirates, 2020). With a generous pitch of up to 40-inches, each seat is 19.5 inches wide and designed to provide optimal comfort with ample room to stretch out (Emirates, 2020). As part of the airline's multi-billion-dollar retrofit programme, 67 A380 and 53 Boeing 777 cabins will be fully refurbished to provide over 4,000 premium economy seats by February 2025 (Emirates, 2023).

Another signature feature is Emirates' award-winning inflight entertainment system, *ICE* (*Information, Connectivity, Entertaining*), which has been named 'World's Best Airline Inflight Entertainment' by Skytrax for the 18th time (Emirates, 2024). The ICE system offers more than 6,500 channels of on demand entertainment available in more than 40 languages (Emirates, 2024). Passengers can even create their very own playlist before boarding through the Emirates App and sync to the TV screen once they have sat down on the plane (Emirates, n.d.).

Incorporating digital innovation into the customer journey, Emirates has also introduced a 360° VR seat tour, allowing customers to explore the interiors of each cabin class on the Emirates

app or website (Emirate, n.d.). With this immersive feature, customers can navigate around all cabin classes and visualize the seat layout and amenities onboard. In addition, Emirates offers a unique Polaroid photo service, where passengers can request a crew member to take an instant photo to capture special moments during the flight (Emirates, 2024).

## **Challenges**

The unique services offered by Emirates have helped the airline secure its position as an industry leader. However, some have questioned whether such diverse offerings will pose huge operational challenges, such as securing sufficient crew members and maintaining the service quality across all classes and all routes. Furthermore, while the introduction of Premium Economy has been widely successful, demand has significantly outpaced supply. As of now, the service is available on flights to only 19 cities—excluding major hubs like Hong Kong (Emirates, n.d.).

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What potential risks does Emirates face by focusing heavily on luxury and premium services, and how can it mitigate these risks?
2. Given the high demand for Emirates' premium economy class, what steps can the airline take to expand its availability to more destinations, including cities like Hong Kong?
3. The in-flight shower and onboard lounge have been Emirates' unique selling points for quite some time now. What challenges or barriers might prevent other airlines from replicating these features?
4. How do technologies like VR seat tours and pre-flight playlist syncing enhance customer experience? What further innovations could Emirates explore?

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## **Keywords**

- Airline
- Aviation
- Luxury experience
- Innovation
- Technology
- Service differentiation

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