



HOW ETIHAD AIRWAYS HAS NAVIGATED THE PANDEMIC

News / Airlines



Etihad Airways marks one year since the UAE announced flights were to be grounded due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In recognition of this, Etihad has released a video charting the key milestones in the most challenging year in aviation history.

Tony Douglas, Group Chief Executive Officer, Etihad Aviation Group, said: “As the pandemic took hold, the announcement on 23 March 2020 to ground the UAE’s airlines was not entirely unexpected, yet it was the toughest day of my career. Despite the unthinkable challenges, we recognise there have been so many accomplishments and small victories over the past year.

“We quickly realised that we needed to turn this negative into an opportunity, and that’s when the innovative, entrepreneurial spirit we’re known for kicked in. Our agile operation allowed us to react quickly to the changing market conditions and regulatory framework, at the same time as developing the pioneering Etihad Wellness programme. Having been the first airline to require 100% PCR testing before departure and again on arrival, we then became the first airline to operate with all crew on board vaccinated.”

At the start of the pandemic, Etihad took advantage of having most of its fleet on the ground to complete the most extensive aircraft maintenance programme in its history. All 96 passenger aircraft were surgically and clinically refreshed so they looked like they were fresh out of the hangar. This included minor maintenance tasks, such as seat repairs and updates to Inflight Entertainment Systems, to bringing forward scheduled engine changes and modifications on several aircraft.

In addition to normal scheduled flights, Etihad operated special freighter and humanitarian flights to countries in Africa, Europe and Asia including Havana and Costa Rica – destinations the airline had never flown to before.

Etihad Cargo, the airline’s freight operation, had a strong year, driven by huge demand for medical supplies such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and pharmaceuticals. In November 2020, Etihad joined the Hope Consortium, an Abu Dhabi-led coalition formed to facilitate the distribution of Covid vaccines across the world. The consortium has a complete end-to-end supply chain solution covering demand planning, sourcing and world-class facilities for transporting temperature sensitive cargo at ultra-cold conditions up to -80°.

Internally, Etihad also launched ‘Project Vision’, which prioritised envisioning what the travelling public would want from an airline post-Covid.

The first initiative to be inspired by this, in June 2020, was the Etihad Wellness programme. This involved the introduction of Wellness Ambassadors, who are available to support guests with their health and wellbeing needs online, at the airport and on board.

In another world-first, on 10 February 2021, the airline announced 100% of its crew on board – both cabin crew and pilots – were vaccinated against Covid. This achievement was a result of the organisation’s tremendous efforts to ensure the health and wellbeing of its employees.

More recently, as a result of Project Vision, Etihad is working with a variety of different companies to develop the technology required for a global health certification system that would help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with government requirements for Covid tests or vaccines.

Douglas concluded, “In my opinion, Abu Dhabi has handled the response to the pandemic exceptionally well and this leaves us in a strong position as we move forward. I’m optimistic, thanks to the efforts of the UAE government, coupled with the strength and resilience of our turnaround strategy, that global passenger demand will start to recover very quickly.”

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