



Above: A selection of FAI rent-a-jet's global jet food service



Premium Jet flight attendant Oliver Rico, first officer Martin Pohl and commander Silvio D'Ambrosio with DeliSky MD Sascha Gassmann.



Qatar Executive performance manager Thalita Souza's in-house catering team works with a range of suppliers to produce its gourmet menu in the sky.

to the wide variety of passenger demands from standard menus and ready-to-serve trays on light jets right up to a multi-course meal with silver service. Haase says caterers have adapted to the needs of operators and their customers, and service is very professional. "Ten or 15 years ago, if you had asked for catering at three hours notice it would never have happened, unless you bought sandwiches at the gas station. Nowadays you will get it."

Food safety

LSky staff are divided into two groups for separate cold and hot prep-

arations. There is a specific technical file for all menu items so that each is always made and plated the same way. Staff follow government food safety rules and when it is ready and plated up it goes to the fridge, before being put into special containers and delivered in refrigerated cars.

German operator FAI rent-a-jet uses catering companies for all its charter flights but will use selected supermarket or luxury store-bought products if the passengers have such a preference. The company likes to be able to offer something new and creative so its menu changes regularly to include new and inno-

vative products, packaging, service and food presentation suggestions.

FAI crew tend to come from a reputed commercial airline and have first-class experience. Thus they already know the basics of service and guest management but the finer techniques can be taught on the job. When new crew start flying they undergo a few training flights with another crew member to show them the ropes, after which the head of cabin will do a check flight to make sure they are up to standard.

The Jet Exchange crew take an active interest in food presentation in their everyday lives. Their passion for

service doesn't start and finish on board, they will have attended numerous courses in their own time and like to keep themselves current. New staff receive in-house training and are sent on external training courses as required.

The secret of an effective galley

For perfect service, and business aviation clients expect nothing less, LSky encourages good cooperation and communication between all kitchen staff, good stock, efficient scheduling times and, most importantly, motivated staff.

A galley doesn't necessarily have to be big, but a host needs to plan the perfect layout to make the environment work for everyone on board. Milou Martens has been a hostess with Belgium and Netherlands operator ASL/JetNetherlands on its long range jets for the past three and a half months. She is based at Eindhoven in the Netherlands where she works closely with the Van Eeghem catering company.

Martens says: "Even if the flight is a short hop on a small jet, if a customer wants canapes, caviar, sushi and champagne we have to make that work." She recently had a flight with four children on board. Children tend to like different drinks and snacks to the adults so she went to a shop and bought sweets and chocolate for them. "They loved it, and of course a happy child makes for happy parents too."

Preparation is a very important part of catering. When food arrives in plastic boxes just before departure, she must decide how to make it look attractive and how best to serve it.

FAI head of cabin Nelia Miller says: "Everything in the galley has to have its own place, and crew members must be able to stand in the galley with their eyes shut and still touch everything and know exactly where it all is." A dirty galley is a bad galley, and she keeps all areas disinfected and cleaned to pristine standards at all times.

"The crew freshly cook your eggs in flight: scrambled, poached, sunny side up or omelettes"
Abner Tato, Global Jet Concept

In a small aircraft there is little space so greater organisational skills are required. But she advises caution when supplying provisions in a large jet. There may be more space, but that doesn't automatically mean crew need more things. She recommends having a standard loading list, with no unnecessary items on board that just clutter a galley, cabin and cargo compartment.

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Hygiene is very important and Tato says that different knives must be used to cut fish, meat and vegetables. Aircraft galleys are very small and it can be quite easy to contaminate food so it is important to work with gloves on.

Food tastes different in the air

Altitude and air pressure do not change the flavour of food, rather they change the way passengers taste. In order to compensate for this LSKy adjusts the amount of salt and seasoning in its dishes and limits the temperature at which food stuffs are kept in order not to dry them out after reheating in the aircraft.

Jet Exchange's Roberts may organise the catering for a continental breakfast on board so as to serve freshly baked croissants and hand pick a selection of charcuterie, yogurts and seasonal fruits. At other times she will use VIP caterers who generally understand corporate aircraft galley space limitations and who will provide a full three-course meal service to a full load of guests in a way that is easy to store, prepare and serve efficiently.

Cooking at altitude is very different to cooking on the ground and Jet Exchange flight attendants are trained in food safety and presentation techniques. Cabin pressure and low humidity can manipulate the tastebuds so that even food cooked by the best chef on the ground can be lacking in flavour and umami when eaten at altitude.

"We did the catering for Gordon Ramsay and he was very pleased with the food quality he got on board"

André Seijbel, Galley Cuisine

Salt is the sensory taste most affected when flying, so On Air Dining looks to increase the salt flavour without increasing the sodium content, as sodium lessens the pleasant taste. He recommends using pink Himalayan salt on board as it has less sodium yet has sufficient mineral content within the salt to enhance the flavour of the food. It can also be kept in a lump and grated.

Ingredients that cut through the impact on taste that flying has are shitake mushrooms, ginger and peanut, and the company also looks



Global Jet Concept's Abner Tato talks food hygiene and the art of service.

to create dishes that smell great as they drift through the aircraft. Flight attendants are encouraged not to present dishes in a symmetrical fashion, like the spokes of a bicycle. "Dishes should draw the eye in a lot of different directions, like a work of art from Gaudi," says Hulme. "A dish should offer different lines, shapes, colours and textures, but at the same time the food should be in the centre of the plate to focus the attention. The food should be exciting and break up the journey. It is a highlight of aircraft travel." Flashcards with photos and step-by-step instructions show crew how the dish should look.

Luxaviation chefs use goats cheese, olives and capers within dishes to enhance flavours. Its authentic Chinese menu has been very popular since it was launched late last year following development with a specialised supplier, showcasing authentic Sichuan, Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong cuisine.

Catering an A340-500 on a 24-hour ground stop was particularly challenging for Air Culinaire operations director Neil Hayes. He and his regional operations manager met the crew on arrival, took the order and then worked through the night with the kitchen team for a next day delivery. "How did we handle it?" he asks. "Two words, teamwork and coffee."

Regional considerations

LSky uses foreign products but gives priority to national foodstuffs such as fresh vegetables and fruit. Fish and seafood come from the Portuguese coast and its most popular dishes are Portuguese lamb stew, codfish



Christian Haase reflects on how caterers have adapted to the needs of last-minute decision making customers.

cooked lagareiro style in olive oil and octopus, perhaps in a salad.

Light and healthy food is still popular but Seijbel believes that the trend for gluten-free food is on the wane. The main catering difference he sees between the various regions of the world is in the quantity of food ordered. If there are three Americans on the aircraft one might want a salad, four sandwiches and a cup of soup; one might want one salad and a cup of soup and a dessert; and the third a big sandwich and a hamburger.

The Russians, on the other hand, tend to order everything from the menu because at home they are used to filling the table with food. "They like a lot of everything," he says, "and the same applies to Africans. Middle Eastern clients tend to order a lot of juices, hot snacks, mini pizzas, mini hamburgers and mini kebabs while most Europeans are into salads and fish."

As a general rule, Roberts finds it advisable to offer the local cuisine of the departure region as the caterers are more likely to do that best. She too notes that portion sizes can vary

hugely from place to place, so adding specific quantities to an order really helps. "In the USA for example I tend to find portion sizes are larger than we're accustomed to receiving in Europe," she says. She mentions geographic considerations too: "I'd avoid ordering seafood items if we are hours away from the coast."

It is becoming more common for passengers to order fast food for the flight. Sometimes they want to cast aside the stuffy vestiges of luxury travel and may even request a McDonalds. But Roberts says: "Of course their selection of Big Macs and nuggets will still be served to them on a silver platter."

Around 80 per cent of Denmark-based Global Reach flights go out of anywhere except Denmark according to cabin chief Sanne Sofie Nielsen. "Most of the time we don't fly out of Scandinavia, so only a small part of our catering is from Denmark," she says. Any locally-sourced catering comes from a restaurant in Billund, to the delight of some Danish passengers who were regulars at the restaurant. The bread comes from local bakeries too, and while no one yet has requested snacks with a company logo on them, if they did she would certainly arrange it.

"If you are charging a reasonable amount for food, whether it's in a restaurant or on an aircraft, being able to provide provenance and authority is important," says Gama Aviation global chief marketing office Duncan Daines. "People want to know where the food is reared."

Passengers can be quite demanding and one, who hadn't flown privately before, requested a certain type of cake that Gama Aviation did not have and was not part of the manifest. The company explained that it could be sourced but only by landing the aircraft en route and having someone go to pick it up, making it the most expensive



cake they would ever have eaten. It didn't happen.

Hilton Munich Airport catering primarily looks after the private planes at Munich airport, which tend to be small aircraft with a team of 12 people including kitchen and service. It works with companies like NetJets, and quite a lot of customers order directly online if they have a password to log in to the menu.

Based in Bavaria, staff often get asked for Wiener schnitzel and local delicacies, but it also provides international food such as sushi, kosher and halal dishes, courtesy of two or three local suppliers.

Food needs to have some resilience; general manager Dagmar Mühle explains: "Thicker cut meat is more robust, we avoid items that fall apart easily." Meat and fish are kept quite rare so that it just needs to be reheated, not cooked. "And we avoid fresh whipped cream which gains volume and loses consistency in the air."

Top tips

FAI's Miller suggests that having well designed bags, atlas boxes and storage containers that use the least amount of space is effective. Storage compartments should be well organised and everything should be kept in its place at all times. Crew members should be well prepared and well informed as each flight is so different that service will be individually tailor-made for each trip.

Generally, ordering items to be packaged in bulk helps to save space as several portions will be packed into one container rather than individual portions. Caterers are familiar with on board oven sizes or storage space and will use packaging more suitable for the different types of jet.

LSky puts forward its favourite high altitude menu of the moment: Rich seafood and fish cream flavoured with fennel and saffron; duck foie gras with apple confit and a red fruit coulis; cod, pea and mint risotto with red pepper sauce and a crispy bacon chip; followed by a passion fruit and coconut bavaois. Using ingredients such as strawberries, grapes, ginger, and herbs refreshes the sense of taste for passengers in the clouds. ■

Correction

Helicopter Film Services is based at Denham aerodrome, not Elstree aerodrome as stated in the feature on aerial photography last month.

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Capt Christian Stafford, head of cabin services Jane Roberts and Capt Steve Beynon of Jet Exchange.