



EXECUTIVE TRAVEL: BRITISH AIRWAYS GIVES COMPETITION A RUN FOR ITS MONEY WITH DREAMLINER FIRST CABIN

News / Airlines



When British Airways launched its “First” cabin on the Dreamliner last year, the larger open suites and new TV screens didn’t seem enough to steal passengers from rival airlines on the London Heath-row-Abu Dhabi route. Etihad, for example, offers nine first class “Apartments” and the Residence with its three rooms including bathroom and double bed.

However, a recent trip with BA from London to Muscat via Abu Dhabi, on one of the airline’s newest 787-9 aircraft, proves the competition isn’t clear-cut.

BA rules the roost in Heathrow’s Terminal 5, where First customers are treated to a separate check-in zone. With the aircraft departing London at 9.40am it’s peak time. However, fast-track lanes can get passengers from check-in to the lounge in less than five minutes.

On board, First offers eight semi-open suites aligned to offer each guest privacy from being overlooked without the need for a sliding door.

The cabin has the feeling of a private members' club with faux wooden texture bulkheads emblazoned with the carrier's crest. Arranged in a 1 x 2 x 1 configuration, the best seats for solo business travellers are by the window, with the two windows dimmed by a controller, rather than using a blind.

The suite features brushed alum-inium trim, quilted fabrics and faux carbon fibre worktops, giving the impression of the interior of an Aston Martin. A controller customises the lighting and seat, which transforms into a fully flat bed, and compared to the previous BA First suite passengers have 20 per cent more space; a personal storage unit lined in soft leather has been added along with a wardrobe to hang jackets. There is also an enlarged 23" screen that sits in front of the passenger, so you can watch TV after landing. The in-flight entertainment touchscreen handset was a little difficult to control though, with small buttons that are hard to use, and the viewing was glitchy – it had to be reset a couple of times.

Passengers connecting to Muscat can stay on board for the short stop, before a 45-minute hop across to Oman with more drinks and canapés.

While BA may not offer the grandiose bells and whistles of Etihad on this route, its newly reimagined First Class has levelled the playing field a little.

q&a first class reimagined

Jonny Clark expands on BA's new first-class service between London Heathrow and Abu Dhabi:

If you can get to the BA First lounge at Heathrow in five minutes, what's on offer when you arrive?

British Airways offers two lounges for first class guests at Heathrow, the Galleries First Lounge or the more exclusive and quieter Concorde Room. The Concorde Room offers dining cabanas with waiter service and a changing menu dependent on time of day. For the early morning flight to Abu Dhabi and Muscat, expect a breakfast menu which includes pastries, cereals and hot dishes such as eggs benedict. There is also an Elemis Spa and passengers flying in First can pre-book treatments.

What daily flights are there from Heathrow to Abu Dhabi for first-class passengers?

British Airways BA073 departs daily from Heathrow at 9:40am, arriving in Abu Dhabi at 8.55pm. Etihad offers three direct daily flights at 9:15am, 2:05pm and 8:05pm.

How much does BA First Class from Abu Dhabi cost?

Flights start at Dh27,475.

What did you eat?

Once airborne I could eat at my leisure. I enjoyed an amuse bouche – a pistachio cake with hummus – followed by an Arabic mezze, served with Arabic flatbreads. The main courses included sea bass fillet with white asparagus, and a fried Arabic chicken dish with Machbous rice followed by a mango and coconut delice, decorated with berry-infused sugar flowers. Before landing, an afternoon tea came with cakes, sandwiches and warmed scones with clotted cream and jam.

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