

The Future of Air Travel

Not so long ago, air travel was the preserve of the few. Nowadays, with increased competition and the proliferation of low-cost airlines, flying is a common form of travel for everyone. With close to two million aircraft leaving the UK alone each year, air travel is expected to continue growing, escalating concerns over the damaging effects of increased fuel emissions and noise pollution caused by greater air-traffic. Congestion is also a concern for those of us who have to travel regularly, especially for business. We take a look at how Airbus, who, at the forefront of 21st century travel, has responded to these challenges with the launch and development of pioneering new aircraft.

In response to the growing need for better aircraft performance, increased fuel efficiency, lower operating costs and greater comfort for passengers, Airbus has explored a range of socially and economically responsible solutions.

Flagship of the 21st century

Due to enter service in 2006 and deemed 'the flagship of the 21st century', the new double-decker A380 from Airbus is set to provide long-haul passengers with a new way of flying.

Able to carry 35% more passengers than its closest rival, the A380 has a seating capacity of 555, making the A380 not only the most spacious civil aircraft ever built, but also the most advanced technologically. Its ability to carry more passengers will help to relieve congestion by cutting down the number of flights needed to transport people.

In terms of the environment, the A380 minimises environmental damage with significantly reduced noise and emission levels. Its new generation engines combined with its advanced wing and under-carriage design mean that the A380 will not only comply with today's noise limits but, compared to its nearest rivals, will produce half as much noise on take-off.

Furthermore, the use of composite and lightweight materials drastically improves its weight, helping to make it a highly fuel-efficient aircraft. It burns 12% less fuel than existing aircraft, thus reducing exhaust emissions.

Long range

Able to fly distances of up to 15,000km, almost three times the distance between London and New York, the A380 has a range that is 10% greater than that of comparable aircraft.

This efficiency and advanced technology results in 15 to 20% lower seat-mile costs – meaning cheaper prices for passengers.

What will strike passengers most, however, is the increased floor space which will help airlines to deliver unparalleled comfort with more open space for passengers to stretch their legs. ▶





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Utilising A380 technology to the full, Airbus are also developing a new breed of smaller, lighter and more fuel efficient aircraft to help improve air travel across the board.

Airbus President and CEO, Noël Forgeard, said: "The long range market is becoming more segmented in terms of size and range. Airbus has listened to its customers, who were interested in the medium size category with a greater range to complement their current Airbus wide-body families. As a result of this demand, we are now pleased to offer the A350, which, in addition to its intrinsic characteristics, is in the unique position of being a full member of a comprehensive airliner family, hence benefiting from an unmatched level of commonality."

The future

Due to enter service within the next five years, the A350 will typically seat 245 - 285 passengers. With a range in excess of 15,900 km it will provide ultra-long range capability in this 'medium size' seating category – therefore offering the lowest seat per mile costs.

So, the future of air travel certainly seems bright; with cleaner, quieter and more spacious aircraft on the way, the Airbus approach to contemporary problems look set to revolutionise the air industry. This means good news for the environment and good news for anyone planning to travel in the near future. ■