

Getting some air

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [October 2020 digital edition](#).



The Air Astana catering unit is supplying solutions, such as this disposable meal box, based on destination

Like many airlines, [Air Astana](#) enacted measures to fight the pandemic back in February. In response to the regulations implemented by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it introduced rule changes to its tickets, allowing passengers to change the date of travel without penalty. The domestic network was reduced until May and international destinations until June and July.

The year prior was incredibly profitable for Air Astana. For 2019, it recorded an unaudited net profit of US\$30 million, up from US\$5 million in 2018. The year 2020 was meant to be another year of growth, having moved from Sheremetyevo Airport ([SVO](#)) to Domodedovo Airport ([DME](#)) in Moscow and replacing its 757 fleet with A321LRs.

But instead, the airline has spent this year making a number of flight schedule changes, implementing personal protective equipment requirements, upping cleaning and disinfecting routines and installing HEPA filters in the aircraft.

A light shone in the otherwise bleak summer when Air Astana received [Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Award](#) for the third consecutive year. "I'm deeply grateful to our crews and colleagues involved in delivering such a high level of service on board," said Peter Foster, President and Chief Executive Officer of Air Astana, in the July 27 press release.

Things have picked up since August, with announcements that the Kazakhstan flag carrier has resumed daily flights to Turkey with its 767s from Almaty and eight direct weekly flights from the

capital of Nur-Sultan to Frankfurt using A321LRs. Among others international destinations, flights to Amsterdam, Dubai, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia have resumed, with extended online check-in of 36 hours before departure instead of the usual 24.

And, the airline's buy-on-board low-cost sister airline, [FlyArystan](#), is now operating more than 40 domestic flights daily.

As for its catering operations, these swift changes have presented unforeseen challenges as onboard services restrictions vary based on destination.

"Keeping up with the constant changes can be quite challenging for the catering department," Graham Hobbs, Catering Manager at Air Astana tells *PAX International*. "And, we have obviously had to react accordingly. On some international routes we needed to supply disposable meal boxes and individual packaged beverage items, whilst on other routes, there are different or no such restrictions."

To avoid using plastics, the catering unit developed an eco-friendly card-based alternative with a local supplier. It is now used on all routes where restrictions require it, Hobbs says.

With daily COVID-19 cases decreasing in the country ([66 new cases](#) were reported on October 7, the day this was written), the future looks promising.

Or, as Hobbs says, "demand is stable."

Come October, Hobbs says the airline plans to reinstate its four weekly charter operations to Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, with new destinations planned in the very near future, pending governmental approval.

"All things considered, and although we are only operating at around 50 percent of 2019 levels, we at Air Astana are all very grateful that at this stage of the crisis, we are most probably in a better position than many other of the world's airlines," Hobbs says.