

TAP's transformation takes flight

By **Mary Jane Pittilla** on | Airline & Terminal News



This is a special feature from *PAX International's* April World Travel Catering and Onboard Services Hamburg 2020 [edition](#).



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[TAP Air Portugal](#) has come a long way since 2016, the year Portugal's flag carrier was privatized. In fact, the airline has been transformed and now boasts one of the most modern long-haul fleets in the world. Some 80 percent of its wide-body fleet is brand new, and is now composed of 17 A330neos, four A321 LRs and seven A330ceos with completely retrofitted and standardized cabin interiors.

This transformation has taken place under the watchful eye of Joel Fragata, Head of In-Flight and On-Ground Product at TAP since 2017, who is responsible for cabin interiors and catering product definition. He joined the company in 2007 and, in an interview with *PAX International*, recalls the profound changes that have taken place with the fleet.

"Since 2016, after privatization, we started retrofitting the whole fleet of 42 A320s. Then we ordered new A320neos and A321neos, making our long-haul fleet one of the youngest in the world," he says. "The rest of the fleet has been 100 percent retrofitted."

One major milestone was the launch last year of the A321 LR, enabling the company to offer narrowbody transatlantic routes to the US and northeast Brazil, one of the key cornerstones of the

growth strategy. TAP's hub in Lisbon is ideally situated geographically to serve as a transit point for passengers flying between the Americas and Europe. "These small planes offer the same comfort as the A330," says Fragata, noting that they are more cost-efficient.

Since privatization, prioritizing passenger comfort has moved up the agenda. The fleet changes were implemented as an important way to reinforce and improve passenger comfort, says Fragata.

Inside the cabin, the A320 fleet now is outfitted with [Recaro](#) seats. "In Economy Class, we chose the BL3530 seat as it offers very good comfort. We have a unique cabin configuration. You can fly Business Class, Economy or EconomyXtra. The seat pitch in EconomyXtra is 34 inches, which is a lot," Fragata says. "The comfort of our passengers is crucial. EconomyXtra also offers a dedicated luggage compartment, electrical and USB outlets for your device, reclining seats, and more legroom."

On long-haul flights, the Recaro SL3710 Economy Class seat pitch is 34 inches and a 13.3-inch screen is offered. All passengers on A330neos get a USB outlet for charging their devices.

A sense of place

After privatization, TAP worked to refresh its cabin design. The airline engaged Portuguese design agency Almadesign to redefine its identity. Almadesign came up with three mood boards, representing each cabin class interior. Business Class offers "Portuguese luxury", he says, with nautical details incorporated into the seats, in cool colors, with a premium texture; EconomyXtra has a tech mood board with a red color and a premium texture; and Economy combines the freshness of TAP's green logo with a hi-tech design. Fragata says that the Recaro seats were selected as they matched the images and inspirations depicted on the mood boards.

A sense of place is key to TAP's cabin experience, he says. "In Portugal, we say 'Portugality'. That means the food, tableware, fabric, blankets, pillows and cabin interiors are as Portuguese as possible. Our inspiration comes from the Douro river, Portuguese style, and TAP's own identity, including the colors of the logo, to create a unique and seamless experience, so you know where you are when you enter the cabin."



Joel Fragata, Head of In-Flight & On-Ground Product, TAP Air Portugal

The carrier has a “huge partnership” with renowned Michelin-starred Portuguese chefs who help design the premium meals in Business Class for long- and medium-haul flights. Henrique Sá Pessoa, Ricardo Costa, Rui Paula, Tiago Bonito and TAP’s own chef Victor Sobral are ambassadors of the national cuisine served onboard. This initiative is branded “Taste the Stars.” Menus are changed monthly, and one chef is featured per month, offering a starter, main course and dessert.

Turning to amenity kits, [skysupply](#) has been the provider for many years, but for the last collection, Fragata’s team challenged the German company to inject some “Portugality” into the kits.

“We wanted something unique and a story to tell, so we chose Castelbel from Portugal, a very premium brand that specializes in soaps, candles and fragrances,” Fragata says. The first kit was introduced last year under the Hello Portugal banner. The kit featured different cities and regions in Portugal and incorporated different fragrances, depending on the city of origin. For example, Lisbon’s fragrance was basil, reflecting the small basil pots that are sold in the street during the annual Festival of Saint Anthony in June, which are bought as small love tokens.

This year, the airline introduced the second kit in the collection with the same smell and image concept, called Hello World, featuring images of the world cities on TAP’s flight network such as Rome, New York, San Francisco and Barcelona.

Another unique feature in TAP’s onboard experience is connectivity. The company’s long-standing IFE supplier is [Panasonic](#), which developed new, customized software for the airline focused on quick and easy navigation through the wide selection of movies, music, TV and radio channels. On all flights

fleetwide, TAP offers free Wi-Fi for messaging so passengers can stay connected. Passengers who want to use the internet to download documents and perform other operations can purchase an Internet package.

Providing a high level of passenger comfort has been a thrilling experience for Fragata. When asked about how he would describe the last few years at TAP, he enthuses: "They have been the best years of my life, and I speak for my colleagues, as there is huge teamwork involved in transforming the company. The last year has been my dream job in the airline industry, and I'm very happy to see how far we have improved our passenger satisfaction scores."

Recaro tests first connected seat on TAP

Recaro and TAP Air Portugal have teamed up to test an intelligent seat as part of a pioneering connected cabin project.

Recaro has installed connected seats on a TAP Air Portugal A321 single-aisle aircraft. The Economy Class BL3530 iSeat is equipped with numerous sensors to gather data on seat performance and generic behavior during flight.

Part of a pilot project, it is the first ever Economy Class seat to be designed, certified and installed as an intelligent seat. The connected seat seeks to provide valuable insights to make air travel even safer and further enhance the passenger journey.

Equipped with sensors, the iSeat documents various actions, such as if the seat is occupied, how many times a passenger uses the tray table, raises the armrests, reclines the

seat and whether the seatbelt is fastened.

Data retrieval will take place every two months, and the collected data will be analyzed for future investigations, such as tracking passenger preferences and maintenance.

The trial began in September 2019 and was scheduled to run for six months.