

# dnata's catering gains momentum with new partnerships

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [June 2023 WTCE issue](#) on [page 40](#).



dnata's beetroot-cured Tasmanian Balik-style salmon with Meredith Dairy goat cheese, golden heirloom baby beetroot, native ruby finger lime caviar and foraged sea spray

Australia is known for many things: playful kangaroos, rough-and-tumble rugby and superstar Margot Robbie come to mind. But in the inflight services industry, there's one name that has been making a splash down under, and that's [dnata](#).

The lower-hemisphere continent and the catering division of the Dubai-based leader in airline logistics are a natural partnership, according to Robin Padgett, the company's Divisional Senior Vice President for Catering and Retail. With the opening of a kitchen at Australia's Sunshine Coast Airport in January, Padgett says that dnata has positioned itself well to cater to its carrier clients.



Robin Padgett, dnata's Divisional Senior Vice President for Catering and Retail

"dnata Catering plays a key role in keeping the Australian aviation industry moving," explains Padgett, adding that the company is committed to supporting its growth across international, domestic, and regional networks.

"dnata Catering has lofty goals for not only its businesses but also for the Sunshine Coast as a key travel destination and hub. As the region's only inflight caterer, and the preferred caterer for many of the country's and world's leading airlines, we are excited to be able to contribute to the growth of the region."

The launch of this new kitchen coincides with another big announcement for dnata: a multi-year contract with Australia's newest airline: Bonza, through which the company will support the carrier's operations and services. As Brisbane is preparing to host the Olympics less than a decade away in 2032, the move is perfectly timed.

The menu dnata has created for its newest customer stays true to the homegrown theme that the low-cost airline has crafted. In this vein, dnata has delivered a 100-percent Australian selection of meals and beverages, sourced from across the continent through its robust supplier network.

Opening the new facility in the Sunshine Coast airport precinct marks the company's fifteenth facility across 10 cities worldwide.

## **Snapfresh**

dnata's ready-made meal solution, Snapfresh, is also an area of growth for the company. The Snapfresh line came into dnata's fold during its acquisition of Qantas' catering business in 2018. This "viable alternative to the traditional cook-chill meal sector," as Padgett describes it, serves over 20

million meals each year on airlines and in healthcare, long-term care, retail and more. But it's more than a ready-made meal solution: it has made strides in improving the way food is delivered to dnata's clients, and in turn to their customers.



Snapfresh serves over 20 million meals each year on airlines and in healthcare, long-term care, retail and more

“Snapfresh has focused on transforming the business through process improvement and investments in new technology and equipment,” says Padgett. “It is a full-service catering solutions partner setting the standard in menu design, meal production, packaging selection and logistics management.”

Award-winning international chefs bring this program to life, along with in-house microbiology and food safety experts, with the goal of meeting — and exceeding — the expectations of dnata's customers. The technology behind the line allows for high-quality products.

“We utilize state-of-the-art spiral-freeze and vacuum-sealing technology to guarantee product taste, consistency, nutritional integrity, and most importantly, safety,” notes Padgett. “Due to this technology, our products are far superior to those that are frozen or sealed using other types of technology, which take significantly longer to ‘slow freeze’, creating large ice crystals among the ingredients and damaging the structure of the meal.”

This is just one example of how dnata works to provide a bespoke catering experience to its airline customers.

## Mighty menus

“Menu changes are based on the individual needs of each (airline) client,” says Padgett. “We regularly make changes with airline customers on a monthly basis, although for our short-haul partners, these can take place weekly. We also implement changes quarterly based on the seasons. For example, many customers like us to create a special festive-themed menu in December or an Easter offering in April.”

In 2023, Padgett says that travellers can expect to see an array of menus from its kitchens that focus on locally grown, sustainable produce. “There is great produce in every local destination. Our task is making sure that we source that produce, and its route to market is short and sustainable,” he says.

Other trends that are on the rise are healthy options and vegan and vegetarian menus, which dnata’s airline customers have been demanding in recent months. “They need to be as good or better than meat-based alternatives,” notes Padgett.

Looking ahead, Padgett sees promise in the onboard retail side of the business, noting that it will be a big part of air travel’s future.

“We have seen it for many years, albeit generally with low-cost airlines promoting it for the last 20 years,” he reflects. “But now we’re seeing legacy carriers, and perhaps long-haul carriers, become more excited for this area. We have a great track record in onboard retail, and have significant experience across our global network, in countries such as Australia, the UK and Czech Republic, where we deliver amazing customer service for our airline partners through our retail programs.”