

# gategroup introduces Conscious Kitchen, inspiring new era for special meals

This is a special feature from the [March 2026 Special Meals/Pre-WTCE issue](#) of *PAX International*, on [page 26](#).



Marius Rytz, Project Manager, Culinary Excellence, gategroup

Across the world, travelers are redefining what it means to eat well. Passengers want meals that nourish the body, respect the planet and reflect real culinary intent. For airline dining, that expectation shows up most clearly in special meals, where good enough has never been good enough. Marius Rytz, Project Manager, Culinary Excellence, [gategroup](#), tells *PAX International* this shift is not simply observed, but is embraced as a catalyst for transformation.

gategroup is introducing Conscious Kitchen, a cross-functional culinary initiative, designed to help shape a future where inflight dining feels more meaningful, more responsible and more inspiring.

"It brings fresh momentum to the space where passenger needs, dietary requirements and modern wellness values meet, without losing sight of what matters most: food that still tastes genuinely good in the air," says Rytz.

## **A smarter standard for special meals**

Special meals are often treated as a constraint, something to "solve" with substitutions and compromises, explains Rytz. Conscious Kitchen reframes that mindset. The ambition is to make special meals feel considered, contemporary and satisfying, designed from the start rather than adapted at the end.

“That means taking a more holistic view of what passengers are asking for today: plant-forward choices that feel complete, gluten-aware options that do not feel like an afterthought, lighter menus that still deliver comfort, and meals that align with cultural, religious and lifestyle preferences,” says Rytz.

The goal is not to create a long list of “free-from” labels, but to deliver meals with clarity, balance and confidence.

### **Wellness, built into the brief**

Health and wellness are no longer peripheral; they shape how many people choose to live and travel. Conscious Kitchen amplifies this shift by embedding nutritional thinking into menu development, treating balance as part of the creative brief, not a final check.

In practice, that translates into meals that aim to sustain energy, support comfort and feel lighter without feeling less.

“It is a simple idea with a high bar: every passenger, regardless of dietary need, deserves a meal that feels intentional and uplifting,” says Rytz.

### **From philosophy to operating rhythm**

Established in 2025, gategroup’s Conscious Kitchen is formed by a working group that brings together leaders across Global and Regional Culinary teams, ESG, Nutrition, Procurement and Operations. Meeting monthly, the group reviews current practices, identifies opportunities for improvement and evaluates new ideas with a clear goal, to make responsible culinary excellence a standard across gategroup’s worldwide network.

Importantly, the focus goes beyond ingredients. It extends to how kitchens operate and how choices scale, encouraging lower-impact cooking methods, smarter workflows and a more disciplined approach to reducing waste.

“When sustainability is woven into everyday decisions, it becomes more than a target, it becomes long-term value for passengers, airline customers and the wider ecosystem that supports inflight dining,” Yulia Bolotina, Global Head ESG at gategroup explains.



Conscious Kitchen reimagines special meals as thoughtfully designed, contemporary inflight dining experiences—crafted from the start, not adapted as an afterthought

### **Plant-forward, not product-forward**

Global food culture continues to move toward whole, recognizable ingredients and away from overly engineered alternatives. Passengers are increasingly drawn to plant-forward dishes built on natural, fiber-rich components, while still appreciating balanced portions and familiar proteins.

Across regions, gategroup chefs respond by blending local flavor identity with globally relevant creativity, so menus feel both comforting and current. Rytz says the result is a more modern “special meal” experience, one that can feel fresh and vibrant on the tray, not clinical or constrained.

### **Collaboration as a catalyst**

Innovation thrives where perspectives meet, and gategroup’s culinary studios serve as living spaces for that exchange. Through collaboration with chefs and specialists across hospitality, education, healthcare and food tech, alongside partnerships with culinary institutions, gategroup strengthens its leadership in modern inflight dining and helps cultivate the next generation of culinary talent.

“This spirit of collaboration matters for special meals because the best solutions tend to be interdisciplinary. Great special meals are rarely born from a single function,” says Rytz, adding that “they come from aligned thinking across nutrition, procurement, culinary craft and operational reality.”

gategroup’s Conscious Kitchen is more than a program. It is a mindset, a promise and a path forward. By uniting wellness, craftsmanship, and responsible practice, gategroup is shaping a future where special meals carry intention, nourish passengers, respect the world and elevate the travel experience with every bite.