

Emirates works to improve travel experiences for neurodivergent passengers



Emirates superfan Humza welcomed onboard (Photo courtesy of Emirates)

[Emirates](#) and [Dubai International Airport \(DXB\)](#) are working alongside local schools, autism groups and key stakeholders to improve the travel experience for neurodivergent passengers. According to the October 17 press release, the airline and airport are facilitating rehearsal flying experiences where children can practice travelling through the airport and sitting onboard the aircraft.

Together, Emirates and the Dubai International Airport are collaborating with families to support superfans like Humza, age 11, on his first flight with Emirates.

Humza Dabab flew from Melbourne to Dubai with his mother and two siblings and received a VIP experience from Emirates, which is his favorite airline. Although it was his first time onboard, Humza's parents shared he was already familiar with the airline, the aircraft, the inflight entertainment *ice*, the cabin crew uniform and the safety video, through his own research.

According to the press release, Humza bought his own safety belt so that he could act out the safety demonstration. He had memorized all the words to the presentation and even has a collection of Emirates aircraft models at home for practicing take-off and landing.

Humza's mother Lamees said, "The plane is Humza's happy place. The destination is not even the most exciting part of the journey, I can wholeheartedly say it is the plane ride itself. He is so excited to be finally travelling with Emirates."

Humza is autistic and being on time is a crucial part of his needs. Running late or missing a flight is cause for anxiety that needs to be alleviated for him, said Emirates. Through the rehearsal travel programming with Emirates and Dubai International Airport, employees are being trained for specific requests and needs like these that help them better assist neurodivergent passengers. Neurodivergent passengers are called People of Determination in the UAE.

Students from the Mohammed bin Rashid Center for Special Education also received a rehearsal travel experience from Emirates and Dubai International Airport. The rehearsal gives the passengers a chance to become familiar with the airport environment, the process and the people in the airport before boarding.

The students were accompanied by family members and therapists as they travelled through the airport to the aircraft to simulate a complete travel experience. Everything from security screening to presenting a boarding pass is practiced as part of the simulation to help students and their families gain confidence ahead of a real flight.

Besides supporting People of Determination and their families, the Emirates press release stated that the process also enables the airline and Dubai International Airport to identify areas where they can improve services for passengers with additional needs.

Supports in place at Dubai Airports and on Emirates aircraft

Emirates trains its employees to support neurodivergent passengers in various ways, with more than 29,000 cabin crew and ground staff globally completing the “Introduction to Autism and Hidden Disabilities” online course.

Before travel, Emirates provides passengers with as much information as possible to help them plan their day in transit accordingly. There is free seat selection and Bulkhead Seating available for autistic passengers and their companions on Emirates flights.

According to the press release, passengers can book with a DPNA code which indicates a Special Service Request (SSR) for passengers with an intellectual or development disability. The code can be applied at booking and ensures a passenger receives the necessary support from a trained staff member during their journey.

As part of their efforts to improve travel experiences for neurodivergent passengers, Emirates has worked with Dubai International Airport to create an Autism Friendly Guide to the airport with details and images of what to expect while travelling.

Passengers who need a special meal on board due to sensory sensitivity can order their food at least 24 hours in advance of the flight on the Emirates app or online. They can also pre plan what to watch onboard with the Emirates app, *ice*, for inflight entertainment.

People of Determination receive two hours of complimentary parking at all terminals in Dubai International Airport.

Neurodivergent passengers can make themselves recognizable to support staff with the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard. Emirates and Dubai International Airport staff sporting Sunflower pins are specially trained to help travellers with hidden disabilities during their journey. According to Emirates, the sunflower lanyard can be collected from the information desk in Departures, Terminal 3 and from dedicated collection points in Terminals 1 and 2.

Dubai International Airport has an Autism Friendly Route

The airport has an Autism Friendly Route for People of Determination to use while transiting through. This route includes priority lanes for check-in, passport control, security and boarding. Wearing the Sunflower lanyard enables access to the route.

If passengers have declared their hidden disabilities, they can access priority boarding or board last, depending on their preference and needs.

Inflight experience for People of Determination

Besides the travel rehearsals that Emirates facilitates, they have special accommodations for passengers and fans like Humza inflight. Families with children are seated together and passengers with aural sensory sitting in First Class and Business Class can get noise cancelling headphones.

Passengers with light sensitivity can inform the cabin crew and an Emirates staff member will turn off the passenger's individual light or close the window blind during take-off.

Entertainment is also available onboard for young children. Emirates has a "Fly with Me" activity pack featuring non-toxic colouring pencils, featuring kid-friendly world maps, puzzles, drawing tutorials, colouring pages and educational activities about Dubai and the environment.

These services are available for passengers who inform Emirates staff of their neurodivergent status and specific needs.