

Ethiopian Airlines elevates passenger experience with strategic investments



Aijaz Khan (left), Publisher of *PAX International* and Samson Arega, Group Vice President Customer Experience at Ethiopian Airlines

In a conversation with Samson Arega, Group Vice President Customer Experience at [Ethiopian Airlines](#), during IFSA Global EXPO in Long Beach, *PAX* learned how the airline is uniting cost efficiency, innovation and cultural authenticity to elevate inflight hospitality, entertainment and sustainability across its worldwide network.

“At Ethiopian Airlines, we see cost efficiency and passenger experience not as competing priorities, but as mutually reinforcing,” says Arega. “Our strategy is to optimize resources while ensuring every touchpoint elevates the journey.”

The airline’s scale provides a distinct advantage. Ethiopian Airlines operates one of the largest inflight catering facilities in Africa, producing up to 100,000 meals daily. “This allows us to tightly manage costs while still introducing upgrades that passengers can see and feel,” Arega explains.

By leveraging its in-house operations, Ethiopian Airlines is able to control resources while delivering culinary variety and cultural authenticity. Recent initiatives include collaborations with renowned chefs from China, Lebanon, India, Africa and Europe; seasonal and festive menus tied to occasions such as Ramadan and Christmas; and the addition of a national dish service in Economy to honor

Ethiopian heritage. The airline has also introduced fruit yogurt on select routes, digital portion-control scales to reduce waste, and passenger meal tastings to refine menus before rollout.

Alongside catering, inflight entertainment is receiving significant investment. Arega highlights that the airline has grown African movie selections from 12 to 57, Hollywood titles from 156 to 325 and TV shows from 60 to 140. Music albums have expanded from 140 to 533, supported by more than 7,000 digital reading titles.

“Our ShebaSkyConnect Wi-Fi keeps travelers connected and productive throughout their journey,” he adds.

Embedding sustainability in service design

“Sustainability is built into our service design and procurement and is one of the five key pillars of Ethiopian Airlines’ growth strategy,” Arega states. The airline operates under an ISO 14001 environmental management system with clear targets for waste minimization, reuse, recycling and recovery.

In catering, plastic snack bags have been replaced with paper on domestic flights, portion-controlled production has been implemented and a Meal Wastage Management System is in development with a technology partner. Local sourcing, including tumblers and flavored yogurt, reduces carbon miles while creating measurable cost savings that are reinvested in the passenger experience.

“At the same time, our sustainable aviation fuel partnerships strengthen our decarbonization roadmap, ensuring that Ethiopian Airlines continues to grow responsibly and set a benchmark for Africa’s aviation sector,” Arega says.

Harnessing technology for personalization

Technology is playing a growing role in optimizing inflight operations.

“We are harnessing AI and data analytics to better understand passenger preferences, anticipate needs and personalize the onboard experience,” Arega tells *PAX International*.

Automation supports the crew through smart inventory tracking, digital service requests and AI-assisted passenger feedback analysis. Recent innovations include a Passenger Feedback Analysis tool, Salesforce-based complaint handling and full automation of catering processes from planning to dispatch. Pre-order meal services are already available on Middle East routes, with expansion planned across other regions.

“These systems help us predict demand, tailor loading, reduce waste and close the loop on service recovery faster,” Arega explains.

Meeting evolving passenger expectations

“Our passengers today are more diverse and more discerning. They seek not only efficiency and comfort but also experiences that reflect their lifestyle, well-being, and cultural values,” Arega says.

Ethiopian Airlines has expanded wellness-focused options, including nutritious menus, hydration choices and redesigned rest kits. Slippers are now available on flights longer than four hours, with pajamas and slippers for flights over eight hours. Younger travelers benefit from new kids’ amenity kits, while premium passengers enjoy refreshed amenity kits, upgraded seating and elevated dining concepts.

Entertainment enhancements include expanded accessibility features, 51 African music albums and thousands of digital reading titles.

“Together, these initiatives create a cabin environment that is more personal, healthy and globally welcoming,” Arega notes.

Partnerships and recognition

Arega emphasizes that collaboration is central to Ethiopian Airlines’ future strategy. Partnerships with [Anuvu](#) have broadened inflight content, while [Panasonic Avionics’](#) Astrova system will debut on the upcoming Boeing 777X fleet. Connectivity advances include Airbus Airspace Link HBCplus with GX Aviation for high-bandwidth inflight broadband on the new A350-1000s.

“These investments are not just strategic, they are resonating with passengers and industry experts alike,” Arega says.

Ethiopian Airlines has received accolades including the 2025 PAX Readership Award for Outstanding Food Service by a Carrier; Best Entertainment in Africa and Best Wi-Fi in Africa at the APEX Passenger Choice Awards; and Skytrax named the carrier Best Airline in Africa for the eighth consecutive year in 2025.

“These honors validate that disciplined investment and smart execution are delivering experiences that inspire loyalty and position Ethiopian Airlines as both the standard-bearer for Africa and a competitive force globally.”