

Two years on: SriLankan Airlines on enhancing passenger experience

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SriLankan Airlines uses A330-300s for its long-haul flights

In April of 2018, [SriLankan Airlines](#) launched a bold plan to turn its fortunes around and control costs. Now, two years later, the airline has a list of achievements, ratings and signs that some of those plans have taken root.

Many of the moves were internal changes that only employees could see. Others, the airline says, have improved passenger experience both in the aircraft and in the process of booking tickets and moving within its route structure.

In the calendar year 2019, SriLankan Airlines carried 5.5 million passengers at an overall load factor of 82 percent. The airline has shifted its capacity to money-producing routes, such as Doha, Delhi and Dhaka in Bangladesh. This year will see the launch of two new codeshare agreements which will open up its routes to six additional cities and expanding codeshare agreements with existing partners that will add 21 destinations.

A two-year initiative has helped make the expansion possible.

“Due to collective efforts of the management under the guidance of the board of directors the airline

has achieved some significant milestones in terms of reducing costs, revenue generation and operational performance improvements,” Chief Executive Officer Vipula Gunatilleka tells *PAX International*.

One example is trimming losses. For 10 months ending January 31, SriLankan Airlines cut its EBITDA losses to US\$10 million, much less than the US\$57 million in EBITDA losses for the same period the previous year. Part of the reason for the improved performance is the reduction in unit cost per available seat kilometer (ASK).

Part of the revenue that contributed to the reduction in losses was increased activity on the airline’s direct sales channel which saw a 14 percent increase, and savings in distribution costs. SriLankan Airlines has a goal to increase its online revenue share to 30 percent in the next three years. It is also investing heavily in strengthening the customer experience in the online booking process. It has also expanded its online payment options adding Alipay, WeChat, PayPal, Paytm, Apple Pay and PoLi.

The airline's loyalty program, FlysmiLes, currently has a base of 600,000 members with approximately 1,500 reaching the Platinum level. The airline has made it easier for members to book redemption tickets on the website and mobile app.

While the savings and increased revenue are good news for the employees and the board of directors, the airline’s cabin service product improvements were good enough to increase the cabin load factor for its Business Class by six percent compared to the previous year.

Spirit in the cabin



SriLankan Catering provides meal service to the airline out of Colombo

The A330-300s that make up the SriLankan Airlines long-haul fleet seat 28 passengers in Business

Class in a herringbone look designed for privacy and aisle access. The airline picked [Safran](#)'s Cirrus product that gives all the passengers in Business Class a lie-flat seat.

It has taken on six new aircraft in its narrow-body fleet: two A320neos and four A321neos. The aircraft are equipped with ergonomically designed leather seating by [Geven](#) in both Business and Economy Class cabins.

For inflight entertainment SriLankan Airlines uses three suppliers: [Thales](#), [Panasonic](#) and the Safran [Rave](#) system. The airline's long-haul fleet was recently upgraded to Thales AVANT with a customized Graphical User Interface (GUI). The signature GUI for the system offers passengers a more user-friendly experience.

Another entertainment milestone was recently reached. SriLankan Airlines became the first airlines in southern Asia to introduce Virtual Reality (VR) entertainment through its partnership with French company [Skylights](#). The VR headsets are available in the airline's Serendib Business Class lounge in Colombo. It's not the only tech enhancement at the lounge. SriLankan Airlines also offers passengers access to wearable technology in partnership with a company called [Twinery](#). It stimulates blood flow and reduces blood pooling in the feet, for use before a long-haul flight. Business Class passengers departing from Colombo have access to a fast track check-in line called the Silk Route. To streamline the experience for Economy Class the airline is heavily promoting its kiosk check in facility at BIA.

Food service has also been improved by bringing aboard specially curated meals by well-known chefs. Now, passengers in Business Class can also access the airline's Sky Cuisine program allowing them to pre-order from a menu of 26 meals complimentary. For a cost, a similar menu is also available for Economy Class.

SriLankan Airlines has its own caterer out of Colombo. [SriLankan Catering](#) produces an average of 22,000 meals per day out of the airport.

Other changes and improvements are in the offing, says Gunatilleka. "With the aim of providing a more premium experience, our amenities onboard will be replaced to feature sophisticated amenity kits with a local touch and other essentials such as duvets and pajamas insuring comfort on our premium routes."

These efforts over two years has earned SriLankan Airlines some accolades for punctuality and a 4-star rating for the third consecutive year. It also claimed a marketing award from the [Airline Passenger Experience Association](#) (APEX).

Like other carriers, SriLankan Airlines is turning its attention to sustainability and environmental initiatives.

"Elimination of single-use plastic on board all our flights is a passionately driven project that aims to achieve a sustainable onboard experience commencing from the year 2020," says Gunatilleka. "This exercise will see the elimination of most single-use plastic products and packaging on board and change to sustainable planet-friendly options."