

Callin

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2018 IS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOEING 747, SO TO CELEBRATE, LET'S RECALL A JOURNEY IN WHAT WOULD STILL BE A TOP PASSENGER EXPERIENCE: THE PAN AM B747-100 UPPER DECK. THIS WAS THE FIRST REAL MILE-HIGH CLUB

Words by Jennifer Coutts Clay



THE PAN AM UPPER DECK WAS PERFECT FOR ANYTHING FROM DINING TO AN INFORMAL BUSINESS MEETING. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE PAN AM MUSEUM FOUNDATION



“Philippine Airlines even installed dorm-style bunk beds”

When Pan Am launched the Boeing 747-100 in January 1970, publicity announcements trumpeted, “The circular stairway leading to the cocktail lounge in the skies.”

Juan Trippe, the airline’s chief executive, had decreed that the upper-deck ‘hump’, located behind the cockpit, should be used by passengers (and not for crew-rest facilities, as many employees had hoped). Walter Dorwin Teague Associates furnished the lounge to accommodate 16 visitors: two tables, each with four swivel chairs and a sofa-couch against the back wall with eight seat positions.

During the first oil crisis in the early 1970s, it was difficult to sell all the seats on a wide-body aircraft, so airlines such as Braniff and Lufthansa emulated Pan Am’s onboard lounge initiative, and Philippine Airlines even installed dorm-style bunk beds.

In 1972, Pan Am tested a dining concept for 12 passengers in the B zone of a B747-100. Following positive assessments, the airline took the decision to turn all its upper-deck lounges into restaurant-style dining rooms. The ‘dining in the sky’ experience was designed by the

ABOVE: AN IDEAL SPACE FOR PASSENGERS TO MEET ONE ANOTHER, IN COMFORT AND IN COLOR. IMAGE: BRANIFF / GEORGE DESIGN STUDIO

BELOW: AN EXAMPLE OF THE FINISHED PRODUCT LOOKING EVEN BETTER THAN THE CONCEPT SKETCH. IMAGES: PAN AM MUSEUM FOUNDATION

famous Maxim’s de Paris restaurant, and first class passengers were asked to make advance reservations.

Flight service handbooks provided details and pictures of Pan Am’s high-quality hospitality procedures, along with the correct forms of address for important personages and explanations of the rank and branch of armed-forces service personnel in uniform.

Joan M Benham, formerly system director for frequent traveler marketing at Pan Am, describes the first class dining experience: “The upper-deck dinner

mirrored the service in the main cabin, but it was more leisurely. The upper deck was decorated in warm colors and the tables were set with fine china and cutlery, crystal stemware, beautiful linens and flower arrangements. Name cards identified





LEFT: THE PRIME RIB ROAST WAS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE PRESIDENT SPECIAL DINNER

where each passenger would sit, streamlining the seating process.”

The President Special dinner was a lengthy multicourse event, accompanied by the finest champagnes, wines and spirits. A typical menu started with assorted hors d'oeuvres and passengers were invited to select from a range of canapés, consommé, turtle or oxtail soup, and Caspian caviar with gourmet garnishes. The fish course was followed by a sorbet.

For their main course, passengers were offered various meat dishes, including grilled lamb cutlets, veal marsala, duckling, pheasant, or the *pièce de résistance* – the prime rib roast. In accordance with Maxim's superlative traditions, the rib roast was partially pre-cooked in the airport's flight-catering kitchen, then chilled for further processing on board. Flight attendants received professional training in how to handle the cooking so that the *cuisson* ('doneness') of the meat was medium-rare in the center and relatively well-done at the extremities. When ready, the roast was presented on a carving board surrounded by parsley decoration and accompanying vegetables in heavy silver-plate salvers. With French-style sauces and condiments, the display was placed on a food cart and wheeled alongside individual passengers. Flight

BELOW: DINERS COULD RELAX AFTER THEIR MEAL WITH A DIGESTIF. IMAGES: PAN AM MUSEUM FOUNDATION

attendants then carved the roast to suit personal preferences: medium, well done or slightly pink, thick or thin slices, etc.

In the European tradition, the salad course was offered after the hot dish, followed by a food cart with cheese, fruit and dessert. Finally, another food cart arrived with coffee, digestif liqueurs, chocolate mints and branded cigarettes in packets of five (until no-smoking regulations were enforced). After dinner the tables were folded and, if they wished, passengers could carry on lounging in the upper deck.

The circular stairway, located at the back of the A zone on the B747-100 fleet, conveyed an aura of mystery, and



“The circular stairway conveyed an aura of mystery”

“Pan Am’s upper-deck dining was one of the most talked-about events in air travel”

press reports hinted vaguely at glamorous ‘goings-on’ in the secluded area above the main cabin. In later B747 variants, the stairway design was modified and relocated, but the step-edges always required close maintenance attention. Before, during and after flight operations, all traffic to the upper deck has to move through the stairwell. Flight attendants groaned when they had to haul catering equipment up and down the steps, and passengers sometimes dragged carry-on bags that had vicious metal corners. The outcome? Coverings on step-edges got beaten up at a great rate, and fraying carpet is extremely dangerous.

The solution? Non-slip tread surfaces and durable polyurethane ‘bullnosing’ incorporating reduced-edge radii to replace carpeted step-nosing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Coutts Clay has worked on the refurbishment and upgrade of Boeing 747 fleets, across all classes of service: at British Airways when she was controller of corporate identity; at Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) when she was general manager of product design and development; and when she was consultant to South African Airways.

Jennifer is the author of the e-book *Jetliner Cabins: Evolution & innovation*, available on Amazon, Apple iTunes and Google Play (more information at www.jetlinercabins.com).



ABOVE: THE UPPER DECK OFFERED SEVERAL SEATING OPTIONS TO SUIT VARIOUS PASSENGER PREFERENCES

BELOW: THE WINDOW SURROUNDS HAD A BEAUTIFUL ARCHITECTURAL STYLE. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE PAN AM MUSEUM FOUNDATION

COME FLY WITH ME

Before the advent of seatback entertainment systems and wi-fi enablement, Pan Am’s upper-deck dining was one of the most talked-about events in air travel.

“I have very fond memories of how social that upstairs area was – something so lacking in today’s era of isolated private suites and coffin-like pods,” said Joyce Stogo, a travel consultant at ProTravel, a corporate and luxury travel agency based in New York, at a recent business meeting. “The upper deck was very popular and you could mingle with other passengers in a club-like atmosphere, making it the first mile-high clubroom in just a fun, convivial way. That definitely helped pass the time on long flights. I used to enjoy meeting people on flights – something I greatly miss today!” ✕

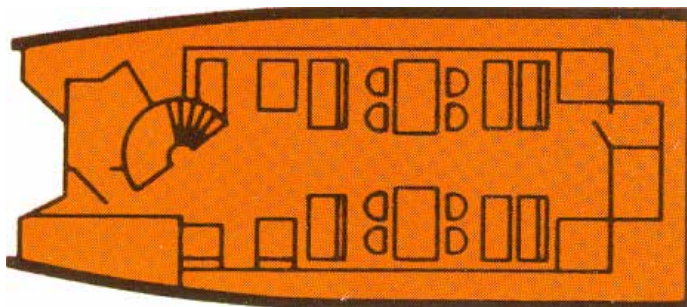


Boeing 747 Upper Deck

Courtesy Braniff/George Design Studio



Courtesy Pan Am Museum Foundation



Boeing 747 Upper Deck

Courtesy Pan Am Museum Foundation





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