

Flying HIGH

Size counts in the aviation industry, but so does efficiency and environmental concerns – and on all fronts the gigantic Airbus A380 comes up trumps, writes **Alisha Haridasani**

Today, the idea of the Airbus A380 – the superjumbo, the Big Bird, the Giant of the Skies – is commonplace. But before it was launched in 2007, a large-scale double-decker aircraft was to most people little more than an improbable concept. If you think about it, such a plane is a phenomenal notion to grasp: an aircraft almost twice as long as a blue whale and heavier than 100 elephants, with the capacity to seat up to 853 passengers, making the Boeing B747 – the previous biggest aircraft – look like Thumbelina. And that's just the size factor; also of great note is the incredible fuel

efficiency – 20 per cent less fuel burn per seat than the B747 – and the customisable interiors that offer carriers a world of options, from bars to showers as well as wider seats. The idea of this behemoth aircraft first came about in the early 1990s. "We knew we had a potential in the market place for a successor to the B747," explained Richard Carcaillet, Airbus's director of marketing for the A380, who has been involved in the project since its inception. "Our forecasts showed us that air traffic would grow by 4 to 5 per cent every year despite the occasional hiccups in the world economy or geopolitics. So, on high volume routes, there was no way an airline

could keep growing and meeting demand without a bigger aircraft." In fact, the product was so obviously needed that at some point between concept development and making the aircraft a reality, Airbus and its biggest competitor, Boeing, actually pondered working together on this superjumbo. However, with Boeing having the upper hand at the time, it became evident that a collaboration would not be to Airbus's advantage. "The interests of the series of discussions were very much in Boeing's favour because they could continue selling 747s while keeping us at discussion stage," said Carcaillet.

In 1996, Airbus created its own Large Aircraft Division to focus on pushing the idea beyond the drawing board. The group worked closely with 20 of the top airlines in the world to understand the industry's needs. "They didn't want an aircraft that is better just because it is bigger," said Carcaillet. "They wanted cost reduction, fuel efficiency and a smaller environmental footprint by notably reducing the noise of the aircraft." After four years, production began when the Airbus board decided that there were a sufficient number of pre-emptive orders – 60 to be precise – to really spend the big bucks and build the airplane. "That's when we launched detailed design efforts in parallel to setting up new assembly facilities that had to be designed for the aircraft, given its size."

Manufacturing is spread across different plants in various countries, based on the aircraft section. Wings, for example, are made in the UK. A total of six section-specific facilities were built to handle the manufacturing, including the final assembly line in Toulouse, France and the painting facility in Hamburg, Germany. In the latter two facilities alone, a total of nearly 2,000 employees work on putting the aircraft together, installing the cabin and painting the livery. In October 2007, Singapore Airlines flew the first A380 and since then the plane has been a great success. Within just four years,

a combined total of 57 A380s are in operation by seven carriers – Singapore Airlines, Qantas, Emirates, Lufthansa, Air France, Korean Air and, most recently, China Southern. Each carrier has its own unique setup and flies to various major hubs, including London, Hong Kong, Frankfurt and Sydney (see pages 70 and 71 for more details). Over the next few years, more carriers will take delivery of the A380, including Malaysia Airlines (MAS), Thai Airways, British Airways, Air Austral, Virgin Atlantic and Qatar Airways, all of which will also offer their own unique features. The stakes were high when Airbus launched this project, but it is now evident that they have yielded a runaway success. In the near future, with more airlines set to deploy A380s across their network, the plane

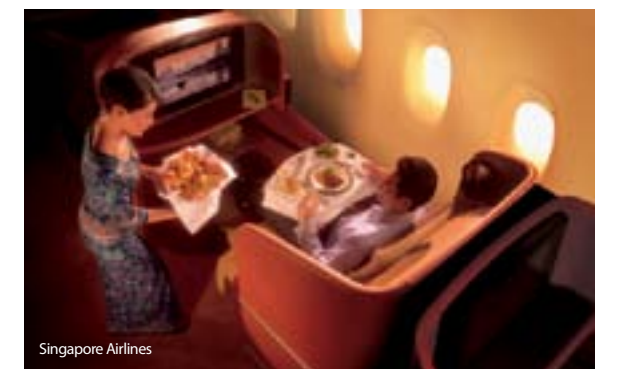
may become more common but by no means any less fantastic. The B747 has been an icon in aviation development for many decades, but for some time to come, it seems, the A380 will be the king of the sky. To see what our readers think of the plane and to join the lively discussion on the A380, scan this QR Code. ■

THE TECHNICAL SIDE

GREATER COMFORT is achieved with more space and fresher cabin air. The main deck cabin is 20 inches wider than the B747 and, in turn, all seats are up to 1.5 inches wider. The aircraft's air conditioning and ventilation system changes the air every three minutes for better circulation. **GREATER FUEL EFFICIENCY** is achieved by using double the proportion of light weight composite material compared to previous aircraft such as the A340. This, in combination with new aerodynamics and engine designs, makes the aircraft 15 metric tonnes lighter than it would be if made completely of metal. **NOISE REDUCTION** The A380 makes half the noise of the B747 during take off because the engines are larger in diameter, enabling more cold air to pass through them.



Emirates



Singapore Airlines



An A380 being built for MAS

SINGAPORE AIRLINES A380 ROUTES
 Singapore ↔ Sydney / London / Tokyo / Hong Kong / Melbourne / Paris / Zurich / Frankfurt (January 2012)
 Frankfurt ↔ New York (January 2012)
 Tokyo ↔ Los Angeles

QANTAS A380 ROUTES
 Sydney ↔ Los Angeles / Singapore / London
 Melbourne ↔ Los Angeles / Singapore / London
 Singapore ↔ London

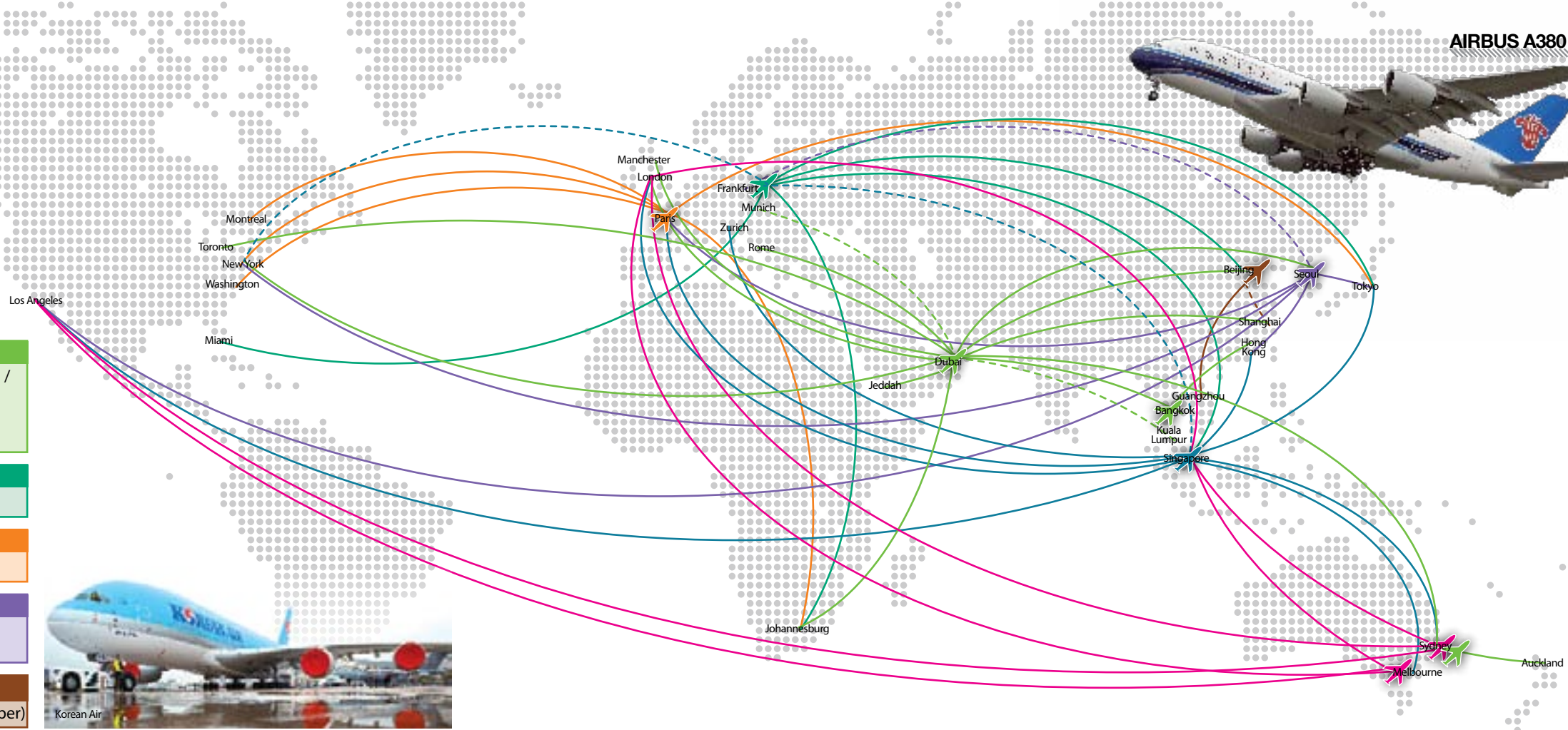
EMIRATES A380 ROUTES
 Dubai ↔ London / Sydney / Bangkok / Toronto / Paris / Seoul / Jeddah / Beijing / Manchester / New York / Shanghai / Johannesburg / Kuala Lumpur (January 2012) / Rome / Munich (November 2011)
 Sydney ↔ Auckland Bangkok ↔ Hong Kong

LUFTHANSA A380 ROUTES
 Frankfurt ↔ Singapore / Miami / Johannesburg / Beijing / Tokyo

AIR FRANCE A380 ROUTES
 Paris ↔ Washington / Montreal / New York / Johannesburg / Tokyo

KOREAN AIR A380 ROUTES
 Seoul ↔ Hong Kong / New York / Paris / Los Angeles / Tokyo / Frankfurt (December 2011)

CHINA SOUTHERN A380 ROUTES
 Beijing ↔ Guangzhou (October 18 - 27) / Shanghai (temporary as of October)



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Sheraton.com/shenzhen or 86 755 8363 8888

OPERATORS	TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS		CLASSES	UNIQUE FEATURE	DATE OF FIRST DELIVERY	NO. OF A380S IN OPERATION	NO. OF A380S ON ORDER
	Configuration1	Configuration2					
Singapore Airlines	471 with mixed upper deck	409 with all-business class upper deck	First, Business and Economy	Suites (first class) consist of a separate bed and leather armchair	Oct-07	14	5
Qantas	450 with first class cabin	Details have not been released but will not have First class	First, Business, Premium Economy and Economy	Business lounge at the front of the upper deck	Sep-08	10	10
Emirates	517 without crew rest area	489 with crew rest area	First, Business and Economy	Showers in the first class cabin	Jul-08	16	74
Lufthansa	526	N/A	First, Business and Economy	Most business class seats(98,onupperdeck)	May-10	8	7
Air France	538 with three classes	507 with four classes (including premium economy)	First, Business, Premium Economy and Economy in four-class configuration	Digital photo gallery and a three-class upper deck (Configuration 2 only)	May-10	6	6
Korean Air	407	N/A	First, Business and Economy	Duty Free showcase on main deck and all-business class upper deck	May-11	4	6
China Southern	506	N/A	First, Business and Economy	Information unavailable at time of press	Oct-11	1	4

Tried and tested

SEOUL – HONG KONG

Korean Air Business



From left: Prestige Class and one of two onboard lounges

REPORT

BACKGROUND Korean Air – northeast Asia's first operator of the Airbus A380-800 – began using the aircraft commercially on June 17 on flights between Seoul Incheon and Tokyo Narita, and Hong Kong. Business Traveller joined the debut Seoul Incheon-Hong Kong flight. Besides Tokyo and Hong Kong, A380s are now being used on three other routes: New York, Los Angeles and Paris.

CHECK-IN Flight KE607 was scheduled for departure at 2000. I asked for a window seat and was assigned 19H in business class (Prestige Class).

I only had carry-on luggage; the security scan was swift, and so was immigration clearance. A large KAL Lounge sign to the left after the immigration counters indicated our press group's destination, up a nearby escalator.

THE LOUNGE Both first class and business class lounges share this floor but occupy two different sections, accessed by walkways. The space reserved for Korean Air's top-tier customers enjoys a panoramic view of the runway, seeming to go on forever.

It features a variety of seating sections, and alongside the floor-to-ceiling windows runs a work counter equipped with phones and

PLANE TYPE Airbus A380-800

SEAT TOTAL 407 seats with 12 in first class, 94 in business class and 301 in economy class

SEAT CONFIGURATION 1-2-1 first, 2-2-2 business, 3-4-3 economy

SEAT WIDTH 21.6 in/54.9cm

SEAT RECLINE 180 degrees

PRICE Internet rates for Prestige Class on flights in mid-November start from HK\$8,524 (Biz Saver, US\$1,096)

CONTACT www.koreanair.com or www.a380.koreanair.com

power outlets (the only place to charge one's gadgets, which I found inconvenient as I was sitting some distance away).

The hot meal selection at the Hyatt Regency Incheon-catered buffet, consisting of ginger lemon chicken, vegetable lasagna and a fish dish, was tempting, as was the sushi tray. **BOARDING** I headed for gate 10 early to get a view of the superjumbo, and it arrived at about 1900. Two airbridges led to the aircraft, one on the left for first class and economy on the main/lower deck, and one on the right for business class.

As we settled down, the immaculately groomed flight attendants began their rounds, serving drinks and distributing a raft of international dailies. We pulled back gently at 2010 and took off with the same ease that I remember so well from other A380 flights.

THE SEAT Korean Air has upgraded 49 mid- and large-size aircraft with Kosmo Sleeper Seats in first class, Prestige Sleepers in business class and wider seats in economy.

Other enhancements include expanded AVOD offerings and power outlets. Korean Air has opted for standard seat pairings, but still the legroom is spacious enough for the window-side passenger to easily access the aisle, provided the aisle seat isn't in the fully flat position.

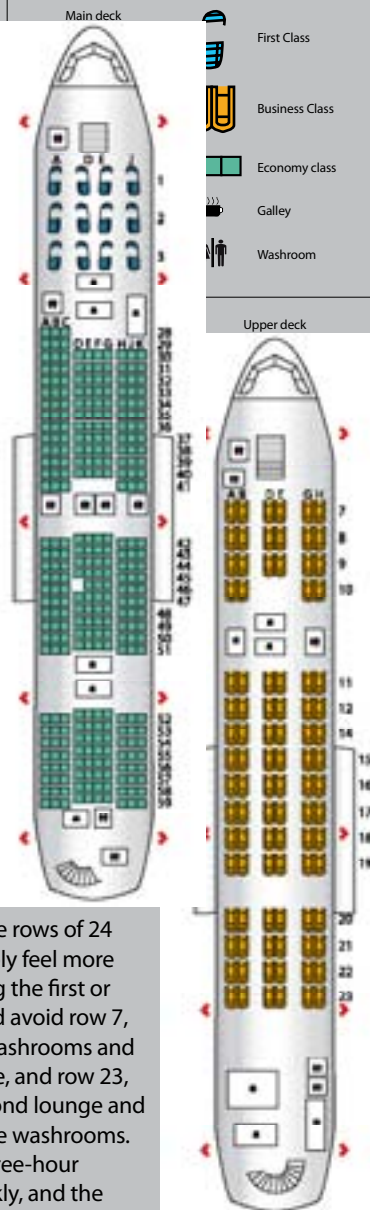
A small reading light could be adjusted to various intensities, a thin storage pocket provided room for water bottle or eyeglasses, and slippers and earphones were inserted in a pouch under the 15.4-inch seatback TV.

WHICH SEAT TO CHOOSE

Business class is divided into three cabins: four rows of 22 seats; eight rows of 48 seats; and four more rows of 24 seats. You'd probably feel more exclusivity choosing the first or third cabins. I would avoid row 7, which is near the washrooms and a communal lounge, and row 23, which is near a second lounge and bar, galley and more washrooms.

THE FLIGHT The three-hour flight went by quickly, and the crew, who had to be retrained to operate efficiently on a much larger aircraft, made a good job of conducting the meal service without missing a beat, despite some nasty air pockets and turbulence.

From the three main course options I selected stir-fried chicken with garlic chilli sauce served with egg fried rice and mixed vegetables. I found the chicken a bit too soupy, although the rice was excellent. **ARRIVAL** We landed at 2236, and thanks to Hong Kong's seamless transport system, I was unlocking the door to my flat by midnight.



Margie T Logarta

VERDICT

There is nothing like a new plane, especially when that plane is an A380. It was a pity that we had only three hours to enjoy it. The crew provided brisk but very attentive service.