

Ethiopian hospitality in the skies



When I was invited to cover a technology event in Brazil as well as Argentina, I requested the organisers to fly me on Ethiopian Airlines. Though a bit surprised, the organisers heeded to my request (though later they did agree that Ethiopian gave them the best connection). I then approached my good friend Tadesse Tilahun Regional Director, Indian Sub-continent Ethiopian Airlines with a request for an upgrade. He like as always was kind enough to consent and also showed me online that the airline not only had excellent connections to Sao Paulo from Addis Ababa with waiting time of less than 3 hours and then the same flight goes on to Buenos Aires – thus making it convenient to passengers planning to visit both countries. “A direct flight from Addis to Sao Paulo makes it one of the shortest ways of getting to Brazil from India. Not just that if you notice apart from the least time spent to reach the destination we are also having the best price,” added Tadesse Tilahun.

Considering I had a 20+ (while going) and 24+ (on my return from Buenos Aires) flight hour’s experience, resting becomes one of the most important requirements - so a business class seats make all the difference. It was also only the second time I was flying fifth-freedom routes (i.e., a flight between two countries operated by an airline from a third country) from Argentina and Brazil on an Ethiopian flight.

Ethiopian Airlines markets its business class cabin as “Cloud Nine”, and my flight had all forward-facing seats arranged across four rows in a 2-2-2 configuration. The flat bed seats are quite comfortable with controls embedded in the central console between the two seats. There’s a good amount of legroom for each seat, but for the window side passenger to access the aisle he/she has to cross over you. On my leg from Sao Paulo to Addis Ababa, a girl was allotted the window seat. It being a 12 hour flight, this was what came to my mind and fortunately after takeoff the next aisle seat was empty and I shifted so that both of us can be comfortable.

I look forward to Ethiopian airlines putting in Apex Suites (each of the window

seats offer direct aisle access as they have a private walkway leading to the seat, and you can raise or lower the partition between seats for full privacy).

There are separate check-in queues for Business and Gold/Platinum Star Alliance which are strongly adhered to. Also being a part of Star Alliance, makes it the preferred choice for many frequent travellers who would love to earn miles or redeem them.

In spite of being relatively a small airport - Addis Ababa airport has several lounges - while the Cloud 9 lounge caters exclusively to Business Class passengers there are separate lounges for Gold Class Star Alliance members and one for Platinum members. The lounges all have low red sofas with charging plugs on the walls. The internet is quite good but speed drops down when the lounge gets crowded.

Being a vegetarian I was surprised by the good quality of vegetarian food on board. “That’s one of the task that I have personally taken. To keep our flyers happy we have to provide them with the type of food that they prefer and preferably the taste should be the same. For this our catering department is getting trained by an Indian chef,” said an enthusiastic Tadesse Tilahun.

On the flight apart from the excellent vegetarian options one can relish the Ethiopian national dish called ‘Injera’ (leavened and flat bread like our Indian dosa). Lots of spicy stew accompanies ‘Injera’ and they can be both vegetarian and non vegetarian. Kolo was available as a snack served with pre-meal drinks. Kolo is simply roasted grain mix and quite tasty + nutritious. And as always service was with a smile and warmth.

They have unique amenity kits in three colours - bright yellow, red and green – the colours of the Ethiopian flag. Truly appreciate the concept. The surprising part is that it’s provided for flights even 3 hours long – while many airlines prefer to give it for 6 + hours flight and only during night flights.

The overall experience was great and for those travelling to Latin America, Ethiopian Airlines can be one of the best options.

