

Republic Airways - The Biggest Airline You Never Heard Of

AIRLINERS

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THE WORLD'S AIRLINE MAGAZINE

**A380
Makes
Aviation
History**



The First A380 Commercial Flight and the Exemplary Service of Singapore Airlines

Skybus: "Outrageously Low Fares"
As The Southwest and Ryanair Models Meet

Re-Living The Fantasy
Some Thoughts And Memories
Of An Airline Enthusiast





Flight SQ380 - Singapore to Sydney with Oscar Garcia

Welcome Onboard Aviation History!

"Fly with me from Singapore to Sydney on the first commercial service of the one and only passenger airliner in history to enter the 1,000,000+ pounds of takeoff weight, a maximum of 1,235,000 pounds to be precise. Propelled by 280,000 pounds of "smooth as silk" thrust from four gigantic Rolls Royce Trent 900 engines, Singapore Airlines flight SQ380, its first of 19 A380s on order, plus six options, will quietly and "cleanly" take us through the South East Asian and Australian skies at 37,000 feet, Mach .085, in the company of 455 privileged travel companions, 21 flight attendants and four ultra experienced Captains, including Airbus Chief A380 test pilot and Singapore airlines Chairman and CEO".

October 25, 2007

It is still dark at 4:30 a.m., in Singapore. An impossibly clean Mercedes Benz Taxi whisks my friend and I to Changi International Airport's dated but impeccably kept Singapore Airlines Terminal. Singapore impresses everyone, as a tiny island country as clean as a whistle and tropically beautiful, with the financial strength, technological creativity and economic muscle of a first world power. It is no surprise that Singapore Airlines is rated as the world's most profitable, best in service and innovation, year after year.

Pre-Flight!

The terminal was quiet at 5:00 a.m., except for an oasis of spotlights illuminating giant A380 banners with photos of the exterior and interior, Singapore Airlines logos and the slogan "First to Fly A380." As we crossed the gate doors, the scene reminded me of The Oscar's red carpet night, with cameras flashing and photographers and people talking to reporters. We were suddenly caught in the middle of the hyped-up crowd and before we knew it, we were taken to a stage-like back drop where a photographer flashed our photos.

At 6:00 a.m., we passed immigration and walked to Gate F31 passing through thorough individual security checks. Once inside, the scene reminded me of the boarding gates of Pan American Airways Clippers in the 1920s at Dinner Key in Miami. A full breakfast buffet full with French

From the top:
Flight Attendant.
Reception Quartet.
Oscar Garcia.
KrisWorld Airshow.

and tropical delicacies was laid out with waiters and waitresses serving champagne and fresh exotic juices. A classical string quartet played, and beautiful Singapore Airlines Flight Attendants, renowned in the industry as "Singapore girls," lined the room and guarded the jetway door under a large SQ A380 banner, next to a gala-like stage and lectern and a "First to Fly A380" backdrop.

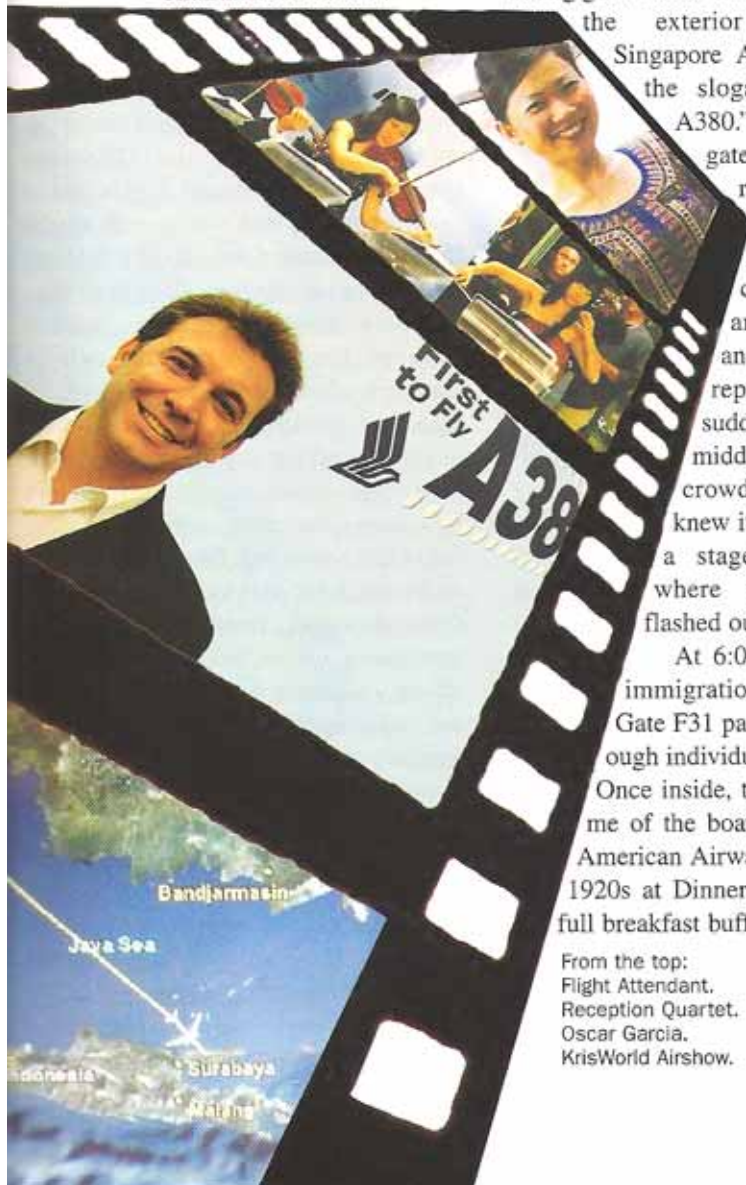
The ribbon cutting ceremony took place at 7:20 a.m., and finally unleashed everyone's pent up cheers, enthusiasm and anticipation when Mr. Chew announced that the flight was officially open for boarding. First onboard was Australian resident, Briton Julian Hayward, who truly deserved a guided tour of the empty aircraft, including the cockpit, by Captain Ting himself. Mr. Hayward was the one who paid the highest bid of all passengers, US\$100,380 for the privilege of occupying suite A1.

There were three standard sized jetways plugged to the aircraft for boarding, two to the lower deck and one to the upper deck. As we entered, we shook hands with Chairman Chew, who wished us a good flight. For the first time ever, I climbed "up" a jetway to get to the airplane since our seats 77K-H were located on the right rear section of the upper deck.

Boarding!

Upon entering the airplane, the smell of leather, fine woods and carpets permeated the air. The front of the cabin hosted 1-2-1 business class seats, at 34 inches wide and 55 inches of pitch. The rear economy cabin was configured 2-4-2. At 19 inches wide and 32 inches of pitch, the Weber seats were the largest I had ever seen in economy.

I checked out the lavatories, closets, galleys and their furnishings. Chromes and other trimmings were reminiscent of an Airbus corporate Jet (ACJ). I made my way through the crowd and the galleys and descended the rear spiraling full-size





Flight SQ380 - Singapore to Sydney with Oscar Garcia, October 25, 2007

Welcome aboard! Let's celebrate!

stairway to the lower deck. As I emerged on the lower deck and looked ahead, the A380 size and its airborne "monumentality" become real. Wider and taller than a 747 main cabin, the A380 is closer to a cruise ship than an airplane. This is it, I thought. Possibly, there will not be a larger passenger airliner ever.

Welcome Aboard!

By now it was 7:45 a.m., and everyone was still up, talking and roaming the cabins as the SQ trademark sarong clad "girls" politely tried to have everyone seated for what seemed an unlikely on-time departure. Somehow their assertive charm prevailed and exactly at 8:00 a.m., SQ380 pushed back to the taxiway. Literally seconds later, while I was waiting to hear the engines start, the aircraft started moving. I supposed we were being towed but we were not. The A380 Rolls Royce Trent 900 engines would prove to be the surprise of the flight. They were so quiet we barely heard them at all, even during the take-off.

Before Take-Off!

The view from the window is always above any other airplane on the ramp. The massive dihedral wing is designed to carry the planned stretched versions of the A380, and it looks like a mountain of aluminum. The plane taxied slowly, its four main landing gears, outboards with four wheels and inboards with six, for a total of 20 wheels, steered by two massive nose tires.

The PA announcements and safety briefings were standard, with an estimated seven hours and six minutes flight time. We were the first paying passengers to use the safety cards and listen to and watch the A380 specific emergency videos. There are eight doors on the lower deck and six on the upper deck. The ramps coming down seemed excessively steep! I knew 873 people evacuated the aircraft within 90 seconds during flight tests. Impressive!

Airborne!!

Exactly at 8:15 a.m., with a de-rated

or "flex" thrust setting of 76% of Max Take-Off and a planned rotation speed of 154 Knots, the plane slowly rolled down the runway with no perceptible acceleration and virtually no engine sound. As we approached the last third of the runway, the airplane finally started rotating at a speed that felt too slow for its size and weight and quickly leapt into the air. Everyone started cheering, applauding, screaming, talking and even singing. This takeoff will go in history as one in which the noise inside the cabin was much higher than the noise footprint outside of the airplane! I am sure Captain Ting and his crew in the cockpit heard it loud and clear!

Enroute to Sydney, Let's Celebrate!

The seatbelt sign came off and never came on again until descent into Sydney. The 455 passengers interpreted the chime as the bell to start the world's largest airborne party ever recorded! Fine Charles-Heidsieck champagne, cocktails and fine first class wines started flowing, cameras started filming, air phones started dialing and reporters started writing and interviewing. Most of us stood up and spent the flight chatting, exchanging views, business cards and email addresses and exploring the aircraft's nooks and crannies. As the flight progressed, thousands of photos and hours of videos were taken, friendships and business relationships were made. We all had a common aviation bond, one that we would all share for life.

All of a sudden, in full uniform Captain Ting walked down the aisle shaking hands, sharing small talk and signing autographs for the passengers. At the same time, CEO Chew roamed the lower deck doing the same and personally thanking and sharing with everyone on board. The atmosphere was that of a Gala/Party/Awards ceremony. Ting and Chew could have never predicted the reaction from passengers. At times they were circled by over 20-30 people.

Meal Service By Renowned Chefs

Flight attendants' charms and smiles

persuaded us to sit down and lunch service started. Together with the menu, each passenger was personally addressed and given an official SQ First A380 Certificate. Chew and Ting delivered the framed versions personally to each business class and suites passenger. The menus on each cabin varied, as you can imagine. I will let you know that the food in economy was better than in some business class flights I have taken. The uniqueness of this flight was that all menus were prepared by two renowned chefs who were onboard, Mathew Moran from Australia (Aria restaurant) and Sam Leong from Singapore (Tun Lok Group). They both supervised the service and gracefully chatted with passengers to ensure the meals were as extraordinary as the flight.

After lunch, I went to view the lower deck and looked for the cabin crew rest area, which is in the middle underneath the lower deck. A large door leads to a spiraling staircase and into a stand up area with ample space for 10 double bunk beds and a couple of double seats.

Next on my list was a visit to the Suites, so I walked upstairs. All the way to the front of business class there was an oasis of peace and quiet, compared to economy. The seat partitions are so large that even when there are two people in each seat (guest chairs for face-to-face dining or talking are standard in each seat), you cannot see heads, resulting in a very quiet environment. The eight individual suites and four center double suites are fully enclosed with full size doors and rolling drapes that make them true dining rooms, bedrooms, cinemas, offices or simply sanctuaries of peace and relaxation. The center suites can be opened up to create a double bed environment. The details are mind boggling. A seatbelt light panel allows flight attendants to confirm seatbelts are buckled without entering the suite. The seats are 35 inches wide with 81 inches of pitch. They are the largest sized "rooms" of any airline in the world. The bedrooms are complete with coat closets, office organizing space, personal luggage

The Future Lands in Sydney Today

areas, a guest chaise lounge and a bed, separate from the seat, with a proper mattress. The upholstery is handmade by Italian luxury upholsterer Poltrona Frau. The china and linens are from Ferragamo. The list goes on and on.

On Approach

Back in the lively economy cabin, the spirits were high and, even though we were approaching the descent point into Sydney, everyone seemed ready to turn around and do another seven hours back to Singapore! The flight attendants started serving the arrival snack as Captain Ting announced that Sydney ATC had authorized a fly-by viewing the Opera House and Harbor to silver line the inaugural flight. The thunder of cheering and applause was even greater than before.

As we approached 3,000 feet, still in the clouds, the plane leveled off and a disappointed Ting told us that showers and low ceilings would make the fly-by impossible and that we would head directly for landing at Sydney's Kingsford Smith International airport. The ILS approach was flown in instrument conditions and maneuvering and speed changes felt no different from any other widebody. The remarkably quiet cabin made it difficult to judge engine power applications. The triple panel ailerons worked their ballet movement yielding a perfectly smooth ride. From the upper cabin, landing gear deployment was almost imperceptible. Flaps came down to the landing configuration and we broke out of clouds at approximately 1,000 feet above the ground and at 150 knots. Over the fence, the runway was lined up with photographers and safety and airport cars. With a slight flare, the A380 forward tilted bogeys delivered a "smooth as silk" landing. Time was 5:21 p.m., four minutes ahead of schedule.

At The Gate!

A caravan of vehicles and helicopters tracked the aircraft to its parking gate. Deplaning took no longer than any other

widebody, even considering that the upper deck jet bridge had a glitch which delayed deplaning by 10 minutes. Nobody minded. Everyone wanted to stay onboard and keep celebrating. Some passengers would be back on the same aircraft in less than 24 hours for the journey to Singapore and there were jokes about camping onboard, if SQ would allow it.

I stayed behind chatting with the

cabin crew and asked for a cockpit tour. To my surprise, I was granted the tour, and Captain Ting himself was there finishing up paperwork and securing the cockpit before the plane was towed to remote parking for the night.

We followed the crew out of the airplane into the customs and immigration areas. Little did they know that their best stardom status was yet to come.

Back to Earth!

The bags arrived within 20 minutes of doors opening at the business and suites special carousels and 10 minutes later at the economy belt. Leaving customs and stepping into the arrivals lounge was yet another surprise. Night turned into day with television and media crews assaulting Chairman Chew, Captain Ting, his crew and anyone else who cared to talk. We might as well have been the first group of humans having returned from Mars. A daily newspaper front page announced in huge bold letters: "The Future Lands in Sydney Today!" ✈

From the top:
Oscar Garcia.
SQ CEO Chew.
James Wallace.
Lead F/A with Captain.
Economy seating.
SQ Attendant.
A380 Winglet.

