



THE RULES OF FLYING POST COVID-19

Asia-Pacific carriers are gradually welcoming passengers back on board while scrambling for funds to remain in the air

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Dream of an aircraft defeated by market forces

As the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc across the globe it will have one very sad outcome for the aviation industry. With passenger numbers forecast to remain well below pre-crisis levels for several years, a flagship commercial aircraft of the last two decades is set for a premature demise.

We already know deliveries of the giant A380 were scheduled to end in 2021. The decision was announced last year when Airbus was faced with non-existent new orders for the type. It would not have lasted that long without a final commitment from Emirates Airline. Now, as the industry fights to overcome COVID-19, the writing is on the wall for the very large passenger jet.

Although not officially announced, it is understood Emirates is seeking to scrap its last five A380 orders, but Emirates president, Sir Tim Clark, did say he was keeping the current fleet, all of which are now grounded only weeks after declaring "the A380 is over".

Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways also is reportedly considering retirement of its 10 A380s. Singapore Airlines, first to enter the plane into service in October 2007, has several A380s parked at a storage facility in Central Australia. Qantas Airways has hinted strongly most, if not all, of its A380s may not return to service. Lufthansa has announced six of its 14

A380s will be retired and Air France is doing the same with nine of the type.

In reality, it is very likely not a single new A380 will be delivered to a customer and that Airbus will be left with half finished aircraft on its production line.

The A380 was an expensive program. It began life full of promise as a giant that would connect the world's major hubs, carrying 500 or more passengers at a time. In the end, it was an expensive bet that went wrong. The plane became more costly to operate, especially when oil prices rocketed, and Airbus refused to invest in a neo version, or New Engine Option.

It fell victim to airline strategies dominated by the belief, rightly, that smaller new generation, fuel efficient and long-range wide-bodies, capable of circumventing hubs, was the future. For passengers, the story was often different. They loved to fly aboard the aircraft and reveled in its comfort levels, cabin and silence when in flight.

No doubt some A380s will fly for many years to come as the current crisis passes and travellers return to flying in substantial numbers. But COVID-19 will be seen as the final nail in the A380 coffin and one that prematurely ended the aircraft's reign as the flagship of many of the world's major airlines. ■

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