



How airlines can use their heritage to add a touch of storytelling to the travel experience

At the recent Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg, airlinetrends.com presented its take on how one of the main trends in luxury today, [‘Heritage Luxury’](#), can be a source of inspiration for airlines in developing new products and services.

Heritage luxury

Luxury has undergone a significant change in the past years. In the first decade of the new millenium, the steady rise in disposable income brought luxury goods within reach of the middle classes. As part

of this [‘democratization of luxury’](#) trend, premium brands also introduced more affordable versions of their designs. However, as a result of the global financial crisis and its effects on the overall economy, consumers in the past years have been going back to basics, even those that have been relatively shielded from the effects of the downturn. Consumers today are more reflective and after a decade of ‘fast forward’ are looking for more authentic and meaningful consumption. Gucci CEO Robert Polet

summarizes today's luxury consumer as follows: "Customers are looking for more discreet, timeless purchases, and are not keen on anything that could fall out of fashion. People feel guilty about that."

Of course, luxury houses have always been emphasizing their heritage, but today luxury brands from Italy and France to Japan and China are paying homage to their craftsmanship, knowledge and diligence stronger than before. A good example of this ['heritage luxury'](#) trend is Gucci, whose current ['Forever Now'](#) campaign celebrates the traditions and values that have helped Gucci evolve into a fashion authority.

Even in rapidly growing economies such as China, consumers are increasingly looking for goods that link them with the past. Says one analyst: "China is changing so fast and there is no reference point for consumers. They have so many new Chinese brands with no history, and there are Western brands with histories that is hard for them to identify with. There's a whole generation who will want something that reminds them of what it used to be like."

Storytelling

So what does the 'heritage luxury' trend mean for the airline industry? At [airlinetrends.com](#) we have highlighted the concept of storytelling several times before: Passengers love to learn about the story behind the product as it is something that makes their journey more exciting and memorable, be it local and seasonal food served onboard, city guides that have been created by the airline's crew, or in-flight amenities that have been co-created with the general public.

As the airline industry has always captured people's imagination, airlines can tap into aviation history to incorporate a bit of

storytelling into the travel experience. Legacy carriers in particular can benefit from their history to stand out against cheap and cheerful low-cost airlines. A simple example is painting aircraft in a retro-livery as part of a 75 or 90-years anniversary. However, a number of airlines have gone beyond this, creating an onboard experience inspired by heritage luxury.

British Airways new First

In early 2010, British Airways introduced its new First Class cabin. Instead of joining other airlines in their onboard extravaganza, such as onboard bars, showers and private cabins, BA sought to create an air of calm understated British luxury. Harking back to the 1920s, BA's First Class design is inspired by classic British luxury car brands Aston Martin and Jaguar, and the prominent use of quality leather and electronic window blinds adds to a classic luxury feel.

Passengers in First also receive a traditional 'Gladstone' style BA bag designed by Anya Hindmarch and embellished with the airline's original 'To Fly, To Serve' coat of arms. The first range of products inside the BA bag were sourced from the St. James-based store of 200-year-old London pharmacist D.R Harris, which has been supplying members of the British Royal family for over 80 years.

Virgin Atlantic and Porter: Jet-set chic

Boutique airlines such as Virgin Atlantic and Porter Airlines play into the 'PanAm' days of air travel, when flying was a lot more glamorous. For example, Virgin Atlantic's elegant Heathrow Clubhouse is designed to feel like a vintage members club, with 70s-style seating areas featuring iconic 'Eames' lounge chairs, retro arcade video games and a 60s-inspired widescreen mini-cinema.

On a similar note, Toronto-based Porter Airlines wants to re-create the glamor of the 50s in an age of cost-cutting across the board. Designed by Tyler Brûlé (of Wallpaper and Monocle fame), Porter's tagline is "Flying refined" and the whole look and feel of the airline is classy retro, with flight attendants wearing stylish navy blue uniforms and turboprop aircraft with all-leather seats.

Austrian Airlines amenity kit

Austrian's new Business Class amenity kit features eight different historical black and white images that show quintessential Austrian mountain hiking and skiing scenes from the early 1900s. The amenity bag is made from felt (called Loden in Austria), in a nod to traditional Austrian clothes and hats made from felt, such as the typical 'Steirer Anzug'. The amenity kit also contains cosmetics from Austrian eco-brand Alpienne.

KLM Delft Blue

KLM has just launched a social media campaign that invites Facebook users to convert their Facebook profile picture into a Delft Blue tile and add an inspiring message. Four thousand of the most inspiring 'Delft Blue tiles' will then be placed on the body of a KLM Boeing 777-200.

Delft Blue tiles are part of the Dutch tradition. The porcelain tiles were decorated with typically Dutch scenes, such as windmills or fishing boats, and were commonly supported by some words of wisdom. For nearly 60 years, KLM has also been handing out small Delft Blue ceramic replicas of historical Dutch houses filled with Dutch 'genever' to passengers in Business Class.

Delta 'wing pins'

In 1958, 'kiddie wing pins' made their debut on Delta Air Lines flights. Boys were given 'junior pilot' wings while 'junior stewardess' wings were handed out to girls. The wing pins became an iconic part of Delta's service but the airline stopped their handout as part of cost cutting measures. At the end of 2010, Delta decided to bring the pins back and they now come in two varieties – a gold wings pin that a Delta pilot may give young flyers and a silver wings pin that will be given from Flight Attendants. Says one Delta flight officer: "I have been handing out the gold wings for a few weeks now. The response has been amazing! I think the parents are as excited as the kids when I give them the pins. Great PR, glad to have them back."

Japan Airlines: Return to basics

Japan Airlines' 'tsurumaru' logo was introduced in the 1950s and graced the tail fins of JAL's fleet during its period of rapid growth. In early April 2011, Japan Airlines revived its traditional logo to mark its relaunch after nearly three years under bankruptcy protection. Says JAL President Masaru Onishi, "We adopted the logo with the determination of going back to the basics, when we had the spirit of challenge. We want to create a regenerated JAL."

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