

Etihad Airways A380-800 The Residence Abu Dhabi-Mumbai

BACKGROUND Etihad launched The Residence two years ago, to much fanfare, and it remains the only three-room suite on a commercial airline (designed for two people travelling together) containing a living room, separate bedroom and ensuite shower. While it remains an exclusive offering, rates have come down from launch. Note the second companion was free but now costs 25-40% of the first person's fare.

CHECK-IN After two hours of my booking, the VIP Concierge of Etihad called and greeted me. My preference of butler (male or female), dietary preference and arrival details were noted. There was a small delay on the day of departure, but the VIP Concierge kept me informed and updated. My day started with two cars to collect me; a white upgraded Audi A8 limousine and a Toyota Previa for my luggage. I was surprised that no check-in was required; Etihad had already issued my boarding pass and escorted me through the immigration and security screening.

THE LOUNGE We headed straight to The Residence Lounge, which is hidden inside the First Class Lounge. When I arrive at the lounge, my lounge butler, Mr Salah, is already waiting to welcome me. Apart from a generous lounging area, it offers private dining up to four passengers. It also has its own bar on the side table with coffee machine. Other amenities include a bathroom with shower and private prayer room with cleaning area.

BOARDING Etihad printed me three sets of boarding passes so I could keep two as souvenirs, which was a nice touch. I was transported to Gate 61 by a golf buggy with my driver and a bell boy. My Savoy hotel-trained butler, the impeccably dressed Leanne, greeted me warmly at the gate and escorted me onto the Upper Deck airbridge for premium passengers.

THE SEAT The Residence is a unique three-room private cabin located at the very front of the A380 upper deck. The 'living room' brown leather seating area (with ottoman opposite) is so wide it could comfortably seat four people. Leanne asked me to feel comfortable and took my beverage choice (Arabic coffee/date) before closing the door. Straight away I felt the privacy and realised why this oasis, within a plane that carries 500 passengers, commands such a premium price point. I received a welcome letter with my name printed in gold, and my name was also on the menu.



The hallway leads to a bedroom with a 6-foot 10-inch double bed, with designer Italian bed linen. I was given Chrisitan Lacroix sleepwear, the most comfortable I've worn out of all first class pyjamas. The bed has proper firm mattress with very soft and comfortable pillow.

I enjoyed the meal on a wooden tray in bed, watching the camera showing the A380 chasing the setting sun. The toiletries in the bathroom are provided by Acqua di Parma from Italy and even the toilet paper has the Residence logo.

THE FLIGHT On this short flight to Mumbai, the food choices were four appetisers (more Abu Dhabi-farmed Caviar served with blinis, toast and brioche; truffle chicken with artichoke and rocket leaf jelly; hot and cold Gulf mezze; and Pudina Mutter Shorba) and six mains (I enjoyed the large lobster tail with purple potato, asparagus, pink peppercorn and citrus butter).

ARRIVAL My butler, purser, chef, food and beverage manager came to bid me farewell and I couldn't resist taking some photos together. Upon de-plane, Etihad ground crew in Mumbai escorted me direct through transit onto my onward flight. *Sam Chui*

VERDICT The Residence is a truly unique and bespoke travel experience – every part of the travel experience is seamless and discreet. Private travel on a commercial plane is a possibility now.

JOURNEY TIME 2 hours 39 minutes

AIRCRAFT TYPE A380-800

CONFIGURATION two seats in The Residence (9 First Class Apartment Suites,

70 Business Studio seats and 415 economy class).

BED LENGTH 6-foot 10-inch double bed

PRICE \$3,036 one way Abu Dhabi to Mumbai or \$4,200 round-trip.

CONTACT etihadairways.com