



MORE AND MORE BUSINESS JET TRAVELERS ARE 'FOODIES' WHO EXPECT THE SAME QUALITY AND SERVICE THEY RECEIVE AT A FOUR-STAR RESTAURANT.

in-flight culinary service

BON VOYAGE—ET BON APPÉTIT_by Kirby J. Harrison

IS IT REALISTIC TO EXPECT the same quality of culinary fare aboard your business jet that you enjoy at four-star restaurants? That depends on your flight attendant's cooking skills and on whether the aircraft galley is equipped to support them. But even the best airborne chefs can be stymied by the cabin environment in which they have to work.

Certainly, business aviation caterers have raised the bar in recent years with regard to cuisine. On the other hand, the perception remains among some that catered meals are a lesser light in the culinary galaxy.

Donna Casacchia, president of The Corporate School of Etiquette in Newport, Beach, Calif., recognizes this phenomenon. She employs a chef who teaches a two-day course for flight attendants in advanced culinary skills, from saucing techniques to menu planning.

One aircraft owner made it clear, she said, that his motivation for sending his flight attendant to the class was "no more catered meals." Another owner asked Casacchia whether she

could recommend a "self-contained" flight attendant capable of "slicing and dicing and putting meals together."

Paula Kraft, the owner of Atlanta-based business aviation caterer Tastefully Yours, is experiencing the same shift in in-flight dining expectations. She is mentoring flight attendants to study culinary disciplines in her kitchen.

A small number of flight attendants already have considerable experience as chefs. Joe Botelho, a flight attendant with The Drax Group in Naples, Fla., learned to cook in Italy. When he came to the U.S., he opened his own restaurant in Florida but was subsequently lured into aviation by one of



GROWING NUMBERS OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS ARE LEARNING THE CULINARY SKILLS NECESSARY TO OFFER QUALITY MEAL SERVICE AT 41,000 FEET.

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his customers. He has been happily cooking on the company's aircraft for more than 10 years.

Many are not. For food preparation, said one flight attendant, the typical galley even in larger business jets is "a lot like working in a closet, but with less room."

Storage and counter space are limiting factors, as is electrical power. Some galleys have no supplemental electrical outlets, others have just one. And even if the galley has an outlet, flight attendants often discover that before using it, they must shut off the coffee pot to prevent the power draw from popping the circuit breaker. Refrigeration is nonexistent, and ice drawers and convection ovens are rare. The typical microwave is barely large enough to reheat a frozen dinner.

But galleys are improving as more flight attendants are being consulted during the design phase of an aircraft completion. Debbie Franz, senior coordinator of flight services for Bombardier's widebody demonstrator fleet, insisted on equipping galleys in the company's newer Global 5000 and Global XRS with both microwave and convection ovens.

Cessna, meanwhile, is in the midst of designing its largest business jet cabin to date, the Large Cabin Concept aircraft, which incorporates an unusually spacious galley. It has multiple electrical outlets, a carry-on thermos carafe storage bank, warming and cooling drawers, space for bottled water and a user-friendly espresso machine. The aft baggage compartment offers additional storage room for china and flatware.

Flight attendant Botelho said he played a major role in design of the galley on the Global Express that The Drax Company acquired six years ago. It features a large warming oven that allows him to keep multiple meals hot during the plating process. There are also three insulated ice storage containers with drip drains to void the melting ice; a large convection oven; countertops that can be pulled out for additional work space; and four electrical outlets.

COOKING IN THE CABIN

Even with such a well-equipped galley and a flight attendant with culinary training, on-board preparation of gourmet food can be difficult, partly because a business jet's cabin altitude can be as high as 8,000 feet when the airplane is flying at cruise altitude and the humidity of the cabin air can be as low as 2 percent.

Chef Kendra Wilcox of Telluride, Colo., is familiar with cooking at higher altitudes—both on the ground and in private jets.

A GROWING NUMBER OF FLIGHT ATTENDANT RÉSUMÉS INCLUDE A RANGE OF CULINARY SKILLS.

At typical cruising altitudes, Wilcox said, a soufflé will not rise and even boiling water presents a challenge, since water boils at lower temperatures than it does at sea level. Thus, boiled foods take longer to cook. Similarly, meat prepared by simmering or braising in a portable electric skillet also requires more cooking time.

Clearly, the preparation of gourmet in-flight meals presents challenges. Even with the most accomplished chef and carefully outfitted galley, you may have to accept certain menu limitations or minor modifications to culinary expectations. Nevertheless, if food ranks high on your list of life's pleasures, the payoff can be well worth the cost and effort. ■



PRIVATE JET GALLEYS, SUCH AS THIS ONE BY ASSOCIATION AIR CENTER IN AN ACJ, ARE BEING DESIGNED TO ALLOW FOR THE IN-FLIGHT PREPARATION OF MEALS.