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In the Battle of the Airline Lifestyle Brands, Etihad's Style Is Expanding

Marisa Garcia, Skift - May 02, 2016 6:30 am

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Flight attendants from Etihad Airways and partners in a promotional image celebrating the airlines' sponsorship of fashion events. Etihad Airways

SKIFT TAKE

The goal is to make airline lifestyle brands relatable, likable, insidery, and envy-inducing badges of honor. Fashion and other style elements are the type of brand associations which make that connection happen. Plus: Women make key travel decisions for themselves and their families.

— Marisa Garcia

Etihad Airways is ramping up its lifestyle brand game with a new long-term runway alliance with WME|IMG to support 17 fashion weeks events around the world.

Etihad will become the official airline of New York Fashion Week: The Shows, MADE Fashion Week, London Fashion Week,

London Collections Men, Milan Fashion Week: Milano Moda Donna, Milano Moda Uomo, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Berlin, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia, and Lakme Fashion Week (Mumbai).

That's a lot of style.

"Fashion weeks and Etihad Airways represent an ideal brand fit, as we share attributes of being remarkable, ambitious and innovative," said James Hogan, Etihad Airways CEO. "This is a landmark deal because it goes beyond traditional sponsorship and is a world-first agreement for an airline group. As a result of our business model, Etihad Airways Partners will collectively unveil a wide range of exciting new fashion initiatives for guests in our home market of Abu Dhabi and throughout the world."

The Etihad Airways Partners collective comes from Etihad's stakes in Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Airberlin, Alitalia, Etihad Regional, Jet Airways and Virgin Australia.

It's Not Soccer

Airlines have long sponsored sports teams, but fashion has been sidelined by a blindspot for the key role women play in travel booking decisions. Now both the blinders and gloves have come off.

Beyond the Etihad equity partners framework, Finnair and Helsinki have coordinated a special [Runway edition of its Match Made in HEL](#), featuring a series of designers from Asia and Scandinavia; which fits its focus on routes between the two continents.

The airline has also added native fashion brands to its Wi-Fi in-flight shopping selections, featuring Finnish fashions which appeal to both [male](#) and [female](#) fashion-conscious flyers.

Qantas Airways has lifestyle down to a science, making ties [with fashion icons as brand ambassadors](#), [selling destination-themed fashion accessories](#) and high-end footwear, holding TEDTalks at 30,000 feet, racing Teslas, featuring wines, gourmet dishes and more in a [dedicated connoisseur online shop](#), even getting [Christopher Walken hopping to promote heart health](#) (and Qantas health insurance).

Etihad seems to be stepping on Qantas in the lifestyle space. The Etihad Airways fashion week collaboration will make its debut during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia, which takes place in Sydney May 15 to 20.

Etihad Airways will sponsor five more events this year—in Berlin, Mumbai, New York, London and Milan—and extend its sponsorship to 17 men's and women's fashion happenings throughout 2017.

This is hardly Etihad's first lifestyle brand move. If everything the airline did with Reimagined doesn't qualify as lifestyle branding (it does), then consider its recent [TASTE food festival partnerships](#), collectible [LUXE Guide cabin amenities](#), and [Savoy Butlers](#), to name a few.

Airlines have made amazing progress in a short period of time and entered a new age of dizzying lifestyle brand escalation.

It wasn't all that long ago that Skift featured the thoughts of design consultancy Teague's principal brand strategist, Devin Liddell, who argued that [airlines could greatly benefit from lifestyle branding](#).



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