

Virgin Atlantic, Guide Dogs partner to improve travel for the visually impaired

In an effort to create a more inclusive air travel experience for those with sight loss, Virgin Atlantic and Guide Dogs have announced a new long-term partnership that will see the airline's cabin crew specially trained on how to support those flying with a visual impairment (VI).



Image: Supplied

As the airline seeks to develop inclusive policies for its people and customers, Guide Dogs will provide each cabin crew member with online resources incorporated into their wider training programme, in a bid to improve accessibility for those travelling with sight loss.

Guide Dogs' training aims to support customers by teaching Virgin Atlantic crew best practices when helping those with visual impairments and covers topics from how to approach someone with sight loss, to navigating narrow or busy spaces, stairs, steps, and doorways, to taking a seat. They'll also focus on the best position on the aircraft for guide dogs to rest on their long journeys. The airline's people will also have opportunities to participate in more in-depth practical training where they will learn to safely guide someone with sight loss with confidence, skill, and empathy.

Research

The collaboration launches as new research of 250 Brits with sight loss revealed that three-fifths (59%) would like to travel abroad more, however, almost seven in 10 (68%) are reluctant to travel by plane because of previous negative experiences.

Despite this, over half (56%) have felt uncomfortable travelling by plane at some point in the past. Reasons included feeling nervous checking in at the airport (38%), reading the food menu (34%) and putting away their luggage (32%).

In response, to being asked what would improve the travel experience, 65% said that they'd like to see airlines undertake training to understand how they can better support passengers with visual impairments, as the majority (84%) said they'd feel more comfortable with air travel if cabin crew were better educated. Additionally, 59% said they'd like to see airlines consult those with sight loss to improve their policies.

Corneel Koster, chief customer and operations officer, Virgin Atlantic said: "At Virgin Atlantic, we believe that everyone can take on the world and that means ensuring every one of our customers has the best possible experience when they fly with us. Our partnership with Guide Dogs is one part of this journey and aims to broaden our understanding of those travelling with sight loss, ensuring that we make flying more accessible for everyone."

"We're delighted to be working with Virgin Atlantic and hope our long-term partnership will put in place improvements that will tangibly impact the lives of those with sight loss for the better," said John Welsman, customer experience lead, Guide Dogs. "By providing advice to cabin crew and having them undertake sighted guide training, we hope blind and partially-sighted passengers will have the confidence to travel as fully and independently as possible."

Whilst all guide and assistance dogs have a legal right to fly, passengers who wish to travel with their guide dog should contact Virgin Atlantic's special assistance department before flying to ensure full support is put in place and any questions can be answered.

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