

# Catering with care: Interview with Qatar Airways' VP Catering Shashank Bhardwaj

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Shashank Bhardwaj, Vice President Catering, Qatar Airways

[Qatar Airways](#) is known for its onboard dining experience and the airline accommodates a variety of dietary restrictions and preferences through its special meal program. In 2017, Qatar Airways introduced the option to “pre-select dine on demand” which allows passengers to choose their main meal for flights longer than five hours, departing from Doha ([DOH](#)).

“Qatar Airways’ special meal program is driven by [IATA](#) standards,” Shashank Bhardwaj, Vice President Catering, Qatar Airways, tells *PAX International*. Following these clear practices allows the airline to offer special meal options to passengers in the meal selection process and ensure that the correct meal is put onboard.

## Special requests

Qatar Airways ensures that beyond the special meal fulfilling the necessary dietary requirements, it also elevates the passenger experience in the same way that a traditional inflight meal does.

As panelists discussed on the latest episode of [PAX Panel](#), entitled “Examining special meals,” serving up a safe meal that meets passenger’s dietary requirements is only one part of the special meals equation—there remains an expectation that the special meal will be presented in an appealing way and will retain the quality and flavour that other passengers, without dietary restrictions, are afforded onboard.

As a part of its meal evaluation program, Qatar Airways ensures that special meals are given the necessary attention to cater the medical restrictions and dietary preferences while being mindful of the passengers’ presentation expectations. To address the medical requirements of some passengers in their meal orders, Qatar Airways pays special attention to the preparation of these offerings, including restrictions on ingredients that could impact the taste.



The Business Class child meal onboard Qatar Airways

“Our chefs work with the caterers to make sure the right cooking techniques and best ingredients are sustainably sourced to provide the enhanced dining experience to our customers,” Bhardwaj says.

In addition to offering special meal alternatives onboard, the airline also has several beverage options to meet the needs of passengers who cannot or do not want to consume excess sugars or alcohol.

“Our variety of beverages complements the dietary needs of our customers,” Bhardwaj explains. “Diet and sugar-free drinks are our standard offerings including non-alcoholic sparkling drinks.”



A healthy salad option served onboard Qatar Airways

### **Exceeding expectations**

For Qatar Airways, accommodating passengers' special meal requests is part of delivering a top-notch inflight experience—but that brings challenges.

As Bhardwaj says, special meals are customized to the traveller, so preparation requires greater lead time than other onboard meals, ultimately increasing the cost per meal. The meal then needs to make it from the ground to the aircraft to be delivered to the correct person so that the crew does not have to deal with an unhappy passenger inflight.

In terms of trends in special meals, Qatar Airways says that requests for children's meals with a vegetarian option and vegetarian meals on the whole are becoming more common.

"Should we see a particular trend in special meal demand, we can make it a part of our menu," Bhardwaj explains. "These trends are closely monitored and measured for customer sentiments through our bespoke inflight feedback technology."