Etihad Airways gives audiences exclusive look at airport lounge

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

United Arab Emirates airline Etihad Airways is celebrating a fresh space at Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Terminal A is now open after more than a decade of construction and delays, and within it, the flight company has built a three-floor luxury lounge. The new home to the carrier sets the scene for “Lounging With: Gareth Bale,” a conversational video interview that not only taps into the appeal of the namesake Welsh soccer legend but grants the leisure area and its premium offerings a globally popular celebrity’s stamp of approval.

“The Lounging With: Gareth Bale’ video by Etihad Airways is a brilliant advertising strategy because it clearly evokes a sense of luxury, relaxation and excitement associated with travel,” said Sekita Ekrek, founder of Sekita Ekrek Luxury Travel Marketing, New York.

“Featuring an unscripted chat’ with global icon Gareth Bale adds credibility and appeal to the brand, and the video showcases the airline’s premium lounges, emphasizing the comfort and sophistication travelers can expect,” Ms. Ekrek said. “By presenting an elite travel experience, Etihad Airways entices viewers, creating a desire to embark on a similar luxurious journey.

“The video not only promotes the airline but also inspires travelers to consider upgrading their travel experience, just like Gareth.”

Ms. Ekrek is not affiliated with Etihad Airways, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Bale out

In the same fashion as Vogue’s “73 Questions” web series, where celebrities are interviewed via quick prompts seemingly unscripted, Etihad Airways’ new video features Mr. Bale responding to a slew of queries.

From what superpower he wishes he had to his favorite goal he has ever scored, the soccer veteran gives viewers an inside look at his life, dreams and personality. The star appears relaxed and candid, an attitude that could land well with modern consumers, who are increasingly showing favor toward celebrities who demonstrate authenticity.

Etihad Airways presents ‘Lounging With: Gareth Bale’
“I really enjoyed the video because he seemed so natural and relatable,” said Ms. Ekrek.

“That’s what people want: to connect with their heroes and idols.”

Throughout, the behind-the-camera interviewer also asks Mr. Bale about his travel habits, bucket list destinations, experience flying with Etihad and his thoughts on the new lounge.

The opening is based in Terminal A, which was completed at the end of October 2023. Starting today, Nov. 9, and through an expected date of Nov. 14, the airways is transitioning to the branch, making it the carrier’s new home.

Viewers might recognize Terminal A from a summer blockbuster, and it is now going to be the home of Etihad Airways. Image credit: Etihad Airways

Shown briefly in Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part 1, one of the biggest movies of the year, the terminal increases the airport’s capacity, the facility able to process 45 million travelers a year. The lounge is sure to attract many of these fliers.

“As travel has rebounded so forcefully post-pandemic, airport lounges have been getting more popular,” said Ms. Ekrek.

“But that has forced the airlines to toughen up access to their premium lounges to limit overcrowding,” she said. “Lounges are now back to being a premium amenity that comes with premium admission for entry, reserved for the biggest spenders and frequent fliers.

“Airlines are upgrading their lounge offerings too to keep them exclusive, but those in the Middle East like Etihad and Emirates have always been leaders in the luxury lounge offering.”

Wandering through the luxury space, the Welsh athlete walks past plush seating, sparkling lighting fixtures, huge windows and an expansive bar. It is here that he grabs himself a drink, sipping on the beverage throughout the remainder of the video.

Mr. Bale praises the flight he had, which boasted live matches that he was able to watch in the air. He also gushes about the new lounge, rating it an 11 out of 10 for its amenities such as the kids’ area and culinary services.

He concludes his spot by flashing his famous “heart celebration,” forming the love symbol with his hands before stating that he has a plane to catch and heading off on his next voyage.

Scoring soccer affiliations
Etihad Airways’ inclusion of Mr. Bale aligns with the advertising efforts of others in luxury that are likewise turning to the soccer
world to uplift their products, from French fashion house Louis Vuitton (see story) to LVMH-owned German luggage brand Rimowa (see story) to Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen (see story).

Due to the jet-setting nature of their lifestyles, soccer players bring an air of adventure to marketing, making them especially apt for travel entities.

As what many consider the most watched sport, soccer appears to be a popular field to draw ambassadors and spokespeople from for luxury. Image credit: Etihad Airways

Perhaps it is for this reason that this is not the first time that Etihad Airways has gotten involved with the sport (see story). However, tapping well-known figures at all inherently comes with perks, regardless of whether or not they are footballers.

“Both Etihad and Emirates have had years of success using international celebrities in general for their campaigns,” said Ms. Ekrek.

“Nicole Kidman was an Etihad ambassador and Penelope Cruz is Emirates’ current ambassador,” she said. “The Middle East has seen a lot of success aligning specifically with global soccer stars, so it doesn’t surprise me to use Gareth.

“Global icon Lionel Messi endorses Saudi Arabia tourism and David Beckham does so for Qatar.”

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