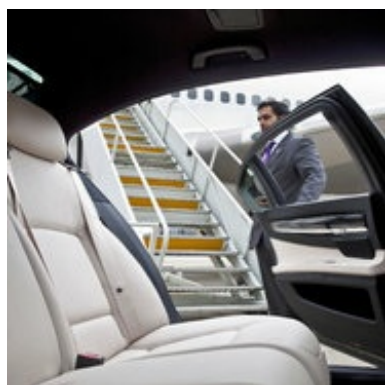


IN-STORE

## London's Heathrow eyes luxury brand participation for new VIP lounge service

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By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

In search of more incremental revenue and upscale business, London's Heathrow has opened its VIP suites to passengers arriving at the airport with the promise of securing luxury brands to add to the swank experience.

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Previously reserved for royalty, heads of state and visiting diplomats, the suites are now targeting a high-net-worth demographic for a premium service priced at \$2,400 for a group of up to six passengers. The service, labeled Heathrow by Invitation, is yet another initiative to position Heathrow as a venue for luxury experiences in addition to high-end products for passengers arriving or departing from the world's busiest airport.

"We are constantly looking for ways of innovating our product and providing new levels of premium service," said Sarah Lewis, commercial manager for Heathrow by Invitation at Heathrow Airport Ltd.

"In the new year, we will be looking at working collaboratively with luxury brands to enhance the experience," she said.

Based in Hounslow, Middlesex, Heathrow Airport Ltd. is owned by operator BAA Airports

Ltd.

Kerb calling

**Heathrow by Invitation** promises exclusive use of the VIP suites for passengers shying from media gaze and the general public. It is claimed that many celebrities and business executives who value privacy and convenience have already signed up for the service.

Offerings include kerbside drop-off and pick-up point and exclusive terminal entrance, a luxury private suite with VIP handlers taking care of check-in, luggage drop-off, customs and passport control, and a dedicated private security search area.

Among the other pamperings are a limousine service to and from the passengers' private suite directly to the airplane's steps, a private suite to host meetings for up to six flyers and non-flyers before boarding the flight, and the pickup and delivery of arriving bags directly to the VIPs.

Customers can request onward travel via limo or helicopter.

Convenience is the key here. A chauffeur-driven luxury car will drive the passengers directly to private lounge even while another team handles passport and customs checks as well as baggage retrieval.

Per Heathrow, each booking leads to a private lounge for use up to three hours before the flight. Amenities include light refreshments, television and Internet access, iPad usage, newspapers and the ability to hold meetings of up to six additional people whether they are flying or not.



In this Q&A, Ms. Lewis goes into detail about Heathrow by Invitation's positioning, the focus on offering VIP passengers a stab at privacy and convenience, and the airport's focus on complementing the luxury service with upscale retail opportunities. Please read on.

Why open the VIP suites to general passengers landing at or departing from Heathrow? Heathrow's VIP suites were previously the preserve of royalty, heads of state and visiting

diplomats under a contract with [Britain's] Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Following a review of this arrangement, we made the decision to open these facilities to all passengers at Heathrow. There's nowhere more discreet or more luxurious at Heathrow.

Who is the airport specifically targeting?

Heathrow by Invitation primarily caters for high-profile guests and business executives who value privacy and convenience.

For these passengers, we are able to offer a journey that is swift, effortless and supremely comfortable.

How unique is this offering for non-VIPs? Any other airports you can think of doing something similar?

At £1,500 [\$2,400] for up to six guests in one journey, Heathrow by Invitation provides an experience available to any passenger travelling in on a premium airline ticket.

Uniquely, passengers using this service can travel through the world's busiest international airport without encountering another passenger.

What happens when royalty, heads of state or visiting diplomats arrive or depart – will they share the suites with the paying passengers?

Each suite within the lounge is booked exclusively for each guest and movements throughout the facility are managed to ensure the highest levels of privacy for individuals.



How many suites will be offered?

There are approximately 21 suites managed across the airport campus which are used by guests for a short period before and after their flight.

How did you arrive at the pricing? Is it £1,500 per person or per group? And is it per visit or per year?

£1,500 covers one journey, either an arrival or departure for up to six people travelling in a group.

What is the registration process? Do consumers have to dial a number or book online or on mobile ahead of time?

To make a booking, guests can complete an online registration form at <http://www.heathrowbyinvitation.com>.

Will Heathrow Airport handle all customs and immigration formalities? Will this apply to citizens from non-visa waiver countries?

All customs and immigration requirements are managed within the Heathrow by Invitation service in partnership with the relevant government authorities for all passengers, regardless of origin.

Heathrow's new Terminal 5 also services domestic traffic. Will those passengers also be eligible to use this service?

The Heathrow by Invitation service covers all terminals at Heathrow – all premium passengers are eligible for this service regardless of destination.

How will Heathrow by Invitation offer a competitive edge?

We are constantly looking for ways of innovating our product and providing new levels of premium service.

In the new year, we will be looking at working collaboratively with luxury brands to enhance the experience.

How is the airport going to market this service besides public relations?

Heathrow by Invitation is not overtly marketed.

We know that our customers value their privacy, so much of our outreach is based on relationship building and brand association.



What else is Heathrow doing to service high-net-worth passengers?

Heathrow leads in luxury retailing and, over the last three years, we have outperformed the U.K. and global markets, fuelled by the growth in the BRIC economies: Brazil, Russia, India and China.

Shopping for luxury retail goods in the U.K. is an attractive proposition for high-net-worth individuals and, for foreign visitors particularly, Heathrow's price proposition makes it even more so.

At Heathrow, we have passengers who are choosing to fly through the airport specifically

to pick up items sold here.

Passengers will phone in advance to reserve certain items, and we have continued to witness a significant increase in demand for luxury goods from Chinese passengers as well as the Middle East with British brands such as Mulberry, Burberry and Smythson proving particularly popular.

Heathrow is known to be one of the busiest airports in the world. Is Heathrow by Invitation eyeing an untapped opportunity or trying to ease the process of travelling through Britain's largest hub?

Heathrow by Invitation is a unique experience at this airport.

Passengers using this service can travel through the world's busiest international airport without encountering another passenger.

*Heathrow by Invitation promotional video*

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