EMIRATES FIRST ON-BOARD FOR BIOMETRIC BOARDING

News / Airlines



Emirates is pushing the boundaries of technology, becoming the first airline outside America to receive approval for biometric boarding from the U.S. Customs Border Protection (CBP).

Soon, customers flying from Dubai to any of Emirates' 12 destinations in the U.S. will be able to choose facial recognition technology at the departure gates, reducing the time taken for identity checks to two seconds or less. No pre-registration is required, and customers may also choose not to use the technology. Emirates does not store any biometric records of its customers – all the data is managed securely by CBP.

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The technology was piloted at the departure gates of Emirates' flights from Dubai to New York and Los Angeles through the peak periods in July and August. The results were encouraging with some flights achieving 100% biometric boarding and zero manual checks. The airline expects to make biometric boarding available for all its U.S. destinations by year-end, once the equipment is in place.

How biometric boarding works: at the boarding gate, the system clicks the passenger's photo, which is matched against CBP's gallery in real-time to verify the person's identity in two seconds or less. The system may not work for those who haven't travelled to the U.S. for a long time or whose images are not in CBP's gallery, in which case they can simply approach the gate desks.

Dr Abdulla Al Hashimi, Divisional Senior Vice President, Emirates Group Security said: "Safety and security will always remain our number one priority, as Emirates continues to explore and invest in innovative solutions for hassle-free travel that help our customers fly better. Our ultimate aim is to help our passengers travel paperless, without the need for passports and IDs. Biometric boarding is one more step in streamlining processes at our hub using digital technology, saving our customers time and giving them peace of mind. We are talking with authorities of several countries to make security using facial recognition technology more acceptable and accessible."

John Wagner, Deputy Executive Assistant Commission, Office of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said: "CBP has been working with our stakeholders like Emirates to build a simplified, but secure travel process that aligns with CBP's and the travel industry's modernization efforts. By comparing a traveler's face to their passport or visa photo that was previously provided for the purpose of travel, we have streamlined identity verification that further secures and enhances the customer experience."

The announcement will serve as a boost for AVSEC Global 2019, which is being held from Sunday, 22 to Tuesday, 24 September at the JW Marriott Marquis, Dubai. The symposium is one of the most significant aviation security events in the region and one of the biggest globally.

In June, Emirates had implemented biometric boarding for passengers on its Washington-Dubai flights. The airline expects to roll out this technology across all its US destination airports. Emirates currently flies to 12 US cities: New York, Newark, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Orlando and Fort Lauderdale. In October last year, Emirates launched the world's first biometric path to offer customers a smooth and seamless journey at Dubai International airport.

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