

Jumbo Stay

Ground control to cockpit suite

Alannah Eames

I'm reclining in my leather chair reading a newspaper in the first-class lounge of a jumbo jet, enjoying a view of the runway. This will be my home for the next 12 hours.

The difference this time is that there is no pilot on board, I have no life vest under my seat and I'm not flying anywhere. Instead, I am 'overnighting' at the Jumbo Stay 'hotel' at Stockholm's Arlanda airport.

The Jumbo Stay 'hotel' - parked on the edge of Stockholm's international airport in Sweden - is the brainwave of Oscar Diös. "I wanted to expand to the airport area, found out about this plane lying here idle and thought it would be good for a hostel," he says.

In the end, he bought it in 2007 "for around the same price as a family-sized house in the Stockholm area" and renamed the plane 'Liv' after his daughter.

This Boeing 747-212B aircraft has clocked up quite some history during its glory days. It made its first flight in 1976 and belonged to Singapore Airlines before being sold to Pan Am in 1984 and renamed 'Clipper Belle of the Sky'.

From there it found its way to Stockholm where Diös redesigned it - giving it a retro feeling from its glorious Pan-Am days and adding all mod cons. In 2009, it opened its doors as a hostel with 26 rooms and 73 beds.

Standing at the entrance to the plane, it's the first time I have ever stood so close to a 747 on ground level; the sheer size of this flying monster makes me feel like a midget next to its huge wheels and landing gear equipment.

"We chuckle at the oxygen masks hanging over the reception"

At the reception, we are welcomed by Australian Rodi Serov Pearson, an ex-flight attendant, dressed as cabin crew. Just like in any other hotel, we fill out the registration forms, chuckling at the oxygen masks hanging over the reception and the business cards designed like airline boarding passes. To the left of the reception is a small café and communal lounge area.

From the reception, it's up a narrow winding staircase to the Jumbo's 'first-class'. Standing outside the aptly named Room 747, we open the door, wondering what to expect. In front of us (and above our heads) stands the original cockpit control panel and windows. In between the two single beds hangs a flat screen TV. The suite's a clever mix of original 747 gadgets and modern clean-cut design. And it works.

The upper floor of the aircraft has been split between the cockpit suite and a small 'business lounge' with flat screen TV which can hold up to 10 people for a conference and the serving of a business class in-flight meal. But if you're staying in the cockpit suite, it serves as your private living room in the evenings.

The ash trays in the seat pockets remind me of the days when in-flight smoking was allowed. All that's missing are seatbelts and life vests.

After seeing the cockpit, Pearson takes us on a guided tour. The dorm rooms have two sets of bunk beds and the more expensive 'Private 1-2-3' rooms can sleep one to three people.

All rooms have a TV and the original overhead baggage compartments serve as 'lockers'. In typical Boeing style, all room numbers begin with a 7. If you're a technical freak, check out the rooms in the landing gear compartment and in the former jet engines which will be open soon.



The 'hostel' is a converted Boeing 747-212B aircraft.

Jumbo Stay is an upmarket kind of hostel. "The reception staff on duty do everything from check-in and concierge service to light cleaning and ordering supplies," says Diös, "just like on a plane."

He tells us that housekeeping, catering and laundry are all outsourced. "There's not much space for storage on board so every morning we fax our suppliers a list of what we need for the day."

When we climb into our 'cockpit' bed that night, we can see the runway and I feel high up. I raise the level of my bed and start fiddling around with the steering wheel, emergency break and buttons on the roof. To the right of my bed is the 'oxygen dilutor' button and above me are 101 knobs and buttons for radio traffic control.

The next morning we awake to blue skies and a steady queue of planes taxiing around the corner towards the terminal buildings. Breakfast is basic but fun - a small plastic tray with continental breakfast, served with fresh bread and coffee - just like on a real flight.

The experience of staying overnight in the world's first converted jumbo jet is a great one. And even though it's far from cheap, the cockpit suite is definitely worth splashing out on - remember a first-class seat on a long-haul flight will cost you much more... and without a private cockpit tour.

About Jumbo Stay

Where: In Sweden, at Stockholm's main international airport, Arlanda. A free shuttle bus runs regularly between the terminal and Jumbo Stay.

Rooms: 27 rooms, 76 beds.

Rates: Prices range from approximately €42 (SEK 400) per person bed-and-breakfast in a four-person room to €350 (SEK 3,300) for two people bed-and-breakfast in the cockpit suite.

Services: Café and walkway along the wing (open in summertime). Website: www.jumbostay.com.

SAS and Air Malta fly daily from Malta to Stockholm Arlanda. Ryanair flies direct from Malta to another airport, Stockholm Skavsta, which is around a two-hour drive from Arlanda.



One of the single rooms inside the plane.



Staying in the cockpit suite is a unique experience. Photo Lioba Schneider