

BA plans to remove 30,000 suitcases of plastic from their flights

British Airways has set a new target to remove more than 700 tonnes of single-use plastic on board its flights in 2020, the equivalent to more than 30,000 suitcases full of single-use plastic, which is even more than the number of bags customers check in with the airline at Heathrow on an average day.



Eco-artist Sarah Turner's giant suitcase made of plastic is on display at Heathrow.

The airline has already rolled out initiatives to remove 25-million individual items of single-use plastic on board each year, equivalent to 90 tonnes, and has now set itself an ambitious target to increase this by more than 700%.

British Airways has been working closely with its suppliers to identify alternatives to single-use plastic items and this year it will replace as many as possible with recyclable or re-usable items or items from sustainable sources. To date, the airline has achieved the following plastic reductions:

- Swapped plastic stirrers with bamboo alternatives
- Reduced plastic packaging on Club World amenity kits
- Swapped plastic wrapping for all bedding and blankets for paper wrapping (currently being rolled out across all cabins)
- Removed plastic wrapping on headsets and instead placed these inside paper charity envelopes in World Traveller cabins
- Water bottles on board are made from 50% recycled plastic
- Removed inflight retail plastic bags

The target also includes finding alternatives to single-use plastic cutlery, tumblers, cups, toothpicks and butter packaging on board. The airline described the process of making these changes as complex, with a significant amount of research required to ensure that the alternative products sourced are credibly sustainable, offer the same hygiene levels as their plastic counterparts and do not outweigh the items they replace.

“Our customers have told us that they want to see these changes and we’re pleased to have made real strides in our journey to becoming more sustainable. We’ve spent a long time researching how to make sustainable changes without causing environmental impact elsewhere. For instance, we are looking at the amount of water and detergent needed to wash metal cutlery and how often it needs to be replaced versus using plastic or bamboo cutlery,” Kate Tanner, British Airways’ customer experience manager says.

“We’ve looked at how we ensure blankets and other items can be kept clean without a plastic covering and the lifespan of all the new items compared to the existing ones. Some potential replacement options may be heavier, which would then have an impact on the weight of the aircraft and therefore on our emissions, so we must ensure we are making the right choices on all replacements.”

To mark the new target British Airways commissioned eco-artist Sarah Turner to create a giant suitcase made from a thousand pieces of waste plastic, including 160 spoons, more than a dozen plastic stirrers, drink lids, plastic wrap, bubble wrap, catering dishes and covers and bottles. The sculpture, which represents the 30,000 suitcases worth of plastic waste being removed, is currently on display at British Airways’ Headquarters near Heathrow.

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