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FLYING HIGH

Virgin Blue Group has teamed up with acclaimed Australian chef Luke Mangan to make their vision of fresh, tasty airline food a reality.

With award-winning restaurants in Sydney, Melbourne, Tokyo and Singapore – not to mention on three luxury cruises – chef Luke Mangan is no stranger to a challenge.

His passion for creating outstanding dishes inspired Virgin Blue to recruit Mangan to produce a new, premium quality on board retail menu for all Virgin Blue, Polynesian Blue and Pacific Blue flights as well as domestic and international business class menus.

Mangan's philosophy for the menu was in keeping with Virgin Blue's – to source the freshest, quality local and Australian ingredients and showcase them with a contemporary twist.

Mangan served his apprenticeship in Melbourne in the '80s before heading to Europe. He's known for his fresh, modern creations that combine classic French training and Asian influences.

"In my cooking, I like to keep it simple and let the flavours speak for themselves," he says. "It's not tricky food, it's good, basic, fresh ingredients. We have some of the best produce in the world in this country, from seafood to meat, fruit and vegetables. I'm lucky enough to travel the world, and I get a lot of inspiration from different cities and cultures."

Of course, there are many challenges to be faced when putting together a menu for an airline. Not only are there

Luke Mangan owns restaurants all around the world, including Tokyo, Sydney and Singapore. His next great challenge? Designing a new menu for Virgin Blue Group.

logistical problems with keeping food fresh during periods of storage, as well as serving hot dishes at 35,000 feet, but our sense of taste changes when flying at altitude. ▷

"All of our senses get dulled down when flying," explains Mangan. "The food has to have a stronger flavour than I would usually serve up in a restaurant."

Mangan's knowledge of spices came to the fore here. Dishes such as Tandoori-spiced lamb salad with Moroccan pumpkin, chickpeas and yoghurt dressing' (served on the V Australia international menu) pack plenty of flavour with a liberal use of spices, as do the Za'atar Flatbread Crisps with Spicy Tomato Salsa on Virgin Blue domestic flights. "The bold flavours featured help to keep the senses alert while flying," Mangan adds.

The chef has also exclusively designed Virgin Blue's first domestic business class menu. This will be launched next month on the new Airbus 330 airplane.

As part of this collaboration with Virgin Blue, Mangan has introduced a range of his own branded products on board. These include fresh salads and paninis, gourmet chunky beef pies with tomato relish and ice-cream sandwiches.

"We want to lead the way in providing a great range of quality in-flight food and beverages as we build on our strategy to be the airline of choice in Australia," says the Virgin Blue Group of Airlines Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, John Borghetti.

"Luke Mangan is renowned internationally for his expertise in food and we knew he was the right person to help us redefine our onboard menus. Just because you are up in the air doesn't mean that you can't enjoy fresh, great tasting meals and snacks."

Mangan also supports The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, and The James Beard Foundation among others. He also co-founded the Australian culinary foundation, Appetite for Excellence to help promote the development and mentoring of young waiters, chefs and restaurateurs.

With his food to be found on land, at sea, and now 30,000 feet in the air, the future looks bright for Luke Mangan. And thanks to his talent in the kitchen, we can all look forward to a new standard of onboard excellence in airline cuisine on Virgin Blue Airlines. 



"It's a massive thing to be feeding people on international and domestic flights - I think it's a great partnership," says Luke Mangan, whose fresh, flavoursome fare is now found on all Virgin Group airlines. Short flights offer a menu of snacks including paninis, pies and noodle salads, while long-haul flights offer a tempting choice of dishes including snacks, starters, soups, main courses, desserts and matching wines.