

Emirates rolling out 'Travel Rehearsal' programmes for autistic children

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dubai: One year after Emirates' first successful 'travel rehearsal' for children with autism the programme is now being rolled out across 17 cities. The programmes allow children to practice the journey through the airport in order to prepare for real flights.

The rehearsal programme is being rolled out to cities including Barcelona, Brisbane, Budapest, Cebu, Christchurch, Dubai, Durban, Luanda, Madrid, Manila, Mauritius, Manchester, Montreal, Nice, Oslo, Paris and Toronto, with more destinations committing to the programme every month.

Travel rehearsals are conducted in partnership with airports, authorities, local centers, and foundations. Currently, this is not a bookable service and is available on an invitation basis in collaboration

with accredited centers. Parents, therapists and teachers are also involved in the rehearsals.

The Travel Rehearsal concept first began in 2023, as a community collaboration between Emirates, Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, Dubai Airports, the General Directorate of Identity and Foreigners Affairs, Dubai Police and Dubai Customs, and several schools and centres for autism in Dubai, whose feedback was invaluable to the process.

For many people with autism, air travel is a challenging experience or something to be avoided completely, due to the high level of sensory stimuli that can be involved. A survey on AutismTravel.com revealed that 78% of families are hesitant to travel or visit new locations, and that 94% of respondents would take more vacations if they had access to places where staff are autism-trained and certified.

Emirates has also achieved its designation as the world's first Autism Certified Airline™, with more than 30,000 cabin crew and ground staff now trained to support customers with autism.

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