

This Indian flies high in the A380

Manju V | TNN

Mumbai: The only thing small about it is its name: A380. The world's first double-decker aircraft, A380, may not have made its maiden commercial flight to India, but it does boast a local connection: an Indian commander in the cockpit. Capt Cyrus Cama is the first Indian to be a commander on the A380, which completed its first anniversary in the skies a few months ago.

"I was expecting it," said Capt Cama over the phone, recalling the selection exam held in May this year. He was one of eight pilots to be chosen for Emirates' first A380 training batch. "I feel proud and happy about the whole thing. And since I'm Parsi, this achievement was of special significance, considering that it was a Parsi (JRD Tata) who brought aviation to India." Capt Cama flies the 489-seater, Emirates A380, on the thirteen-and-a-half-hour Dubai-New York route. "It takes about 12 hours on the New York-Dubai leg," he adds.

So how was the A380 experience? "She flies very nicely and is very stable," says the captain. "You have to be aware of the sheer size and wing span, which at 79.8 m puts it in the super category," he says. So huge is this bird that airports have been redesigned to accommodate it. "Manoeuvring on ground is the most demanding part. JFK airport in New York has dedicated taxi ways and parking stands for it," he adds.

With a maximum take-off weight of 540 tons, a range of 8,000 nautical miles and a capacity to seat 555 passengers in three class configuration, the largest passenger aircraft is "very much advanced". "It is fly-by-wire like say, the A320, but there are remarkable differences. For instance, it is the only Airbus aircraft to have an electronic checklist. The avionics, computers, displays and screen are of high standard," says Capt Cama.

And it's an attention seeker. The super-jumbo gets its share of eyeballs and eardrums every time it lands or takes off. "It's

a new toy in sky. A new huge, fancy aircraft. Our cabin crew says that we get passengers who are all excited and inquisitive. When I saw it the first time at



SUPER JUMBO: Capt Cyrus Cama is the first Indian to be a commander on the world's first double-decker aircraft A380

the Dubai air show last year, I was amazed by its sheer size."

Capt Cama is envied by many for being in a position to fly this magnificent machine. At 40 years, and with 11,500 hours of flying experience, Cama is a line instructor on almost all wide-bodied and new

aircraft including the B777, A330, A340, and now the A380. The Bandra boy was also the first Indian pilot to join the Emirates, after he moved base to Dubai ten years ago. "Emirates has about 2,300 pilots and about 35 to 40 of these are Indians. Indian pilots were not recruited by foreign airlines when I joined the airline industry 19 years ago. In fact even Air India did not hire fresh Commercial Pilot Licence holders," he recalls. He was just short of 21 when he landed his first job with Vayudoot. After this he moved to Jet Airways for five years before settling for Emirates.

The A380 training is easily the most memorable achievement of his career. "I did my four-week ground and simulator training in Dubai and then went to Toulouse for actual flying. More Indian pilots from Emirates will be flying the A380 soon," he adds.

A total of nine A380 aircraft have been delivered to date—with six in operation with Singapore Airlines, Qantas and Emirates.