

Finnair upbeat about India operations, to add three flights

Betting high on the increasing air traffic for overseas travel from India, Nordic carrier Finnair has decided to add three more flights a week to the country from summer next year, even as it has its eyes set on flying to Bangalore.

'We are very upbeat about our Indian operations. We see a huge potential for both tourists and transit traffic. So next summer, we will increase the number of our flights to India,' said Timo Riihimaki, vice president for global sales.

'From next summer we will increase our flights to Delhi to all seven days a week from the present six, and to [Mumbai](#) to six days a week from four. These numbers can go up further depending on market conditions,' Riihimaki told IANS here.

'We are also looking closely at Bangalore. We are ready with our plans but will like to study the market - we are in the wait and watch mode,' he said, hoping India will permit Finnair to fly to the city when the bilateral air pact comes up for review.

'In just three years, our traffic to India has grown significantly. We are expecting more than 100,000 passengers this year.' The airline has been operating charters to Goa for more than two decades.

According to Christer Haglund, senior vice president for corporate communications, Finland also offered the Indian traveller a huge tourism potential both in winters, especially for Christmas with Santa Claus, and in summers.

'We are betting high on tourists as well. We will be redeveloping our airport and will have saunas, spas and hotels, food courts to make it more tourist-friendly,' Haglund said.

'So far as our Asian traffic is concerned, the passenger traffic has increased 25 percent, led by India. This is very a good figure,' he said.

He said Helsinki, which was the closest European airport to India, also offered a good transit point for air traffic from Asia to [Europe](#) and the US. 'The shortest Arctic route between Europe and Asia is via Helsinki,' he said.

'So more and more travellers are taking this route as it is not only less time-consuming but also saves on fuel. Certainly, it has added to the number of Asian tourists as well.'

Riihimaki said the airline was going to introduce nine Airbus A-330/340 aircraft by 2010 and that some of them may be deployed to the India sector.

Speaking about competition, he said German carrier Lufthansa was a significant rival. 'But in the next five years we are positioning ourselves to be the number one passenger carrier in the Asian market.'

Finnair completed 85 years of service Nov 1, making it one of the world's oldest continuously operating airlines. Founded under the name Aero in 1923, its first flight was a year later when an aircraft flew 162 kg of mail to Estonian capital Tallinn from Helsinki's Katajanokka aerodrome.

Now, with its modern fleet and direct flights, Finnair carries millions of passengers and tonnes of cargo to more than 120 destinations around the world.

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