

STAR ALLIANCE WELCOMES FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY

News / Airlines



South African Airways subsidiary **Mango Airlines** plans to join the **Star Alliance** network by the third quarter of 2016 under Star's new "Connecting Partner Model," concept, potentially paving the way for more budget carriers to enter the 28-airline alliance.

Star Alliance made the announcement at its annual Chief Executives Board meeting in Chicago on December 10. With the addition, Star Alliance will get access to 51 percent of the South African market.

The new model looks at adding routes operated by "low-cost" and "hybrid" airlines to the network. "With a focus on 'Friends of the Family,' the Alliance plans to add connectivity to these types of carriers within the family of Star Alliance," said Star Alliance CEO Mark Schwab. "Many already own or are transitioning parts of their operations on to these types of platforms. There are also other parts of world we have a desire to look around where the panorama does not provide a full service and where entities like Mango provide connectivity." Star has already started talks with Brazilian low-fare carrier Azul following Avianca recent induction. "We are now only concentrating on solving the second half of the solution in Brazil," added Schwab.

Another likely addition in the near future could involve Singapore Airlines' long-haul budget subsidiary, Scoot.

Although Star could accommodate two carriers in India, no active discussions have begun as Air India, a Star member, further integrates into the network of member airlines' bilaterals and code shares, explained Schwab. India's largest budget carrier, IndiGo, has not shown interest in diluting

its present model.

Meanwhile, Star appears to have abandoned efforts to attract a Russian carrier after past hits and misses. “The Russian geography is well served on an international basis for the last couple of years and has not been, frankly, on our radar screen,” Schwab told AIN.

Though Connecting Partners need to comply with Star’s operating standards they will not become a member of the Alliance itself. Only those transferring between a Star Alliance member airline and a Connecting Partner (and not on a point to point) will get benefits such as passenger and baggage through check-in.

“Embracing change and challenging the status quo would be a contributing factor to Star choosing us...We are the first on the African continent to offer a full suite of mobile apps, Wi-Fi, tickets through retail stores,” Mango CEO Nico Bezuidenhout told AIN, who insisted the new arrangement would not compromise his airline’s budget model. “Star has been surprisingly flexible in their engagement,” he said. “Traditional network carriers can be stuck in their ways. Becoming a Connecting Partner gives us a competitive advantage that immediately grows into market share.”

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