ETIHAD IN BULLISH MOOD AS IT REPORTS 17% RISE IN PASSENGERS LAST YEAR, FUELS ABU DHABI AVIATION AMBITIONS

News / Airlines

The Etihad Airways chief executive James Hogan said on Tuesday that the airline would continue to “face challenges” from protectionism in the US and Europe this year as it fights to bring “new competitive choice” to its passengers.

The Abu Dhabi carrier flew 17.4 million passengers last year – a 17 per cent increase on 2014 – and operated 97,400 flights, covering 467 million kilometres, it said. Etihad and its equity partners combined accounted for 84 per cent of passenger traffic at Abu Dhabi International Airport.

“We enter 2016 with confidence as a stronger, more dynamic airline that will continue to support the evolution of Abu Dhabi as a global aviation hub,” Mr Hogan said.

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Etihad owns minority stakes in Alitalia, airberlin, Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Jet Airways, Virgin Australia and the Swiss regional carrier Darwin Airline. It said that its partnerships delivered more than 5 million passengers on to its flights last year, reflecting a rise of almost 43 per cent over the 3.5 million passengers in 2014.

However, the threat of regulatory action driven by its European and American rivals remains.

“We continue to face challenges, not least the protectionism of the major American and European legacy carriers,” said Mr Hogan. “[However] we will continue to fight to bring new competitive choice to travellers around the world.”

During the past 12 months, Etihad and its Arabian Gulf peers Emirates and Qatar Airways have been under increasing regulatory scrutiny amid allegations from American and European rivals of unfair practices in breach of open skies agreements, claims which the Gulf carriers refute. Etihad is locked in a legal dispute in Germany, after a court ruled that the country’s ministry of transport was entitled to stop it from selling tickets on some routes operated by airberlin, Germany’s second-largest airline.

Etihad added new destinations last year, increasing frequencies on existing routes and signing codeshare agreements with other airlines.

In 2015, Etihad introduced six new destinations including Kolkata, Madrid, Edinburgh and Hong Kong and increased frequencies on 16 existing routes.

Its fleet grew by 9 per cent to 121 aircraft by the end of last year including new A380s and Boeing Dreamliners, making it “one of the youngest” fleets in the industry at an average of 5.8 years, Etihad said. This year Etihad expects to receive 10 aircraft including two Boeing 777-200 Freighters.

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