FINNAIR READIES FOR FIRST A350 DELIVERY; EYES ASIA MARKET EXPANSION

News / Airlines

Finnair will take delivery Oct. 7 of the first of 19 Airbus A350 XWBs it has on order, becoming the third airline to receive an A350 and the first European operator.

The oneworld airline will receive the seventh A350 off the production line in Toulouse Oct. 7, following deliveries earlier this year to launch customer Qatar Airways and Vietnam Airlines.

Senior executives at Finnair, including CEO Pekka Vauramo, are in Toulouse for the ceremonies and to see the aircraft flown to Helsinki.

The other six A350s with Qatar and Vietnam have so far transported around 250,000 passengers, operating an average of 11.4 hours a day, Airbus told journalists in Toulouse today. Average flying time has been 5.1 hours per flight, A350 marketing chief Marisa Lucas-Ugena said.

Finnair CCO Juha Jarvinen confirmed the first scheduled A350 long-haul flight will take place Nov. 21, from Helsinki to Shanghai Pudong. Other planned destinations include New York JFK, a daily

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service that is expected to switch from A330 to A350 in 2016.

Finnair expects to take delivery of four A350-900s this year.

"By 2017 we plan to have phased out all our A340-300s," Jarvinen told ATW, saying that Finnair aims to become a leading airline in the Europe-Asia market.

Helsinki's geographical location in Northern Europe allows Finnair to offer the shortest flying time from Europe to North Asia destinations.

The airline can use long-haul aircraft more productively because it can do 24-hour turnarounds between Europe and North Asia and can offer a minimum transfer time in Helsinki of 35 minutes.

"We needed new aircraft for our growth. And we think the A350 is the right vehicle for Asia, which will enable us to open new markets," Jarvinen said.

Helsinki airport operator Finavia said in a statement the airport is ready for the new widebody. Some renovation was done on the two oldest passenger bridges, but no other modifications were necessary.

Finavia is implementing a massive development program at Helsinki Airport with the goal of being able to serve 20 million customers annually by 2020.

"Air traffic between Asia and Europe is expected to grow exponentially in the next few years. We need to improve all of the functions and services of Helsinki Airport in order to keep up with the competition," Finavia CEO Kari Savolainen said in a statement.

Widebody aircraft, including the Airbus A350, will have eight new bridge stands, doubling the current number of stands.

Airbus has 783 orders for from 41 customers for the A350.

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