ALL NIPPON AIRWAYS WILL CONSIDER EXPANDING LOCAL FLIGHTS BEYOND SYDNEY

News / Airlines

Japanese carrier All Nippon Airways will consider expanding to other destinations like Melbourne and Perth in the future after launching its first flights between Tokyo and Sydney since the 1990s on Saturday, says Kenya Inada, ANA general manager Asia and Oceania.

"We want to see very good success in the [daily Tokyo] Haneda-Sydney route first, then we will look at other options later on," he said through a translator. "One idea might be Perth, but I do hear there is an increased demand from Melbourne as well. So I think that we will be considering cities such as those."

Rival Japan Airlines (JAL), which flies from Sydney to Tokyo Narita, has reportedly been considering the launch of new flights to Perth as demand for travel between the two countries continues to increase, in large part due to the popularity of Japan as a tourism destination for Australians. Perth lacks any direct flights to Japan, while Melbourne is served by Jetstar four times a week.

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Qantas this year switched its Sydney-Tokyo flights to Haneda Airport from Narita International Airport once slots became available because Haneda is closer to the Tokyo CBD and more convenient for business travellers. At the same time, Qantas launched new daily flights from Brisbane to Narita. Qantas and JAL are codeshare partners as well as co-owners of the Jetstar Japan joint venture.

Mr Inada said ANA had returned to Australia after a long absence because it was an obvious "white spot" on its route map around the world. He said Sydney was chosen as the first route because the city had the biggest demand, particularly in the business market.

To date, 60 percent of the tickets sold on ANA services have been bought by Japanese travellers, the rest by Australians. In the 12 months to October, 326,600 Japanese visited Australia; 284,500 Australians headed to Japan.

Japan is a particularly popular outbound destination for Australians for skiing during the northern winter. Mr Inada said many Australians had been using ANA's domestic services between Tokyo and Sapporo and Hakodate even before the carrier had resumed flights to Sydney.

Codeshare with Virgin

In the Australian market, Mr Inada said ANA was seeking a codeshare agreement with Virgin Australia that would allow inbound Japanese visitors to codeshare on Virgin domestic flights, but he did not know when such a deal could be finalised.

When asked whether Virgin Australia was likely to seek a codeshare on the Sydney-Haneda route, he said the Australian carrier hadn't made such a request to date.

Virgin Australia covers the Asian market through a partnership with one of its largest shareholders, Singapore Airlines, which flies many Australians to Japan via Singapore. Singapore Airlines and ANA are both in the Star Alliance.

Mr Inada said the ANA flights would also open a new way for Australians to fly to Europe, as the morning arrival into Haneda connected easily with ANA flights to London, Frankfurt, Munich and Paris. But he said the prices set by ANA on the Kangaroo route were unlikely to be particularly low unless there was a dearth of empty seats at a particular time of year.

"I don't think that we will be able to compete with the Emirates of the world," he said.

For its first flight to Sydney, ANA brought a special Boeing 787-9 aircraft outfitted in a R2-D2 Star Wars livery, which neatly coincided with the opening of the latest Star Wars film last week. Mr Inada said he couldn't say when it would next return on the route.

"That is top secret," he said with a laugh. "We wanted it for the launch. After that, it does need to be utilised in operations in other areas as well."

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