JETBLUE IN TALKS WITH AZUL TO LET FLIERS BOOK ON BOTH CARRIERS

News / Airlines

JetBlue Airways Corp. is talking with Brazil's Azul SA about an agreement that would let passengers fly both carriers on one itinerary -- a move that would reunite Azul Chief Executive Officer David Neeleman with the U.S. carrier he founded.

Linking the two airlines would help Neeleman, who left JetBlue in 2007, eight years after its creation, to further his global expansion plans. After starting Azul's first international flights, to Florida, last year, he has since added Punta del Este in Uruguay and Cayenne in French Guiana. In June, he took control of Portuguese carrier TAP, and sold 5 percent of Azul to United Continental Holdings Inc.

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"It's being discussed," Antonoaldo Neves, president of Azul, said in an interview last week at the company's headquarters in Barueri. "We need to discuss, make an agreement -- we're exploring interline agreements with a number of airlines."

JetBlue confirmed the talks with Azul, said Morgan Johnston, spokesman for the New York-based carrier.

JetBlue has said it plans to increase daily departures from Fort Lauderdale to 100 from 78 now as it expands in the Caribbean and Latin America.

A so-called interline agreement would allow travelers to purchase a single ticket to fly on Azul from Sao Paulo to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and then take a JetBlue flight to destinations across the U.S. Bags checked at the beginning of the trip would be automatically transferred to the second flight and the airlines would share the revenue.

JetBlue, which primarily operates in the domestic market, has interline agreements with 41 airlines, most of them based outside the U.S.

Interlining is a precursor to a codeshare, which lets a passenger buy a ticket on one airline and fly another. For example, a passenger books a flight on United and the trip is actually operated by All Nippon Airways.

Neeleman started Azul in 2008. Brazil's third-biggest airline, it has a 17 percent domestic market share, and flies to more destinations than rivals. Earlier this year, Neeleman beat Avianca Holdings controller German Efromovich to buy 61 percent of TAP, which has 77 weekly flights between Portugal and Brazil.

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