STAR ALLIANCE IS SET TO EXPAND ITS NETWORK UNDER 'HYBRID' MODEL

News / Airlines

Star Alliance is set to expand its network reach with the launch of its Connecting Partner Model. Under this new concept, routes operated by “low-cost” and **“hybrid”** airlines will be able to connect to the Alliance network. This will allow customers of Star Alliance member carriers to select from an even wider choice of destinations and flights.

“With this innovative concept, we are breaking new ground. We see a definite trend of convergence between the ‘traditional full service’ and ‘low-cost’ business models in the airline industry,” said Mark Schwab, CEO Star Alliance. “At the same time, our customers are telling us that they need access to markets where we do not yet provide ideal coverage. In many cases network carriers are not in a position to fill this gap and hence working with future Connecting Partners will allow us to provide an extended network to our travellers.”

Connecting Partners will be carefully assessed for their fit into the existing Star Alliance network. While these selected airlines need to comply and adhere to the high operating standard required by the Alliance, they will not become a member of the Alliance itself.

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Customers travelling on an itinerary which includes a transfer between a Star Alliance member airline and a Connecting Partner will be offered Alliance benefits such as passenger and baggage through check-in. Moreover, Star Alliance Gold Card holders will enjoy a tailored set of privileges in line with the different product offerings of the individual Connecting Partner.

Connecting Partners will enter into bilateral commercial agreements with selected Star Alliance member airlines, which may include additional Frequent Flyer Programme based privileges.

Innovative and multi-award winning South African low-cost airline Mango has been selected as the first airline with which Star Alliance will be implementing the new concept.

“We are delighted to be working with Mango as we marry traditional and low-cost or hybrid airlines for the first time in our Alliance’s history. The airline’s innovative and progressive style makes it an ideal candidate for launching our new Connecting Partner concept. We aim to have first customers using this new offer as of the third quarter of 2016,” adds Schwab.

Mango’s first flight took to the skies on November 15th, 2006. Since then, the airline has grown its fleet from four to 10 Boeing 737-800 aircraft, operating between South Africa’s key domestic points as well as between Johannesburg and Zanzibar. The carrier remains the only African airline to offer on-board Wi-Fi. In addition, Mango has been recognised for its Customer Service Excellence by various awards, including the World Travel Awards and Skytrax.

“Innovation and a relentless pursuit of excellence are the cornerstones of Mango and fundamental to our culture as a business,” says Mango CEO Nico Bezuidenhout. Mango celebrates a decade in aviation next year and the carrier has recently become the largest low-cost airline in South Africa by passenger volume. “Participation in the development of, and ultimately becoming the launch Star Alliance Connecting Partner airline, wedges-in with our medium to long term business objectives,” he added.

Bezuidenhout said that while the Connecting Partner product flies in the face of convention, the common ground for the concept relates directly to the bottom line. “Becoming a Connecting Partner will give any low-cost or hybrid airline a competitive advantage that immediately grows market share while creating greater choice for travellers,” he said.

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