

UNITED PUSHES CHINA EXPANSION AFTER HITTING ROADBLOCKS IN INDIA

News / Airlines



The rapid expansion of seat capacity to and from India by Middle East carriers is impeding United Airlines' plans to build market share in the country. Instead, United, which already has daily nonstop service from New York to both Delhi and Mumbai, is mainly focusing on expanding operations to China's secondary cities. According to Brian Znotins, United's network vice president, the carrier now has more nonstop flights to China than any other U.S. airline. "Despite the slowdown of China's economy, as travel from China grows, we will be there in future," said Znotins.

One new route pending Chinese government approval is a nonstop seasonal service to Xian that it hopes to start in May 2016. Demand for flights to the fast-growing city of Chengdu has exceeded United's expectations, according to Znotins. Apple has an iPad factory in Chengdu in partnership with Foxconn.

For now, San Francisco is the main hub for United's service into China, with the Boeing 787-9 deployed on these services. "Once Chengdu matures we will add more [U.S.] hubs," said Znotins, adding that United's partnership with Air China is the foundation for these expansion plans.

Meanwhile, Air India is working with its Star Alliance partner United to deal with the overcapacity issue created by rival Middle East carriers. The two airlines are discussing a new codeshare for services to and from India and this should provide seamless travel to multiple U.S. airports via United's hubs in Chicago, New York and San Francisco (which Air India serves with nonstop flights).

"This is one sure way to deal with Middle East carriers. If we put our act together, we will be able to work out a solution," commented Air India commercial director Pankaj Srivastava. The Indian flagcarrier is now exploring the viability of new direct service to Washington, D.C.

United currently has a codeshare arrangement with India's Jet Airways, in which Abu Dhabi's Jet Airways now has a 24 percent stake. Znotins would not comment on whether United might abandon this codeshare if it commits to an agreement with Air India.

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