

Bloomberg

Hawaiian Adds Service Training to Win Asia Fliers on New Routes

*By Will Daley
Sept. 22, 2010*

Hawaiian Airlines, poised to start flights to Japan and South Korea, is coaching employees on how to meet the service expectations of Asian passengers as it bids to win business in the region.

The Hawaiian Holdings Inc. unit worked with a consultant specializing in cultural variances between the U.S. and Asia to help tailor a two-day program for flight attendants and service workers, Chief Executive Officer Mark Dunkerley said yesterday in an interview at Bloomberg's New York headquarters.

Hawaiian will begin flights in November between Honolulu and Tokyo's Haneda airport and will add service in January to Seoul, both of which are springboards into Asia. The carrier will vie for market share against a dozen flights to Japan, mainly by Japanese carriers including All Nippon Airways Co.

"You are competing against, in many instances, the flag carrier of that country, which of course is used to and understands the culture," said Jerry Glass, president of Washington-based consultant F&H Solutions Group. "If you want to effectively compete, especially in the global market, you absolutely have to do these sorts of things."

Dunkerley said Hawaiian's program delves into Asian culture and history to help workers understand why certain expectations exist.

The training isn't an "instruction manual on how to provide good customer service," he said. Rather, the aim is for employees to understand "what Asian customers expect in terms of service and how we can deliver Hawaiian service in a way that meets the need, the expectations of Asian customers," he said.

Culture, Customs

Differences in culture and customs create the risk of inadvertently offending passengers from other countries, said Glass, a former labor executive at US Airways Group Inc. who isn't involved with Hawaiian's program.

Hawaiian received U.S. Transportation Department permission in May for one daily flight between Honolulu and Japan. Delta Air Lines Inc. won authority to operate two daily flights, serving Los Angeles and Detroit in the U.S., and AMR Corp.'s American Airlines got clearance for one daily Haneda flight to and from New York.

Bloomberg

A draft “Open Skies” agreement reached in December created openings for four daily U.S.-Japan round trips for U.S. carriers at Haneda, which is 10 miles south of Tokyo. Narita Airport is the Japanese capital’s main international airport, about 44 miles (71 kilometers) east of the city by car.

U.S., Pacific

Hawaiian Holdings climbed 10 cents, or 1.8 percent, to \$5.73 yesterday in Nasdaq Stock Market trading. The shares have declined 18 percent this year.

In 2009, Hawaiian operated about 192 scheduled flights a day, including to the state’s four major islands as well as airports in the western U.S., Sydney and Manila, according to a regulatory filing.

Hawaiian’s 35-plane fleet is a mix of Boeing Co. and Airbus SAS aircraft, according to the carrier’s website. The airline announced an order of 12 Airbus widebody jets in 2008 to help replace aging Boeings on long-haul routes.

Winning access to Haneda gave Hawaiian a victory over UAL Corp.’s United Airlines, which is poised to merge with Continental Airlines Inc. and surpass Delta as the world’s largest carrier. Hawaiian’s traffic last year was equal to about 5 percent of Delta’s total on mainline jets.

“We are very conscious of the fact that Asia is going to be the engine of global economic growth over the course of the next generation,” Dunkerley said yesterday. “We actually sit on the doorstep of that.”