

Air India Express explores 30 countries for int'l expansion

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New Delhi : Air India's low-cost arm Air India Express is looking to expand its international presence under its new owner, the Tata Group. One of the airline's senior executives recently spoke at an event and said that the carrier intends to grow its network rapidly in the next few years.

Several aviation executives and leaders attended the recently concluded Routes Asia 2022 event in Da Nang, Vietnam. Air India Express was also among the various airlines from the Asia-Pacific region present there, including all major Indian carriers, Qantas, Air New Zealand, Scoot, and VietJet Air, among others.

Speaking at the event, Air India Express' Chief of Commercial Tara Naidu said the budget carrier wants to grow its network further under its new owner while maintaining its strategy of offering inter-regional routes within a six-hour stage length.

Over the next five years, AI Express could connect second and third-tier cities in India with several more countries as part of a "huge" expansion plan. According to Naidu, around 30 countries are being explored by Air India Express, including Cambodia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Turkey, and Vietnam.

She said, "There are some markets where there is no direct connectivity, which is strange because they are huge markets. We believe that it's going to be a win-win for us-it will stimulate growth of tourism in both directions and ease business connectivity."

Air India Express offers budget flights from its Indian bases at Kochi, Delhi, Mumbai, Manga-lore, Thiruvanan-thapuram, and Kozhikode, among others, to 14 international destinations, mainly to the Middle East.

The airline flies high-density point-to-point routes from Indian cities to places like Dubai, Sharjah, and Muscat, which are among its largest international destinations by capacity. According to reports, the airline operates 24 Boeing 737-800 aircraft but hopes to add more in the near future.

Naidu said that apart from inducting new aircraft, AI Express could also implement new interline and codeshare agreements with other carriers to gain additional market reach and access to market segments it wouldn't have otherwise.