

## Saudia eyes global expansion

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Dhaka: Saudi Arabia's national carrier, Saudia, is rapidly advancing its fleet and network expansion strategy.

The airline is making substantial moves, including major aircraft orders and an emphasis on innovation and technology adoption, as part of its efforts to strengthen its competitive position against regional giants like Emirates and Qatar Airways.

Last month, Saudia secured a significant deal with Airbus for up to 20 new wide-body A330neo aircraft. This includes a firm order for 10 jets for flyadeal, the airline's budget carrier, marking a key milestone in its fleet expansion. Looking ahead, Saudia is also set to launch an ambitious retrofit program for its existing fleet.

According to Arved von zur Muehlen, Saudia's EVP and Chief

Commercial Officer, there's more growth on the horizon. This year, Saudia anticipates receiving five new narrow-body aircraft. These planes will enable the launch of 10 new destinations during the summer peak, primarily targeting routes in the Mediterranean and Europe, including popular spots like Venice, Crete, Malaga, Antalya, and Bali.

"We will receive five aircraft which are narrow-bodies. So, the wide-body fleet will not change this year. We have started announcing 10 new destinations for the summer peak, which are all in the three to four-hour range," said Muehlen. He said the airline is focused on enhancing its European network.

"Currently, we are very strong naturally in South Asia, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. We are very strong in Indonesia and in Malaysia. So, but we are always... we are constantly looking. But right now, it is more since I don't get new planes this year, you know, we need to use our planes in the most efficient way, so it's more and more regional destinations," he explained.

Saudia currently has a significant pipeline of 128 new aircraft on order. This planned growth represents a substantial 87 per cent increase in its fleet size, designed to support Saudi Arabia's national goal of welcoming 150 million tourists by 2030.

A core component of this overarching strategy involves enhancing the Jeddah hub, said Muehlen. The aim is to boost its capacity to capture more international transfer traffic significantly.

Muehlen emphasized Saudia's close collaboration with Saudi aviation authorities (GACA) and airport operators, describing the airline's role as integral to the "Saudi ecosystem" supporting the Kingdom's massive infrastructure developments and contributing significantly to achieving the ambitious Vision2030 passenger targets.

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