

Thailand's airlines expanding rapidly; expect pre-pandemic level travelers

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Dhaka: Thailand's airlines are promptly increasing their capacity to address the rising travel demands across the Asia-Pacific region. The move aims to recover Thailand's tourism sector by increasing travelers to the pre-pandemic level, a record 39.8 million foreign arrivals in 2019.

Flag carrier Thai Airways International has taken the boldest step in the process. The airline has signed an agreement to receive nine aircraft, comprising eight Airbus A330s and one A321, on lease in the third quarter of this year. The newly leased fleet will be utilized to expand operations to high-demand destinations across China, India, Japan, and Germany.

CEO Chai Eamsiri expects this expansion will increase the carrier's passenger numbers to 16.5 million in 2025, a 3% increase from 2024.

Apart from this, Thai Airways previously confirmed a firm order for 45 Boeing 787 Dreamliners, with options for 35 additional units, at the Singapore Airshow, held in February 2024. The Dreamliners are scheduled to be delivered from mid-2027. Thai aims to increase its aircraft fleet size to 116 by 2027 and to 150 by 2033.

Budget airline Thai AirAsia has announced it's planning to acquire six new jetliners this year to expand its fleet to 66 aircraft. This addition will avail 26 million passenger seats, as the airline expects to serve nearly 24 million passengers in 2025. Thai AirAsia aims to add 31 more Airbus A320s and A321s by 2030 and expand its fleet to 97 aircraft.

Thai AirAsia's long-haul wing, Thai AirAsia X, will increase its capacity as well. The long-haul, low-cost carrier currently operates a fleet of nine Airbus A330 wide-body aircraft and plans to procure an additional three to four units, with the intention of launching services to new destinations in Japan, Kazakhstan, and the Middle East.

Bangkok Airways announced it'll receive an A319 and A320 in the second half of this year, and an additional 12 ATR 72-600s are scheduled to be delivered between 2026 and 2028. The airline expects an 8% rise in passenger numbers, which takes the figure to 4.7 million.

Another carrier, Thai Lion Air, expects to receive 14 jets in 2024. The airline's current fleet comprises 19 Boeing 737-800s and seven Boeing 737-900ERs. It expects to serve 6.6 million passengers this year, a 10% increase from 6 million in 2024.

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