



RwandAir Ltd Soars Scoops Best Airline Short Haul in Africa



RwandAir staff receiving the Africa Travel Awards Best African Airline (Short Haul) Award for 2013



Best Short Haul Airline in Africa Award

BY THOMAS KAGERA

RwandAir scooped the Best Airline Short Haul in Africa during the 9th Akwaaba Tourism Fair that took place at the Eko Hotel, in Lagos, Nigeria. The Director General of the Nigeria Tourist Development Cooperation Mrs Sally Mbanefo officially opened this year's Akwaaba which had tourism boards from Rwanda, The Gambia, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria.

The crowd puller during the ceremony was the Intore dancers from Rwanda who excited the crowd to their feet.

The award was received on behalf of Rwandair by the Rwandair Head of Marketing Patrick Manzi who was joined by the Rwanda ambassador to Nigeria H.E. Joseph Habineza and other senior staff from Kigali and Lagos to receive the award. Akwaaba is the biggest travel and tourism

exhibition in West Africa. This year the show attracted hosted buyers from Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Safari Communications is the media partner in east and central Africa while publisher Denis Gathanju is one of the awards committee members of the African trade Market Awards. The function took place on 27th October 2013.



THE LONG WALK TO CONNECTING RWANDA TO THE WORLD FOR GREATER OPPORTUNITIES

RwandAir Ltd has metamorphosed from a small airline of two turbo-props, into a sizable aviation company, from wet-leasing to owning its aircraft, acquired soft and hard assets that have seen it get to the regional high table of the aviation industry. The Chief Executive Officer John Milenge gives an insight of RwandAir's journey. Thomas Kagera writes

THE GENESIS

RwandAir Ltd was born from Rwandair Express which was Air Rwanda before the 1994 liberation war. At that time the institution, Air Rwanda, had two tiny 19-seater turbo-props. After the war, government took a decision to privatize some government parastatals and Rwandair Express was among such corporations.

Alliance Air, a subsidiary of South African Airways, had decided to take over airlines in Eastern and Western Africa. They had very big ambitions of consolidating all the airlines that previously belonged to governments. So, Alliance Air acquired 51% with the government retaining 49% of the shares. Alliance Express was therefore born with an idea of developing short hops that would develop into a continental airline.

Alliance Express survived for about three years and then went into liquidation, and what had been its shares were taken back by the government. This culminated into the creation of Rwandair Express that survived from 2002 to 2009.

Within the time-span of seven years, the government of Rwanda was engaged in negotiations with would-be investors. But the investors that usually came up were not giving the right value and focus.

The government therefore took a strategic decision of reinvesting and rebranding the national carrier.

A decision was taken at that point, in 2009, as part of the

Vision 2020 and EDPRS to reinvest in the company and make it a fully-fledged airline that was rebranded as RwandAir Limited.

Connectivity, according to Rwanda vision, especially the aviation industry, is going to be a key pillar in the development of this country. When you talk of connectivity, you are talking of prosperity, trade, tourism and growth.

REBRANDING

After rebranding RwandAir, the airline had to move away from wet leasing to dry leasing and owning its own aircraft.

The company has built capacity in terms of the number aircraft that it operates which has given the airline many more seats to sell to its passengers. RwandAir decided not to go back to leasing of aircrafts that are already fully managed, it instead went in for building its own capacity.

The two jets, CRJ-200 which are 50 seater acquired in 2009 were put into operation without any of that external support structure.

So having started from a clean slate, the airline acquired two 50-seater CRJ200 aircraft in 2009, three Boeing 737-500 in January 2010 on a dry lease basis, fully branded in the RwandAir colors and in 2011 acquired two brand new Next Generation Boeing 737-800. These were additions to the leased 37-seater Dash8 aircraft that plies the domestic destinations in Rwanda.

On the whole, currently there is a fleet of 7 aircraft including 78 seater CRJ-900s delivered in late 2012. The one turbo-prop will be replaced with a Q400 by February 2014, a 67-seater that will operate between Kigali and Kamembe. The plan is to grow our fleet to 12 aircraft in total in the next five years.

In this day and age, time is a rare commodity, which is why the airline has moved towards easing the process of ticket sales. Clients no longer have to go to our sales office to purchase tickets, since they can now pay for them on the airline's website using their credit cards.

Having inched out of the woods in the past 2^{1/2} years where RwandAir handled an annual

rate of 50,000 passengers, in 2011 the airline transported 220,000 passengers and looks forward to transporting over 400,000 passengers by the end of 2012. The revenues have also grown proportionately.

In the next five years, RwandAir will have been able to transport a million passengers per year. So far we have realized a good take-up and support from passengers across the continent, from a point-to-point network that we were three years ago, to a hub-and-spoke network with Kigali being the hub. Last year, RwandAir registered 40% transit traffic which originates and terminates from the countries in which we operate.

Our network connects the Western part of Africa; Accra, Lagos, Brazzaville to East Africa—Entebbe, Nairobi, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Juba, Mombasa—linking them back and forward through the hub in Kigali, to Johannesburg and Dubai to the Gulf. In 2014, we shall soon start flying into Duala, Khartoum, Lusaka and Harare.

In 2015, we see ourselves launch into new markets—South East



The RwandAir CEO, John Milenge



Asia, China, India—Mumbai (which may be realized before 2015).

We pride ourselves as the fastest growing airline on the continent; which has earned us a lot of good will. We also pride ourselves in our customers that fly us and operating brand new aircraft at the entire network.

With a workforce of about 500 well-trained employees, RwandAir will continue enhancing and consolidating the values of safety, reliability and trust and to be part of the national organic development route.

The airline has so far demystified the aviation sector in the country. People can now do business much easier and in an affordable manner. RwandAir has greatly contributed to the opening up of the country.

With the expansion of Kigali International Airport, which will be complete by the first quarter of 2014, we are excited that our passengers will enjoy better facilities and services.

The use of IT has formed (like for any other airline) the bedrock of our operations and progress; the distribution/booking system, payment system, check-in system and cargo-tracking system are all IT-based. Even the planes we operate today are IT-based—as they fly, they send back the

conditions of their engines, among others.

The airline has continued to promote the Dream Miles Loyalty Program, which enables clients to earn miles on all flights they take with RwandAir; members can then redeem these miles for tickets and get other privileges like access to airport lounges among other benefits.

RwandAir will continue to position its self as a safe and secure airline, because the aviation business is about perception that informs a client which airline to fly.

The airline has also quickly built a reputation around reliability and on time performance.

Fairness is also another important component of RwandAir corporate culture. The customers get good value for money and the airline will continue to develop the customer-centric culture in the minds of the employees and stakeholders.

To our esteemed customers, RwandAir is committed to continuous delivery of the best services. We are here to make a difference by offering safe, reliable, and fair services. We appreciate your patronage and we pledge continued improvement and opening the world of opportunities for the prosperity of all.

OTHER 2013 MILESTONES

The year 2013 has been witnessed great progress for RwandAir. The news from the national carrier's communication camp seemed endless and certainly kept journalists and media houses busy. From new destination launches to code share agreements, new aircraft, mammoth increase of its social media following, to receiving prestigious awards, it is needless to say that RwandAir took the bull by the horns this year. Saying that the airline has leaped a few years into the future within a year is surely an understatement.

LAUNCH OF NEW DESTINATION ACCRA, GHANA

On June 1st 2013, RwandAir, had its maiden flight to Accra with landing time confirmed at 20:00 at the Kotoka International Airport. RwandAir had chosen to operate the Boeing 737-800NG aircraft fitted with Sky Interior cabin design (unique in Africa) and state-of-the-art inflight entertainment. The 154 seater aircraft is one of two that were purchased from factory in November of 2011 and serves daily flights to Dubai, Johannesburg via Kigali. It also serves on the Lagos leg with five weekly flights. Accra became the 14th destination for the carrier, and the 4th in western Africa joining Lagos, Libreville and Brazzaville.

DREAM MILES LOYALTY PROGRAM REACHES OVER 10,000 MEMBERS:

The Dream Miles program is all about rewarding and thanking customers for their loyalty. As it stands, the Dream Miles program is an exclusive program with 5 levels: Junior (2-16 years old), Emerald (adult entry level), Silver, Gold and Diamond that offers a range of privileges, all designed to enhance our client's journey before, during and after their flight. This remarkable program offers a world of benefits, convenience and personalized service on all RwandAir operated flights, including: 1) Earning status and bonus miles on tickets purchased and flown on RwandAir. 2) Redeeming miles for ticket purchase, upgrades, and companion awards. 3) Lounge access, extra baggage allowance and priority at check in.

On September 12th 2013 the CEO of RwandAir approved what's being referred to as the Dream Miles Face Life. In addition to the great benefits already offered, the team has out done themselves with the introduction of the newly added offers that will allow: 1) The Dream Miles™ members to earn double of the currently earned miles and easily redeem flights, upgrades and excess baggage on RwandAir operated flights. 2) Corporates to join the program by earning miles for



Government Officials pose for a photo upon the arrival of the new Boeing



flights purchased for employees and can be used as a company staff incentive. 3) Account pooling for family members' travels to be credited to one family account and be managed within the family.

Dream Miles today has 10,000 members strong and working towards partnerships with hotels and restaurants, banks, car rentals and supermarkets in a bid to increase the benefits and privileges to its members as a gesture of appreciation for flying RwandAir.

WINNER OF BEST INNOVATOR AT 16TH RWANDA INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR:

RwandAir participated at the Rwanda International Trade Fair 2013, which took place in Kigali-Rwanda from 24th July - 07th August 2013. In the spirit of Public Private Partnership (PPP), Private Sector Federation in partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry organized the trade fair which successfully placed the RwandAir brand in optimum position when they won the Best Innovator Award.

CODE SHARE AGREEMENT WITH AIR UGANDA:

On August 14, 2013, the management of RwandAir received the Air Uganda CEO Cornwell Muleya and his delegation at the Kigali International Airport for the most anticipated signing of the code share agreement between the two airlines.

RwandAir and Air Uganda both agreed to offer competitive fares and rates with respect to the Code Share Flights. Both Parties used their reasonable endeavors to agree to mutually beneficial joint prices. With such agreements the customers of both carriers were assured that their interests are top priority. The codeshare partnership with Air Uganda has been a commercial success, as both airlines are relishing in the record surge in arrivals from Kigali and Entebbe alike contributing to their growth.

ACQUIRED TWO BOEING 737-700NG

April 17, 2013, RwandAir acquired a Boeing 737-700NG amidst the presence of high profile government guests and partners. The aircraft performed the customary low-pass and was received with a firemen salute as it was taxiing to the hangar.

In attendance was Honorable Prof. Silas Lwakabamba the Minister of Infrastructure as guest of honor, the state Minister in charge of Transport Alexis



Nzahabwanimana, distinguished guests comprised of the RwandAir steering committee, board of directors, and the management. This aircraft offers the highest operating range capability, about 6,000 km that could easily offer direct flights to south-western Europe, Minor and Monsoon Asia and the Middle East. The airline also gets to easily cover more western Africa destinations, especially with addition of Accra to the list of West African destination RwandAir flies to.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWING GROWS FROM 700-3,000

RwandAir has made it top priority to really push their way through the online social media space. Social media is an amazing way to grow an online brand in leaps and bounds. It simply takes creativity, passion and consistency to keep things moving in the right direction. RwandAir has done just that; in a matter of a year, their social media following has increased by an impressive margin from 700 to 3,000 followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We are committed to growing this number every year as our goal is to exceed 100,000 followers.

LAUNCHED NEW DESTINATION JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN

On September 06, 2013, RwandAir had its maiden flight to Juba with their three weekly flights leaving Kigali at 13:40 every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. RwandAir chose to operate the Boeing CRJ 900NG aircraft, the only of its kind in the region. The 75 seater aircraft is one of two that were purchased from the factory in November of 2011 and serves daily flights to Nairobi and Entebbe via Kigali. It also serves on the Dares salaam leg with five weekly flights as well as two

weekly flights to Bujumbura and Brazzaville.

After being dubbed one of the fastest growing airlines on the continent, our incomparable performance this year helps us secure our reputation of always being the subject of awe and appreciation for our sustained and fast growth.

RWANDAIR ONLINE BOOKING ENGINE

RwandAir is among the first companies in Rwanda to avail its products for sale online via the use of credit and debit cards. Its simple and easy to use booking platform was unveiled in February 2012.

Mr. John Mirenge , the CEO of RwandAir and Mr. Cornwell Muleya, the CEO of Air Uganda exchange documents after the signing of a code share agreement between RwandAir and Air Uganda

to increase the ease of access and to promote mobility.

Passengers visiting the airline's website, www.rwandair.com can immediately have access to the booking form where they enter the details of their travel. The system immediately serves them with available flights based on their selection, and does so with pricing details that help the customer place his order. The system currently accepts VISA and MasterCard payment schemes, with plans to include more forms of payment regionally and internationally available.

In less than ten minutes, the customer can receive his confirmed e-ticket on email after successful payment. And that is not all there is to it. On a laptop or a smart phone, anyone around the world is able to book a flight and board the aircraft in less than five hours, practically saving travelers the burden of endless queues at ticketing offices and allowing them to plan according to their own need, or plan weeks or months in advance, since the system is able to notify of any changes once a seat has been confirmed.

Future plans include the addition of more ancillary services related to travel like hotel booking or car rentals, vacation reservations, etc. all available on one platform or in partnership with other providers to give the customer an overall experience that serves their travel plans in a holistic, all-encompassing manner. As more and more travelers across



(L-R)Raphael Haddad the vice president of Bombardier Company from Canada., Dr Elijah Chingosho African Airlines Association

The service has since evolved exponentially to attract millions of self-sufficient travelers who like to do everything on their own, laptop and credit card on hand. The system is PCI compliant, which means it is safe and secure for e-commerce activities fitted for airlines, and can be ported onto other devices

the region, and the world, rely on our booking platform to fulfill their travel plans we at RwandAir remain vigilant to their feedback to help us improve and appeal to each customer fully. We also keep an eye on the industry trends in regard to online ticket purchases or other aviation related services available online.