

Air of Success



As Rwanda sets path toward economic resurgence, its national airline has big plans, too—with Boeing jets

by Eric Fetters-Walp

Like its home country, RwandAir is on the move.

With two Next-Generation 737-800 airplanes on order, RwandAir is one of Boeing's newest customer airlines. The new jets are scheduled for delivery in 2011, and in the interim, the airline is adding used 737s to its fleet. It's a substantial step for RwandAir, which was launched less than eight years ago as the national airline of Rwanda and previously had leased a fleet of regional airplanes.

"Today, RwandAir owns and operates two of its regional jets and looks to add to this structure with Next-Generation 737s for its future," said Rob Faye, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Sales director for Rwanda.

RwandAir's rise mirrors recent economic progress in the nation of 9.7 million, fostered by Rwandan President Paul Kagame's government. Kagame has emphasized the importance of attracting more foreign investment and expertise. "Rwanda has made huge strides economically and stands out as a model for others," Johnnie Carson, U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, said recently. Carson pointed out that the World Bank recently named Rwanda as the top business reformer in the world. It was the first time a sub-Saharan nation in Africa had earned that title.

"The philosophy behind Rwanda's economic growth includes bringing in industry experts from around the world to assist in developing business and to mentor Rwanda's future leaders," Faye said. "RwandAir is a great example of this philosophy at work." Tony Blair, the former British prime minister, is among those advising the nation's government, and RwandAir's management includes several former managers and pilots from major U.S. carriers.

As President Kagame looks to RwandAir to help spur economic growth, the airline is expanding its flight schedule to make use of its airplane acquisitions. It operates direct flights from the Rwandan capital, Kigali, to neighboring nations, as well as to South Africa, a popular connecting point for flights to and from countries around the world.

"RwandAir is focused on its future," Faye said. "The right people, the right equipment, the right operational processes and the right attitude are the foundations for success, and RwandAir is focused on expanding its business connections with important regional hubs such as Johannesburg, Dubai, Lagos and Cairo."

Through partner airlines, RwandAir also offers connecting flights to Europe, the Middle East and China. Eventually, the airline wants to offer its own daily flights to and from Europe. Boeing's 737-800s will help expand the airline's range to include potential direct flights to and from cities in North Africa and the Middle East. ■

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GRAPHIC: RwandAir, one of Boeing's newest customer airlines, has ordered two Next-Generation 737-800 airplanes, like the one shown in this artist's concept, for delivery in 2011. **ED TURNER/BOEING**