

Air bridge to success

Fast-growing Etihad Airways extends service to new markets

By **Kathrine Beck**

Having the right fleet of aircraft and a hub at a geographical crossroads has helped make Etihad Airways one of the world's fastest-growing airlines in passenger numbers.

But the carrier's real key to success is "making sure every customer touch point is seamless and hassle-free," said James Hogan, CEO of 8-year-old Etihad, the Abu Dhabi-based national airline of the United Arab Emirates.

This commitment to service has resulted in travel organizations and passengers voting Etihad the World's Leading Airline at the World Travel Awards in both 2009 and 2010.

Abu Dhabi is within an hour and a half flying time from anywhere in the Middle East and three hours from India, a large and growing market. "The Gulf region is a natural air bridge," Hogan said. "Gulf carriers taking advantage of improved-range aircraft have opened up a whole new range of market options."

Etihad operates a fleet of 61 airplanes, with more than 1,000 flights a week serving an international network of 72 destinations in 45 countries in Europe, Asia, North America, Australia and throughout the Middle East. Code share agreements with several of the world's largest airline networks further extend Etihad's reach by allowing airlines to interchange passengers. In 2010, Etihad served more than 7 million passengers.

Etihad has been aggressive in acquiring the efficient, improved-range aircraft vital to its success. At the Farnborough International Airshow in the United Kingdom in 2008, the airline announced a large order, including 35 787-9 Dreamliners and 10 777-300ERs (Extended Range).

Those choices also support Etihad's service commitment.

"The efficiency of these two airplanes will allow us to extend service to markets that would not be economical with other airplanes," Hogan said, "and both airplanes advance our efforts to provide the best passenger experience available on any airline."

Etihad employs close to 8,000 people around the world, representing more than 120 nationalities.

As it continues to grow, Etihad is building the skilled workforce needed to maintain its high standards. The result is opportunities for the people of the United Arab Emirates, where Etihad has recruited and trained 102 cadet pilots, 30 graduate managers and 30 technical engineers. Graduates in all categories include women. ■

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: Etihad Airways is expanding its fleet with more-efficient, improved-range aircraft such as the 787 Dreamliner, pictured here in Etihad livery. BOEING



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— James Hogan, CEO, Etihad Airways



PHOTO: ETIHAD AIRWAYS

Bio-energy: A sight to sea

Etihad Airways is working with Boeing, Honeywell and other partners to pioneer a system using seawater and the desert for bio-energy.

The Sustainable Bioenergy Research Consortium will use saltwater agricultural systems to support development and commercialization of aviation biofuel sources.

The Masdar Institute of Science and Technology will host the project, providing laboratory and demonstration facilities both within and outside of Abu Dhabi's Masdar City, which aims to be the world's first carbon-neutral city.

"The development of carbon-neutral sources of energy is of major importance to Etihad Airways and the aviation industry as a whole," said Etihad CEO James Hogan. "Project findings will be of great use to Etihad Airways as we look to reduce the use of conventional fossil fuels and to develop a commercially viable alternative that also is able to meet the sustainability principles that we have committed to as a member of the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Users Group."

Sustainable biofuel development is a key part of the aviation industry's strategy to reduce carbon emissions.

The Abu Dhabi project will use saltwater to create an aquaculture-based seafood farming system in parallel with the growth of mangrove forests and salicornia, a plant that thrives in salty conditions. This system will convert what would otherwise be problematic aquaculture effluent in seawater into an affordable, nutrient-rich fertilizer for both the mangroves and salicornia. These biomass sources can then be harvested to generate clean energy and to create aviation biofuels and other products.

— Kathrine Beck