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Who is going where?

AIRLINES CONTEMPLATE THE FUTURE OF AIRLINE ALLIANCES

Global airline alliances, which come to the public in the form of loyalty programs, were developed as a way to work around the limitations of various nations' access to air routes, to support the connections of increasing numbers of the global travelers created by open trade in other industries, and to provide buffers in harsh economic climates. On the customer side, alliances have promised universal standards of service, frequent flyer program benefits, access to lounges for member flyers, and convenient connections.

That promise, however, have been increasingly unfulfilled from both the customer and the airline perspective. Juha Järvinen, Finnair's Chief Commercial Officer, attributed some of the difficulties to gaining consensus among airlines large and small in what he describes as the "United Nations of Airlines." At the CAPA World Aviation Summit in Helsinki this past fall, he and other airline leaders reviewed competitive changes taking place in a slow process of globalization, which is still, for the most part, strictly separated by national borders. He described the big risk of alliances becoming the "United Nations of Airlines."

Keisuke Okada, Senior Executive Advisor to the Chairman at ANA Holdings, which owns All Nippon Airways (ANA), countered that passengers benefit greatly from alliances and joint ventures. ANA is a member of the Star Alliance, and has joint ventures in place with United to North America and with Lufthansa to Europe. Okada suggested that the original synergies created by alliances, in terms of the seamless journey, are still beneficial.

"Star Alliance has a commitment to the customer in terms of check-in, luggage, lounge usage. It's a fundamental promise to the customer," he added.

CHADNER NAVARRO