

Transport, Airlines

## Alaska Airlines Adds Finnair as a Loyalty Program Partner

Grant Martin, Skift - May 23, 2017 9:00 am

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**A**laska took one step closer to the Oneworld alliance by kicking off a partnership with Finnair this week. It already has a strong relationship with American, another Oneworld partner, as relations with Delta continue to cool.

— *Grant Martin*

Alaska Airlines, well known for its industry-leading loyalty Mileage Plan program, announced a new partnership with Finnair, Finland's national carrier yesterday.

The new partnership will allow members of Mileage Plan and Finnair Plus to earn award and miles (but not elite qualifying miles) when flying on the other carrier — effectively expanding Alaska's loyalty program into Scandinavia and Finnair's further into the United States.

Finnair is part of the the Oneworld alliance and already has decent reach into the United States through American Airlines, another allied carrier. The partnership is more interesting for Alaska, which just merged its loyalty program with Virgin America and has big expansion plans.

As it is, Mileage Plan has a hodgepodge of partners in which it's possible to earn and spend miles — including a handful of the world's black sheep programs from Emirates, based in Dubai and Hainan, based in Haikou, China. And to many travelers, that's an advantage. Last year, several bloggers pointed out that through generous bonuses it was possible to earn fast track elite status by flying Hainan and earning miles on Alaska. Others lauded Mileage Plan for giving great access to Emirates premium awards, though that partnership was quashed last year.

Nevertheless, Mileage Plan has so far refused to join a mainstream airline alliance.

With the addition of Finnair to its loyalty program partners, Alaska may be signaling that it's taking interested in cozying up further with American and the Oneworld alliance.

Already, it's possible to earn and spend miles between American and Alaska. Shared credit between Alaska and Delta, on the other hand, is slated to end this month as that relationship cools. Those carriers have sparred repeatedly over the last year as Delta looks to expand its west coast operations in Seattle and Alaska looks to defend it.

For now, travelers in Alaska's Mileage Plan program and Finnair Plus at least have another partner carrier to look forward to. If the trajectory continues, the rest of Oneworld may soon see a partner as well.

Tags: alaska airlines, finnair, loyalty

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