

Finnair seeks to connect China to Cuba via Helsinki

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Jun 8, 2017



Finnair Airbus A350-900

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Finnair believes it can compete with Air China in connecting Chinese passengers to Cuba when it launches Helsinki-Havana flights in December, CEO Pekka Vauramo said.

Finnair, which is the midst of a period of rapid expansion, plans to launch 2X-weekly Helsinki-Havana flights with an Airbus A350-900 Dec. 1. The service will be seasonal,

An advertisement for MROLinks, an Aviation Week Network service. It features a hand holding a smartphone displaying a flight search interface. The text on the left reads: "MROLinks Build your custom microsite and: Elevate your brand, Generate leads, Grow your business". A red button at the bottom says "CONNECT NOW". The Aviation Week Network logo is in the bottom right corner.

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Speaking to *ATW* on the sidelines of the IATA AGM in Cancun, Vauramo said Finnair is eyeing a larger market than just passengers traveling to Havana from Helsinki. “We see market connectivity from China to Cuba through Helsinki,” he said. “There is demand in China for service to Cuba.”

Finnair currently operates flights from Helsinki to Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Guangzhou and Xi’an.

Beijing-based Air China operates a weekly Beijing-Montreal-Havana routing with a Boeing 777-300ER, and has indicated it will eventually switch to a 787-9 on the route. Vauramo said Chinese passengers may view connecting to Havana via Helsinki on Finnair’s A350s as a more desirable way to travel between China and Cuba.

Finnair has nine A350s in its fleet currently and is scheduled to receive two more this year, Vauramo said.

While the Cuba market has proved frustrating for US airlines, “international traffic on non-US airlines has been very strong into Cuba for the last few years,” IATA regional VP-Americas Peter Cerda said during a briefing at the AGM.

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