

Mikko Rautio



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Northern flights

Finnair has been flying between Europe and China for over 20 years. Mikko Rautio, general manager of Finnair China, spoke to the *Review's* Fiona Huo.

How would you describe the company's development in China since you began flying there in 1988?

Finnair was the first European airline to fly non-stop to Beijing. Before that, all airlines used to fly via the Middle East, so the journey took 16 to 18 hours. Our non-stop flights only take 7.5 hrs from Helsinki to Beijing.

When we started, we only had one flight per week to Beijing. We now have 21 flights per week to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, so in 21 years, we have seen 21-fold growth.

How important is China in your Asia strategy?

As recently as 2001, we were running a total of eight flights to Asia per week, and today we have close to 60, so growth has been fast. The China routes account for nearly 40 per cent of Asia routes, so China is very important. In terms of routes, though not local sales, China is Finnair's biggest overseas market.

How do services on the China routes differ from those for other routes?

Firstly, every flight has two Chinese cabin crews. We have a local Beijing crew on the Beijing route, and local crews on the Shanghai and Hong Kong routes, who can speak to clients in their own dialects.

We are careful to select suitable food.

At Helsinki airport we use Chinese signs and have Chinese staff to help passengers with language problems.

Finnair claims to have the shortest routes between Europe and Asia. How is that?

Helsinki is at the top of the map, so if you go from any city in Europe directly to China, you will most likely pass over Finland. Even if you make Helsinki a transit stop, your journey will not be any longer. For example, if you take a flight from Manchester via Helsinki to Beijing, it's the quickest and shortest way.

Helsinki airport is small and uncrowded, so

airport traffic runs smoothly, and we have a 35-minute international transit time, compared with at least 90 minutes in London.

How has the financial crisis affected Finnair's China routes?

Many big companies have reduced their travel budgets, for example, Nokia has cut its budget by 75 per cent. We have fewer business travellers, or they are still travelling but economy class instead of business class.

But the China route is doing very well; Chinese people are still travelling abroad and there are a lot of delegations going to Europe. Generally speaking, our sales in China in 2009 were even better than in 2008. I think the growth is around 10 per cent.

What action are you taking with regard to environmental protection?

Shorter flights require less fuel and are much more environmentally friendly. From this month, all our long haul fleets will be renewed; their average age will be less than two years. Brand new planes save energy. We also use lighter materials on board to reduce fuel consumption.

What is Finnair's long-term development plan in China?

If traffic grows, we plan to increase flights to Beijing and Shanghai to two a day. And when we get more aircraft I think we can consider flying to some other parts of China.

Finnair Local Heroes

Finnair is set to unveil a campaign later this month entitled 'Local Heroes,' in which the airline will support organisations such as the Royal Northern College of Music to help them to encourage and develop young musical talent in China. Finnair has also teamed up with entrepreneur Imran Hakim to assist with his work in inspiring young entrepreneurs and aiding charities in the Far East. Read more about these initiatives in forthcoming issues.