

Thai Airways plans to resume direct flights to US next year

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THE NATION

THAI AIRWAYS International plans to resume flights to the US west coast next year and add more destinations in China after taking a year off to achieve international safety compliance.

The national carrier is also now energetically firing off marketing and sales gimmicks and clearing up flight-management and service issues in order to become profitable and beat the tough competition.

Charamporn Jotikasthira, president of THAI, said yesterday that

either Seattle or San Francisco would be returned to its direct-flight network by next year.

One of these two cities will help the airline reclaim market share from long-haul routes. They are better situated for connecting flights than cities further south such as Los Angeles.

The resumption of service to the United States follows the International Civil Aviation Organisation's lifting of the ban on Thai airlines for safety problems.

However, THAI may wait until

Thailand's Civil Aviation Department has been upgraded from Category 2 to Category 1 on the US Federal Aviation Administration's list for the same problems.

The airline said it would likely propose the plan to US authorities by itself as it is confident of complying with US safety standards.

The flag carrier plans to add more destinations in China after authorities there lifted the ban on THAI over safety reasons, after the ICAO's claims in February of last year that

Thailand's aviation practices did not meet international standards.

THAI is also considering resuming flights to Moscow and Tehran in the high season starting in October.

THAI will receive two new Airbus A350 aircraft this year and five Airbus A350s and two Boeing 787s next year.

The airline will implement its new fare system next month and new sales system in the first quarter of next year to enhance competitiveness. The solution is expected to help increase sales especially through the

online channel by more than 3 per cent.

Next month will also see a new management system that should help improve particularly connecting flights. The airline expects this new system to increase revenue by 3 per cent.

Charamporn and his safety-standard staff yesterday updated the media on THAI's latest safety-compliance efforts, saying the airline had been working with Scandinavian Airlines to create a joint plan for safety and risk management.

THAI will begin using this solution in September to prevent unexpected incidents.

All of THAI's 25,000 staff are urged to watch out for any suspicious objects or persons and report them directly to the corporate compliance department established earlier.

Its July 1-20 average load factor was 76.8 per cent, up from the same period last year.

The airline is not worried about the impending divorce of Britain and the European Union, since European tourists still travel to Thailand because it is cheaper than going to the US.