

“For our passengers we have introduced a free stopover package”



I had the pleasure of interacting with **Esayas Wolde Mariam, MD Ethiopian International Services** who has been with the airline since 1991 at their office. He has worked as Manager Space Control and Yield Country Manager Greece, Nigeria and Germany, VP of Ethiopian Cargo, SVP Global Sales and now finally as MD Ethiopian International Services. In an exclusive Interview with **Chandragupta Amritkar** he highlights the success and future plans of the airline. **Excerpts**

Most African carriers are in red how has Ethiopian Airlines always been profitable? Can you share the magic formula?

It's one word Customer. We have always been customer centric as our employees are well aware that they pay our salaries. So service wise we are among the top airlines globally and certainly the best in African continent. We try to give best air connectivity as we fly to 120 + international destinations and as we speak more destinations are getting added.

We have also invested in the best and latest aircrafts. We have a fleet of around 90+ aircrafts including some of the best globally. We recently got 6 Airbus A350-900 and the latest Boeing B787-9 should join our fleet soon. We have regularly upgraded our aircrafts so that customers know that they are getting the best. We have fully refurbished our Boeing 767-300 ER fleet which serves India too including brand new full flat-bed seats in Cloud Nine, 17 inches screen and in-seat power outlets.

All this has helped us get the vote of confidence from our customers in turn multiple awards which are a byproduct of our dedication to customers.

I met an Ethiopian from USA and she was saying that your airline prices out of USA are expensive and so she preferred another airline. Your comments.

Pricing is a critical factor. Let me tell you selling an airline ticket is much more than selling a water bottle. We do have attractive fares and manage to upscale when required. Many factors are involved in pricing – location, size of aircraft, type of aircraft, flight timing, stopovers, amenities provided, in flight service etc. Also in today's environment the price fluctuates substantially.

How do you view the Indian market and any specific expansion plans?

It is a very important market for us. We currently have 28 flights i.e., a double daily flight from Delhi and Mumbai. Ahmedabad and Chennai are on our radar. More Indians are now flying to Africa either for business or leisure. We hope to make our airline as their preferred choice. We also have good connections to Europe and USA. For our transit passengers we have introduced a free stopover package.

The free stopover offer sounds interesting. Can you elaborate?

This is one of the ways to attract transit passengers (with more

than 8 hrs transit time at Addis) to see part of our wonderful country and then talk about it to friends and come with families for a longer duration or conduct events. The offer includes hotel accommodation, free transfers to hotel and back, free sightseeing in Addis Ababa. Time permitting a nice cultural evening. After relishing Ethiopian hospitality they will be safely deposited back to the airport to catch their connecting flights to USA/Europe.

Coming back to the Indian market who are your target passengers?

As I said both business and leisure. With business expansion and more Industrial parks coming in Ethiopia I am sure Indians will find potential opportunities. Then there are the ethnic Indian Africans. The growing Indian middle class with good spending power are ideal for leisure market. Pilgrimage can be a major segment. From Ethiopia we have seen a substantial increase in medical tourism to Indian and many hospitals have tie-ups with our airline.

What about MICE?

Huge potential. Addis Ababa is the headquarters for African Union. We now have a wide variety of international standard hotels with state of the art conference centers. Our airline has tied up with several of these hotels. For the delegates there is a lot to see and experience in Ethiopia and we can provide excellent fly, stay and experience packages.

You are the largest carrier in Africa as well as Africa's largest cargo operator.

Yes, that's true. Cargo is an integral part of our business and 1/5th of our revenue comes from cargo. It is one of the seven strategic business units of our group. We have 8 dedicated freighters including 6 Boeing B777-200LR and 2 - Boeing B757-260F. We recently inaugurated a state of the art Cargo Terminal which can accommodate 600,000 tons per annum. By 2025, we plan to uplift over 820,000 tons per year.

