

BRUSSELS AIRLINES: 26th MEMBER OF STAR ALLIANCE

9 December marked an important milestone for Brussels Airlines. On that day the Belgian airline company became a full member of Star Alliance, the world's largest airline group. It holds almost 4,000 aircraft, 460,000 member of staff and it serves each year some 586.6 million passengers, flying them to in 19,700 flights per day to 1,077 destinations in 175 countries. The alliance offers 980 lounges worldwide.

The official ceremony was held in the Wedding Hall of the Brussels town hall, probably the most suitable location in town for this 'marriage' of Brussels Airlines with 25 other airline companies. To mark the occasion a light and sound show was projected onto the Brussels town hall and amazed all tourists, as well as representatives of all Star Alliance members and international journalists that had been flown in from all over the world.

For the occasion, Manneken Pis, Brussels best known citizen, was dressed in a pilot's uniform.

"Eight years after SN Brussels Airlines was created, we are extremely proud to become a member of Star Alliance," co-CEO Bernard Gustin of Brussels Airlines said, pointing out that for Brussels Airport, located between SkyTeam hubs at Paris Charles de Gaulle and Amsterdam and "not too far" from oneworld's hub at London Heathrow, "this is a key opportunity."

SN Brussels Airlines was created in 2001 as successor of Sabena. Already after 3 years after start-up it became profitable.

In 2007 the company merged with Virgin Express to create a new company: Brussels Airlines.

Brussels Airlines finds itself now in the company of big airline names such as Singapore Airlines, United, Continental, Thai Airways, Air China and Lufthansa, which owns 45 of the Brussels Airlines shares.

Apart from offering its passengers all advantages of the Miles & More frequent flyer programme, Brussels Airlines now also makes available a worldwide network and swift travel.

On its European routes, Brussels Airlines now offers its passengers a choice between two products: full service and low fares.

"Our biggest challenge for Brussels Airlines was to find our place within the multi-hubs system of Star Alliance in Europe. However, I consider Brussels as an unknown diamond in the European network", explained Bernard Gustin, co-CEO of Brussels Airlines. "When looking at the European map, Star Alliance looked underrepresented in western Europe."

The most visible effect of Brussels Airlines' integration is a multiplication of new flights and frequencies by Star Alliance partners for the next summer. Air Canada will start a daily Brussels-Montreal/Toronto flight, United Airlines will fly to Chicago, and Blue 1 will launch non-stop services to Helsinki.

Whereas the year 2009 will be closed with red figures, the expectations are the in 2010 a profit will be made, as Lufthansa's financial director Stephan Gemkow states.

It is well known that Brussels Airlines has a solid African network, but it now also wishes to strengthen its European routes and make these more profitable.

Also Brussels Airport will benefit from its home carrier membership. The Star Alliance airlines will represent some 40 percent of the activities at Brussels Airport.

SkyTeam, one of the other alliances with Air France/KLM, Alitalia and Czech Airlines, takes another 30 percent, and Oneworld, with British Airways, American Airlines, Iberia and others, is good for some 20 percent. The remaining 10 percent is taken by independent airline companies.