

CHINA: DOMESTIC AIR TRAVEL WEAKER THAN EXPECTED



The tourism recovery in China continues gradually. In this context, the Golden Week holiday at the beginning of the month was expected to be another boosting factor in the country's road back to pre-crisis levels. The domestic air travel numbers however are not as good as expected.

While the numbers for the year are very impressive, Chinese authorities clearly expected something more, but their hopes were hampered by, albeit very rare, Covid-19 cases across the country.

515 Million Trips and Weaker Domestic Air Travel

During the Golden Week, China registered an impressive 515 million domestic trips, as per official data. **An average of 12,952 domestic flights operated during the first week of the month.** This, however, represents 11.27 % less than in 2020.

Moreover, the flight occupancy rates during the holiday reached 73.7 %. This accounts to 4.8 % less than during the previous Golden Week.

Nevertheless, experts believe that there is a clear trend of gradual growth in domestic air travel. They also indicate that the prosperity of the domestic sector is tied to that of the international one, with the revival of international travel set to trigger a return to normality for the entire market.

This gradual growth is also seen when comparing figures from August and September, as domestic air travel grew by 43 % during the latter month, according to data from VariFlight.

Travel Demand Higher Than Fleet Growth

While there is a lot of focus on the present moment and the short-term future, the long-term outlook needs to be addressed as well.

According to China's domestic aircraft manufacturer COMAC, the number of passengers in China is expected to grow by 5.7 % throughout the next 20 years, while the number of aircrafts will grow at a 5.2 % rate.

China is projected to become the largest market by 2040 and the country's airlines will have to buy over 9 thousand new aircrafts. For this reason, it is clear that the capacities of Boeing and Airbus cannot be sufficient.

Thus, the country is ready to rely heavily on COMAC's newly introduced C919 narrow-body jet, which is set to be launched for commercial flights in the near future.

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