

AIRPLANES REPLACED BY RAILWAY?



Air France-KLM is considering getting into the high-speed rail business and also other airlines operating short-haul flights might think about alternatives considering the exploding fuel prices. But is high-speed rail travel really an option?

The fuel prices continue to rise and there is no foreseeable end to it. Furthermore, security standards on planes are getting more complex and the respective procedures previous to the check-in take much time even if passengers are only flying for about an hour from city to city. Today, airports are often overcrowded. This is also the result of the many low-cost airlines competing throughout Europe. Lately London-Heathrow and Frankfurt were named as two of the ten most unpunctual airports.

The experts say that rail travel can come into a market leading position on up to four hour long journeys. One reason why rail traveling might be entering into a period of renewal is the rising fuel prices combined with passengers' determination to become more environmentally friendly. A journey on high-speed train Eurostar for example between London and Paris generates one-tenth of the carbon dioxide produced by an equivalent flight. In times of climate change people think twice when planning a journey and it seems to be getting a good idea to replace some short-haul flights by trains.

The increasing demand in rail travel is putting considerable pressure on the rail operators all over the world. In the U.S., the operators are struggling because a sufficient railway system is not yet developed. European operators however already started building up complex systems and are now taking advantage of the situation.

Railteam for instance is a collaboration of high-speed rail operators in Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK and Austria. They are all Amadeus customers and working together on the standardization and optimization of technology and processes to make travel within Europe more comfortable for the passengers. Airline customers are used to certain advantages like electronic tickets. When they decide to switch to the alternative high-speed train they don't want to be deprived of all the comforts. The operators thus need to take this into account.

Operators are now prioritizing on building up an alliance which works like a code sharing airline alliance. Passengers should be able to book their train tickets on a multilingual website. Booking procedures should be similar in each country and the tickets should look always the same. That makes it easier for passengers to travel across countries. Transborder customer services are being

developed and frequent-traveler-club-train-mile-programs are planned. A European-wide network will also facilitate the operators to cut and optimize waiting times between connections.

Backpacking students is one of the groups of travelers who choose rail more and more often. They especially appreciate that there are no strict baggage restrictions like in planes. And unlike the airports used by low-cost airlines, the main train stations that are always served by the high-speed rails are located directly in the city center.

So it might be worth considering rail travel when planning the next holiday. People planning one-month long holiday for example might try the Global Interrail Pass, which allows you to travel throughout Europe for less plus ... you are going green.

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