

TOTALLY OUTSOURCED AT THOMSON AIRWAYS



Carmen Nevado, Head of Aviation Purchasing, and Nigel Ames, General Manager Airline Ground Experience, at Thomson Airways explain that all the airline's ground handling operations are entirely outsourced with no inhouse handling at all. When it comes to selecting handlers, "Thomson Airways places the upmost priority on safety, security and quality," they say

The link-up of Thomson and First Choice also brought together the travel company's respective airlines: Thomsonfly and First Choice Airways. The result was a brand new airline called Thomson Airways, part of TUI Travel PLC, an international company based in the UK. Its fleet of 737s, A320s, A321s, 757s and 767s fly to over 80 destinations from more than 20 UK airports.

Thomson is in the process of upgrading its fleet with the delivery of two new 737-800s in 2009. The two leased aircraft are the first new deliveries to be received from Boeing since the merger of ThomsonFly and First Choice Airways in 2008. Moreover, as part of the fleet renewal programme, Thomson will be the first UK carrier to fly the 787 Dreamliner in 2011.

When it comes to buying aircraft handling contracts, Nevado says: "Before contracting a ground handling partner a

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full safety questionnaire is completed at tender stage. Pre-operation audits will take place prior to start-up and the Risk, Safety and Quality team will undertake regular audits as part of our business as usual process. Our management teams will also undertake regular audits and KPIs will be monitored daily."

When procuring any ground service, Thomson Airways seeks out long-term partnerships where possible, ideally over a period of three to five years. "Our guiding principles are quality, value for money, experience, supplier risk, sustainability, innovation and customer service," says Nevado.

When asked whether (being part of TUI Travel plc with a sister airline in TUIfly and the combined history of Thomsonfly and First Choice Airways behind the airline) buying ground services is done across the group or whether Thomson Airways and TUIfly operate completely independently of each other when it comes to buying services, Nevado and Ames responds that it is all done in concert. "TUI Travel plc has seven sister airlines and these airlines work together on ground services," says Nevado. "All ground handling in non-source markets is handled centrally."

Thomson Airways is part of a group of businesses that operates significantly in the leisure market; and this can present challenges in terms of passenger and baggage check-in, handling a flood of passengers at certain times in some locations and airport passenger flows. Ames explains that Thomson Airways is constantly evaluating innovative ways to improve the airport experience for its



customers, the majority not being frequent travellers.

"The airline believes that personal touches at check-in is a key differentiator and much appreciated by our customers – nearly all our customers have hold baggage to check-in and they need to visit a check-in desk or bag drop facility," says Ames. "Self-service check-in is however available at key UK airports."

At its main UK bases, London Gatwick and Manchester, the airline also offers check-in 24 hours per day and seven days per week. "This industry leading flexibility allows us to better manage the wide variety of presentation times that exist in the leisure market and gives our customers maximum choice and minimum queue times," says Ames. "Our tour operators have a differentiated product and baggage allowances are tailored accordingly."

Thomson Airways does not operate a low-cost/budget business model. On short and mid-haul flights, custom-

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ers have the opportunity of purchasing a three-course meal before they travel. The airline's long-haul service offers a complimentary four course meal and it recently scored very well in a comparison with the major worldwide scheduled carriers such as British Airways, Virgin and Emirates.

"We utilise the expertise of our service provider LSG Sky Chefs to procure all of our food products and they also manage all of our logistics and aircraft fulfilment for our catering and in-flight retail operation," says Nevado.

Sophisticated IT systems are one of the tools used by the airline to manage

group operations. The airline introduced a new system to customers at the end of 2009 called flight extras. This new service allows customers to book flight extras including inflight meals, extra luggage allowances and sports equipment carriage.

When it comes to cargo, Thomson Airways – in keeping with its business model – outsources the whole package. "The airline outsources all cargo handling and management (including selling) as it does not have the skills or facilities in this area," comments Nevado. "Cargo handling is not part of our core business as the airline's main focus is taking people on holiday."

When asked whether the airline is planning any significant changes to its ground operations going forward, Nevado and Ames comment that Thomson Airways is always looking for new ways to make things easier for customers. Being a leisure travel company, that is exactly what you would expect. ☺