

Fly from Paris to 58 destinations for €49

PARIS, FRANCE: French airline Air France launched on Monday (9 January) an offensive to compete with low-cost carriers, offering flights from four French hubs to 58 destinations in Europe and around the Mediterranean at fares starting from €49 for passengers who travel with carry-on baggage.

"Air France aims to adapt to the changes in purchasing behaviour and the new expectations of travellers, while at the same time attracting new customers," it explained in a statement.

It said that the programme was aimed at the 60% of clients for whom the lowest price was the most important factor.

The new offer is part of a restructuring plan presented a year ago which is designed to save Air France €2bn by 2015, chairman Alexandre de Juniac told a press conference.

Low-cost tickets went on sale on Monday (9 January) for flights beginning from 6 February and were expressly "aimed at clients who might be tempted by low-cost airlines," De Juniac said.

Although the group posted stronger-than-expected quarterly results last October, it is under severe financial and cost-cutting pressures and is trying to fight competition from budget European carriers such as EasyJet and Ryanair.

The new fares, which apply to flights from Orly airport south of Paris and the growing Air France regional low-cost hubs in Marseille, Nice and Toulouse in southern France, "are a long-term offer" according to the airline's deputy director at Orly, Florence Parly.

Air France has found through a study that on short- and medium-haul flights, 40% of its passengers do not check in bags.

The so-called MiNi offer, which does not include frequent-flier credits, is not limited to a specific time period, but customers who buy tickets will have to pay a surcharge if they subsequently seek to check in luggage. They cannot request specific seats via the airline's website.

The fares also complement a strategy by Air France-KLM simultaneously to raise standards for passengers who pay more for business and 'Premium Economy' seats.

Commercial director Christian Boireau said that the airline expected to sell more than a million tickets at prices which would vary from €49 to €69, and noted that the company's website was quickly inundated with applications.

De Juniac said: "Our forecasts show that we will make money. The business plan is viable."

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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