

AVIATION

Nok Air plans second Myanmar service

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Nok Air is adding Mawlamyine to its planned service footprint in Myanmar, now set as the first country for the budget airline's resumption of international services.

The airline intends to reach Mawlamyine, formerly known as Moulmein, from the thriving Thai northwestern border city of Mae Sot over the next three months with two flights a day.

Nok Air's Mae Sot-Mawlamyine service will be operated by the Saab 340B turboprop, capable of carrying 34 passengers, on a trial basis.

"The launch is be part of our ongoing assessment of traffic demand between Thailand and Myanmar," Nok Air chief executive Patee Sarasin told the *Bangkok Post*.

The airline has applied for permission to operate on a charter basis from the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA).

Nok Air hopes to launch a Bangkok-Yangon service in October with two daily flights with larger Boeing 737-800 jets.

It will be the first foreign carrier to connect Mawlamyine by air with the outside world, and it is believed to be the second airline, after Myanma Airways, to serve Mawlamyine airport.

Myanma Airways flies domestic flights from Mawlamyine to Dawei, Myeik and Yangon.

Mr Patee is upbeat about the potential of the Mae Sot-Mawlamyine route as it

provides a safe, convenient mode of transport to the Mon city, the third largest in Myanmar.

While it takes up to nine hours to reach Mawlamyine by car from Mae Sot on a bumpy road, it takes only 15 minutes by air.

Business travel is expected to be the mainstay of the route's traffic on the anticipated economic development in Mon state, according to Mr Patee.

The launch of the service will consolidate Nok Air's position in Mae Sot, where it is the only airline to offer flights — four per day on the Bangkok-Mae Sot route and one daily service to Chiang Mai, all operated by the Saab 340B.

The DCA is spending 840 million baht to upgrade Mae Sot airport by extending its runway from 1,500 to 2,100 metres and building a new passenger terminal.

The expansion, due to be completed in 2018, will enable the airport to accommodate jetliners the size of the Boeing 737 with parking space for three of them.

The passenger terminal covering 7,000 square metres will be capable of processing 300 passengers per hour.

Myanmar newspaper *Eleven* last week quoted Win Swe Tun, deputy director of the Directorate of Civil Aviation, as saying a number of airlines in Thailand including Nok Air have expressed an interest in opening up routes from Mae Sot to Mawlamyine.

He said flights could start after the upgrade of Mawlamyine airport.



The Saab 340B turboprop, operated by Nok Mini, an affiliate of Nok Air, will be deployed on Mawlamyine flights from Mae Sot.