

QUICK NEWS

Nok Air plans Tokyo flights

Nok Airlines plans to start offering flights between Bangkok and Tokyo's Narita Airport as early as November, the head of the Thai low-cost carrier told *The Nikkei* in a recent interview.

Plans call for seven round trips a week, said CEO Patee Sarasin. The flights will be operated by NokScoot, a joint venture between Nok Air and Singapore Airlines affiliate Scoot. NokScoot will become the third low-cost carrier to fly between Thailand and Japan. Nok Air intends to offer flights of five hours or longer through NokScoot. Two other international routes are scheduled to be launched by NokScoot within the year.

Budget airlines have driven growth of the aviation market in Southeast Asia, yet competition has intensified with an influx of newcomers. Nok Air aims to tap demand at home and abroad by increasing popular international routes, including service to Japan.

Nok Air is considering launching flights under its own brand to Vietnam's Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in October. Noting that the airline's service to Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar, "is successful because it is a good market", Patee said that flights to Laos and Cambodia as well as additional routes to Myanmar are a possibility given the strong demand.

Nok Air will hire pilots trained elsewhere. Patee said that this was not a problem now, pointing to the modest increase in flights. But the company hopes to eventually set up its own pilot school – *The Nikkei*