

# Nok Air awaits new turboprops from Bombardier

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THE NATION

BANGKOK-BASED budget carrier Nok Air will before the end of the month take delivery of the first of eight Bombardier Q400 NextGen turboprops and in doing so become the first airline in the region to operate the Canadian-made aircraft.

The fast-growing carrier's second Q400 NextGen plane is scheduled to arrive a week after the first one, while the rest will be gradually delivered this year, said Ranond Mintarkhin, Nok Air's planning

department vice president.

The jets are set to replace the ATR 72-500 turboprop aircraft that Nok Air uses on secondary routes with moderate demand.

Two of these are Bangkok-Mae Sot and Bangkok-Nan.

The Bangkok-Mae Sot route has a cabin factor of about 80 per cent.

"The Q400 NextGen will be capable of carrying more passengers than the ATR 72-500. This will help Nok Air fly with more frequency amid growing demand," Ranond said, adding that the Q400 NextGen is also slightly faster and more fuel-efficient.

The Q400 NextGen has 86 seats while the ATR 72-500 has 66 seats.

Ranond said the new plane was also expected to service Phetchabun, Phitsanulok, Buri Ram, Phrae and Roi Et.

"There will be espresso coffee brewers available in-flight," he said.

Although Nok Air ranked third behind Thai Airways International and Thai AirAsia with a 27.2-per cent share of the domestic market last year, its 17.6-per cent year-on-year growth was the highest.

THAI's market share was 29.3 per cent and Thai AirAsia's 27.8 per cent. Nok Air last week took delivery

of a new Next Generation 737-800 with special livery painted by the aircraft's manufacturer, Seattle-based Boeing.

The livery marked the 10th anniversary of Nok Air taking possession of its first Next Generation 737-800.

It now has 16 of them.

The specially painted plane, which is owned by Ireland-based leasing company Avolon, features a traditional bird-themed livery with stars, streamers and the words "10th Anniversary".

It will be the first of six aircraft to have Wi-Fi.