



# One Way or Another

Look beyond the obvious routes and find surprising connections to your destination. BY LAURA DAILY

**W**hat's in a name? For travelers flying from Houston to Cape Town, Turkish Airlines wouldn't necessarily be the first carrier to come to mind. Yet it's a popular route. What about Washington, D.C., to Auckland? Air New Zealand likely pops into your head. But how about Asiana Airlines, with a transfer through Seoul, South Korea?

Especially for travelers who don't live close to an airport with a direct flight to their destination, global airlines provide alternatives to that age-old, long-haul dilemma: How do I get from Point A to Point B while staying within my alliance to earn miles and enjoy world-class in-flight service and seamless connections at modern airports?

"Haul out a map. Most of these airlines' global hubs are four to five hours away from 60 percent of the world," says Bill Maloney, a marketing consultant to the travel industry. "The Gulf carriers have relied on long-haul travel to increase their customer base for years.

Now many airlines with major hubs outside the United States are adding U.S. cities as spokes to build an entire transportation network."

Michael O'Day, manager, marketing and global partnerships, Ethiopian Airlines, estimates 60 to 70 percent of traffic through the carrier's Addis Ababa Bole Airport hub results from passengers in transit. "With Addis' location in central Africa; a young fleet of Boeing 777-300s and 787s; membership in Star Alliance; and service to not only 49 Africa destinations but Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Tokyo, Abu Dhabi, Mumbai and more, Ethiopian has become the fastest-growing of any African airline," he says.

To many, Avianca is strictly a Colombian airline, but its acquisition of TACA turned it into a powerhouse in Central and South America. For example, the carrier provides the fastest way to Managua, Nicaragua, from New York or Dulles (through San Salvador), avoiding Houston or Miami. And travelers going to and from the Philippines, Thailand,

Vietnam, even Auckland or Christchurch can choose China Airlines and transit through Taipei. Television producer John Wetmore flew airberlin from Venice to JFK via Düsseldorf to use his American AAdvantage miles.

Another factor: Customer-friendly airports that make connections efficient and easy. Pilot and author Patrick Smith opts for the long-haul routes of Asiana Airlines and Korean Air just to transfer at Seoul's Incheon International Airport. "You can even take a free tour from the airport in Seoul, and they'll get you back in time for your flight," he says.

With service to dozens of U.S. cities, including major gateways on both the East and West coasts, Air Canada is an attractive alternative for long-haul travel commencing from secondary U.S. markets. The carrier's main Canadian hubs include Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver.

Francis X. Gallagher, publisher and CEO, *Global Traveler*, is a fan of connecting through Toronto for Air Canada flights to Asia.

"For years I have suggested travelers who do not live close to an airport with direct service should look to Air Canada as an option," says Gallagher. "If you have to transfer through an airport in the United States to connect to your flight to Asia, Canada might be a better option."

While travelers say the No. 1 reason for using an alternative airline for a long-haul is staying within their airline's frequent-flyer alliance, there is another draw: a layover in an attractive destination. When Eric Ludwig, a member of *Global Traveler's* Globility Board, wanted to visit a friend in Amman, Jordan, in December 2013, he found many ways to get there.

"Austrian Airlines came up in my search, with a route from Washington, D.C., to Amman through Vienna, so I took a closer look. Not only could I avoid JFK and earn miles through Star Alliance but also arrange a romantic stop with my wife, Amy." After four days in Jordan, the couple used a 16-hour layover in Vienna to stroll the Danube and visit the famous Christkindl Christmas market. "Choosing that route gave us two vacations in one," says Ludwig.

Jonathan Weber, founder of Marathon Studios in Stroudsburg, Pa., finds flying Turkish Airlines from New York City to Istanbul and then on to Eastern Europe or the Middle East not only less expensive but also, as he says, "I get to spend a few days in Turkey, which has become one of my favorite countries. The way I see it, when traveling on business, I'm getting paid to spend time learning more about a fascinating part of the world."

The airlines are catching on, with some even encouraging passengers to explore a hub city for a day or more. Istanbul is quickly becoming a connecting point for international passengers and is on track to become Europe's third-busiest airport this year, according to Fatma Yuceler, general manager, Western USA, Turkish Airlines.

"Touristanbul offers travelers the unique opportunity to spend their layover touring Istanbul, instead of waiting at the airport," Yuceler says. The free layover tours, offered three times each day, are provided by Touristanbul and led by English-speaking guides. Each tour is open to Turkish Airlines passengers whose flight transfer times are long enough to accommodate the excursion.

Similarly, Etihad Airways promotes its Essential Abu Dhabi Stopover, where the airline covers the first night in a luxury hotel (and offers a discounted rate for additional nights) if you stay a minimum of two nights. The program also includes two-for-one deals on city tours and activities such as a half-day desert safari or admission to Yas Waterworld and Ferrari World. The flight price isn't

**GLOBAL REACH:** An Etihad Airways flight prepares for takeoff in Istanbul.

PHOTO: © ALPIEE | DREAMSTIME.COM



much more than it would be without a two-day interruption.

American travelers are discovering the most convenient schedule or best route isn't always the most obvious. Case in point: Korean Air, part of SkyTeam, flies a Boeing 777 non-stop from Los Angeles to São Paulo, Brazil. While this route connects São Paulo to the Western United States, it also serves as a connection between South America and Korean Air's broad route map in Asia, which includes dozens of cities in China and Southeast Asia as well as Korea and Japan.

"With full-flat business-class (Prestige) seats and private first-class Kosmo Suites, premium travelers can fly to South America in incomparable luxury and privacy," says John Jackson, vice president of marketing for the Americas, Korean Air.

Starting in June, Ethiopian Airlines will offer the only non-stop service from Los Angeles to Dublin, utilizing a 246-passenger Boeing 787. While Dublin is the refueling stop for the flight to Addis Ababa, O'Day says the airline will market to those wishing to build in a two- or three-day stopover, as well as travelers with Ireland alone on their itinerary. "Already we're hearing from travel agents and tour operators anxious to book the flight," he reports.

Industry experts predict the United States will see exponential growth in new direct and indirect long-haul routes. "These days, an airline that wants to grow needs to add spokes to its hub, and the United States has a lot of airports seeking additional service," says marketing consultant Mahoney. With access to 5.4 billion potential travelers within a 10-hour flying radius, Ethiopian Airlines plans to add more than a dozen new destinations, both in the United States and across Europe, Asia and the Middle East over the next decade.

When it comes to long-haul flights, Maloney advises travelers to think beyond the obvious. Ask yourself: What are my choices? Which is an easier connection: London or Abu Dhabi? Can I earn miles? Does the airline offer world-class service? Can I take advantage of a stopover? Then look at the top two or three carriers in your alliance, pull out a map and follow their routes. The results may just surprise you.



