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## **THAI Smile Airways new Connecting Partner in Star Alliance**

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Star Alliance announced the plans for THAI Smile Airways to become the next Connecting Partner in its global network.

The Chief Executive Board of Star Alliance, meeting on the sides of the 75<sup>th</sup> IATA Annual General Meeting in Seoul, approved the application of THAI Smile Airways to become a part the Alliance's Connecting Partner model.

The Connecting Partner model was established by Star Alliance in June 2016 to complement its membership model.

In contrast to full membership in the Alliance, requiring building of commercial ties with all full members, the more regional Connecting Partner scope calls for commercial relationships with a minimum of three carriers only.

Customers travelling on an itinerary which includes a transfer between a Star Alliance member airline and a Connecting Partner will be offered standard Alliance benefits such as passenger and baggage through check-in. In addition, customers who have achieved Star Alliance Gold Status in their frequent flyer programme will enjoy premium customer benefits.

Once all entry requirements are fulfilled, which is expected by the end of the year, THAI Smile Airways will become the second Connecting Partner, joining Juneyao Airlines that entered in 2017.

Connecting Partners allow Star Alliance to close network gaps that may exist of a regional basis. THAI Smile Airways will add 11 new destinations to the Star Alliance network, which already comprises over 1,300 airports in 194 countries.

Jeffrey Goh, Star Alliance CEO said: "Three years after the introduction of the new programme, I am pleased to announce that THAI Smile is set to become the next Star Alliance Connecting Partner, which will support us in further strengthening our position as the leading airline alliance network.

The partnership with our first Connecting Partner, Juneyao Airlines, has exceeded our mutual expectations and we look forward to providing our customers with even more

choice through the addition of the THAI Smile Airways offer”.

Charita Leelayudth, Acting CEO, THAI Smile Airways said: “We are delighted that the Star Alliance Chief Executive Board has given the green light for THAI Smile to proceed with our proposal to become a Star Alliance Connecting Partner. This gives us the unique opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the strong Alliance network and at the same time pursue our own business model, providing superior air travel experience for the modern travellers at affordable prices.”

The Bangkok based airline has begun to implement the necessary technology and commercial links which will allow THAI Smile to begin serving Star Alliance connecting passengers in 2020. As of then, the airline will be offering the privileges to qualifying Star Alliance Gold Status passengers travelling on connecting itineraries, including Priority Check-in, Thai Smile Lounge Access, and Priority Baggage Delivery.