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Finavia rebrands Helsinki-Vantaa as new terminal extension opens

By Chris Kjelgaard

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Finavia, the state-owned operator of 25 of Finland's 27 commercial airports, has rebranded Helsinki-Vantaa as Helsinki Airport in a €30,000 (\$43,200) marketing initiative in partnership with advertising agency TBWA/PHS. The rebranding is intended to reinforce the message that HEL is a modern hub ideal for connections to Asia from both Europe and the North American East Coast owing to its position directly over the shortest great-circle routes connecting the continents.

Finavia President and CEO Samuli Haapasalo said a primary objective of the rebranding is to inform passengers that three-runway HEL offers "all the services of a large international airport, without the problems of one." With passenger traffic of 13 million passengers per year, 1 million of whom connected between Europe and Asia in 2009 (down 23% from 2008), HEL has the size to offer high-quality service without the congestion plaguing larger European hubs, Haapasalo claimed.

The branding initiative went into effect Dec. 11 with the formal opening of the final phase of a €143 million extension to the airport's Terminal 2. The rest of the extension opened in September. It includes the 1,000-sq.-m. Via Lounge, which is open to all passengers for a fee and to oneworld premium passengers for free. It also features the 600-sq.-m. Via Spa, featuring a range of saunas and treatments.

The extension increases the number of widebody gates in T2 from five to eight and allows all long-haul flights to be handled in one terminal. Additionally, it has enabled Finnair to move all its flights to T2 along with oneworld partners British Airways and Malev Hungarian Airlines. HEL-based Blue1 and other European Star Alliance carriers use the smaller T1.

Moving all domestic flights to T2 allows Finnair to maintain a 35-min. connecting time between any two flights. While passengers on flights using gates in the new extension face a long walk to and from immigration, the fact that it forms part of T2's non-Schengen Agreement area means Finnair uses the extension's gates exclusively for its North American and Asian flights, making connections easier.

Hoping to make HEL's case compelling to airlines as well as passengers, Haapasalo revealed that the company will extend the 10% cut in landing and navigation fees introduced in 2009 through the rest of this year. "It's an indication we want to remain customer-oriented, offering quality at a [compelling] price level," he said. "We had a lot of good feedback" from operators on the fee cut, which he claimed is "unique in Europe."



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