

United expands Pacific action with 3 new Asia routes, including flight to Philippines

(Courtesy of David Slotnick, The Points Guy)



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Travel demand between Asia and the U.S. is roaring, and United Airlines is looking to get on board.

The Chicago-based carrier announced an expansion of its Pacific schedule this winter, taking advantage as demand surges following broad reopenings across Asia.

United will start with a brand new route between San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport (MNL) in the Philippines, with daily service beginning Oct. 29.

With the new route, United will become the only U.S. airline to fly between the contiguous U.S. and the Philippines, although it's actually the airline's second route to Manila. United already flies daily to Manila from its Micronesian base at Guam International Airport (GUM) on Boeing 737-800 aircraft.

The flight from SFO, on the other hand, will operate on United's largest aircraft, the Boeing 777-300ER. That aircraft is equipped with [Polaris business class seats](#) and a premium economy cabin, giving passengers options for the nearly 7,000-mile flight.

While no U.S. airline currently flies to the Philippines, Philippine Airlines flies from Manila to GUM, SFO, Honolulu's Daniel K. Inouye International Airport (HNL), New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).

United also announced two other new routes, including the restoration daily service from LAX to Tokyo Narita International Airport (NRT) starting on Oct. 28. United previously operated that route before shifting it to Tokyo's Haneda Airport (HND). The new Narita route will exist alongside the Haneda flight, making for two daily departures from Los Angeles to Tokyo. The airline will use a 787-10 to Narita.

Finally, the airline will begin flying from Los Angeles to Hong Kong International Airport (HKG) with daily service starting Oct. 28, complementing an existing route from SFO. That flight will be operated with a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner.

As part of the announcement, the airline also said it would add a second daily flight between SFO and Taoyuan International Airport (TPE) in Taipei, Taiwan, using a Boeing 777-200ER.

The new service comes several months after [United announced a substantial expansion](#) of its South Pacific and Oceania network. With the new routes, United says it will fly to 15 different transpacific long-haul destinations this winter — more than other U.S. carriers.

The expansion and associated demand comes on the tail of a similar boom in the transatlantic market. It saw more demand than airlines could keep up in 2022 and this summer following the closed borders of 2020 and 2021.

In contrast to its competitors, United took a risky approach during the pandemic by keeping its entire wide-body fleet rather than retiring any of those larger aircraft to reduce costs. While some planes were put in storage during the peak of the pandemic, the airline could still bring them back into service to maximize the sudden increase of demand following reopenings.

It's an approach that the airline says paid off. The share of international flights in the airline's network is 2% larger than in 2019, Patrick Quayle, United's head of international network planning, said during a conference call on Monday ahead of the announcement.

The key, Quayle said, is trying to grow "responsibly," capturing demand where it exists and where it's growing while not overcommitting resources.

In the case of the Pacific, demand has been surging. However, that has varied by region, so the airline is trying to be strategic in how it's adding capacity.

"Tokyo started off the year a little weak," Quayle said. "But as Tokyo opened up to global travel, it's really gone gangbusters."

Notably, the announcements centered around United's West Coast hubs and excluded Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR), which has been in the spotlight following operational struggles ahead of the July 4 holiday week.

United operates a nonstop flight to Tokyo Narita from Newark. It previously flew to Hong Kong as well.

Quayle said that although the airline was working to shore up its Newark operation and was "not rethinking our international network out of Newark," it had no plans to add service to Asia from the East

Coast hub anytime soon. Quayle said restrictions on flying through Russian airspace create range issues for anything beyond the Northern Pacific, while flights to mainland China remain [limited](#) due to ongoing trade tensions.

Nevertheless, the Pacific announcement represents another phase in the reopening and resumption of travel, and with Manila, expansion is back in the skies.