

Your View

Saturday, March 28, 2015

AEROLÍNEAS SOARS AGAIN

President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has many detractors and it's fair to say her second term as president has been a rocky road with her "model" beset by seemingly intractable travails across the board. What with vulture funds, recalcitrant farmers, problematic vice-presidents (one disobedient, the other under indictment), capital flight, bolshie unions, railway tragedies and now Nisman/AMIA, not to mention her health issues, it's fair to say just about everything has turned to custard for CFK and I'm sure, despite her truculent discourses on Cadena Nacional and at the opening of Congress, October can't come quickly enough for her.

There's one project which has succeeded despite CFK's travails and that's her drive to resurrect Aerolíneas Argentinas as a source of national pride, improve domestic connectivity and regain Aerolíneas' supremacy as Argentina's principal in and out-bound carrier. When CFK made La Cámpora leader Mariano Recalde Aerolíneas Argentinas & Austral president & CEO, I was one of many who were dubious because of his lack of aviation credentials. Four years down the track and by any measure it's fair to say CFK's vision has succeeded. Recalde and his La Cámpora colleagues have transformed Aerolíneas and Austral with modern on-line booking systems, new branding, upgraded equipment (22 Embraer regional jets, 14 Boeing 737-800s with 25 more on order and lately a new long-range Airbus) and market-friendly schedules & fares although some say further efficiencies are needed (e.g. AR's 11,000 employees versus LAN's 5,000).

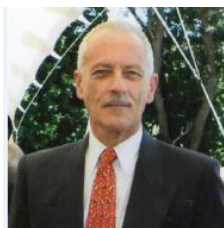
One tangible example of the transformation is Aerolíneas Argentinas' recent code-share alliance with the highly-regarded Air New Zealand which even in the recent past would have been impossible due to a closed-shop mentality in Argentina which was endemic.

In a win/win deal Aerolíneas returns to the transpolar Oceania route they pioneered 35 years ago and award-winning Air New Zealand gains a lucrative new destination from December of this year. There'll soon be an influx of New Zealand tourists roaming Buenos Aires' broad avenues and Patio Bullrich, Alto Palermo & Galerías Pacífico shopping centres, tipping Malbec in Mendoza and eating Black Forest Gateau in Bariloche. Conversely, there'll be many Argentines zooming down Queenstown's Shotover River on jet boats, leaping into precipitous gorges on the end of rubber bungee cords and sailing in Americas Cup yachts on Auckland's sparkling Waitemata Harbour.

Since the announcement of the Aerolíneas-Air New Zealand's Buenos Aires service, as a director of the Latin American New Zealand Business Council, I can report a huge upsurge of interest across diverse commercial sectors in New Zealand which will thrive on the back of the new service. From a New Zealand perspective, in-bound tourism, rugby, horse-breeding and agro-technology aside, education services look the most promising. From the Argentine perspective, in-bound tourism aside again, the most important innovation will be the connection to Asia through New Zealand, which is around half the travel time via Europe or North America. All their other travails to one side, CFK and her La Cámpora protégés deserve praise for their success in rescuing Aerolíneas Argentinas from oblivion and for their perspicacity in welcoming Air New Zealand to Argentina.

Recoleta

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<http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/185422/your-view>


Author Thomas Manning is a New Zealand export market development consultant who's lived and worked in Argentina for over thirty years and commuted regularly on Aerolineas' Transpolar route to Auckland until services ceased in 2012 and he's a long-standing director and past vice-president of the New Zealand Latin America Business Council.

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