Storms in the winter or fog during summer — difficult flight conditions are a given in the Faroe Islands; however Atlantic Airways meets the challenge with a renewed aircraft fleet, equipped with the best navigation technology in Europe.

For many years national carrier Atlantic Airways has offered the only airborne connection to mainland Europe from the Faroe Islands, transporting people for business or leisure, at times for healthcare emergencies. The airline also oversees helicopter search and rescue operations in Faroese waters.

Now with Scandinavian Airlines opening a route between Vagar and Copenhagen as of early 2017, years of virtual monopoly for Atlantic have come to an end. CEO Jóhanna á Bergi, however, showed no sign of worry when we interviewed her.

“We’ve managed to lower the prices of air tickets over the last couple of years,” she said. “Our services are tailored to serve Faroese travelers and put their interests first.”

Atlantic Airways currently operates on 12 routes across Europe with 40 departures a week during high season and 20 in low season. Copenhagen is by far the most important destination, accounting for 180,000 of 282,000 trips in 2016. Other popular destinations include Edinburgh, Reykjavik, Bergen, and Billund. For those looking to escape to summer regions, direct flights to Barcelona, Lisbon, Malaga, Corte, and Lanzarote are likewise available.

Ms. á Bergi said: “By offering direct flights to more varied destinations, we make the Faroe Islands bigger and more accessible.”

Crosswinds, fog and beautiful, but tall cliffs surrounding the only Faroese Airport, Vagar, can make for difficult flight conditions. Atlantic Airways, a publicly owned company, accumulated three new fixed-wing aircraft as well as two helicopters between 2012 and 2016. Together with Airbас, Atlantic Airways launched the most advanced navigation technology in Europe, known as Required Navigation Performance (RNP) AR 0.1, on its Airbus A319. The GPS-based technology makes it possible to land safely under extreme weather conditions.

“Our operational regularity is very good,” Ms. á Bergi said. “We manage to land safely despite challenging weather conditions because our planes are made specifically for Faroese circumstances and our pilots receive special training.”

The CEO puts great emphasis on the airline’s effort to establish an aviation industry in the Faroe Islands whilst also stimulating a growth in tourism and promoting the export of Faroese culture. Founded in 1987, Atlantic currently employs about 25 air mechanics, 30 pilots and 50 flight attendants, most of whom are Faroese.

According to Ms. á Bergi, the airline also plays a vital role in creating growth across domestic industries.

“All of our operations are centered in and around the Faroe Islands,” she said. “Every staff member is eager to serve the Faroese people and visitors alike, our planes always finish their journeys in the Faroe Islands, maintenance is carried out here and spare parts are kept here as well.”

RETURNING YOUTH

The Faroese tourism industry has increased rapidly in recent years, which is widely attributed to years of targeted marketing and a joint effort through Visit Faroe Islands as well as local hospitality businesses.

Ms. á Bergi said: “In my view, our role is to make the Faroe Islands accessible by providing varied routes, flights that operate according to schedule, and we’ve also been very active for many years in promoting the Faroe Islands as a tourism destination. And it’s no secret that visiting the Nordic countries is a growing international trend. Also, the Faroe Islands are seen as an exotic destination by many because it’s such an obscure place.”

The rise in tourism benefits local travelers as increased demand allows the airline to lower its prices.

To promote Faroese culture abroad, Atlantic Airways has long engaged in a range of sponsorship arrangements, including, for example, for national teams in sports such as football and handball. The company recently also, for instance, partnered with the Nordic House in Tórshavn, the Faroese Ministry of Culture, and the Municipal Council of Tórshavn to sponsor artists with an initiative known as Air Bridge (‘Loftbrúgv’ in Faroese).

Ms. á Bergi takes pride in the airline’s new scheme ‘Sveiggj’, which offers discounted tickets to the large number of Faroese students and young people who live abroad. To be eligible, one must either be aged under 26 or study full-time.

“Bringing the expatriate youth and students over age 25 closer to the Faroe Islands has been a political priority for many years, and it’s incredibly important,” she said.

“The best way to do it is by making sure that they can return more frequently.”

Approximately 1600 people plus their children, collectively some 400, are eligible to buy flights at a reduced price under the new scheme. Of those eligible, about 700 are aged 26 and older. A new customer loyalty program, Súlubonus, has also been launched for regular travelers.

Atlantic Airways

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Atlantic Airways is the Faroe Islands’ national air carrier, connecting the country to the rest of the world, linking the islands closer together and helping secure the safety of its passengers and of the population of the Faroe Islands.

Atlantic Airways operates a regular, flexible and diverse route network from the Faroe Islands with competitive prices. The airline uses state of the art technology and equipment and uses fully modern communication services. The customer is at the center of all our activities, and we work closely with customers and the community to continuously improve our services and offerings.

Atlantic Airways was established in 1957 to develop the Faroese airline industry and airline services, and help develop the Faroese aviation environment. The company has grown from a small enterprise with one aircraft and limited capabilities to a carrier operating several aircraft and helicopters, fully compliant with international standards. 173 full-time equivalent employees. Fleet: three aircraft, Airbus A320 (1) and Airbus A319 (2), and 2 helicopters (May 2017).

Domestic helicopter services including scheduled flights between the islands, emergency medical service (HEMS) search and rescue (SAR), and offshore operations.

We strive vigorously and continuously to be a valued and respected member of our local society, creating value, competences and jobs for the Faroese community.