

Vietnam's newest airline Bamboo takes first flight

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Bamboo owner Trinh Van Quyet is offering routes to lesser-known destinations in Vietnam

Vietnam's newest commercial carrier Bamboo Airways took flight Wednesday, officially entering Southeast Asia's crowded aviation sector

where it will face stiff competition from established players.

Air travel in the region has boomed in recent years as appetites—and budgets—for travel have soared among spendthrift flyers.

Bamboo is hoping to tap into the saturated market by offering routes to lesser-known destinations in Vietnam currently underserved by heavy-hitters like Vietnam Airlines and budget carrier Vietjet.

"Bamboo Airways will become a five-star airline to serve domestic and international passengers," Bamboo owner Trinh Van Quyet said at Hanoi's Noi Bai airport after the inaugural flight landed from Ho Chi Minh City Wednesday morning.

Born poor in northern Vinh Phuc province, Quyet is best known in Vietnam for building a vast real estate empire FLC Group, which has built luxury hotels, [golf courses](#) and condominiums across the country and is the parent company of Bamboo.

The property tycoon told AFP in an interview last year that he hopes to offer customers integrated travel packages to his resorts at affordable prices.

But analysts have warned that travellers are moving away from package deals and prefer to tailor their own trips online.

Bamboo will operate eight domestic routes daily, with plans to fly from Hanoi to Japan, South Korea and Singapore later this year and eventually to Europe.

Vietnam's aviation sector is surging, with passenger numbers jumping to 62 million last year from 25 million in 2012.

Regional and domestic airlines are scrambling to keep up with that growth as Vietnam's airports strain to accommodate an increasing number of flights and passengers.

National carrier Vietnam Airlines and Vietjet, infamous for its bikini-clad air hostesses, currently dominate international and domestic travel.

Bamboo is not the only carrier looking to edge into the sector.

Last month, Malaysian budget airline AirAsia signed an agreement with a Vietnamese [travel](#) firm to launch a low-cost carrier in Vietnam, though a timeline for takeoff was not provided.

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