Japan Air receives first ATR

Japan Air Commuter (JAC) took delivery of its first European ATR turboprop airplane on Friday, gambling on attracting foreign tourists to a little-visited archipelago as Japan bids to place Amami and Ryukyu islands on UNESCO’s World Heritage list.

Configured with 48 seats, the ATR 42-600s will be used to replace JAC’s Saab 340 fleet. Flight Fleets Analyzer shows that the Kagoshima-based airline has nine Saab 340s equipped with 36 seats and built between 1992 and 1999.

“Amami is not famous yet but will become World Heritage in a few years, and many tourists from other countries will visit,”

-Hiroki Kato, president of Japan Air Commuter, told reporters.

“If in the future we have tourists from abroad it might be a chance for us.”

The carrier’s main business is in servicing the Amami islands off the coast of southwest Japan. Kato acknowledges that the operation of that network depends on government subsidies and that the local population is shrinking. But he sees an opportunity for growth of tourist traffic as the islands is set to become a Unesco world heritage area.

Japan Air Commuter also operates nine of those aircraft, but no decision on whether to renew or replace them is expected before 2020. In another turboprop battle, Bombardier said last month it had won a deal from Hawaii-based Island Air, knocking out ATR as the airline’s sole aircraft supplier.

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