

Italy's ITA takes to skies from ashes of Alitalia

15 October 2021, by Brigitte Hagemann



Italy's new national carrier ITA will still use Alitalia's iconic green, white and red logo as it replaces the failed airline.

Italy's new national carrier ITA Airways took its debut flight Friday, closing a turbulent chapter that witnessed the decline of the country's storied but ill-fated Alitalia after 74 eventful years.

ITA has been formed out of the ashes of the loss-making Alitalia, which was placed under state administration in 2017 but deteriorated further during the coronavirus pandemic.

Under a deal agreed with the European Union, the new debt-free venture has taken over half of Alitalia's planes and landing slots—but thousands of staff are out of a job.

ITA's first flight from Milan to the southern city of Bari arrived at 7:39 am (0539 GMT), just hours after Alitalia's last landing Thursday night in Rome—itself an emotional affair.

"This is considered the last flight of Alitalia," pilot Captain Andrea Gioia solemnly told passengers, before the crew were met by a toast by fellow

employees on their arrival at Rome's Fiumicino Airport.

Alitalia's iconic green, white and red logo will not disappear from European skies, however, as ITA successfully bid to buy the brand late Thursday for 90 million euros (\$105 million).

Desperate staff

Launched on May 5, 1947, Alitalia symbolised the economic success of post-WWII Italy, and it became the airline of choice of the popes after Paul VI used the carrier in 1964.



On the verge of bankruptcy, Alitalia was placed under public administration in 2017, but Italy struggled to find an investor to take it over.

By the 1970s it was the world's seventh-largest airline. But decades of subsequent decline only worsened in recent years.

"It is with deep sadness that we witness the end of Alitalia, it was our national flagship, a symbol of the history of this country," said Laura Facchini, 47, an Alitalia flight attendant for 20 years.

Like many others, she applied in vain to be taken over by ITA, part of the 2,800 people recruited this year.

ITA said Friday it would reach 5,750 employees within its aviation sector by 2025 after hiring 1,000 next year, still short of Alitalia's total 10,500 employees.

Facchini, a national delegate of the UGL Trasporto Aereo union, said Alitalia employees were desperate.

"We don't have jobs anymore. We were very attached to this company, very motivated, we always had a smile on our faces," she told AFP.

Alitalia unions have held frequent demonstrations, protesting against what they call ITA's proposed "discount contracts", with wage cuts of up to 20 percent and even 40 percent for pilots.

APA citation: Italy's ITA takes to skies from ashes of Alitalia (2021, October 15) retrieved 28 June 2022 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-10-italy-ita-ashes-alitalia.html>

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