

# Air Arabia awaits green light to start Egypt operation

We're hoping to fly by the end of month, chief executive says

- By Nadia Saleem, Staff Reporter
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Dubai: Air Arabia, a Sharjah-based budget carrier, is in its final stages to begin operations from Egypt, its third hub after Morocco and the UAE, company official said.

Initially planned to start operating out of Alexandria airport by this month, Air Arabia Egypt will see short delays as the Egyptian government issues the airline operating certificate, Adel Ali, chief executive told reporters Monday.

"We're hoping to fly by the end of April, but it could take longer," he said.

Ali said the airline, 50 per cent owned by Egypt's tourism company Travco Group, could get a licence to fly within two weeks and will start as soon as that happens.

Ali said one A320 is currently waiting in Egypt, with another ready to move to the third hub as soon as operations begin.

With a fleet of 21 new Airbus A320 jets, Air Arabia will shift any needed planes to the base in Morocco or Alexandria.

After 10 months of operations out of Morocco, the airline recorded a seat factor of over 70 per cent. "Given the first Europe operation, lots of routes, drop in the tourism sector in Europe, we are very pleased with the outcome," Ali said.

Planning to grow organically, it will add three to four aircraft a year in Morocco and the same in Egypt.

"As the market comes back, Morocco is a country with 30 million people, lots of airports, [expectations of] 10 million tourists a year...a lot of Moroccans living in Europe, the market has a potential of large movement," he said.

Meanwhile, operations in Sharjah continue to see growth as demand is high for budget travel.

This year, the carrier will be taking delivery of six new aircraft and another six in 2011.