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Ryanair CEO Wants Alcohol Limits in Airports

O'Leary Suggests Curbing Airport Drinking to Prevent Flight Disruptions

Wednesday, August 28, 2024



In a move that has sparked significant debate within the travel and hospitality industries, Michael O'Leary, the outspoken CEO of Ryanair, has suggested imposing a limit on alcohol consumption in airports. Specifically, O'Leary has proposed that passengers should be restricted to a maximum of two alcoholic drinks before boarding a flight. This suggestion comes as a response to increasing concerns over disruptive

behavior on airplanes, much of which has been linked to excessive alcohol consumption.

O'Leary's proposal is rooted in the growing number of incidents involving unruly passengers, which often lead to serious disruptions during flights. These incidents, in some cases, have been severe enough to force pilots to turn planes around, returning to the departure airport to offload disorderly passengers. The CEO has pointed to alcohol as a significant factor contributing to such behavior, emphasizing the challenges airlines face in detecting intoxicated individuals before they board.

In an interview with The Telegraph, O'Leary highlighted the difficulty airlines encounter in identifying passengers under the influence, particularly when they are in groups. He noted that as long as a passenger can stand and move forward, they are generally allowed to board. The problem, however, often escalates once the flight is in progress, with some passengers becoming increasingly disruptive, necessitating extreme measures such as flight diversions.

O'Leary drew a parallel between the dangers of flying while intoxicated and drunk driving, arguing that while the aim is not to ban alcohol altogether, there needs to be a reasonable limit to ensure safety. He acknowledged that alcohol is not the only issue; in some cases, passengers have mixed alcohol with other substances, further exacerbating inappropriate behavior on board.

To mitigate these risks, Ryanair has already implemented several restrictions on certain routes, particularly those to popular holiday destinations. For example, the airline has banned passengers from carrying duty-free alcohol onto flights after discovering that many were consuming these drinks mid-flight. On routes such as those to Ibiza, Ryanair has even gone so far as to prohibit passengers from bringing water bottles on board, after it was found that some had filled them with vodka.

O'Leary's proposal has not been without its critics, particularly among airport bar and restaurant operators who generate significant revenue from alcohol sales. Among the outspoken opponents is Sir Tim Martin, founder of the Wetherspoons pub chain, who argued that controlled alcohol consumption in a supervised setting is safer than passengers attempting to drink excessively in other, less regulated environments.

Martin also criticized Ryanair for its own onboard alcohol sales practices, noting that the airline offers promotions on double shots of Irish whiskey, which could be seen as contradictory to O'Leary's stance on reducing alcohol-related issues.

Throughout his three-decade tenure as Ryanair's CEO, O'Leary has become known for his unconventional and often controversial ideas, many of which are driven by his relentless focus on cost reduction. These have included proposals to remove toilets from planes, operate flights without co-pilots, have passengers carry their own luggage, and even consider standing-room-only flights. While many of these ideas have not been implemented, they reflect O'Leary's broader approach to optimizing resources and minimizing operational costs.

As of now, Ryanair has not confirmed whether it will introduce a formal limit on the number of alcoholic drinks passengers can purchase during flights. However, such a move would align with O'Leary's broader vision for improving onboard safety and behavior. The idea of limiting alcohol consumption in airports could, if implemented, have significant implications for the travel industry, potentially setting a precedent that other airlines and airports may follow.

In conclusion, while Michael O'Leary's proposal to restrict alcohol consumption in airports is driven by legitimate safety concerns, it raises complex questions about the balance between ensuring passenger safety and respecting personal freedoms. It also highlights the broader challenges the aviation industry faces in managing passenger behavior in an era where air travel has become more accessible, but also more prone to disruptions. As this debate continues, the industry will need to consider how best to address these issues while maintaining a high standard of service and safety for all passengers.