



# Leseprobe

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## **Lufthansa - The First 100 Years**

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## Zum Buch

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**This richly illustrated volume presents the first comprehensive account of Lufthansa's one-hundred-year history—from its pioneering beginnings in 1926 and its role during the National Socialist era to its postwar recovery and rise as a global player in aviation.**

Based on newly accessed sources and materials from the company's archives, this work offers a compelling narrative of Lufthansa's development—set against the backdrop of Germany's turbulent twentieth century. Political, economic, and technological contexts are explored alongside the company's evolving brand identity, characterized by consistently innovative design. The book provides insight into landmark aircraft, key developments in engineering and global reach, and the day-to-day operations that shaped the airline's direction. With rare photographs, vintage advertising material, and internal documents, this volume combines historical insight with visual richness. Special production features such as foldout pages further enhance the reading experience. A must-have for aviation enthusiasts, design lovers, and all those interested in the history of aviation.

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**Lufthansa**

The First 100 Years

# **Lufthansa**

## The First 100 Years

Hartmut Berghoff  
Manfred Grieger  
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# Introduction

## The Turbulent History of Lufthansa

Hartmut Berghoff, Manfred Grieger, Jörg Lesczenski

In 2026, Lufthansa will celebrate 100 years since the foundation of the first Lufthansa. The largest European aviation corporation now comprises 15 airlines, the global market leader in aircraft maintenance and overhaul with Lufthansa Technik, and a world-leading cargo airline with Lufthansa Cargo. It also has several hundred subsidiaries and portfolio investments both inside and outside Germany. In 2024, over 120 million passengers flew with the airlines of the Lufthansa Group, while back in 1926 its predecessor company Deutsche Luft Hansa AG welcomed only 56,000 people on board. This book sets out to explain how the small airline from the inter-war years evolved into a large corporation and global player. What were the driving factors and what hampered progress? The following chapters explore the relationship between continuity and change, with successes and crises, with trailblazing strategies and unfortunate regressions. Seen over the long term, Lufthansa's growth is quite fascinating, although it is less a story of a steady linear upturn and more one of a checkered history complete with massive setbacks, temporary discontinuation, and subsequent liquidation of the company in the years after World War II, followed by its foundation as a new company. There are few corporations that have been exposed to changes on such a scale.

Be that as it may, particular themes run through Lufthansa's history like a common thread. These include, first and foremost, its relationship to government, which midwived both the first and the second foundations of the company. Between 1933 and 1945,

government caused the transformation of Lufthansa from a civilian corporation into an armaments company which, in the end, was essentially part of Germany's air force. After its second foundation in 1953, the share capital of the new Deutsche Lufthansa AG was held by the West German federal government and the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, then in 1966 they jointly floated the company on the stock market and sold 25 percent of their stake in it. In subsequent years, the corporation was privatized in installments and eventually wholly privatized in 1997. In the worst crisis in the company's post-war history amid the coronavirus pandemic, the German federal government temporarily reinvested in the company and came to Lufthansa's rescue by making various state support measures available.

Another theme that runs throughout its history is that of technological progress. Aircraft became ever more powerful and ever larger. In the 1920s and the 30s, single-engine planes were gradually replaced by multi-engine aircraft such as the Ju 52, and large airplanes were introduced, including the Ju 90, which had a range of over 1,500 kilometers. The 60s, by contrast, saw technological upheaval with the transition from propeller planes with piston-driven engines to jets with turbines, a change that was to have massive consequences. The modern aircraft flew faster and further, transported more passengers and more freight. Yet they were also substantially more expensive and changed the business model fundamentally. Flying became an ever more capital-intensive business, and at the same time, economies of scale meant it became more affordable for a growing number of people. However fascinating technological progress may be, the general acceptance of pioneering innovations was often not a matter of course. New aircraft types with revolutionary control systems sometimes changed work conditions radically, meaning pilots suddenly had to have completely new skills, and in some instances the novelties were met with skepticism. Nevertheless, technological leaps and bounds continued to pave the way for Lufthansa's growth and competitiveness.

The third continuous theme is that of recurrent crises. Lufthansa has seen its fair share of them, starting with the Great Depression at the end of the 20s, followed by World War II and the Allies' prohibition on German aviation from 1945 to 1955. Given high fixed costs, cyclical economic downturns have always posed a challenge. This was particularly the case in the oil and economic crises of the 70s, and 80s, added to which came the ever-present threat of international terrorism. In the early 90s, Lufthansa was in fact temporarily a case for financial restoration, although it did manage to overcome the latter crisis by internal means. The coronavirus pandemic of 2020–21, by contrast, took the corporation very close to

the brink, yet once again Lufthansa mastered a profound crisis—in fact, it did so faster than expected, and not merely thanks to support from the state. The experiences garnered from these multiple crises have enabled Lufthansa to develop the abilities necessary to look crisis in the face and to defy it in an effort to secure the company's own future. Down through the decades, for example, Lufthansa has nurtured a unique form of resilience with which it responds to the innate volatility of the aviation industry.

Alongside these three key themes, the present study addresses the fundamental changes in the aviation markets—and Lufthansa's response to them. First, flying as the expensive prerogative of well-heeled clients became increasingly accessible to broader segments of the population during the 60s. Second, what had thus far been a highly regulated market with little competition was liberalized between the 70s and the 90s. A business that operated within the safe framework of legal cartels and national monopolies was replaced by fierce and in some cases even ruinous competition. Many rivals did not survive these changes. The harsh competition invariably led to the industry consolidating, to bankruptcies, and to takeovers. Once Lufthansa had overcome the fear-inspiring crisis of the early 90s, it then had ample opportunity to acquire foreign airlines, a trend that strengthened and enlarged the corporation considerably, giving it greater international reach. At the same time, however, new, aggressive rivals appeared on the horizon with a completely different business model—flying as low-cost carriers, for example, or serving as the national carriers of states in the Gulf of Arabia. This meant Lufthansa was henceforth operating in a sector without level playing fields.

The massive changes in the market and in technology mean that rationalization and streamlining are also something of a common thread in Lufthansa's history. Processes and organizational structures were regularly in flux, given the search for more efficient solutions. In this context, the corporation developed from an airline into a broadly diversified aviation group with many associated business fields, but as of the 2000s it once again focused firmly on flight operations for passengers and freight as well as on engineering and maintenance. The corporation thus reengineered itself into an airline group and parted company with marginal areas it had been active in, such as tourism, catering, and the credit card business. The acquisition of additional airlines strengthened its core operations further and allowed it to tap synergies more intensively as part of a multi-brand strategy, yet this did not prevent fluctuations in its financial results. Business has regularly soared or nosedived, without—and here Lufthansa differs from many of its competitors—there having been any real crashes.

A single book can hardly do justice to all the aspects of the 100-year history of such a large corporation. Alongside the aforementioned themes, it does however cover working conditions and management, customers and staff, the corporate culture, marketing, and the company's corporate identity. In the 80s and above all the 90s, sustainability and diversity came onto the agenda. In 1986, women stepped into cockpits and thus entered the last career preserve of men—although they had to overcome considerable opposition in the process. Over the years, there has been an ever-greater focus on sustainability, which, given global warming, general ecological awareness, and the high price of jet fuel, is a major corporate priority. As a result, fuel consumption per flight kilometer has been reduced considerably, and ecological modernization has emerged as an important corporate objective. The same applies to corporate social responsibility, which extends not only to the payroll but also to people all over the world. Through Lufthansa's help alliance, which was set up by its employees, the company has been working since 1999 to combat poverty and further the education and vocational training of young people worldwide.

This study strives to paint a balanced picture. It describes successes but does not ignore the defeats and mistakes, nor does it fail to discuss the close links to the criminal Nazi regime. It likewise makes certain to mention completely different kinds of erroneous corporate developments—for example, unbeknownst to the Executive Board, some staff members in the freight division participated between 1999 and 2005 in the largest illegal cartel in aviation history, something that led to Lufthansa putting a sophisticated compliance system in place. Moreover, human tragedies of a quite different kind also affected the corporation. In 2015, a psychologically ill co-pilot deliberately caused a Germanwings airliner to crash, taking 149 people to their deaths with him. The corporation responded with great concern and empathy, supported relatives, and improved its safety procedures.

The history of Lufthansa is one of a spectacular evolution from tiny beginnings into a large corporation and is characterized by countless bouts of reorganization and new chapters, by ups and downs, and by a remarkable resilience in the face of recurrent crises. We do hope that we are providing our readers with a reliable guide on this journey across 100 years of a constantly changing and deeply fascinating corporate and aviation history.



# Foreword

## Responsibility for the Future

Carsten Spohr

There is barely any other industry that so strongly symbolizes dynamism, innovation, and change—and in the same breath stands for stability, safety, and reliability—as does aviation. That's what makes this unique industry so fascinating—and the story of Lufthansa so thrilling.

Commercial aviation first evolved in the beginning of the 20th century. Connecting people, cultures, and economies by air marked a milestone in modern mobility, and the business model of civil aviation opened up new opportunities that changed the world around 100 years ago. Since then, the industry has developed at an unprecedented pace.

Ever since our foundation, we as an aviation company have borne great responsibility, not only for millions of passengers and now more than 100,000 staff worldwide, but also for the economies in which we are based and where we have grown. After all, aviation is not an industry that operates merely for its own sake. Rather, it creates the conditions for a country's economy to be successful in global competition and for other industries to be able to participate in this globalization.

The responsibility borne by the corporation as a whole and by each individual staff member unites us Lufthansa employees in a unique way. We are aware of the fact that hundreds of thousands of people put their trust in us every day, mainly because they can sense, and they know, that we live up to our responsibility. Part of Lufthansa's unique culture is that every person who proudly wears the yellow company badge leaves their mark on the history of our company in their own particular way. And conversely, working for Lufthansa also has a lasting impact on countless lives.

The history of Lufthansa is a history of people. With a pioneering spirit, dedication, expertise, and a passion down through the generations, those people have made this corporation what it is today: an icon of international aviation. It is a corporation that

developed over time into a successful airline group, in the process growing beyond its roots in Germany, and which now stands for the unique and precious diversity of our home continent of Europe.

The hubs of our airlines in Frankfurt, Munich, Zurich, Vienna, Brussels, and Rome are the centers of our global network, connecting Europe with the world and the world with Europe. They make the Lufthansa Group the world's largest aviation company outside the USA. With strong brands like Lufthansa, SWISS, Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines, ITA Airways, Eurowings, Discover Airlines, and Edelweiss, we cover a broad spectrum of different customer needs and have shored up our presence in key international markets.

Our successful airfreight business complements our passenger airlines, creating synergies. Lufthansa Cargo is indispensable for the export-oriented economies of our home markets, while Lufthansa Technik, the world's leading provider of aircraft maintenance and overhaul services, is an important part of the Group and at the same time a recognized driver of innovation in the entire aviation industry.

In addition to our responsibility to our guests, employees, shareholders, industry, and society, we are also committed to sustainability. We have a duty to future generations, who, in turn, will want to discover and travel the planet. To achieve this, we need to further reduce the climate impact of air traffic and continue to work on slashing carbon emissions in particular.

For us, however, sustainability also means ensuring the long-term success of the company for generations to come, and that is an effort which calls for economic stability, investment capability, and profitability.

This book honors the hundred-year history of Lufthansa—a century full of innovation, pioneering spirit, and countless stories that connect people all over the world. Reflecting on our past gives us the confidence to forge ahead as the next few decades will continue to bring more changes in aviation. Our goal is to actively and responsibly play our part in shaping this future and in further developing Lufthansa as a leading airline group. As we do so, in the years to come it will likewise be the people who shape Lufthansa, each in their own unique way.

Together we are writing the next chapters of aviation—with the firm conviction that the best is yet to come.

# Welcome

## 100 Years of Lufthansa

Karl-Ludwig Kley

Why is a global corporation like Lufthansa compiling its history? Barely a day goes by without something being reported or written about Lufthansa in the media or online, so you would think that everything has been said, meaning we know it all anyway.

The answer is simpler than you might think: In society today, we are seeing an ever-increasing influx of daily, hourly, and even minute-by-minute updates. That said, what causes a stir today will soon be forgotten tomorrow and replaced by something else. Instead of this constant process of media hyperventilation, we need to take some deep breaths.

With this book, we aim to counter the urge to go faster and faster, and therefore getting more and more out of breath along the way. After all, many trends only become clear with a longer perspective. That's why we invite you, our readers, to join us as we look back on the major events, the important decisions, the influential people, and their decisions that have shaped the history of our company.

"History is the best teacher, who has the worst students," Indira Gandhi once said. We humbly hope to prove her wrong with the example of our beloved Lufthansa.

Understanding Lufthansa also means grasping the social developments of the last 100 years. After all, it's virtually impossible for any enterprise, let alone an airline, to completely duck the social megatrends of the day. The Lufthansa Group is embedded in the social realities and developments of its home markets. Aviation will always be a branch of the economy that is hugely important for

the politics of a country; the internal corporate culture is crucial in shaping the brand image, and it is customers who determine economic success. Managing an airline means constantly balancing customer preferences, staff interests, and political realities. That's what makes this industry and our company so special—and what makes this book so exciting.

This also applies to the tasks that lie ahead of us. Artificial intelligence and digital processes will shape our lives and work in the future, and we are rightly expected to fly ahead of this social and technological change. Lufthansa was founded in Germany, but today its home is Europe. Over 50 percent of our aircraft stationed at hubs already operate from European locations outside Germany, and the cultural change this entails—this “Europeanization”—needs to form part of our day-to-day actions. Our market, meanwhile, is the whole world: a world in which the established structures of the post-war order are disintegrating, in which it is becoming harder to make firm predictions, and one characterized by upheaval. For us, this means gaining agility in order to respond more effectively when things change.

As a corporation with a payroll of over 100,000, we are only able to tackle these changes successfully if the political framework conditions in our European home are fit for the future. Europe needs to regain its ambition, its excitement about work and success, and its sense of reality. And of course, we also need to play our part here. In this context, this historical review of 100 eventful years of the company's history is likewise an incentive for us to give our best—for our customers, our staff, our shareholders, and society as a whole.

# **Maiden Flight— Heading for Ever-Greater Heights— Crash Landing**

Deutsche Luft Hansa /  
Lufthansa AG  
in an Era of Democracy,  
Dictatorship, and War  
1926–1946

Manfred Grieger

