

Ryanair buys up Buzz

US alliance threatens to defy government

THREE US carriers, Delta, Northwest and Continental, are planning to form a major marketing alliance despite the threat of a legal battle over 'unacceptable' conditions imposed by the US Department of Transport (DOT).

Under the alliance, the carriers will be able to sell tickets on each others' flights via a code-share arrangement. □

Low-cost carrier, Ryanair, is continuing to make aggressive gains in the low-cost sector and has bought its smaller rival, Buzz, previously owned by KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. Plans for the airline include a closure of some unprofitable routes and increased frequency and lower costs for other flights.

Ryanair's Chief Executive, Michael O'Leary, said operational problems identified at Buzz would be resolved within 12

months and that customers would soon be able to see the results. 'I am confident that this significant and timely rationalisation will eliminate losses in Buzz over the coming year. With a change of aircraft fleet, Buzz will be in a position to match Ryanair's low fare, profitable growth from 2004 onwards.' He added, 'Customers of Buzz can look forward to new routes, increased frequency, larger aircraft and significantly lower fares from 1 April.' □

Ryanair is continuing to expand and announced another new airport base recently - Stockholm's Stavksa Airport. A new base in Milan opened in January this year. New routes have also recently been unveiled out of London's Stansted Airport. From April 30, new routes will be offered to Maastricht in the Netherlands, Reims and Pau in France, Haugesund in Norway and Niederrhein, near Düsseldorf in Germany. □

New tracking system for USA

THE US government has issued a new rule stipulating that all incoming and outgoing travellers in the USA must provide key personal information to their airlines, which will be passed on to immigration authorities. The ruling means that for the first time, US travellers will be required to supply information about themselves when they leave the country.

Passenger information required is likely to be name, date of birth, citizenship, gender, pass-

port number, country of origin, US visa number and address while in the USA (if applicable). The information will be sent to government agencies and entered into security databases in a bid to help detect terrorists.

'It will just be another step to allow immigration officials to know everyone who comes into or goes from the United States,' said Chris Bentley from the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS). □

Low-cost carriers in the USA

IN THE USA, domestic air travel prices look set to drop as United Airlines has admitted plans for a low-cost carrier as part of its restructuring, while Delta has unveiled details of its own low-cost subsidiary, Song.

United, now under bankruptcy protection, commented, 'The task before us is to transform United into a successful and aggressive competitor for the long-term. We believe that a low-cost carrier, fully integrated into

a global hub network, will be a critical and dynamic element in United's future strength.'

Delta's carrier, Song, is due to launch this month and claims to be a customer-responsive airline letting customers choose the services they require. 'Song is an innovative low-fare airline service, which will provide non-stop service between the Northeast [of the USA] and key Florida destinations,' said John Selvaggio, President of the airline. □

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● Preliminary **World Tourism Organisation** (WTO) figures for last year show that Europe was the number-one tourism region, attracting 411 million arrivals. The Pacific-Asia region overtook the US in second position, accounting for 130 million arrivals. Despite many low expectations for 2002, tourism numbers grew, with international tourist arrivals increasing by 3.1 per cent on 2001.

● **Air China** will purchase 15 new aircraft this year in line with a plan to double its fleet size over the next few years. China Southwest Airlines and Zhejiang Airlines were recently merged into Air China, which now operates over 120 aircraft.

● **Germanwings**, which launched last year as a low-cost carrier in Germany, began a service between Cologne and

Edinburgh at the end of March. Another entrant in Germany's low-cost market, **Hapag-Lloyd Express**, also launched its second route to the UK, offering services from Cologne to Manchester.

● **New Zealand's** international arrivals reached the two million mark for the first time last year, up 5.5 per cent on 2001 figures. According to Tourism New Zealand's UK and Europe Manager, Barry Eddington, growth was due to the 100% Pure promotional campaign and the *Lord of the Rings* films, which attracted interest in New Zealand.

● A fifth runway at Amsterdam's **Schipol Airport** has opened, boosting capacity at Europe's fourth-largest airport. Operating night flights only until November, the fifth runway allows planes to fly over less

densely populated areas of the Netherlands, says Schipol Group President, Gerlach Cerfontaine.

● **Emirates** is planning an expansion of services by adding 11 aircraft to its fleet during the year, launching new routes and adding capacity to existing services. Daily flights from Dubai to Sydney non-stop and from Dubai to Brisbane (via Singapore) begin in October this year, and new routes are pencilled in to Moscow, Shanghai and Lagos in Nigeria.

● At the end of March, **CSA Czech Airlines** added Cork in Ireland, Edinburgh in Scotland and Tallinn in Estonia to its summer timetable operating out of Prague.

● **Lufthansa** is scaling back services on its European routes in an effort to tackle low consumer sales. Nine planes will be taken

out of service, and further measures are being considered, said the carrier. A further 15 planes have already been factored out of Lufthansa operations, taking the total to 21 out-of-service aircraft.

● Australia's low-cost carrier, **Virgin Blue**, has placed an order for 10 new aircraft to be in service by August 2004, with options on another 40. 'This is a massive investment and a major milestone for Virgin Blue,' said Brett Godfrey at the airline. The carrier has plans to start international low-cost services in the future.

● The second-largest airline in France, **Air Lib**, has folded, after investors pulled out of a deal to relaunch the airline. Since Swissair severed its ties with Air Lib, formerly known as AOM/Air Liberté, the carrier had been in financial difficulties.