

# EasyJet eyes up France

EasyJet, one of the largest low-cost carriers in Europe, recently announced its intention to build two new air bases in France by 2011, a move that is in keeping with its strategy to fly from major airports in the dominant European markets.

A reported €600 million (US\$842 million) is being pumped into the four-year project which will see bases built at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport and Lyon-Saint-Exupery airport in Lyon.

Andy Harrison, Chief Executive of EasyJet, said, "This is just the first step in our major investment that will see us double our presence in France by 2011 as we seek to bring the benefits of EasyJet to France's air travellers and its wider society."

The proposed expansion will see 13 additional domestic and international routes launched, with the new hub in Paris servicing destinations such as Biarritz, Oporto, Venice, Marrakech, Hamburg and Krakow and the new base in Lyon operating flights to and from Bordeaux, Toulouse, Casablanca, Marrakech, Venice, Oporto and Lisbon.

The move looks set to create hundreds of jobs for pilots, cabin crew and ground staff with Harrison affirming that the airline will be, "employing French people and flying French passengers from France's major airports on aircraft from Toulouse-based Airbus".

The airline estimates French passenger traffic will top eight million in 2008 and with the planned expansion this could well exceed 12 million by 2011. The carrier will soon operate 80 routes in and out of France. ●

## Open skies between Singapore and the UK

A LIBERAL open skies agreement between the UK and Singapore has finally been reached, nearly two decades after it was first proposed by Singapore's government.

The pact will enable the likes of Singapore Airlines to operate domestic flights within the UK and service international routes out of London Heathrow, without any restrictions on frequency or capacity. The same rule will apply to UK carriers operating out of Singapore's Changi Airport.

Raymond Lim, Singapore's Transport Minister, said, "This is indeed a trail-blazing agreement concluded between two forward-looking countries that share a common objective of promoting free competition in the aviation sector."

This landmark agreement may also help set a precedent for other countries, particularly Australia, which has so far refused Singapore Airlines the right to fly the lucrative trans-Pacific route to the USA out of Australia.

Stephen Forshaw, Vice-President of Public Affairs at the airline, commented, "I think this agreement sends a very clear signal that protection of home carriers is no longer in the public interest. If the UK can do it, surely Australia can do it as well."

The agreement is to take effect from March 2008. ●

## Aviation boom continues

ACCORDING TO statistics compiled by the Official Airline Guide (OAG), global aviation continues to thrive.

Latest industry intelligence claims Europe's busiest international air-link was the Heathrow to Amsterdam route, operating 350 flights per week, with the number of European flights up six per cent on last year's results. However, nine of the 10 busiest routes were in fact domestic, including Rome to Milan, Paris Orly to Toulouse and Bergen to Oslo.

The route between Madrid and Barcelona proved to be the world's busiest for the second year running, operating 971 flights per week, closely followed by Sao Paulo Congonhas to Rio de Janeiro

with 894 flights, Jeju to Seoul Gimpo with 858 flights and Melbourne to Sydney with 851 flights.

Elsewhere, no-frills airlines continue to drive industry growth, with low-cost carriers offering 59 million seats on more than 392,000 flights in September 2007 alone, compared with 47 million seats on 326,000 flights in 2006.

The fastest growth area where budget carriers are concerned is India, which saw a 44 per cent growth in domestic no-frills flights. In the Asia-Pacific region, low-cost flights account for 12 per cent of the industry sector and in the USA, budget flights increased in popularity and now account for 18 per cent of all air services. ●

## Travel Update

- Construction of a second runway at **New Zealand's Auckland International Airport** is reportedly underway. Airport company chairman, John Maasland, said the new 1,200 metre airstrip would help ease runway congestion and would initially be used by domestic and freight carriers. The first stage of the \$32 million (US\$24 million) project is expected to be completed by 2011, in time for the next Rugby World Cup.

- Hundreds of **Concorde** components, including pilot headsets and toilet seats, went under the hammer at a recent auction in Toulouse, France. Collectors were given the opportunity to bid on all sorts of memorabilia, with a laminated cockpit window fetching €3,100 (US\$4,354). The auction is being held to raise money for a local museum.

- The Japanese authorities have announced plans to **fingerprint and photograph all foreign visitors** in a bid to prevent deportees and terrorists from entering the country. All travellers, aged 16 years and over, will be electronically fingerprinted in a move similar to the one introduced by the USA back in September 2001. Airlines will also need to provide passenger and crew records prior to arrival, with all records checked against a main database. The new law will affect an estimated six million passengers visiting Japan.

- Following the launch of its non-stop **New York to Mumbai** route, the USA's Continental Airlines is to add more services to the key markets of India and China. James Summerford, Vice President of European, Middle East and Indian operations, said, "The two places to be in today are China and India. We will begin operations in Shanghai next year and will add more Indian cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai".

- The US government is toying with the idea of limiting the amount of flights at **New York's John F. Kennedy Airport**, in a bid to relieve congestion and flight delays. Having requested the flight schedules of several major carriers, Laura Brown, spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), said, "We want to determine if there will be periods where scheduling exceeds capacity." Nationally, major airlines operated more than 4.3 million flights in the first seven months of 2007 and a massive 1.08 million delays were reported in the same period.

- **Norwegian**, Scandinavia's largest low-cost airline, recently launched a four-times-weekly service from London-Gatwick to Stavanger in Norway. This is the carrier's sixth route from London and Daniel Skjeldam, Director of Network and Revenue at Norwegian, said, "We are happy to add Stavanger to our extensive network from London. With our low prices starting at £26 (US\$53), one way including taxes, we believe this new route will be a success." Stavanger was named the European Capital of Culture for 2008 by the EU.



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