

Terrorism fears disrupt flights

Berlin is latest base for EasyJet

FLIGHTS to and from Berlin will launch in May from successful low-cost carrier, EasyJet. The carrier confirmed the destination for its latest hub at the end of last year, and predicted big interest in Berlin-based services.

"As the German economy returns to full strength and the European Union expands eastwards in 2004, Berlin is likely to be one of the major cultural and business growth markets of the future," said Ray Webster, Chief Executive of EasyJet.

Eleven new routes are to be offered to six countries. □

An intelligence tip-off regarding a planned terrorist attack over the Christmas period caused the grounding and cancellation of a number of flights to the USA, and the White House to demand that armed marshals be present on certain flights in US airspace.

The disruption began on Christmas Eve when, acting on information from the USA, the French government ordered Air France to suspend flights to Los Angeles. A number of Aeromexico flights from Mexico City to Los Angeles were also cancelled over the following days and an Air France flight to New York was forced to make an un-

scheduled landing in Canada for its luggage to be checked.

A British Airways (BA) flight arriving at Washington airport on New Year's Eve was escorted by two US F-16 fighters and its passengers questioned by security officials for three-and-a-half hours. Over the following days, another two BA flights to Washington were grounded at the last minute and BA flights to the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, were also cancelled. At the time of going to press, no evidence of terrorist activity on any of the affected flights had been found.

Information received by intelligence agencies in the USA, UK, Europe and the Arab world

pointed to a terrorist attack taking place at this time, with Washington and Los Angeles airports being particular targets. Further security warnings have led to the closure of the UK embassy in Lima, Peru and a strong warning to UK citizens not to travel to Saudi Arabia.

Reaction to the White House demand for armed sky marshals has been mixed. The UK announced that it will put undercover armed police on some flights, while a spokeswoman for the International Transport Association (Iata) said, "Iata does not like to see guns on board planes. We want to see the security measures taken on the ground." □

Low-cost Wizz Air takes off in Hungary

HUNGARY is to get a new low-cost airline, to coincide the country joining the European Union (EU) in May. Wizz Air is the brainchild of Jozsef Varadi, former Chief Executive of Hungary's national carrier, Malev.

The carrier had yet to establish a base at the time of going to press, but it has already set up local units in Poland and Hungary, while it is registered in the UK. It said it expected to carry "several million" passengers a year.

Wizz Air will be joining Snowflake and SkyEurope in competing for low-cost business in the Hungarian travel marketplace. Language travel agent, Agnes Vinkler, from Inside Word agency in Hungary, said, "I think

everyone was glad to hear that [Hungarians] will have the opportunity to travel at lower costs. We think that this will surely boost interest amongst people to travel abroad and [also] take part in language courses abroad." □

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● **Vietnam Airlines** has launched flights from Hanoi to Frankfurt in Germany on a twice-weekly basis. A spokesperson at the airline commented, "Germany is a promising market for Vietnam, the second in Europe just after France."

● US carrier **Continental Airlines**, and Danish carrier, **Maersk Air**, have signed a code-share agreement for flights between the USA and Denmark, via London or Amsterdam. Danish customers will now have a greater choice of flights to the USA and a seamless check-in available from Denmark. "We need a partner in the important American market and we are very pleased with this cooperation," stated Keld Mosgaard Christensen at Maersk.

● **Snowflake**, the successful low-cost carrier from Scandinavian Airlines, is adding

more locations to its network in March. New routes from Copenhagen include Ankara in Turkey; Skopje in Macedonia; Split in Croatia; and Valletta in Malta. From Stockholm, new routes are to Ankara, Split, Valletta and Inverness in Scotland.

● Formula One champion, **Niki Lauda**, is reported to be getting back into the airline business with a new low-fare venture. He plans to buy a majority stake in the bankrupt German carrier, Aero Lloyd, and launch discount services to European destinations from Vienna in Austria.

● Colombian airline, **Avianca**, had been granted a 32-day extension at the time of going to press to present a restructuring plan that would save it from bankruptcy. The carrier said it would make use of financial credit already obtained to put a new plan in place.

● Air New Zealand has launched its budget carrier, **Tasman Express**, offering cut-price flights between New Zealand and Australia. Ralph Norris, Chief Executive of Air New Zealand, said that the airline was on course to meet an 11 per cent growth target for the first year of operation. "Some particular routes out of each of the international gateways [showed] spectacular growth for the first full month of sales to November 30," he said.

● **JAT Airways**, based in Serbia, is the latest carrier to have set up a low-cost regional airline. Interair links cities in the former Yugoslavia, Trieste in Italy, Thessaloniki in Greece and Tirana in Albania. Other destinations in Eastern Europe are expected to be added to the route network soon. Pregrag Vujovic, JAT General Manager, said Interair would feed

other European airlines with passengers from a market of around 50 million people.

● The **USA** and **Europe** were still trying to reach an agreement over rights to airline passenger data records at the time of going to press. Europe had rebuffed the USA's first request for access to comprehensive passenger records – including health and religion details – for all travellers visiting the USA. "I think we've really narrowed our differences to only a couple of pieces of information," said US Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge, ahead of further talks.

● According to the World Tourism Organisation, **China** is set to become the most popular tourist destination in the world in 20 years time, welcoming over 130 million arrivals per year – eight per cent of the market share.