

# Australia-Asia links improved

Air links from Asia to Australia are set to increase. Air India is moving back into the Australian marketplace, with flights from Mumbai to Sydney, via Singapore, pencilled in for 2005, nine years after Air India's last service to Australia. Geeta Kapoor at the airline explained, "In 2004, Air India's revenue from Australia is up 75 per cent, so the time is right."

At the same time, low-cost carrier Valuair, based in Singapore, is launching budget flights to Perth in Australia. Niles Pritam at the airline said that Perth had been chosen ahead of other Australian destinations because of the city's popularity among Singaporeans for holidays and studying.

Jetstar from Qantas, a new Singapore-based low-cost carrier, has also been launched, joining a number of other budget operators in the country, including Valair, Tiger Airways, and AirAsia. Routes had yet to be finalised at the time of going to press, but Perth and Darwin are thought to be possible destinations for this carrier. ●

## New routes to and from Bournemouth

A UK HOLIDAY company that launched its own low-cost airline in May plans to start services from Bournemouth International Airport from March 2005. Thomson.fly is owned by the Thomson holiday company and currently flies to 10 European destinations. The routes

out of Bournemouth had not been revealed at the time of going to press.

Alex Hunter at the airline, said, "The number of low-cost routes is limited from Bournemouth, so our flights will open this up dramatically and this is a real opportunity for us."

He added, "People want to be able to choose from a range of leisure destinations at low fares without having to travel to a London airport. The routes will also provide a new gateway to the UK for overseas travellers, providing an extra boost for the local economy." ●

## Scotland links up with Prague

GLASGOW IN Scotland has gained new air links to Eastern Europe, thanks to the Scottish Executive which has part-funded airlines using its Route Development Fund. CSA Czech Airlines is one of 27 airlines taking advantage of assistance to start services to the Scottish capital. Flights from Glasgow to Prague, and onwards to other Central European destinations, began in October.

Patricia Ferguson, Scotland's Tourism Minister, said, "We want to make the most of easier access to Eastern Europe and especially the other EU accession states. I am certain that the service will result in increased numbers of visitors coming to Scotland." ●

## Rebound in arrivals

TOURISM IS on the up again after the much-publicised decline of the past two years, according to results from the World Tourism Organisation (WTO). International arrivals worldwide are estimated to have increased by 12 per cent from January to August 2004, compared with the same period in 2003. North America returned to positive figures after three years of negative growth.

According to projections based on the WTO data, global tourist arrivals may also have passed the 90 million mark for the first time in August.

Francesco Frangiali, Secretary-General of the WTO, said, "The fear factor has clearly faded away and travel confidence is back. Even though many threats remain, we see that they have far less impact on tourism than before."

The International Air Transport Association (Iata) also reported growth of 17.7 per cent in international air passenger traffic in the first nine months of 2004. "People are travelling again. Every region is reporting double digit growth," commented Iata Director General, Giovanni Bisignani. ●

## Travel Update

- Australian carrier **Qantas** is reported to be planning to rejuvenate its fleet with a US\$4 billion outlay on new aircraft and modernisation.

- **South African Airways** has resorted to asking its customers for tips on how to improve its cost efficiency, as it struggles with financial problems. "We take the views of our passengers very seriously, and we know that amongst them are those with views and great ideas that can shape the airline's international success," said Chief Executive, Khaya Ngqula.

- Mexican carriers **Aeromexico** and **Mexicana** are to be merged into one single carrier by holding company, Cintra, which then plans to sell it to independent investors. "The international market would benefit from [this plan]," said Cintra in a statement.

- A rebuilding plan for **Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport** is to go ahead after protracted talks involving state airline Aeroflot were finalised. Aeroflot's plans to build its own terminal nearby have now been shelved.

- **Cathay Pacific** has won the right to operate further flights to China. Passenger services to Beijing and Xiamen, as well as cargo services to Shanghai, will be increased from early 2005 and a daily service will be offered to Beijing from Hong Kong. "Being able to operate a daily service to Beijing is welcome, yet still a small entry into this market," said Philip Chan at Cathay Pacific.

- **Vietnam Airlines** wants to double the size of its fleet to 70 aircraft by 2010, as traffic expands in the south-east Asian region. It has signed a memorandum of understanding with Airbus to buy 10 A321 planes, with delivery expected in 2006.

- A deal has been sealed between **SN Brussels Airlines** and **Virgin Express** that will put an end to competition between the two. Instead, they will join forces to compete against Ryanair, which flies from Charleroi near Brussels. The two carriers will operate independently, but Virgin Express will own close to one third of SN's parent company, SN Airholding, which will in turn own both airlines. Etienne Davignon at SN Airholding said, "Increased purchasing power combined with the network and cost synergies will result in a competitive aviation platform that is in the best interests of our customers."

- The first private airline in China was due to launch by the end of 2004, according to news reports. **Okay Airways** or **Aokai Airlines**, as it is also known, will concentrate on cargo services and charter flights initially, reported the Xinhua News Agency. Two other Chinese airlines, United Eagle Airlines and Air Spring, are also reported to be applying for licences.

- **US Airways** is adopting a new business plan, "which combines the best business practices of both legacy and low-cost carriers," according to B Ben Baldanza at the airline.