

# Tiger Airways' new home in Melbourne

Singapore-based budget airline, Tiger Airways, has announced that it is to make Tullamarine airport in Melbourne the official headquarters for Tiger Airways Australia. Chief Executive, Tony Davis, said that Melbourne "presented the best opportunity for the successful launch of Australia's first truly 'low fare' airline". The venture will create over 1,000 jobs and will offer competitive airfares on all flights.

The battle among Australian budget airlines has been fierce recently with Jetstar and Virgin Blue offering discounted flights and Qantas launching a domestic fare sale prior to Tiger Airways' scheduled announcement. Davis said that Tiger Airways expected to carry around two million passengers in its first year.

At the time of going to press, further negotiations concerning the airline's route networks, including a proposed link from Melbourne to Hobart in Tasmania and plans to set up a second base in Australia, were also under way. Canberra is one city likely to

be served by the new airline in the future with fares from Melbourne to Canberra rumoured to be as low as AU\$19 (US\$16). Managing Director of Canberra Airport, Stephen Byron, said the airline was considering operating one flight a day, six days a week. In a press statement he said, "It's a commercially attractive proposition for [Tiger Airways] because the leisure market around Canberra is under served and there is certainly a shortage of seats for AU\$19 (US\$16)." ●

## Travel Update

- The US Department of Commerce has recorded a one per cent drop in **UK visitor numbers** so far this year. However, of the 576,000 visitors who journeyed to the USA from Western Europe in January 2007, 236,000 came from the UK, making it the market leader for the USA in this region. Problems regarding immigration and strict regulations at US ports of entry may have contributed to the decline, but with the pound sterling hitting the two-dollar mark recently, many predict that the British market will remain strong in the future.

- The **Middle East** is fast becoming a major destination for passenger stopovers and could well become a second major hub (after Beijing) for **Air China**. The Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing confirmed that Air China is looking to feed traffic from Asia to the Middle East and then on to Africa in a move that may be a direct result of the impending 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

## Aer Arran flies to France

IRELAND'S regional airline, Aer Arran, has launched a new route from Bristol in the UK to Nantes in western France, opening up Bristol and the surrounding regions to international operations.

Colin Lewis, Head of Sales and Marketing at Aer Arran, said, "Business and leisure passengers wishing to travel to the capital of the west of France have a great choice of flights to choose from."

This route expansion is well timed, with the city of Nantes hosting the 2007 Rugby World Cup in September. Ollie Morgan, who plays for Gloucester Rugby Club and is a member of the England Rugby Union squad, helped launch the inaugural flight and will be one of the many who will benefit from the new route.

Aer Arran currently services several destinations in Ireland from the UK but this is the airline's first route into mainland Europe. The carrier is also the fastest growing regional airline, attracting 1.15 million customers per year. ●



Rugby star Ollie Morgan launches Aer Arran's new flight to France

## Ryanair toys with transcontinental flights

EUROPE'S largest low-cost carrier, Ryanair, is considering the launch of a low-cost transatlantic airline within the next three-to-four years and the airline is looking to acquire 30 to 50 aircraft to cater for the new move.

Chief Executive, Michael O'Leary, said a number of airports in the USA had expressed an interest in a long-haul, low-fare service that would rival British Airways and new carrier Zoom UK by offering fares for as little as UK£7 (US\$14). O'Leary is keen to serve destinations such as New York, Florida, Dallas and San Francisco from European hubs such

as London Stansted, Dublin, Frankfurt Hahn and Barcelona.

The recent implementation of the open skies act has opened up the transatlantic market but many remain sceptical about the proposed venture. Andrew Lobbenberg, an analyst at ABN Amro, believes that there is little profit to be made from transatlantic budget flights and the cross-subsidisation of economy and business class is what keeps transcontinental airlines afloat. But O'Leary plans to charge for additional in-flight services such as food and entertainment and will offer a premium cabin to help make up for revenue lost through cheaper tickets. ●

## Virgin passengers now check-in at home

FOLLOWING IN British Airways' footsteps, Virgin Atlantic has introduced a technology that enables passengers to print out their boarding passes at home. Customers are already able to check in online 24 hours prior to departure and can even determine their seating arrangements.

However, the ability for passengers to print off a boarding pass in the comfort of their own home will provide a more seamless service, fast-tracking passengers to the luggage drop and the boarding gate, according to the airline. Steve Ridgeway, Chief Executive Officer of Virgin Atlantic, said, "Twenty-seven per cent of our passengers check in online and we predict this will grow to around 40 per cent by the end of the year." ●

- The open skies deal between the USA and the UK has prompted a reshuffle of services at two of the **UK's major airports**. With the ban preventing some US airlines from flying into Heathrow now lifted, Gatwick looks set to lose a third of its key USA flights next year. Many US carriers cite a wider choice of flight connections and more opportunities for alliance partners as reasons behind their decision to switch airports.

- **SunExpress**, the joint enterprise between German carrier Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines, have added yet another route to its growing list of services. Passengers can now travel from Stansted in the UK to Ercan in the North of Cyprus, via Izmir in mainland Turkey, twice a week. Nick Barton, Stansted's Business Development and Planning Director, said, "It's great news that Ercan now has a low-cost link from the UK with SunExpress services."

- According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), **passenger demand is increasing steadily**. February figures for this year showed an increase of 6.8 per cent year-on-year and the Middle East led the way with an 18 per cent increase in passenger numbers. Stronger than expected economic growth has fuelled demand in Europe, which experienced a 7.4 per cent increase. Giovanni Bisignani, IATA's Director General and Chief Executive Officer, said, "Passenger demand continues to exceed expectations. The numbers say it all. People want to travel."

- **Virgin Atlantic** has announced that a stopover in Asia or the Middle East on flights between the UK and Australia may soon become a thing of the past. The first non-stop flight from London to Perth is on the drawing board and so too is a proposed route from London to Melbourne. Virgin Atlantic Chairman, Richard Branson, said that the new flights showed the airline's "continuing commitment to the Australian market".

# AGENTS

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