

Thailand re-opens airport

After being de-commissioned over six months ago, Thailand's Don Muang International Airport has been reopened in a bid to ease congestion at the new Suvarnabhumi Airport.

The 90-year-old airport will deal with three or four airlines, including national carrier Thai Airways, and 140 domestic flights – with a predicted 18,000 passengers – will pass through the domestic terminal each day.

Thailand's Transport Minister, Theera Haocharoen, said the decision to re-open the Don Muang Airport was taken due to a series of problems experienced at Suvarnabhumi Airport. Cracked taxiways, a shortage of toilets and other design flaws have all contributed to flight disruptions and caused congestion at the US\$4 billion airport. By diverting flights to Don Muang, essential maintenance work will be carried out on several runways and taxiways. However, Deputy Transport Minister, Sansern Wingcha-um, said that the move was voluntary and that airlines would not be able to seek compensation for relocation from the government.

The move has generated a mixed response from those directly affected. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said that in operating two airports, resources would be split and IATA spokes-

person, Albert Tjoeng, said, "The long-term vision should be to have all commercial flights operating out of one airport in order to build a strong hub."

But not everyone is opposed to the move being made permanent. Patee Sarasin, Chief Executive Officer of budget carrier Nok Air, said he was confident that business would increase as a consequence and plans to acquire three more aircraft to meet passenger demand were likely to go ahead. Meanwhile, Surapan Tummark, a passenger en route to Phuket, commented that having two airports would ultimately give travellers more choice. ●

Travel Update

- **Air China**, the only Chinese carrier to offer non-stop flights between China, San Francisco and Los Angeles, is preparing to increase the number of flights between Beijing and San Francisco from five-times-a-week to once daily. Zhang Lan, Vice President of Air China, said, "The daily flights will help us seize more market share in America's mid-west."

- Australia is granting more access rights to Middle Eastern airlines and **Qatar Airways, United Arab Emirates and Etihad Airways** are all set to expand their routes. Qatar Airways will soon begin operating flights from Doha to Melbourne, with plans to fly to a second Australian city in 2008.

- **UK budget airlines** have been given the thumbs up in a recent poll conducted by ReviewCentre.com, a consumer review website. Jet2, the Leeds-based operator, was commended for reliability, customer service and value for money, whilst BMI, Thomas Cook and Easyjet also scored highly in the poll.

- **Swiss Air** is to expand its services between Switzerland and the UK. A new daily service from London City Airport to Zurich will cater for the business traveller while daily UK connections to and from Tokyo via Zurich have increased in frequency from six- to seven-times-a-week to meet passenger demand. Swiss Air also intends to start services to Los Angeles, Santiago de Chile and Johannesburg via Zurich later this year.

- According to the Lonely Planet's BlueList, a guidebook compiled by travellers and authors worldwide, Brazil, Argentina, Morocco and the USA have been listed as four of the best places to visit in 2007. Landscape, culture, heritage and general affordability earned **China** the number-one recommendation for globetrotters this year.

- **Lufthansa**, the largest German airline, has become the first carrier to complete the Airbus A380's first intercontinental flight, narrowly beating Singapore Airlines. Landing on US soil for the first time, the Lufthansa test-flight was greeted with a "euphoric reception," said Captain Carl Sigel. Lufthansa CEO and Chairman, Wolfgang Mayrhuber, said, "We are very proud that the first A380 flight to the USA was a Lufthansa flight."

- **Air Canada** has announced that it is to increase services to the USA owing to the rise in passenger demand expected over the summer months. The carrier is to extend transborder routes to the USA by introducing several non-stop services including Vancouver to Sacramento and Calgary to Seattle. The carrier also announced that its non-stop flight from Vancouver to Beijing will fly twice daily during the summer period and that a new Toronto to Shanghai route would soon commence service. Air Canada's domestic services also look set to increase in order to offer passengers more choice when travelling within the country.

Latin America enjoying tourist boom

AT A RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE held by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Brazil, Argentina and Chile were reported to be experiencing a boost in tourism numbers and are expected to generate a combined sum of US\$186.4 billion in economic activity in 2007. By 2017 this figure is expected to reach US\$304.3 billion, spelling positive economic growth for the region.

Argentina, the third largest travel and tourism economy in Latin America after Mexico and Brazil, and Chile, the fifth largest, are each expected to perform well in 2007, achieving a 7.6 per cent and 12.3 per cent growth in tourism demand respectively.

WTTC President, Jean-Claude Baumgarten, commented that Brazil's decision to focus attention on its marketing and promotional budget for travel and tourism has had a positive effect on the economy, whilst Argentina and Chile, he says, should concentrate more on the industry's potential. He also added, "The thriving travel and tourism industry can certainly generate jobs and spread prosperity around the world."

Globally, travel and tourism is reported to be growing at a steady annual rate of 4.3 per cent, a growth that is expected to remain constant over the next 10 years. ●

Jetstar launches in Japan

JETSTAR, the Australian low-cost carrier, has launched a new international route between Australia and Japan, with flights from Osaka to Sydney via Brisbane now operating daily. The new long-haul route will offer those travelling to and from Australia an affordable alternative and gives Jetstar a competitive edge over rival, Virgin Blue, which isn't due to commence international flights to the USA until 2008.

This route expansion is to continue with a six-times-weekly service between Cairns

and Nagoya, and a four-times-weekly service between Cairns and Osaka planned for August 2007. However, at the time of going to press, these proposed routes were subject to regulatory approval.

Japan is Australia's third-largest tourism export market and received 651,000 arrivals in 2006. However, in recent years, numbers have dipped and Jetstar Chief Executive Officer, Alan Joyce, said route expansion would be integral to the tourism industry's attempt to prevent further decline. ●

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