AIR NEW ZEALAND TIPPED TO LAUNCH FLIGHTS TO VIETNAM

News / Airports / Routes

Air New Zealand is expected to announce on Friday it will start flying to **Vietnam.**

Sources say the national carrier will begin flying to the South East Asia destination in 2016.

Ho Chi Minh City is the national gateway to Vietnam but it also has a major airport in Hanoi.

Air New Zealand chief strategy, networks and alliance officer Stephen Jones will make a "significant annou

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SHANE WENZLICK/FAIRFAX NZ

Air New Zealand chief strategy, networks and alliance officer Stephen Jones will make a "significant announcement" on Friday

Air New Zealand has previously said it was also evaluating at least one other long haul route for launch next year.

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Air New Zealand said a "significant announcement" would be made at 8am on Friday..

Nearly 16,000 travellers left New Zealand for Vietnam in the year to September, which was flat on the same period the previous year.

As part of Air New Zealand's "go beyond" expansion strategy the airline was also understood to be evaluating options to add capacity to its domestic main trunk and regional routes, indiciating further investment in jet and turbo prop aircraft.

Air New Zealand would be looking to defend its home turf as budget carrier Jetstar prepared to begin regional flights to New Plymouth, Napier, Nelson and Palmerston North from December.

Air New Zealand also starts flying from Auckland to Buenos Aires, Argentina three times a week from December 1 and Auckland to Houston five times a week from December 15.

On December 10 a new alliance between Air New Zealand and Air China begins with flights from Auckland to Beijing serviced by Air China.

Friday's announcement would be made less than 48 hours after American Airlines announced it would take on Air New Zealand on the Auckland to Los Angeles route from June 2016, through an alliance with Qantas.

Las Vegas and Chicago had also been considered.

In 2014 Air New Zealand flew a private, one- off flight to Chicago via Los Angeles for fans heading to the All Black's test match against the USA Eagles at Soldier Field.

It also flew two jumbo jets to Las Vegas with more than 700 passengers in 2011 as part of a Grabaseat promotion.

Air New Zealand already flies direct to San Francisco and Hawaii in the US and Vancouver in Canada.

Following American Airlines' announcement on Wednesday share analysts at Macquarie Group maintained its "outperform" rating for Air New Zealand.

Macqurie said Air New Zealand could add more Asian destinations.

Other direct Air New Zealand flights to Asia include Auckland to Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Shanghai.

Major Asian markets where it has no direct flights include Korea and Malaysia.

However, China was where major growth opportunities lie with Chinese visitors to New Zealand expected to grow from about 250,000 in 2015 to more than half a million by 2020.

Flight Centre general manager product Sean Berenson said Asia was a real growth area for New Zealand travel and South East Asia in particular had long been popular with New Zealanders.

"There would certainly be the demand to expand on the offering in this space," Berenson said.

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There was still potential for more US routes, particularly for business travellers into key business cities, he said.

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