AIRASIA X TO START KUALA LUMPUR-GOLD COAST-AUCKLAND FLIGHTS

News / Airports / Routes

Long-haul low-cost carrier AirAsia X is to add a tag flight on to Auckland Airport from one of its existing Gold Coast flights from its Kuala Lumpur hub. The new flights begin in March and will mark nearly three years since the Malaysian carrier has served New Zealand.

D7 206 will continue to be a late night departure from Kuala Lumpur, followed by a daytime return to Auckland departing OOL at 0840 and returning from AKL at 1630. The flight will then make an evening departure from Gold Coast for Kuala Lumpur.

In addition to nearly 400 passengers' worth of daily additional capacity between the Gold Coast and AirAsia's connecting hub in Kuala Lumpur, an additional daily widebody service between Auckland and Gold Coast will see yet more international widebody carrier capacity provided in the trans-Tasman market.

Australia-New Zealand routes already see three Emirates A380 tag flights from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Auckland, as well as a Boeing 777-300ER flight from Sydney to Christchurch, and Taipei-based China Airlines services from Sydney to Christchurch and Sydney to Auckland. Air New Zealand also operates a number of widebody services to Australian east coast capitals alongside its Airbus A320 services. Qantas's Jetconnect subsidiary, Jetstar and Virgin Australia's international operation also fly the route.

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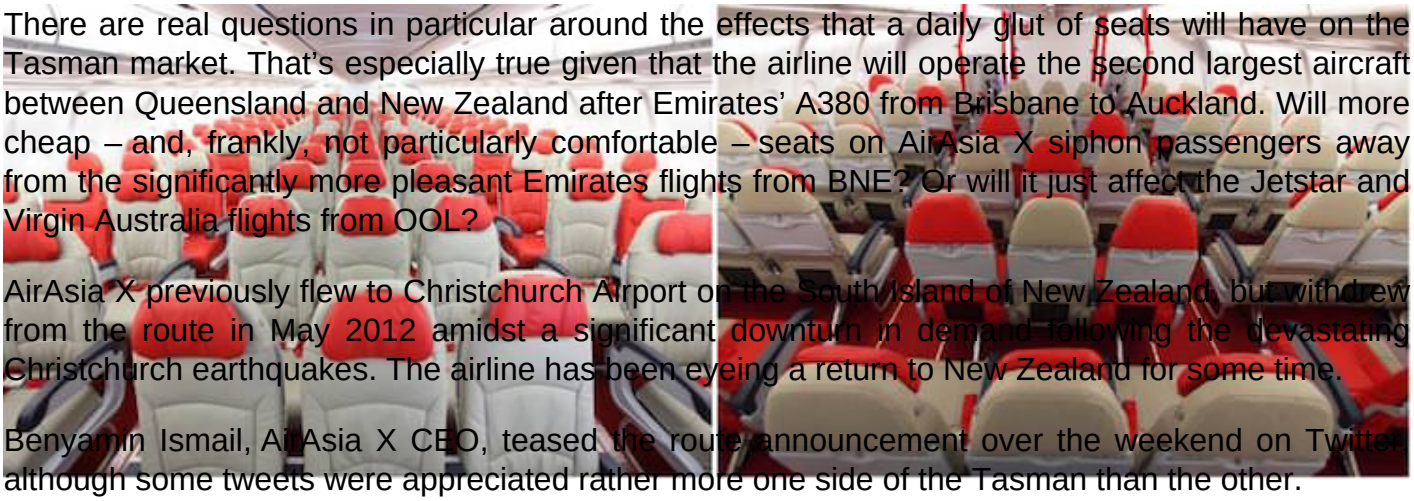
In terms of the trans-Tasman effects, the 365 ultra-narrow economy seats (arranged in a 3-3-3 configuration at 31in pitch) and 12 angled lie-flat Premium Flatbed seats will dent premium demand for the competition on OOL routes, as well as to Brisbane, given the significant expatriate New Zealander presence in southeastern Queensland.



There are real questions in particular around the effects that a daily glut of seats will have on the Tasman market. That's especially true given that the airline will operate the second largest aircraft between Queensland and New Zealand after Emirates' A380 from Brisbane to Auckland. Will more cheap – and, frankly, not particularly comfortable – seats on AirAsia X siphon passengers away from the significantly more pleasant Emirates flights from BNE? Or will it just affect the Jetstar and Virgin Australia flights from OOL?

AirAsia X previously flew to Christchurch Airport on the South Island of New Zealand, but withdrew from the route in May 2012 amidst a significant downturn in demand following the devastating Christchurch earthquakes. The airline has been eyeing a return to New Zealand for some time.

Benyamin Ismail, AirAsia X CEO, teased the route announcement over the weekend on Twitter, although some tweets were appreciated rather more one side of the Tasman than the other.

Ismail announced the new route at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, noting that "New Zealand is a world class destination that has always had a special place in our heart. We are excited to be back in this beautiful country to launch this service, allowing seamless connection for our guests from all over Asia to Auckland. Similarly, New Zealanders will now have more flight options to Gold Coast as well as access to all the exciting destinations across our extensive flight network in Asia through the Kuala Lumpur hub. We are confident that our highly competitive fares will attract many new guests from the region, creating higher travel demand and in turn boosting tourism traffic for all sectors. We would also like to thank Auckland Airport and other business partners for their support in making this route launch possible."

Norris Carter, Auckland Airport's general manager – aeronautical commercial, welcomed the airline back to New Zealand, stating, "AirAsia X previously flew into Christchurch in 2012 and we are delighted to welcome them back to New Zealand."

The airport appears to see growth from three particular markets driven by the new flight. "Malaysia, India and Indonesia are AirAsia X's key markets. Over the last three years the numbers of annual international arrivals from these three tourism markets have increased by 10%, 21% and 11% respectively," Carter said. "We expect this new AirAsia X service between Kuala Lumpur and Auckland will further grow visitor numbers, especially for free independent travellers."

"The new service will also mean more affordable travel to Asia for Kiwis, and increased capacity to the Gold Coast. This new AirAsia X service is expected to add 275,000 seats between Kuala Lumpur and Auckland every year, boosting the New Zealand economy by an estimated $176 million," Carter concluded.

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