FIRST MONTREAL-CHINA DIRECT FLIGHT

News / Airports / Routes

Starting yesterday, Montrealers can fly non-stop to China as Air Canada and Air China launch their first direct flight to Beijing.

This is also the first non-stop trans-Pacific link between Montreal and Asia. Previously, Montrealers wishing to visit eastern Asia had to make a layover.

Montrealers could reach Asia directly if they flew over the Atlantic Ocean, with direct flights to Doha, Qatar.

The flights to Beijing will take off three times a week, on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. This is welcome news for the president of the Metropolitan Montreal Board of Trade, Michel Leblanc.

"The benefits will come in many forms," he said. "There will be more Chinese students that will be visited by family, more companies that will set up here, and more Quebec companies that will do business in China."

Eastern provinces will also benefit

China has become Quebec's second largest trading partner, after the U.S. Trade between Canada and China topped $78 billion last year, with Quebec and the Maritimes making up 20 per cent of

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that.

The eastern provinces are also expected to benefit from the new flights, especially the agro-food and lobster industries.

Quebec's economy minister also praised the new direct link, mostly for its convenient travel times.

"I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. to make a stopover in Toronto to go to China," Jacques Daoust said. "Montreal is now a hub for Eastern Canada and northern U.S."

Tickets selling well

Air China said that sales have been going well, with 85 per cent of tickets already sold for the first few flights.

The number of tourists coming from China to Quebec increased 60 per cent last year, the carrier said, and it expects the demand to continue.

"The origin of these passengers is very diverse," said He Zhigang, an Air China director. "We have diplomats, businessmen, but also people who use the link as an entry to the rest of Canada or U.S."

Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) also commended the new link. The airport management authority says Montreal has lost several international flights to Toronto and Vancouver.

"It's important for us to have this diversity of destinations," said ADM's executive director, James Cherry, adding that his agency is working on adding more direct flights to Asia.

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