

More new flights to Panama

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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□ This article was published on the Panama Forum. Note: COPA Airlines has signed the deal, however Air Canada is fighting them. Resolution expected by March. □

In other news, Panama's Copa Airlines will add 22 Boeing 737-800 aircraft to its fleet for \$1.7 billion with an option to buy 10 additional planes, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Also - the cruise port reported below is moving ahead.

Roberto

Panama's tourism authority has been hard at work, lobbying airlines around the world to establish direct flights to Panama

Panama has long been a growing hub, thanks to Copa Airlines. The nation's premier airline has done much to make Tocumen International the "Hub of the Americas," as it is known.

Recently Panama's tourism authority has been hard at work, lobbying airlines around the world to establish direct flights to Panama. According to tourism officials, one of the best ways to promote tourism is to ensure easy travel to Panama. As the year draws to an end, the results of the tourism authority's efforts are encouraging.

Last month, Dutch Antilles Express (DAE) inaugurated twice-weekly direct flights from Curacao to Panama—the airline's first Central American destination.

Iberia also inaugurated a direct flight from Madrid, Spain. Just this month, German Airline Condor began a weekly flight between Frankfurt and Panama City, via the Dominican Republic. Next month, Ecuador's Tame will begin flying here three times a week from both Quito and Guayaquil.

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Australia's Qantas is expected to follow suit with an interesting package: passengers will stay in Cuba for four days before heading to Panama for another four days, then it's back to Australia (no word yet on which city in Australia).

According to government officials, UAE airlines such as Emirates Airlines and Flydubai are also interested in establishing flights to Panama. The UAE is expected to sign an agreement with Panama before the year-end.

Panama's La Prensa reports that Japan's All Nippon plans to begin negotiations with Panama for a direct flight, too. Per local sources, British Airways is also considering direct flights to Panama via Puerto Rico—those may be running as soon as March 2011. Panama's Copa is also apparently negotiating with Canadian authorities to establish a direct route to Toronto.

Panama already boasts direct flights to Amsterdam via KLM, as well as direct flights to most every major city in South America via airlines like Taca, Copa, Aires, and Avianca. There are also direct flights to Panama from a plethora of cities in the U.S. via Copa, Continental, Delta, American, and even Spirit.

Tourism numbers are up and Panama has more hotel rooms in the pipeline than any other country in the region save Brazil.

In addition to new flights and increasing arrivals, Panama is expanding its airports. A new airport is already in the works for the city of Colon and the David airport is already being expanded, as is Tocumen International in Panama City. Rumor has it that another airport may soon follow somewhere in the Cocolé Province, which is well known for its beaches.

Panama isn't merely a hub for flights. Home to the Panama Canal, this country has long been a shipping hub, and plans are underway to further expand this hub with cruises and more. Colon 2000, a Caribbean port on the coast of Colon, is already a homeport for Royal Caribbean (I just went on a three-day cruise to Cartagena without having to set foot on a plane first). Now local sources say the government is planning to build a new cruise port in Amador, on the Pacific Coast, in the Bay of Panama.

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The tourism authority, which is luring cruise lines with low taxes, says the objective is to encourage more lines to include Panama among their home ports and ports of call.

Panamanian officials aren't just focusing on the cruise industry, though. An inter-institutional commission for maritime affairs will reportedly expand the nation's logistics industry by evaluating everything from sustainability to infrastructure to auxiliary marine services and training. The commission is scheduled to meet this month. The government is also considering building two new large ports on the Pacific coast. Agencies such as the Panama Canal Authority and Maritime Authority are evaluating the prospects even as massive port expansions are underway at major ports on both coasts. Add to that the corporate, business and logistics parks coming up in the area known as Panama Pacifico, and it's clear...Panama isn't playing around.