

## Panama flying high as a hot destination

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)  
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Panama flying high as expanding hub for international airlines  
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By Adrian Barry

British Airways (BA) is the latest in a series of European based airlines to consider direct flights to Panama, to take advantage of its predominance as a hub for Latin America.

BA wants to use Panama as stopping point, following other airlines from Latin America, Japan and Canada who want to access Central and South America.

The airlines' interest is fueled by an increase in tourists visiting the Isthmus, the siting of more multi national companies in Panama City, and the increased traffic generated by the Panama Canal expansion, and other major projects bringing in specialists and managers from overseas. The boom in hotel construction is expected to prove a boon to package tour operators.

Iberia has direct flights to Madrid

Iberia, which plans to merge with BA on Monday ( November 29) established in October a direct flight from Madrid-Spain. KLM has increased its flights from Amsterdam to six a week and by 2011 will fly daily.

Condor recently began direct flights to Frankfurt, Germany.  
BA will begin flying to Puerto Rico in March 2011 and their planning includes a Panama stop.

The carrier is studying using the Tocumen hub for passengers to make connections to other destinations throughout Latin America.

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Direct flights to Frankfurt British Airways, before privatization, was known as BOAC. Cynical passengers translated the acronym to Better on a Camel, and BA later as Bloody Awful. But other carriers got similar treatment TWA an American trans-Atlantic carrier (Try Walking Across), SABENA of Belgium (Such a Bloody Experience, Never Again) and Air France (Air Chance).

BA has recently been involved in strikes and disputes with flight crews, as it seeks to streamline its operations, but its public image is radiant when compared with discount flyer Ryan Air, about which disgruntled users have created a website to report problems, but the carrier still dominates in Europe.

KLM moving to daily flights to Amsterdam

Ernesto Orillac, advisor to the Panama Tourism Authority says that an agreement has been reached to promote in the UK a package that includes stays in Puerto Rico and Panama, using connections offered by Copa Airlines.

Copa recently joined the Star Alliance airline network of which BA is a member, making code sharing easier.

Between January and September reached the country about 9300 British tourists, representing an increase of 15% over the same period last year.

Other airlines that have recently established direct flights to Tocumen are Tame of Ecuador, Venezolana de Aviacion, and Dutch Antilles Express from Curacao.

Japan Airlines (JAL) is considering direct flights from Tokyo, and Copa, one of the few airlines in the world to remain profitable during the recession is working with Canadian authorities on a direct route to Toronto, Canada.

***EDITOR: The COPA deal with Toronto is signed, pending Pearson's allocation of the time slots for landings. Expect flights to commence in March 2011.***

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