

NEW FLIGHT ROUTES CONNECT EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA



In recent months, several European airlines have expanded their flight routes to both Mexico and Central and South America. Cultural tourism as well as business travel in the region is growing steadily.

The beautiful Caribbean beaches by themselves, a scarce and coveted asset in the cold Europe, are a sufficient reason for the increasing amount of flights. But there are others. According to experts, **besides the world known wonders that Latin America has to offer, the region has become a very attractive business hub.** Several airlines have taken note of this and for months now have been increasing the amount of flight routes linking Europe with Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

One example is the German airline Eurowings which this month opens new flight routes between Cologne and Varadero (Cuba), and between Cologne and Punta Cana (Dominican Republic). On December 18 they will begin flying to Puerto Plata, also in the Dominican Republic. While it is clear that Eurowings is looking to exploit the interest in beaches and tourism, it is also true that there is a situation that facilitates this commitment: the growth of budget airlines.

"With its new subsidiary Eurowings, Lufthansa aims to become one of Europe's top three providers of low cost flights, and we want to expand our offer of intercontinental travel," said the communications officer of Eurowings Katharina Muschalla.

Ms. Muschalla added that the aim is to attract European tourists, but also Latin Americans who wish to travel to Europe. While European interest in visiting Caribbean beaches has increased, the same is true of Latin Americans who want to see the attractions that Europe has to offer.

That bilateral interest is a good niche. This has been understood by Alitalia as well, which will open a new flight route from Rome to Santiago de Chile on May 1, 2016.

"The new route is an important platform for the development of Chilean tourism in Italy and it will bring significant economic benefits by increasing investment," Alitalia said in a statement. To that they will add another route, linking Rome with Mexico City starting in June 2016.

As proof of their serious interest in increasing links between the two continents, LAN flights will also operate in Italy, adding the Santiago-Sao Paulo-Milan route to already established routes in the region, starting this November.

The fact that LAN is a Chilean company shows that the market is open to companies from both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, since October 1 there have been flights between Sao Paulo and Barcelona, and as of September three new flight routes were added to the current links between Sao Paulo and Madrid.

Moreover, the Italian airline Neos announced that they consider opening a sixth route from Milan to Cuba, specifically to Villa Clara, an area to which it has already done a test flight with tour

operators. Air France said that starting January 2016 it will launch its Paris-Mexico City connection with the giant Airbus A380 to meet the growing demand. These flights will be on daily basis from March 2016. In addition, the number of flight routes to Panama will increase to 13 per week, and there will also be an increase in flights to Caracas, Lima and Havana.

Even cities with no direct flight to Europe for decades will benefit. Asunción is the case in point; from December 16 it will have, for the first time in 21 years, two weekly flights to Madrid, thanks to the decision by Air Europa, which expects to serve a potential market of 80,000 passengers per year. Up to this point these passengers have had to make their connections to the Paraguayan capital in Brazil or Argentina.

In 2016, Iberia, one of the airlines with the most flights in the region, will have been connecting the two continents for 70 years. **This year the Spanish company decided to reopen the flight routes it had cancelled between Madrid and Santo Domingo, Montevideo and Havana. Besides that they will add new destinations: Cali and Medellín in Colombia.** That country, along with Peru, takes pride in the fact that as of December its citizens will no longer need visa to enter the Schengen area, which will surely give a boost to travel.

Iberia acknowledges that "it is true that the competition in flying between Europe and Latin America has grown", but they add that "almost all Latin American countries have experienced sustained growth in recent years, leading to an increase in air traffic." Perhaps the answer to the question of why so many Europeans want to fly to Latin America lies in what Iberia is trying to do: "More and more people are interested in traveling to Latin America for its cultural, natural and culinary richness."

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