

COPA Airline Flies into Montego Bay

TUESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2011 12:00

WRITTEN BY JIS



Minister of Tourism, Hon Edmund Bartlett

An inaugural COPA Airways direct commercial flight, out of Panama's Tocumen International Airport, arrived at the Sangster International Airport, Montego Bay, on Sunday December 11, 2011 with approximately 150 passengers.

The flight signalled the start of twice weekly service by COPA Airlines to Montego Bay, which should boost Jamaica's tourist arrivals for the rest of the year.

The new service will provide the necessary airline seats connecting Panama and the rest of Latin America to Jamaica. With a fleet of 73 planes, COPA Airlines is projecting that, by the end of the year, they would have added 9 new destinations to its present route network, providing a total of 293 daily flights to 49 cities in 28 countries across the American continent.

Minister of Tourism, Hon Edmund Bartlett, in an address at a ceremony to officially welcome the airline to Jamaica, at the Sangster International Airport, underscored the importance of partnerships with airlines such as COPA, noting that the emerging tourism markets of South America are being viewed by his ministry as a source of inbound air traffic to be tapped into, to cover eventualities within the traditional markets.



"So, it is against that background that we looked hard and long, to see what was the best medium, what was the best carrier, what provided the best fit for Jamaica, at this time; what was most cost effective and what would give the efficiencies that we require to enable us to make that incursion and to do it quickly," he stated.

He added that several discussions were held with airlines across South America and, after lengthy deliberations, COPA Airlines was chosen for final negotiations.

"Because COPA had a level of connectivity throughout South America unparalleled by any other airline of its size," he

explained.

Mr. Bartlett pointed out that the COPA flights to Jamaica will mean 10,000 additional airline seats for the upcoming Winter Tourist Season.

"We are looking at a 4.7 percent projection for increase in arrivals, some 769,000 visitors we are projecting for the winter, and that will earn Jamaica US\$850 million for this winter; the strongest winter that we would have ever had," he noted.

He said that to ensure that Jamaica offers a seamless travel opportunity, as a destination, the government is working at significantly influencing the visa regimes that determines transit activities within the region, to make it easier for visitors to come to Jamaica for tourism and other purposes. He noted that great headway is being made in this area.

Caribbean Regional Manager for COPA Airlines, Claudia Zoluaga Alam, stated that COPA is very excited to visit Jamaica, and the COPA family is certain that the new flight will further strengthen cultural ties between Panama and Jamaica.

By Bryan Miller, JIS Reporter