

# JetBlue to take off for Fort Lauderdale

PAUL ALLEN Business reporter

[allenp@jamaicaobserver.com](mailto:allenp@jamaicaobserver.com)

JETBLUE Airways will be expanding its Jamaica services with twice-daily, non-stop flights from Kingston to Fort Lauderdale from April 30 next year.

And passengers wanting to make the trip before June 12 can purchase tickets until the start of December for as low as US\$59 (\$5,100)

A maximum of 250 people will be able to travel to the destination daily, though the company is expecting to have a load factor of 80 per cent, or 200 passengers.

Edmund Bartlett, minister of tourism, said this was an important expansion of Jamaica's airlift capacity. JetBlue has been the fastest growing airline locally since its entry into Jamaica in May 2009.

The airline had two per cent of local flyers in its first year, growing to six per cent in its second year, Bartlett said. Figures for this year are not yet available.

Robin Hayes, the airline's chief commercial officer, said the airline has been even more successful elsewhere. "In just a few years, JetBlue has become the largest airline in the Dominican Republic. We've become the largest airline in Puerto Rico, and I'd like to think that we can one day become the largest airline in Jamaica."

Hayes said the demand for travel between Jamaica and Fort Lauderdale cinched the decision to open the new route.

"There's a very strong demand there and both ends of the market want a morning and an evening flight," Hayes said. "If we started with a daily flight we'd only be half serving the market."

Fort Lauderdale has one of the highest concentration of Jamaicans in the US, Hayes said. This made it even more feasible to launch the new flights, especially with the island's 50th year of Independence being celebrated in 2012.

Times for the new flights have not yet been decided as these will be based on when people want to fly, aircraft availability and the availability of gates in Fort Lauderdale Hayes said. "This is a new market for us and so it's our intent to come into the market and reduce fares."

In responding to the possible implications of this week's launch of REDjet in Jamaica, he said: "What I've seen of REDjet is they've done a terrific job with their launch and what's good for Jamaica is good for JetBlue."

The airline has further plans for expansion but Hayes declined to say where these would be and if Jamaica was involved.

"We want to grow as quickly as we can but we want to make sure that we can do that profitably. So we think that adding one of two markets per year is the right way to do that. If we continue to get support from the Jamaican community, I like to think we can become the largest airline quicker (than we did in other regional markets).