

Ticket sales for first US direct flight low, says KQ

By [Constant Munda](#)

29 Jun 2018

Ticket bookings for inaugural non-stop flight to New York have been low since opening in January, according to Kenya Airways (KQ), but it remains optimistic sales will pick up from August.



Chief Executive Sebastian Mikosz said teams in the US commercial hub were busy chasing deals with travel agents amid stiff competition from other established airlines flying to Nairobi.

He said air passengers usually start booking tickets three months earlier, adding that the main booking window will open from August.

"We just have quite (a few) tickets sold, but still the biggest selling window is ahead of us. So we have no reason to be pessimistic, but it is still a challenge," Mikosz said.

Dreamliners

"We have our team there... (and) every week I get a report. I feel okay, but it is still a very difficult market. Competition is enormous."

The national carrier opened booking for the 28 October, 15-hour inaugural flight to John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York on 11 January subject to final approval by the US authorities.

KQ has dedicated two Dreamliner aircraft to the daily flights on the New York route - a night flight from Nairobi and a mid-day one from New York.

The two high-capacity aircraft include one of the B787-8 Dreamliners recalled from Oman Air which will arrive in September.

Tourism

The other recalled plane, expected in June 2019, will be redeployed on other routes, taking KQ's Dreamliner fleet to nine.

Mikosz spoke after the publicly-traded carrier hosted the visiting US Under Secretary of Commerce Gilbert Kaplan to a luncheon at its hangar at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport following his arrival for a three-day official visit to Nairobi.

US is Kenya's top tourism source market with arrivals growing 17% to 114,507 arrivals in 2017, official statistics show. "Launching this direct flight will indeed make it easier for business and tourism to flow, and increasing this flow between US and Kenya is precisely the goal of (US President Donald Trump's) Advisory Council (on Doing Business in Africa)," Kaplan said.

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