

FlySafair to connect KZN, Eastern Cape

FlySafair today announced that it will be launching new routes between Durban's King Shaka Airport and East London as well as Durban and Port Elizabeth.



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The launch of these routes comes in the wake of a survey that the company conducted amongst 29,000 unique respondents, to determine public appetite for a number of potential route options. The survey included the Durban-East London and Durban-Port Elizabeth options along with Nelspruit-Cape Town, Durban-George, Cape Town-Bloemfontein, Lanseria-Bloemfontein and Lanseria-Cape Town.

The winning route according to the survey, with an overwhelming majority of 54% of the votes, was Cape Town-Nelspruit. However, the airline chose to launch the routes that came in second and third place instead.

“Public appetite for a new route is naturally a massive consideration when launching new routes,” says Kirby Gordon, head of sales and distribution at FlySafair. “But there are some other important factors that have to fall into place, including utilisation of aircraft and crew and slot compliance.”

Gordon explains that airlines look at three key factors when choosing to launch a new route:

Demand to capacity fit

FlySafair operates Boeing 737-400 and 737-800 aircraft which have either 165 or 189 seats. In order for a route to be economically viable, the airline needs to mostly fill its aircraft, most of the time. What this means is that there needs to be a minimum of about 140 people willing to fly on each flight offered. If there are less than that number of people, the route is better served by an airline that operates smaller aircraft.

Efficiency

The key to running a low-cost airline lies in keeping the costs low - as the name suggests. One of the most critical factors in achieving this is to maximise the available flying hours of both the aircraft and the crew. As such it's necessary to determine the right movement patterns that allow for maximum flying while ensuring that crew sleep in their own beds.

Take-off and landing slots

OR Tambo International Airport processes up to 50 take-offs and landings every hour - that's a movement every minute and 12 seconds. These slots are all scheduled very carefully and competition for the slots between airlines can be intense as everyone needs specific slots to match their utilisation patterns. Sometimes, there has to be a compromise somewhere along the line.

"Looking at all these factors, the Durban to East London and Durban to Port Elizabeth links are the ones that made the most business sense," says Gordon. "The interest in the Cape Town-Nelspruit route is very encouraging and we'll certainly keep looking into it too," he adds.

Final survey results

Proposed route and score:

- Cape Town-Nelspruit - 54%
- Durban-East London - 15%
- Durban-Port Elizabeth - 12%
- Lanseria-Port Elizabeth - 6%
- Durban-George - 6%
- Cape Town-Bloemfontein - 4%
- Lanseria-Bloemfontein - 2%

The first flights will depart on 27 November 2017.

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