2017-03-25

Kenya-US direct flights herald trade, tourism boom for East Africa

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The East African

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NEW DAWN IN REGION’S AVIATION

Kenya-US direct flights herald trade, tourism boom for East Africa

It will take eight months before direct flights take off after vetting by the International Civil Aviation Organisation

By MARYANNE GICIRI

Trade between East Africa and the United States is set to increase after the latter’s Federal Aviation Administration granted Kenya’s national carrier Kenya Airways rights granted. The government has invested $64 million to upgrade JKIA to make it an international airport. The terminal at JKIA.

The new international arrivals and departure terminal at JKIA. Picture File

The EastAfrican
FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 3, 2017

there were yet to undertake a significant reduction of commercial planning at through Kenya is also an exporation the region’s aviation hub from Kenya to the national carrier Kenya for both passengers and cargo. Convenience will also save on the time it takes travelling through Europe or the Middle East. Currently, due to JKIA’s second-class status, passengers travelling between Asia and the US have to travel through London, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Dubai, or Adelaide, whose airports are approved for direct flights to the US. Fying to the US from Nairobi and connecting via Addis Ababa are the cost-effective options for the country’s fruit and fish exports. If a clean bill of health is given, the airport will be given a last point of departure approval. Airlines wishing to run direct flights to the US from JKIA will then individually apply for commercial and technical licences.

There are a few direct flights from Lagos, Nigeria to New York and a traveller from Nairobi connecting via Nigeria will take approximately 23 hours with layover time at a cost of $2,600. If one chooses to connect via Oliver Tambo Airport in Johannesburg from Nairobi, the journey will be 20 hours, exclusive of layover time and at a cost of $1,800.

Direct flights are usually more expensive than connecting ones and so travellers should expect shorter but costlier flights.

For travelers, tickets to the US via Europe or the Middle East are bound to become cheaper as competition heats up. Following the attainment of Category One status, Kenya Airways will immediately apply for approval to codeshare with US Airlines while concurrently pursuing approval for direct flights, the Cabinet Secretary said in a media briefing in Nairobi. The move will be a boost for the nation, which is planning to offer direct flights to the US, which will make KQ, Kenya's national carrier KQ can now fly directly to the US, after the latter’s US impromptu visit to Kenya. This will take eight months before the FAA inspectors were in Kenya to oversee safety, which is one of the prerequisites to obtaining the US market.

The EastAfrican head of commercial planning at Kenya Airways, Jimmy Musoni, said they were yet to undertake a study to weigh their options. Direct flights to the US will allow passengers to travel to the US in seven days to as little as a day. Burundi’s Minister of Transport and Public Works Jean Bosco Nyamuragira welcomed the news, saying it will help to cut costs and facilitate tourism and trade with the country’s fruit and fish exporters. Kenya’s efforts to attain the highest status, could soon revisit the two destinations, “This was followed by a corrective action plan that was developed in Washington in January 2017 to address deficiencies identified in the technical review. A total of 61 corrective actions were developed and all have been closed.” The association is in the middle of a study of how tourism numbers will be affected by the opening of direct flights. We are doing a value chain analysis, interviewing market players like grocers, butchers and drinks suppliers to see how tourism numbers will be affected by the opening of direct flights. The government had put in place all requisite measures. Apart from coming up with a new Civil Aviation Law, Kenya Airways has also set up a Civil Aviation Tribunal as part of the requirements. The government has invested $64 million to upgrade JKIA to make it an international airport. The terminal at JKIA.

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