

SAA denies Voyager strike

SAA has denied that its Voyager call centre employees are partaking in industrial action.

The airline told eTNW that SAA has outsourced its reservations and Voyager call centres which are currently operated by Merchants, a wholly owned subsidiary of Dimension Data.

Contact centre staff are in the process of moving to the new, purpose built contact centre located in Parktown, Johannesburg.

In order to mitigate against service lapses for customers calling into these contact centres, calls will be routed to SAA's back-up call centres in London in the UK and Fort Lauderdale in the USA and, where necessary, extra staff will be deployed to assist in the Reservations and Voyager contact centres. Voyager customers can also make use of www.flysaa.com where all the major functionalities are available.

Iata: US\$11bn loss still likely

AIRLINE nett losses of US\$11bn still look likely, according to Iata's latest financial health monitor.

The industry body said airlines' financial performance had begun to improve in the third quarter, but that the previously announced US\$11bn losses remained a possibility.

Iata said the third-quarter benefited from seasonally strong traffic, unlike quarter four. A sample of 75 major airlines reported a nett profit of US\$0,7bn, compared with a US\$3,4bn loss in Q3 2008.

The rising trend of the oil price is also now squeezing cash flows. "Jet fuel prices have been on a renewed upward trend since the second quarter and recently moved above US\$80 a barrel," Iata said in a statement.

"The fuel price rise reflects rising oil prices, which have doubled since the start of the year – largely, it appears, due to big OPEC supply cuts."

According to Iata, both travel and freight volumes have regained levels last seen at the start of the end-2008 collapse.

Despite an expanding fleet, airlines further cut seat-kilometre capacity by a further 1,7% this year. "Year-on-year comparisons are looking smaller simply because of the big cuts last year," Iata said.

Further cuts in passenger capacity throughout 2009 coupled with a rise in demand fed through to raising passenger load factors to an all-time high for the time of year, in October.

“This is starting to turn fares and passenger yields up from their mid-2009 lows. However, high load factors are not a sign of high utilisation of airlines’ key asset. Both narrow and wide-body passenger aircraft utilisation is down 6% from early 2008 levels.”

Iata continued to say that there had been a further rise in average fares in August, as high load factors meant low fare categories did not need to be held open as long.

“Unlike volumes, passenger yields are still way below year ago levels, as competition remains intense. Average premium fares were down over 25% in Q2 as airlines sought to generate cash from this normally less-price-sensitive sector.”

By August average premium fares were down 15%, a significant improvement on Q2.

“Clearly cyclical pressures are starting to pull average fares and yields up from their mid-year lows. What is not clear at present is the extent to which there has been a structural reduction in premium fares – because business travellers are buying economy tickets or corporate buyers have improved their bargaining position.”

New Durban airport nears completion

ACSA has announced that the R7bn new international airport at La Mercy is well on track, with more than 86% of the project already completed.

The air traffic control tower has been handed over to the Air Traffic Navigation Services, the airfield lighting has been commissioned and the air bridges are in the commission stage and are being tested.

At the end of 2009, contractor Ilembe Consortium is expected to deliver 25% completion of the passenger terminals to Acsa.

Acsa said in a statement that the name of the new airport was now on the critical path as it had to be issued so that the Civil Aviation regulations could be met in terms of the airport international code, placement code and name into aviation manuals and also the road and directional signage that needed to be completed by year end.

“The matter is being prioritised at national government level and through this process there have been public sessions held. As Acsa we look forward for that matter to follow due process and the name officially issued.”

Durban International

On the future of Durban International, Acsa said once the new airport was fully operational by May 2010, the current airport would be decommissioned as an airport and all aviation business would be relocated and conducted at the new airport.

The current airport, according to Acsa, will become a “prime piece” of

property, with plans to dispose of it.

The “disposal” of the property will be conducted by a task team that consists of Acsa, the Department of Trade and Industry, the National and Provincial Governments and eThekweni Municipality.

The 2010 Soccer World Cup event is being planned to be managed from the new airport, with the old airport used in case of an emergency and possibly to park aircraft should it be required, and only during the event.

Operational relocation

The last aircraft is planned to land at the current Durban International Airport (DIA) on April 30 and after the passengers have left the airport those aircraft will have to be relocated to the new airport. The new airport is expected to commence operations the following day.

Acsa concluded by saying that all employment and business opportunities for the operation of the new airport will be publicised by the necessary airport service providers and companies according to their resources and business needs in the public domain in the next few months.

Take note: SAA flight cancellations to Perth

In reference to the eTNW article ‘SAA flight cancellations to affect QF pax’ – eTNW would just like to clarify that SAA has only cancelled its Friday and Saturday flights.

South African Airways (SAA) wishes to advise our travel industry partners of the cancellation of SA282 from Johannesburg to Perth on Friday and the return SA283 from Perth to Johannesburg on Saturday in the month of February 2010 and March 2010. These cancellations are being affected due to runway maintenance in Perth.

Both Friday and Saturday flights in February and March have been cancelled and the CRS systems have been updated accordingly.

Passengers booked and ticketed on the Friday flights inbound and Saturday flights outbound will be affected by the cancellation. SAA will be offering the following options to affected passengers who are holding SAA tickets.

1. Revalidation / Reissue free of charge to travel on the day before or the day after.
2. Full refund less admin fee if passengers are not able to travel on the day before or the day after.

Iberia introduces direct luggage service

IBERIA introduced its new 'Direct Luggage' service on December 1.

Luggage can be picked up and delivered to the passenger's door by parcel express company IBEXPRESS/CACESA at special rate for Iberia customers.

The service is available in areas with or without airports, seven days a week and for flights within mainland Spain and Portugal, the Balearic and Canary Islands, the European Schengen area countries and the United Kingdom.

Several options are available. In mainland Spain and the Balearic islands, for example, the pick-up and delivery can be done on the same day, including Sundays and holidays, or on the following day. An express service is available for international flights, and a more economical service ensures delivery within approximately 72 hours.

Reservations, tracking, and general information about the service and rates is available on www.iberia.com