

Airlines sweeten travel in Ugandan skies

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First, Fly540 a new Kenyan airline, started low-cost daily flights from Entebbe to Nairobi, then South African Airways launched daily flights to Johannesburg, and just before the week could close, Air Uganda added a third and comfortable airplane to its fleet.

It was simply remarkable for a country that has for more than a decade grappled to salvage its aviation industry from the shadow of its defunct national carrier, Uganda Airlines, in the face of high air transport costs.

Fly540 flies to several destinations in Kenya and hit the Entebbe-Nairobi route last week with an introductory fee of \$79 for a one-way trip to Nairobi and vice versa. Its offer is now the lowest on the route closely followed by Air Uganda's \$95 exclusive of a \$45 airport tax levy while Kenya Airways charges \$141 exclusive of airport tax for a similar option.

"The popularity of our flights between Nairobi, Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu, Kisumu and Eldoret has driven our plan to establish similar operations in other African countries," said Don Smith, Fly540's CEO, according to *Nation's Business Daily*.

The airline is using a 48-seater aircraft but plans to introduce a larger 72-seater ATR 72-500.

Reacting to the entry the new airline, Peter De Waal Air Uganda's chief executive officer told Bizcommunity, "We are not afraid of any new airline and we are not going to lower our fares because of their entry."

He said the Air Uganda, the country's new national flag carrier, would flourish on the back of quality services and without any delays. "We are going to fly 100% on time and if a passenger doesn't to be delayed by 2 or 3 hours, they will chose us. We want to give our customers the best service," he said in an exclusive interview.

To boost its services, the airline flew in a new McDonnell Douglas (MD)-87 (99-seater) to Entebbe International Airport on March 1. The new acquisition brings the airline's fleet to three. De Waal added that the airplane is 50% cheaper in fuel consumption and has no take-off limitation like its DC-9 – which gives it flexibility.

Air Uganda is flies from Entebbe to Nairobi (Kenya), Dar-es-Salaam and Kilimanjaro (Tanzania) and Juba (South Sudan) and has seen passenger numbers grow from 1000 in December 2007 to over 10,000 by the end of February.

In related developments, South Africa Airways started daily flights to Johannesburg to increase convenience and flexibility to travellers on the route. The airline is charging \$400 for a return ticket from Entebbe to Johannesburg.

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