



RYANAIR PASSENGER NUMBERS JUMP AFTER AIRLINE CUTS FARES FOLLOWING PARIS ATTACKS

News / Airlines



Ryanair cut fares to attract bookings after the Paris terrorist attacks, which boosted passenger numbers by a quarter last month and helped it grow at more than double the rate of fierce rival easyJet in 2015.

The Irish budget airline, which is led by chief executive Michael O’Leary, carried 7.5m customers in December, a 25pc jump on the same month a year earlier. Ryanair’s load factor – a measure of how many seats flown were actually occupied – climbed by three percentage points to 91pc.

The surge in travellers last month meant that in 2015 the airline flew 101.4m passengers, a 17pc rise on 2014 that far out-stripped easyJet, which recorded a 6.9pc increase to 69.8m over the 12 months.

Ryanair, which does not fly domestic routes within Ireland, claims it is the first airline in the world to carry more than 100m international customers in the space of a year. However, including domestic routes, other airline companies, such as Germany’s Lufthansa, have passed the 100m milestone.

Kenny Jacobs, the airline’s chief marketing officer, attributed Ryanair’s leap in customers last month to “lower fares in December” after the Paris gun and bomb attacks in November that left

130 dead, and the subsequent terrorist scare in Brussels.

Analysts at stockbroker Goodbody cautioned that the cheaper fares will likely result in weaker yields at Ryanair, which also today outlined plans to open a base at Belfast International Airport that include a new service to Gatwick.

The Paris tragedy rocked the tourism industry and deterred some people from travelling abroad, particularly to France.

Low-cost carrier easyJet is France's second-biggest carrier and said today that its load factor suffered following the Paris outrages, and fell by 1.8 percentage points to 86.6pc in December.

Some 23pc of its capacity that month was on routes that flew via France, easyJet said, although the airline sought to reassure investors that "load factors are now recovering to normal levels and management does not anticipate any change to full year market expectations".

Budget airline easJet suffered lower passenger numbers as a result of the terrorist attacks in Paris

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It carried 4.85m passengers in December, a 4.6pc increase on the same month a year earlier, but shy of the 5m forecast by Goodbody analysts, who said the figures were "below expectations" because of the Paris attacks. They added that Ryanair's decision to open the Belfast base was a "major negative" for easyJet as it was yet another instance of the Irish airline muscling-in on the British carrier's network.

Ryanair has been increasingly stationing aircraft at important airports for easyJet, including Milan Malpensa and Berlin, intensifying competition between the two carriers.

EasyJet also said it was pressing ahead with plans to tap the bond markets to help finance its fleet expansion and that it would start meetings with debt investors next week.

Two credit rating agencies, Moody's and Standard & Poor's, have given the carrier investment

grade ratings of Baa1 and BBB+ respectively.

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