



SILKAIR TO GO NONSTOP ON SINGAPORE-CAIRNS

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Cairns Airport expects Silkair's move to make its flights to Cairns nonstop rather than via Darwin will increase tourism to the region and make the destination more accessible to overseas arrivals.

The airport said in a statement Silkair's three times a week flights between Singapore and Cairns will operate nonstop from May 30 2016.

Currently, Silkair flies from Singapore to Cairns via Darwin on Mondays and Thursdays, with a non-stop flight on Saturdays.

The return from Cairns to Singapore is non-stop on Mondays and Thursdays, while those heading to Singapore or beyond on Saturdays will travel via Darwin.

The regional wing of Singapore Airlines (SIA) started flying to Cairns on May 29 2015, so the move to have all services between the North Queensland city and Singapore nonstop comes a year after operating on the route.

"It is expected to help boost visitor numbers to our region from key visitor markets in Asia and Europe as well as providing Cairns locals with easier access to Singapore and the many international connections available from there," Cairns Airport said in a statement on its website on February 8.

The change also means Silkair's five times a week Singapore-Darwin flights will also be nonstop from May 30.

SIA alliance partner Virgin Australia codeshares of Silkair's Cairns and Darwin flights. SIA owns about 23 per cent of Virgin and has a seat on the Australian airline's board.

Silkair's Cairns manager L Ravindran said the Singapore-Cairns route had performed very well and there was enough demand to increase capacity to Cairns by making the flights nonstop, which would also shorten travel times for passengers heading to Singapore or beyond.

"The load factors are doing pretty well and head office are very pleased with the performance," he told The Cairns Post.

"The pick-up (in bookings) has been very fast. We didn't expect it (so quickly)."

In addition to Silkair, Cairns Airport currently receives international service from Cathay Pacific (Hong Kong), Hong Kong Airlines (Hong Kong), Jetstar (Denpasar, Osaka Kansai and Tokyo Narita), Philippine Airlines (Manila and Auckland) and Qantas (Port Moresby).

The airport also has seasonal international service to Auckland with Air New Zealand, while China Eastern and China Southern have also served Cairns on a seasonal from their hubs Shanghai and Guangzhou, respectively.

Figures from the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) showed Cairns Airport handled 44,903 international passengers in November 2015, up 31.4 per cent from the prior year.

And the BITRE data showed the number of passengers travelling between Cairns and Singapore has risen from 2,495 in June 2015 (the first full month of Silkair's operations) to 3,175 in November 2015.

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