

8 of the BEST

NEW ROUTES FOR 2026

Tap into some of the exciting new routes taking off next year, writes **Laura French**

from new short-haul hops to increased long-haul connectivity, there's plenty for flying fans to get excited about in 2026. Flag-carrier British Airways is extending its winter service from Gatwick to Bangkok to year-round and going all in for the US ahead of the World Cup with a route from Heathrow to St Louis, as well as a reintroduced service twice-daily to Miami and daily to Dallas-Fort Worth.

There's a roster of new regional options in the pipeline too: easyJet is making Newcastle a base next year, while Ryanair will connect Birmingham with Albanian capital Tirana for the first time.



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SEOUL

Virgin Atlantic will be setting off for South Korea for the first time next year with a daily direct route to Seoul, which is launching on March 29. As part of the airline's easterly expansion, the service will fly on a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, taking around 12-13 hours. The new flight shines a spotlight on this vibrant capital, where highlights include the elaborate, 14th-century Gyeongbokgung Palace; Bukchon Hanok Village (pictured), known for its traditional, restored hanok stone houses; and Gwangjang Market, where tangy bibimbap and other local specialities spill out from the stalls. The new route also opens up further connections to Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand with Virgin Atlantic's codeshare agreements.

Book it: InsideAsia sells a 12-night Korean Wave self-guided tour from £3,981 per person (based on two sharing). Includes return flights from Heathrow to Seoul with Virgin Atlantic, 12 nights' accommodation with breakfast, some other meals, ground transport, plus some guiding and listed excursions. insideasiatours.com



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SAMOS

Jet2.com is putting the picturesque Greek isle of Samos on the map with new twice-weekly flights from Stansted and Manchester, taking off between May and October 2026. Jet2holidays has also introduced a range of accommodation across the island, from private villas to family-friendly hotels, with key locations including Pythagoreio, Samos Town and the charming fishing village of Kokkari (pictured). Beyond the beaches, clients will find hilltop mountain villages, historic ruins and tavernas aplenty, all scattered between lush, emerald landscapes and the glittering blues of the Aegean.

Book it: Jet2holidays offers a week's half-board at the Hydrela Beach Hotel and Village in Pythagoreio from £729 per person, based on two sharing and including flights from Manchester on May 1. jet2holidays.com



PUNTA CANA

Tui will be operating a new direct flight from Belfast to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic from June 20. The limited service will run each Saturday for four weeks, bringing the country's beaches, rainforests and mountains a little closer to the shores of Northern Ireland. Basing themselves in the upscale resorts of Bavaro and Cap Cana, visitors here can head to Scape Park to see the Hoyo Azul (blue hole) cenote, glimpse the 27 waterfalls of Damajagua or explore Los Haitises National Park, where giant rock formations were a filming location for Jurassic Park.

Book it: Tui offers 14 nights' all-inclusive at the impressive Punta Cana hotel (pictured) from £1,850 per person, based on two sharing a Double Room with Garden View and including flights from Belfast on June 20. tui.co.uk



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DESTINATIONS

AVIATION | NEW FLIGHTS

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OTTAWA

Ottawa's cultural highlights will be more accessible than ever next year with a new Air Transat route from Gatwick, operating three times a week from May 15 for the summer season.

Air Canada has also extended its Heathrow-Ottawa service to year-round; it will run three times a week until March 27 and go up to four flights a week in summer. Must-sees in the Canadian capital include the impressive, Gothic-style Parliament Buildings (pictured), while the Unesco-listed Rideau Canal turns into an ice rink for the winter season.

Book it: North America Travel Service offers four nights at the DoubleTree by Hilton Ottawa Downtown from £995 per person, based on two sharing, room-only, with Air Canada flights from Heathrow in April.

northamericanatravelservice.co.uk

BEST OF THE REST

Tui is launching two routes from Cardiff for next summer: Hurghada from May 2 and Faro from May 21.

Jet2.com has a string of other new routes planned for the summer season, including from East Midlands Airport to Agadir in Morocco, plus connections to Palermo from Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle.

EasyJet will be flying from Edinburgh to Ljubljana for the first time from April 4, marking the only direct route from Scotland to Slovenia. The airline is also adding routes from Birmingham to Rome, along with Bristol to Thessaloniki and Reus.

Norwegian is adding a route from Edinburgh to Billund in Denmark – the home of Legoland – from April, joining the airline's existing Nordic services from the Scottish capital to Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Bergen.



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TIRANA

Ryanair is opening a base in Tirana (pictured), Albania, in April, introducing routes from Birmingham from March 29 and Dublin from April 2. Flights will operate twice a week from each, opening the country up to those seeking an escape without the crowds seen in some of its Balkan neighbours. Tirana highlights include the Dajti Express cable car, the Bunk'Art communism museums and tasty Albanian restaurants. Across the country, clients can explore the Unesco-listed city of Berat, the Accursed Mountains – where hiking trails criss-cross scenic alpine slopes – and the pretty Albanian Riviera.

Book it: Regent Holidays offers a five-day Tirana Short Break, priced from £1,495 per person including B&B accommodation, private tours, transfers and Ryanair flights from Birmingham. regent-holidays.co.uk



7 NEWARK

Returning after a seven-year hiatus is United Airlines' Glasgow to Newark route, the only non-stop service from Glasgow to the US. The daily summer service will run from May 8 until September 23 – coinciding with a slew of World Cup games being played in New Jersey, including the final on July 19. Football isn't the only draw next year: July 3-9 brings a tall-ships flotilla to New York (pictured) to mark the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, plus a huge fireworks display on July 4 – another reason for clients to hop across the pond.

Book it: Gold Medal offers four nights' room-only at the Royalton New York Hotel from £1,295 per person, including United Airlines flights from Glasgow on September 17. goldmedal.co.uk

8 NICE

EasyJet is establishing a base at Newcastle next year, with 11 new routes in the pipeline from late March – among them an exclusive new connection to Nice, set to operate three times per week. Clients will find plenty to explore in the Provence region, from Nice's quaint, cobbled Old Town to nearby villages such as Èze, known for its medieval hilltop streets and Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (pictured), where elegant, pastel-hued villas line the water. Beyond Nice, other new European destinations served by easyJet from Newcastle include Rhodes, Corfu, Antalya, Dalaman, Faro, Malta, Prague and the Spanish city of Reus, plus Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt and Enfidha in Tunisia. **Book it:** EasyJet holidays offers three nights at the Nice Pam Hotel from £373 per person room-only, including flights from Newcastle on October 15. easyjet.com



PICTURES: Shutterstock/Sina Ettemer Photography, Neirify