

# Connect more

Consider all the options when flying long-haul, says Samantha Mayling

**D**irect flights are the quickest way from A to B, so it might seem logical that they would also be the most desirable – but that isn't always the case. For long-haul passengers, breaking the journey with a stopover or travelling from a regional airport to connect overseas can be more interesting or cost-effective.

Not only that, but it helps underline the benefits of booking through an agent – having all these options at your fingertips and ready to recommend to the right client proves how much knowledge you can offer, and will help build repeat business.

Here is a snapshot of the options on offer, with return fares unless stated otherwise.

## US

**Direct:** British Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly to cities such as Boston, Washington DC and New York, with fares from £400. Flight durations are seven to eight hours from Heathrow.

Budget carrier Norwegian offers Gatwick-New York from £272, and will start flying to Boston in May, from about £300.

**Connect:** Icelandic budget carrier Wow Air has new A321s for Gatwick services to Boston and

Washington DC, via Reykjavik, and from next summer will serve Los Angeles and San Francisco. Journeys take three to five hours longer than direct connections, but are good value, with fares to the East Coast from just £275.

Icelandair offers 16 destinations in the US and Canada, also via Reykjavik, from Aberdeen, London, Birmingham and Manchester, and will boost frequency from Glasgow in March. It's tapping into Iceland's growing popularity with stopover rates letting passengers stay up to seven nights for no extra cost. Heathrow-Boston fares start at £393.

**Or try:** Virgin Atlantic flies to Atlanta and Detroit – hubs for partner Delta Air Lines – opening up countless connections to the rest of the US. New Orleans, Nashville and Tampa are among the most popular connections from Atlanta, or passengers can fly straight to Hawaii from Detroit. A Heathrow-Atlanta-New Orleans flight would set clients back £796.

Virgin flies to Atlanta from Heathrow and Manchester, plus Virgin and Delta are adding Edinburgh-New York next summer, and a non-stop summer route between Heathrow and Salt Lake City on May 1.





LEFT:  
Qatar  
Airways

RIGHT:  
Finnish  
Lapland



## → SOUTHEAST ASIA

**Direct:** BA has introduced a daily A380 flight on its Heathrow-Singapore route, alongside Boeing 777s, from £572. Singapore Airlines flies A380s and B777s from Heathrow, with a journey time of 12 hours and 40 minutes.

Asian destinations were the first to welcome BA's Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, complete with a new First cabin. The launch route for the B787-9 was Delhi, in October. Abu Dhabi/Muscat (a double-sector flight) and Kuala Lumpur will be the next routes to be served by the 787-9.

**Connect:** Turkish Airlines has flights from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh to its Istanbul hub, then onwards to 39 countries in Asia. Passengers passing through Istanbul's Ataturk airport, with at



## A Qatar stopover offers two nights' accommodation, a desert safari and dining onboard a dhow

least six hours to wait between 9am and 6pm, can use the free Touristanbul service, for a whistle-stop city tour with an English-speaking guide.

**Or try:** Fly via Doha with Qatar Airways to Singapore from about £600, or Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur from about £640.

The airline's Qatar Stopover package offers two nights' accommodation, a desert safari,

shopping excursion, museum visit and dining onboard a traditional Arabian dhow.

Even Qatar's airport, Hamad International, is a shopping and dining destination, with more than 70 retail outlets, a 25m airside pool, gym, squash courts and hotel.

Qatar Airways will add flights from Birmingham in March, joining services from Heathrow, Manchester and Edinburgh.

## → FAR EAST

**Direct:** There are established routes such as BA's Heathrow-Shanghai service (fares from £517), but the exciting news for next year is Hainan Airlines' launch of the first direct flight from Manchester to mainland China. The Beijing route starts in June, costing from £478.

**Connect:** Helsinki might not seem the most obvious connection for flights to the Far East, but transfers at Finnair's hub can be as short as 35 minutes, and flight times mean passengers travel overnight, arriving in Asia rested.

Finnair flies Heathrow-Helsinki-Shanghai, with fares from £463 and a 13-hour duration, including connection.

Finnair and Visit Finland have introduced StopOver Finland packages. Ranging from five hours to five days, highlights include Helsinki and Finnish Lapland.

**Or try:** KLM and Air France operate up to 77 weekly flights connecting their hubs at Paris-Charles de Gaulle and Amsterdam-Schiphol to nine destinations in Greater China: Guangzhou, Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Hong Kong, Xiamen, Taipei and Wuhan.

UK passengers can connect from several airports, with journey times from about 12 hours to Beijing and 12 hours and 30 minutes to Shanghai.

Air France offers Manchester-Paris-Beijing from £397 and Birmingham-Paris-Beijing from £398. Connections are also available from Newcastle, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

KLM has connections to its Amsterdam base from regional airports such as Norwich, Durham, Humberside, Leeds-Bradford, Cardiff and Belfast, with lead-in Beijing fares from between £434 and £473.



LEFT:  
Singapore

PICTURES: VISIT FINLAND

## → SOUTH AFRICA

**Direct:** South African Airways offers double-daily flights, taking 11 hours and 30 minutes, from Heathrow to Johannesburg from £885. BA also offers Heathrow-Johannesburg from £702.

**Connect:** Turkish Airlines, which serves Cape Town and Johannesburg, added Durban (via Jo'burg) last month, with fares from £686. Heathrow-Istanbul takes almost four hours, the connecting time is about 90 minutes and the Istanbul-Johannesburg flight time is about 10 hours.

**Or try:** Ethiopian Airlines offers some of the cheapest fares, with flights to Johannesburg from £568 (14 hours and 30 minutes) and to Cape Town from £602 (18 hours). It has connections from London via its Addis Ababa hub, with free stopovers on the return leg for passengers who want to go sightseeing. It will also add Durban as its third South African destination later this month.

## → CARIBBEAN AND SOUTH AMERICA

**Direct:** Many UK-based airlines fly to the Caribbean and South America from London and the regions. Thomas Cook Airlines added Cancun and Barbados from Glasgow this winter, while BA reported a strong year to Caribbean islands such as Antigua, Barbados and Saint Lucia, with lower fares as a result of cheaper fuel and cuts to Air Passenger Duty.

Last month, Norwegian launched the UK's only link to Puerto Rico with fares on the nine-hour Dreamliner flight from Gatwick starting at £251.

**Connect:** For

South American routes, carriers such as TAP Portugal and Iberia offer numerous connections via Lisbon and Madrid. TAP Portugal flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester to Rio de Janeiro 16 times a week, via Lisbon (13 hours, from £684).

**Or try:** Iberia offers London-Rio via Madrid from about £477 (14 hours). It also serves Edinburgh and Manchester but not with same-day connections in Madrid, although that might not worry clients who fancy a quick stopover in the Spanish capital.

From Manchester, passengers can connect the same day to Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Montevideo, Sao Paulo and Santiago; and from Edinburgh, to Havana, via Madrid.

From March, Iberia will add Birmingham-Madrid flights, allowing for connections to destinations such as Havana, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Montevideo and Santiago.

## → AUSTRALIA

**Direct:** Not yet – but Qantas is reportedly planning a 19-hour non-stop flight between Perth and London by 2017, which would be the world's longest commercial flight.

The 18,700-mile route would be onboard the new 787-9 Dreamliner.



ABOVE: Etihad

**Connect:** Passengers can reach Australia in about 24 hours, but stopping over for a night or two helps the body clock adjust. BA flies to Sydney via Singapore from Heathrow, from £780. Popular stopovers with other airlines include Bangkok, Dubai, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur.

Etihad Airways starts daily A380 services between Abu Dhabi and Melbourne on June 1, replacing one of the three-class Boeing 777-300ER aircraft currently on the route. The total journey time with another A380 connection to London is just under 23 hours, and starts at £725. Manchester or Edinburgh to Melbourne start at £698.

For stopover stays, stretch the legs with a wander along the Abu Dhabi corniche, a visit to Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, an

adrenaline-fuelled visit to Ferrari World or a more sedate tour of Saadiyat Island, where hawksbill turtles nest along the beaches.

**Or try:** Emirates claims to offer the fastest flights to Sydney from Birmingham, Manchester, Gatwick, Newcastle and Glasgow. Passengers leaving Birmingham at 1.15pm arrive in Australia at 10.30pm the next day – a journey time of 22 hours and 15 minutes.

Heathrow and Manchester fares to Sydney are from £849, and Birmingham-Sydney is £829.

Emirates has a dedicated stopover programme, with welcome packs, a range of room types, 24-hour check-in or out, and transfers. With 119 weekly flights to Dubai from six UK airports, it's no wonder it's home to the world's busiest international airport. 