

# High fliers

Passengers are making their pounds go further with low-cost long-haul routes, writes Phil Davies

Low-cost long-haul airlines are much talked-about these days, but they may not quite be the modern phenomenon some pundits make them out to be.

Freddie Laker's Skytrain was the trailblazer, with £59 fares from Gatwick to New York in 1977. Almost 40 years on, a new generation of carriers is jockeying to entice cost-conscious travellers with an unprecedented list of destinations.

Skytrain went bust in 1982 in the face of pressure from transatlantic incumbents anxious to protect their monopoly. But the Laker legacy lives on, with transatlantic routes remaining the main focus of growth – although Norwegian has ambitions to expand into Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

The equation wouldn't be complete without Thomson and Thomas Cook; both have emerged from their charter

airline roots as major long-haul players on global leisure routes.

There's no lack of ambition by the main players, with new aircraft, routes and inflight offerings – albeit mostly at additional charge. In the fight against traditional network carriers, how do the upstarts of long-distance flying match up, and what kind of inflight service can be expected for their rock-bottom prices?

## ► NORWEGIAN

**Routes:** Eight destinations from Gatwick with nearly 30 long-haul flights a week this winter to New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Las Vegas, Oakland-San Francisco and Puerto Rico.

**Aircraft:** Boeing 787 Dreamliners in a two-class configuration with 259 economy seats in the 787-8 and 309 seats in the 787-9.

**On board:** Economy is in a 3-3-3

configuration with 31-inch seat pitch and four-degree recline.

The premium cabin features 32 seats on the 787-8 and 35 seats on the 787-9 in a 2-3-2 configuration. Leather cradle seats offer a 46-inch pitch and nine to 10-degree recline.

**What's included:** Personal seatback inflight entertainment screens measure nine inches on 787-8s and 11 inches on 787-9s. All passengers have access to in-seat power ports to charge personal devices and do not pay a supplement for seats with extra legroom.

Economy passengers can take one 10kg piece of hand luggage. An extra £50 each way is charged for one checked 20kg bag, meal service and free seat reservation with Lowfare+ tickets. Economy passengers travelling on Flex tickets have two 20kg checked bags, meal service, free seat reservation

→ and fast track in addition to eligibility to make free changes and cancellations to booking.

Premium passengers receive priority boarding, complimentary meals and drinks, plus two 20kg checked bag allowance, seat reservation, fast track and complimentary lounge access at selected airports including Gatwick, New York, Los Angeles and Oakland. Premium Flex ticket holders can also make free changes and cancellations to their booking.

**Where next:** Introducing the extended-range Boeing 737 Max in 2017 will open opportunities to serve the US East Coast from smaller UK airports.

**How much:** Fares at £135 one-way from Gatwick to Boston and £399 in premium in winter and £449 in summer.

**norwegian.com**

## ▶ WOW AIR

**Routes:** Nine North American cities served from Reykjavik by summer 2017 with connecting flights from Gatwick, Bristol and Edinburgh. New destinations include New York, Miami and Pittsburgh in addition to Boston, Washington San Francisco, Los Angeles, Montreal and Toronto.

**Aircraft:** Airbus A320s and A321s

and wide-body A330s offering a single-cabin configuration.

**On board:** Wow Air's A321 seat pitch measures 31 inches and 34 inches for the A330.

**What's included:** A seat on the aircraft at a no-frills price with one small carry-on bag. A fee of £38 is charged for larger carry-on bags. Checked bags cost from £53 per flight. Passengers pay \$17 extra to rent iPads to view inflight entertainment. All inflight food and drink costs extra. Seats with extra legroom cost between £16 and £38. All tickets are non-refundable.

**Where next:** Daily flights from Gatwick to Los Angeles and San Francisco, via Reykjavik, from March 27, with one-way fares starting at £149. The year-round services currently operate four times a week to Los Angeles and five times a week to San Francisco. Miami joins the network from April 2017 and a new route to Pittsburgh starts on June 16 four times a week with connecting flights from Gatwick and Edinburgh. The fleet of 11 aircraft is set to grow to 17 by the end of 2017.

**How much:** Fares start at £119 one-way to destinations in the US and Canada.

**wowair.co.uk**



## Forty years after Laker's Skytrain, a new generation of carriers is jockeying to entice cost-conscious flyers

### ▶ AIR TRANSAT

**Routes:** Gatwick to Calgary and Montreal in summer and Toronto and Vancouver year-round. Manchester, Glasgow and Dublin to Toronto year-round with Birmingham-Toronto in summer. Manchester and Glasgow to

Vancouver also in summer. Connecting domestic flights from Toronto or Montreal year-round to Calgary, Vancouver, Ottawa and Quebec City.

**Aircraft:** Airbus A310-300, Airbus A330-200, Airbus A330-300 and Boeing 737.

**On board:** Economy includes leather seats, inflight entertainment and a choice of six hot and cold meals. Option Plus for economy passengers includes seat selection, priority check-in, supplementary checked baggage allowance, priority queue at security checkpoints at Montreal and Vancouver, priority boarding and baggage handling, and inflight perks including amenity kit and glass of champagne.

Club class includes Option Plus amenities in a more spacious cabin with wider seats, specially selected travel amenities, additional baggage allowance, rapid check-in counter, gourmet food, alcoholic drinks and coffee.

**What's included:** Economy passengers get one 23kg checked bag and one 10kg carry-on bag. Seat width is 16 inches with a 32-inch pitch. Snacks and drinks can be bought on board. Club passengers have a 40kg checked luggage allowance and a 15kg carry-on bag.

**Where next:** Increased use of A330 wide-body aircraft and a growing number of domestic flights from Canadian hubs.

**How much:** Fares start at £315 return from Gatwick to Toronto.

**airtransat.com**



TOP:  
Air Transat

LEFT: San  
Francisco

## ▶ WESTJET

**Routes:** Year-round from Gatwick to Calgary and Toronto.

**Aircraft:** Four Boeing 767-300 extended-range aircraft carrying 262 passengers operate transatlantic routes.

**On board:** Two-class configuration – economy and Plus. One carry-on bag free of charge. Seatback TV included. Extra charges in economy for food and alcoholic drinks, internet access, earbuds, charging cable and blanket.

**What's included:** Three fare types – Econo, Flex and Plus. Travellers on lowest Econo fares must pay £15-£18 for the first checked bag and £21-£25 for a second. Flex fares include one checked bag. Plus includes two checked bags, advance boarding, priority security screening, lounge access at Gatwick, pre-departure drink and bottled water, meal selection, beers, wines and spirits, amenity kit and hot towels. Advance seat selection in Econo and Flex costs anything from £3 to £35 depending on position of seat.

**Where next:** Summer 2017 flights to be announced in January.



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**How much:** Fares start at £302 return from Gatwick to Toronto in January.

[westjet.com](http://westjet.com)

## ▶ THOMSON

**Routes:** India, Thailand, Sri Lanka (winter), Aruba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados, Mexico, Costa Rica and Florida from Gatwick, plus selected regional departures from Manchester, Birmingham, Stansted, Bristol, East Midlands, Glasgow and Newcastle.

**Aircraft:** Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

**On board:** Two-class configuration – economy and premium. At least 32-inch seat pitch in economy plus on-demand films and TV, all



drinks, three-course meal, afternoon tea or breakfast and meals for children.

Premium includes 38-inch seat pitch, amenity kit, noise-reducing headphones, sparkling wine before take-off, drinks, four-course meal, afternoon tea or breakfast, magazines and newspapers.

**What's included:** Economy includes 20kg luggage allowance, while Premium includes 23kg and 10kg for children plus dedicated check-in, fast-track UK airport security and priority boarding.

**Where next:** Phu Quoc in Vietnam from winter 2017, Saint Lucia and Cayo Santa Maria in Cuba in summer and winter 2017. Flights from Bristol to Barbados, Cancun, Punta Cana and Florida being introduced for winter 2017.

**How much:** A 14-night holiday to Vietnam starts at £889 from Gatwick in November 2017.

[thomson.co.uk](http://thomson.co.uk)

## ▶ THOMAS COOK

**Routes:** Manchester to Boston, Cancun, Cayo Coco, Holguin and Varadero, Cuba; Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Orlando, Dominican Republic and San Francisco for summer 2017; plus selected long-haul departures from Gatwick, Stansted, Glasgow and Belfast.

Cape Town is being served from Gatwick this winter together with Cancun, Cayo Coco, Holguin and Goa. Winter flights from

Manchester cover Antigua, Barbados, Cancun, Cayo Coco, Goa, Holguin, Las Vegas, Miami, New York, Orlando, Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Tobago and Varadero.

Weekly flights run in winter from Glasgow to Orlando.

**Aircraft:** Airbus A330-200s on long-haul routes.

**On board:** Two-class configuration, with 265 seats in economy and 49 in premium. Economy class includes one 6kg bag, personal 8.9-inch screen with on-demand entertainment and economy meal created by celebrity chef James Martin.

Premium includes 10kg carry-on bag, free seat reservation, premium entertainment, headphones, alcoholic drinks and upgraded James Martin meal.

**What's included:** One 20kg checked bag in economy, rising to 23kg on flights to the US and Canada, premium entertainment upgrade available. One 25kg checked bag in Premium or 32kg on US and Canada flights and separate check-in. Passengers can pre-order duty-free.

**Where next:** Manchester-San Francisco in summer 2017. Manchester-Boston frequency doubling to four flights a week and Manchester-Los Angeles up from two to three a week.

**How much:** Fares from Manchester to San Francisco start at £490 economy and £690 premium.

[thomascookairlines.com](http://thomascookairlines.com)



**ABOVE:** A WestJet Boeing 767

**LEFT:** Havana, Cuba