

JetBlue sets date for start of flights between US and London

May 19 2021, by David Koenig



The tail of a JetBlue Airways Airbus A321 is shown as the plane prepares to take off from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2021, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. JetBlue is announcing details around its first flights to London. The airline says it will start flying between New York's JFK Airport and London's Heathrow in mid-August, and add flights to London's Gatwick Airport in September. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee

JetBlue Airways said Wednesday it will start transatlantic service late this summer, competing against bigger rivals on the lucrative route between New York and London.

The New York-based airline said it will start daily flights between JFK and Heathrow airports on Aug. 11, and add daily trips from JFK to London's second-biggest airport, Gatwick, on Sept. 29. It plans to add Boston-London flights next year.

JetBlue wanted to start the flights earlier than mid-August but was delayed, partly by the process of proving to regulators that it could operate long over-water flights safely. The late launch means JetBlue will miss most of the peak summer travel vacation season. However, travel between the United States and the United Kingdom is still restricted because of the coronavirus pandemic, and it's not clear when restrictions will be eased.

"Given that the U.K. remains closed, we didn't feel a ton of pressure to open earlier in the summer," JetBlue President Joanna Geraghty said in an interview. "This gives us a couple more months. We are pretty optimistic that by then things will be ready to go."

Before the pandemic, New York-London was among the most lucrative and highly competitive airline routes on the globe. It was popular with high-fare corporate travelers moving between two great financial hubs.

JetBlue believes it can undercut other airlines on price by using fuel-efficient and smaller, single-aisle Airbus jets with 117 economy seats and 24 lie-flat seats in a premium service that it calls Mint.

JetBlue said fares will start at \$599 and £329 in economy and \$1,979 and £999 in Mint. The latter is several hundred dollars cheaper than mid-August business-class fares displayed on Google Flights for rivals such

as American Airlines, British Airways and Icelandair.

New entrants frequently offer deals when they start on new routes. Sometimes the bargains go away quickly.

JetBlue wants to offer more flights but found it difficult to break into Heathrow, where takeoff and landing slots are hard to get. The daily JFK-Heathrow flight will arrive in London after 10 a.m., which is later than many business travelers like.

"The times are not what we would have preferred," Geraghty said, "but we also think they are times that are very workable for a large number of customers."

JetBlue is looking next at expanding into continental Europe, where it would run into more competition from American, Delta and United. Among the cities being considered are Paris and Amsterdam, Geraghty said.

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