

United plots big expansion of flights between US and Europe

April 26 2022, by David Koenig



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United Airlines plans to offer more flights across the Atlantic this summer than it did in 2019, a wager that international travel will bounce back strongly despite the persistent pandemic.

United said Tuesday that it will boost transatlantic passenger-carrying capacity by 25% over pre-pandemic levels to a combination of new destinations and old favorites such as London.

Patrick Quayle, the airline's senior vice president of international network, said it was the biggest single transatlantic increase in United's history.

"We will be the largest carrier across the transatlantic," he said.

Later this week, United will begin serving several new destinations that it named last fall, including Portugal's Azores and Spain's Canary Islands. The company is also adding flights—for example, jumping to 22 daily flights from the U.S. to London in late May.

Even before Tuesday's announcement, United had scheduled more passenger-carrying capacity to Europe in June and July than its closest rivals—15% more than Delta Air Lines and 36% more than American Airlines, according to data from research firm Cirium. Each carrier also has European partner airlines.

United's annual revenue from U.S.-Europe flights fell from \$7.4 billion before the pandemic to \$2.2 billion in 2020. It edged higher to \$3.4 billion last year, or 14% of total revenue.

There is risk to United's growth plans as international flying has lagged the recovery in domestic travel. Airlines blame that largely on a U.S. requirement that travelers test negative for COVID-19 within a day of boarding a U.S.-bound [flight](#). Some Americans are unwilling to risk being stranded overseas for several extra days if they contract the virus during their trip.

Despite intense lobbying by airlines, the Biden administration has given

no indication of lifting the testing requirement.

United had to scale back its summer plans—delaying three new routes—because of a pilot shortage and the grounding of several dozen Boeing 777 jets after the Pratt & Whitney engine on one of them blew apart over Denver in February 2021.

Quayle said Russia's invasion of Ukraine does not seem to be affecting bookings to Europe—something executives at other airlines have also said. United does not fly to Russia, Ukraine or neighboring countries. Its closest destination is Dubrovnik, Croatia. Quayle said, however, that there might be "a little bit" of weakness for connecting flights into Poland or Romania.

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