

First U.S. Commercial Flight to Cuba in More than 50 Years Due Next Wednesday



Havana, August 26 (RCH/AFP)-- The U.S. airline JetBlue will make the first direct commercial flight between the United States and Cuba in more than half a century next Wednesday.

The August 31st inaugural flight -- the first of its kind since 1961 -- is scheduled to take off from Fort Lauderdale, Florida and arrive in the central Cuban city of Santa Clara.

Next Wednesday's scheduled journey will kick off a new flight schedule that includes 110 daily trips, with 90 already authorized by both governments to nine Cuban airports, many of them in or near tourism hot-spots.

"The revival of regular direct flights is a positive step and a contribution to the process of improving relations between the two countries," Cuban Deputy Transportation Minister Eduardo Rodriguez told local media.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the airlines designated to start flights to the nine Cuban airports, not including Havana, are American Airlines, Frontier Airlines, JetBlue Airways, Silver

Airways, Southwest Airlines and Sun Country Airlines

Twenty daily routes to Havana are pending, with airlines requesting that U.S. authorities triple that number, according to reports.

With regards to Cuban airport security, the head of Cuba's Civil Aviation, Armando Garbalosa, noted recently that the local airports involved comply with world standards, including the standards of the United States. "There is nothing to fear," Garbalosa has stressed.

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Their flights will depart from Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Chicago, Minneapolis and Philadelphia, slated to land in the Cuban cities Camaguey, Cayo Coco, Cayo Largo, Cienfuegos, Holguin, Manzanillo, Matanzas, Santa Clara and Santiago de Cuba.

Projections on the U.S. side show there is an 850,000 passenger potential on an annual basis, a figure that in the U.S. some consider conservative due to Cuba's unexplored general makeup and tourism appeal.

Washington and Havana agreed in February to restore direct commercial flights, a major step in the way bilateral U.S.-Cuba scenario, following the December 17, 2014 announcement that the two countries were relaunching relations, after more than 50 years of nonexistence of those.

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