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**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027

Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:**

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**Ms H S Winkler (DA) to ask the Minister of Tourism:**

What (a) is the current status of various international airlines with regard to flying to the Republic post COVID-19, (b) engagements has she had with international airlines and (c) are the tangible outcomes of the specified engagements in increasing international arrivals? NW51E

**REPLY:**

1. **What is the current status of various international airlines with regard to flying to the Republic post COVID-19**

A significant number of airlines have restored their pre-Covid route networks within the Airports Company South Africa’s (ACSA) network. The restoration of International traffic continues to grow thus having a positive impact on the recovery at OR Tambo International Airport, King Shaka International Airport and Cape Town International Airport. Currently, a total of 44 international airlines are operating scheduled services at ACSA airports.

International air capacity is recovering positively compared to domestic supply. Supply for the next 12 months is 80% of the pre-pandemic supply overall, however, it is important to note the uneven recovery with the Middle East almost fully recovered while Asia and Australasia are just over half of the 2019 level of seats available to South Africa.

Fares are up across most of South Africa’s direct routes as fewer options are currently available to travellers. Most of South Africa’s key markets are serviced by one or two airlines which makes our destination a difficult seller’s market with consumers with limited alternatives available. Critical to improving the present recovery will be to defend the airlines already active in 2022 and creating incentives to attract new routes, or increased frequencies on existing route.

Some of the key priority markets i.e., Brazil***,*** India, Canada, Japan, and Russia have no direct airlift. In addition, Nigeria, Germany, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, and China are currently serviced by one airline, and adding airlines will have an impact on pricing and therefore arrivals and spend in South Africa from those markets.

1. **What engagements has she had with international airlines**

SA Tourism is now a registered member of the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) which is the leading representative airline organisation within Southern Africa, working together with leaders of the aviation industry and senior public and government officials on policy, regulatory, planning, operational, safety, security and financial matters affecting the overall profitability of the airlines and their continued sustainability.

There has also been improved engagement opportunities with international airlines through the various Air Access committees i.e., Cape Town Air Access, Durban Direct Air Access and Gauteng Air Access where the teams formulate possible incentive programmes for reducing operational costs.

Furthermore, SA Tourism in collaboration with provincial air access structures participates at the annual Routes World, an event that bring together airlines, airports, aviation stakeholders and destinations from across the world to build air services and global economic growth. The event provides a platform for conversations between senior network planners that will define the industry's global future. South Africa uses the platform as an an opportunity to entice airline route planners and positions SA as destination of choice as one of the key destinations for their future route network.

1. **What are the tangible outcomes of the specified engagements in increasing international arrivals**?

Some of the notable outcomes include the following:

* Following lengthy discussions, SA Tourism and Emirates Airlines concluded a collaborative MOU. The MOU is aimed at unlocking airlift opportunities to increase arrivals from key source markets including the markets where there is no direct access. Emirates Airlines have increased frequencies to Cape Town and will be increasing frequencies to Johannesburg in March bringing the number of flights to 42 a week in order to get close to pre pandemic levels.
* In collaboration with air access partners from the Airports Company of South Africa, the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, the Gauteng Tourism Authority, to Cape Town Tourism and WESGRO, Air Belgium launched a two-times-a-week service between Brussels, Johannesburg and Cape Town, effective from 14th September 2022.
* United Airlines restarted the Newark – Cape Town route much from 5 June 2022, with three flights a week with the added intention to increase frequencies as well.
* Qatar Airways MOU is at advanced stage and scheduled to be signed at Meetings Africa 2023).
* Furthermore, there are a few airlines who have chosen to operate on a seasonal calendar (6months) while assessing the situation with a view to maximise their frequencies.
* From the identified pipeline, we’ve received commitment from Latam in South America and Cathay Pacific in Hong Kong who will resume their flights by Quarter 4 of 2023.
* Air China's new direct flight from Beijing to Johannesburg.