

Transport

Budget Airlines Battle Over Ukraine Market



Lee Reaney

Making Lviv's airport truly international, Ryanair will fly to London, Berlin and Munich



KYIV – Ireland's Ryanair entered Ukraine's market with a bang Wednesday, announcing 11 routes from Lviv and Kyiv. Europe's largest low cost airline will jostle for market share with Wizz Air and other carriers that bet that Ukraine will win visa-free status this summer for Europe's Schengen zone.

Earlier this week, Hungary's Wizz Air, Eastern Europe's leading budget carrier, announced four new routes from Lviv and Kyiv, bringing its total Ukraine network to 21 destinations in eight countries. Ukraine International Airlines, the country's leading airline by flights, also announced this week new flights to Poland and Israel.



David O'Brien, chief commercial officer for Ryanair, started his Wednesday in Kyiv with Ukraine's Minister of Infrastructure, Volodymyr Omelyan (r). Here he announced flights from Kyiv to Eindhoven (Germany), London (Stansted), Manchester and Stockholm. (Photo: UNIAN: Vladimir Gontar)

Lviv to London, Berlin and Munich

With Ryanair, Lviv will get its long awaited flights to London and to Germany. These direct air links are expected to make it easier for Britons and Germans to invest in western Ukraine. Starting in October, Ryanair will have from two flights a week from Lviv to Berlin, Budapest, London Stansted, Munich Memmingen, and Eindhoven, Netherlands. It will operate three flights a week from Lviv to Krakow and Wroclaw in Poland.

From Kyiv, Ryanair will fly three times a week to Eindhoven and Manchester, four times a week to Stockholm Skavsta, and five times a week to London Stansted. Founded in 1985, the discount giant is now the most popular airline in Italy, Spain, Poland, Ireland and Central and Eastern Europe.

Bold Move

David O'Brien, Ryanair's chief commercial officer, said here that his airline sees big opportunities in tapping a large market with low air travel number, compared to the rest of Europe. On a per capita basis, he said, Dubliners fly by airplane five times as much as Kyiv residents.

"Kyiv has approximately 66 international European routes, while Dublin, which is on the other extremity of Europe, has 138. You can see the potential," he said. Ryanair could employ 387 people in Ukraine.

"There is a pretty large potential and fewer connections than there should be," he said at joint press conference with Ukraine's Infrastructure Minister Volodymyr Omelyan

Omelyan praised Ryanair's new Ukraine flight networks as "without exaggeration, a remarkable event for Ukraine. I am convinced that Ryanair will be another bridge that connects the infrastructure of Ukraine with Europe and will be a good signal for the world's major investors."

Earlier this week, representatives of Lviv's Danylo Halytzkyi International Airport, Lviv Tourism Alliance, and Lviv City Council announced a foundation to attract budget airlines, including Norwegian Air, Europe's third-largest low cost airline. Some cities attract airlines by guaranteeing a level of seat sales.

Lviv Airport CEO Tetiana Romanovska said four new airlines, in addition to Ryanair, are to launch flights this year from Lviv.



A Wizz Air jet stands at Lviv Danylo Halytskyi International Airport in 2015, just before the discount carrier's 2-year suspension of flights to Lviv. (UNIAN)

Ryanair bets on Lviv, the EU free trade boomtown

Ukraine marks Ryanair's 34th country and its easternmost market.

Interestingly, it calculates that it will get slightly more passengers for Lviv than for Kyiv, a city with four times the population.

Lviv is a more popular tourist destination. And located only 75 km from the Polish border, Lviv benefits more from the new free trade pact with the European Union. Ryanair expects to draw 260,000 passengers per year to Lviv, with seven routes to five countries, compared to 250,000 passengers to Kyiv, with four routes to three countries.

Ryanair flights will begin in late October. Seats are on sale for an introductory price of €19.99 if booked by midnight tonight, March 16.

Wizz Air adds four routes and a new Airbus

Anticipating Ryanair's move, Wizz Air said this week it is adding flights from Lviv to Berlin Schoenefeld in June and from Kyiv to Frankfurt-Hahn, Poznan, and Lublin, Poland in August. Tickets also start from €19.99.

The company announced it is adding a second Airbus A320 to its Kyiv base. The new routes mean Wizz Air will serve 21 destinations in eight countries from Ukraine, including summer flights to Copenhagen and Nuremberg.

2017 Shaping up as the year Ukraine air travel booms

In January and February, Ukrainian airlines carried more than 1.235 million passengers, a big year-on-year jump of 51.9%. International traffic on Ukrainian airlines rose by 55.2%. Figures from regional airports show big increases of 40 percent and more in overall passenger traffic. Much of the growth is catch up from the 2014-2015 recession and the loss of Russian destinations in October, 2015.

This summer, introduction of visa-free travel to the Schengen zone is expected to open a flood of Ukrainian tourists to Europe.

"The principal decision has already been made by the relevant bodies of the European Union," Hugh Mingarelli, head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, told RBK-Ukraine this week. "The visa free regime should enter into force before the end of June."

Airlines Inaugurate New City Pairs

Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) announced two new international routes this week from Vinnytsia, in central Ukraine. Initial roundtrip fares will be \$100 to Warsaw and \$190 to Tel Aviv.

Alitalia starts daily flights from Kyiv Zhuliany to Rome on May 2. LOT Polish Airlines introduced daily service from Zhuliany to Warsaw last month.

Turkey's Pegasus Airlines launched a flight from Zhuliany to Ankara two months ago. The company offers flights to Turkish airports from both Kyiv and Lviv. It hopes to expand to Kherson and Vinnytsya.

Other low-cost carriers operating in Ukraine include:

- Spain's Vueling: Kyiv to Barcelona and Rome from \$58.50
- Latvia's AirBaltic: Kyiv to Riga from \$105
- Azerbaijan's AzaJet: Kyiv or Lviv to Baku from \$52
- Greece's Aegean: Kyiv to Athens or Larnaca, Cyprus from \$117
- Italy's AirOne: Kyiv to Milan from \$94.50
- Norway's Norwegian Air: Kyiv to Oslo from \$138

Slider Photo: After Kyiv, Ryanair's David O'Brien (l) flew to Lviv, where he announced Ryanair will offer winter 2017-2018 flights from Lviv to seven new European cities. Then, he walked the city's historic center with Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi (r). (Photo: Lviv Today)

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