

Air New Zealand to service Coast

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AIR New Zealand will fly to the Gold Coast from next month, giving the city the full-service international airline it deserves after Qantas all but pulled out of the tourist strip four years ago.

The airline will cease using its budget carrier Freedom Air on March 30 and while some former Freedom routes will be cut, Gold Coast routes will remain the same.

Local tourism bosses said the decision enhanced the city's reputation as an international tourism destination.

The Air New Zealand tail on the Coolangatta tarmac also brings the city an association with the Star Alliance group which will connect the Gold Coast to the rest of the world.

"Being a Star Alliance port means passengers can check in at our airport and through connect to any other port, such as LA or Heathrow, serviced by a Star Alliance airline," said Gold Coast Airport chief operating officer Paul Donovan.

"Conversely, someone traveling from London to the Gold Coast can check their bags at Heathrow and not have to worry about them again until they arrive at our airport."

Gold Coast Tourism spokesman Ben Pole said the body was pleased Air New Zealand had committed to the city.

"We're gaining the premium tail into the Gold Coast," he said.

"This absolutely shows it is a commercially viable route.

"The fact Air New Zealand has shown confidence in the Gold Coast as a destination raises the level of recognition the city gets out of New Zealand."

Mr Pole said the airline's Star Alliance status was a coup because it linked the city with countries such as China, Japan and the United Kingdom. "Most of these are our key destinations."

He confirmed there would be no reduction in the number of services to and from New Zealand.

Mr Donovan said the move also marked the end of an era.

"The Gold Coast was the first international port for Freedom Air when it started flying in 1996 with just two connections a week to Hamilton and one to Palmerston North on New Zealand's North Island," he said.

"Today, we have 17 flights between the Gold Coast and New Zealand each week with Jetstar and Pacific Blue also providing regular services."

Air New Zealand will offer business class flights for about \$750 (one way) between the Gold Coast and New Zealand. There is also extended leg room in economy.

Air New Zealand will fly from Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton. One-way flights from the Coast to Christchurch were being advertised for as little as \$108 on the Air New Zealand website yesterday.

Other airlines appear to want a bigger piece of the Gold Coast, with the Paul Stoddart owned Ozjet taking the Palmerston North to Brisbane route which Air New Zealand did not want to pick up.

While it will fly to Brisbane, the airline has used the Gold Coast heavily in its marketing.