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# Southwest will offer daily flights to Las Vegas from Des Moines

The airline announces it will add the nonstop routes by Sept. 29.

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Southwest Airlines plans to fly to Las Vegas from Des Moines. Register file photo

Written by **Marco Santana**

Southwest Airlines officials are ready to gamble on a second daily destination out of Des Moines, and airport officials hope it means a future jackpot of more routes.

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The low-fare airline announced Monday it would offer nonstop daily flights to Las Vegas starting Sept. 29, nearly one year to the day after Southwest made its Des Moines debut.

"As a whole, we are very happy with that market," Southwest spokeswoman Michelle Agnew said of Des Moines. "It's vibrant. We have great contacts. (Executive Director) Don Smithey is amazing, and the operation he is running there is great."

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Southwest first arrived in Des Moines with a daily flight to Chicago that started Sept. 30. Agnew would not talk about revenue numbers for that flight but said the company had wanted to add a second flight out of Des Moines almost immediately.

However, the challenge was expanding without adding aircraft to its fleet, she said. Although Agnew would not say whether the Vegas flight means more routes in the future, she did say she felt Des Moines was "sitting pretty" in Southwest's service area now that it has connectors at its two largest hubs.

"Our international and network planning teams are always looking for the opportunity where the best revenue possibility will be," she said. "It looks good that we are able to offer and already increase service. I don't know if we'll introduce more routes, but it might be an option."

Allegiant Air also serves Las Vegas with direct flights from Des Moines. Allegiant, which started its route in June of 2003, flies six days a week to McCarran International Airport and serves three other cities from Des Moines, including Los Angeles and Orlando, Fla.

Southwest's flights will run daily and, according to Southwest's website, will start at \$125 for a one-way trip.

Las Vegas is Southwest's second-largest hub, behind Chicago, and serves 17 airports along the West Coast, including Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Smithey said that was one of the biggest scores of the announcement.

"There is a tremendous amount of opportunity here," Smithey said. Southwest "is encouraged by our flights to Chicago and this market. We are growing."

Smithey said he would continue to push for Southwest to eventually add a direct flight to St. Louis.

Industry experts say the move shows Southwest's Chicago flight has clearly been successful.


"By initiating a second route this year, Southwest is making a very important statement that the Des Moines market has worked well for them," said airport industry analyst Sheri Ernico, of the California-based LeighFisher agency. "I am delighted to see that the community has supported their Chicago service, which has provided competition and kept fares in check."

Officials with the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau said that fare competition will benefit them.

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into a major city,” bureau president and CEO Greg Edwards said. “We are not only able to boast about it when pitching convention groups, but it also gives us further exposure into the airlines market. A major factor in a convention planner’s decision on bringing a national convention is airfare, and this could drive rates down.”

Airport officials have partially credited the “Southwest Effect” with its record-breaking 2012, during which it saw 2 million passengers for the first time.

“Their presence in Des Moines continues to have a positive impact on airline services both in pricing, available seats and additional flights,” said Gene Meyer, president of the Greater Des Moines Partnership.

**Where would you most like to see Southwest fly to direct from Des Moines?**

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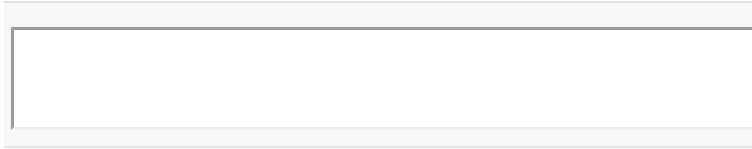
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