

St Helena Air Services

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Q. Who is Comair?

A. Comair is a commercial airline that has successfully operated in South Africa since 1946. It is best known for operating British Airways flights in the Southern African region, and for its low cost airline, kulula.com.

Q. Why choose this airline?

A. Comair is an established airline with a long and successful history, and was chosen as St Helena's air service provider following a comprehensive tender process. Comair will provide unparalleled access for Saints to the outside world with links through Johannesburg to London, Paris, Frankfurt, New York, Buenos Aires, Dubai, Hong Kong, Sydney and many more international and regional destinations.



Q. Where are they headquartered?

A. Comair's headquarters are in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Q. What does the agreement with Comair commit them to?

A. The agreement commits Comair to providing a weekly service each Saturday from Johannesburg to St Helena and back. The aircraft will be capable of carrying up to 120 passengers and a limited amount of cargo.

Q. What term does the agreement stipulate?

A. The agreement will be for an initial period of three years, with potential for up to two extensions of two years each, giving a maximum term of up to seven years.

Q. When will the air service to St Helena commence?

A. The first scheduled flight from Johannesburg to St Helena is earmarked for late February 2016. Naturally, this date is dependent on the final certification and operational readiness of St Helena Airport.

Q. Which aircraft type will Comair use for St Helena services?

A. Comair proposes to use a brand new Boeing 737-800 aircraft, fitted out in British Airways livery.

Q. Can Comair carry special needs passengers, including wheelchair customers and stretcher cases?

A. Yes, Comair provides for the carriage of special needs passengers, including but not limited to wheelchairs, unaccompanied minors and customers with other special needs.

Comair will provide for the transportation of Medivac cases, stretcher cases through the certification process, updating its policies for this specific route accordingly.

Q. Does this mean that patients will now be treated in Johannesburg?

A. This is still being considered and it is too early to say at this point. Johannesburg has world class hospitals, and this will need to be weighed against transferring patients on a short connecting flight from Johannesburg to Cape Town.

Further information will follow.

Q. When will the first Comair test flight take place?

A. Any requirement for test flights will be set by the regulator. Comair will develop a flight simulator for St Helena to assist with pilot training.

Q. Is a visa required to visit St Helena?

A. No, but visitors to St Helena will wish to view the SHG website at www.sainthelena.gov.sh

Flights

Q. What will be the Hub?

A. Flights will originate from OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. OR Tambo Airport is the main international airport in South Africa and provides much better connections to other destinations than the smaller Cape Town Airport can offer.

Q. How many flights per week?

A. Initially flights will be once a week. Increased frequency will be considered if there is sufficient demand.

Q. Has the flight schedule been finalised?

A. The exact timing of the flight schedule is still under discussion, but there will be an early morning departure from Johannesburg to St Helena, a one hour turnaround time in St Helena and an arrival into Johannesburg in the early evening. This timing will allow seamless connections to a range of international destinations.

Q. What is the flight time between Johannesburg and St Helena?

A. The flight time from Johannesburg to St Helena is estimated at five and a half hours and from St Helena to Johannesburg at four hours and forty five minutes. The difference in times is caused by the normal prevailing winds.

Q. How many passengers can the aircraft accommodate?

A. The aircraft has a full seating capacity of around 162 seats, but the number of passengers on flights to and from St Helena is likely to be limited to around 120, due to weight requirements when landing at St Helena Airport.

Q. How much cargo can the aircraft carry?

A. The aircraft has no palletised cargo capability, but a limited amount of cargo can be loaded by hand. But depending on the number of passengers, the aircraft can carry from around one tonne to around five tonnes of cargo.

Q. What will my baggage allowance be?

A. Club Class (Business) – 2 bags @ up to 23kg each
Traveller Class (Economy) – 1 bag @ up to 23kg

Q. What will be the flight turnaround time at St Helena Airport?

A. It will take approximately one hour to turn around the flight at St Helena Airport and return to Johannesburg.

Q. What day of the week will flights operate?

A. Comair will provide a single weekly return flight on a Saturday.

Q. Will passengers from St Helena be able to catch connecting flights at Johannesburg on the same day?

A. Yes.

For inbound flights to St Helena, and depending on passengers' time of arrival in Johannesburg, overnight accommodation may be necessary. There are a number of hotels within minutes of OR Tambo airport.

Q. When will bookings open for sale and where can I buy my tickets?

A. Bookings will open for sale towards the end of this year, 2015. A ticket can be purchased by a variety of means, including ba.com, Comair's call centre and international and online travel agencies. Arrangements will also be put in place for purchase on St Helena. Further details on purchase options will be available later this year.

Q. Is there any guidance on the price of a return ticket between Johannesburg and St Helena?

A. SHG, in consultation with Comair, is in the process of determining the final pricing structures. The aim is to provide very competitive prices for Saints and visitors wishing to travel to and from St Helena.

Indicative return ticket prices are estimated to be around £500 to £600. But this is subject to agreement and confirmation following discussions between Comair and SHG. And ticket prices will vary, as is normal, subject to time of booking, demand and seasonal variations.

Q. What if I want to take a particular item on the plane?

A. This will be guided by the conditions of carriage of Comair. We will be publishing general guidance prior to tickets going on sale.

Other

Q. Will there be services to Ascension Island?

A. It is unlikely that Comair will provide services to Ascension Island, due to a combination of reasons, including aircraft availability and the hours that pilots are allowed to fly. The Ascension Island Government is currently looking at options for separate provision of return services from St Helena to Ascension.

More information on this will follow.

Q. Will this mean that Saints on Ascension and the Falklands will need to travel to the UK then to Johannesburg before they can travel to St Helena?

A. This would be the route if anyone on Ascension or the Falkland Islands chose to use the scheduled weekly flight via Johannesburg.

But as stated above, Ascension Island Government is investigating options for the provision of services from Ascension to St Helena.

Note also that the RMS St Helena will serve Ascension and St Helena until June 2016 (4 months after commercial flights to St Helena are due to commence).

Further information will follow.

Q. Will there be direct flights to and from the UK?

A. Flights to the UK will require a change of aircraft at OR Tambo International Airport. There are many airlines operating out of this airport that can provide onward travel to London at very competitive prices, including British Airways, Emirates, Virgin and South African Airways.

Q. What happens if the Comair aircraft has a technical problem?

A. Contingency plans are in place and Comair would, if necessary, provide a backup plane from its fleet.

In addition, Comair will keep a stock of the most commonly required spare parts at St Helena Airport, ensuring that routine repairs can be rectified on St Helena. Comair will have an engineer on each flight capable of carrying out these repairs.

SHG
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