

Media | Release

China Southern Airlines begins historic new service to South Island

Embargoed until 5pm Wednesday December 16

Asia's largest airline has begun an historic year-round service between Guangzhou and Christchurch, with the first Dreamliner carrying several VIPs landing just before 5pm.

China Southern Airlines, in partnership with Christchurch Airport and the South Island tourism industry, will operate the direct service three times a week from today.

Christchurch Airport Chief Executive Malcolm Johns says history is being made because China Southern Airlines was the first Chinese carrier to fly to New Zealand and is now the first to fly to the South Island.

"Over the past decade we have watched China Southern Airlines steadily build Guangzhou into one of the world's important international airport hubs. In doing so, the airline has also successfully built the Canton route, connecting Australia and New Zealand to China, Asia and Europe through Guangzhou.

"With this new service, Christchurch Airport, Christchurch city and the South Island have an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the Canton Route, bringing Chinese visitors here and helping South Islanders travel to China and beyond.

"It comes after two years of very focused work by the team at Christchurch Airport, working in China with the team at China Southern Airlines, to make this service a reality and I am exceedingly proud of how our team has represented the city and South Island on the international stage to achieve this outcome. Christchurch Airport has to compete hard for international air services as it is our share of international visitors using us as a gateway which provides the opportunity for growth given the size of our local population.

"This is a milestone day for the South Island. The new service offers more than 70,000 seats in its first year, which means an estimated growth in visitor spend of more than \$100M across all southern regions.

"Government statistics show that when Christchurch is the entry point for international visitors, every South Island region benefits, because visitors on average leave around 85% of their spending in the South Island. This drops to less than 35% when the entry point is not Christchurch.

"Continually increasing numbers of Chinese visitors into the South Island through our gateway airport highlight how welcome this new airline service will be for travellers, as well as giving air freight needs a fresh option for access to the important Asian markets."

The visitors on the inaugural flight were welcomed with a "water arch" over the plane after it touched down, a formal Maori welcome, Canterbury's Cabinet Ministers and ten Mayors from around the South Island in attendance, short speeches and a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Christchurch Airport continues to be New Zealand's fastest growing point of entry for Chinese visitors with air services beyond Australia. While national figures grew 33% over the first 10 months in 2015, Christchurch Airport's numbers grew 45%.

About China Southern Airlines - the largest airline in Asia, in terms of fleet size as well as the number of passengers carried. The airline has more than 90,000 employees and 64 offices around the world, including offices in Auckland, Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo, Vancouver, Los Angeles, New York, London, Amsterdam, Paris and Dubai. In 2014, China Southern Airlines was ranked as the world's third largest airline, measured in terms of the number of passengers carried. It is a member of Sky Team, the world's second largest airline alliance, so China Southern Airlines passengers enjoy a global reach of 1052 international destinations in 177 countries and regions.

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Christchurch Airport – bringing the world South

Christchurch Airport is the natural gateway to the South Island, which has long been the brand engine room of New Zealand.

It is the busiest and most strategic southern air connection to the world's trade and tourism markets, having welcomed six million passengers in the past year.

The airport is a major driver of the South Island regional economy, with some 6000 personnel working on the airport campus making it the largest site of employment in the South Island. It is one of the partners in the "South" initiative, which sees all 15 regional tourism organisations working collegially to promote the South Island.

Christchurch Airport's new integrated terminal was completed in April 2013 and is a factor in the airport consistently being rated by an independent international quarterly travellers' survey as the best airport in Australia and New Zealand.

Visit christchurchairport.co.nz for more information.