

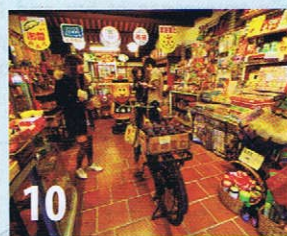
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787 kicks off a new era

By Kim Thomson

VIRGIN Atlantic's maiden 787 Dreamliner flight from London in the UK to Atlanta in the US was named Birthday Girl to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the airline's inaugural flight across the Atlantic. TTN's publishing director, Kim Thomson, was aboard the flight and here is an excerpt of her interview with the airline's chief executive officer, Craig Kreeger.

What does this new 787 Dreamliner mean for Virgin Atlantic?

This is a defining moment and time for our company.

We have been through a period of recovering our financial performance, while still focusing on our customers, and now we look forward to a really bright future.

This aeroplane literally and symbolically represents the transition from where we have been to the next step.

The 787 Dreamliner will be a great aeroplane for customers, it's really comfortable. It has great features every 787 has and it has some unique Virgin Atlantic features such as the mood lighting and the bar.

But in the end, the one thing that will always be unique to us is our service – this is the only 787 where you are served by Virgin Atlantic people. That will really differentiate us.

What kind of long-term savings are you looking at with this model?

On a fuel basis, relative to the A340-600, which this



The Upper Class Bar aboard Virgin Atlantic's 787 Dreamliner

aircraft is mostly replacing, it saves about 32 per cent on fuel – great for the airline and the environment. It is also about 60 per cent quieter than the planes it is replacing.

The first route this aircraft will service is Boston, and then some other key transatlantic routes. Where else are you looking at?

We haven't made decisions yet, but in the end, when we have 21 of these aircraft in about four years from now, it will represent approximately three-fourths of the flights out of Heathrow for us and so virtually all of our Heathrow markets over time will get 787s.

There is an issue we know on slots out of London's Heathrow and Gatwick. In light of this, will there be new destinations not just for the 787 but for Virgin Atlantic?

One of the great things



Kreeger... Virgin Atlantic is about service

about being an airline instead of, say, a hotel company, is that we can take the aeroplanes and put them somewhere else. So the answer is, of course, there could be changes to our network, and we will always be looking at what is the best place to fly to serve the most customers most successfully, but we have just been through that exercise and we are confident that the network we now have is one that will work.

Over time, things will change and there are many markets that I would love to see us flying in, markets such as Beijing as Sir Richard Branson indicated, or Sao Paulo, for example, but at this point the

places we have put the planes look like they are going to do better and serve more people; so that is where we will keep them for now.

What does Atlanta as a destination mean for Virgin?

Atlanta is a very vibrant city, a lot of corporate headquarters have re-located here as the South has really grown, but as much as that, what Atlanta offers us is 160-plus new destinations that we can serve.

So we don't think a majority of our customers who originate in London will end up in Atlanta, many will, of course, but a majority will connect to all these different points around the US, Latin America and the Caribbean that we today don't serve easily. So Atlanta is both a great destination in its own right, but this is the world's largest airport, and it is a great hub to make connections in for our customers.

The Dubai route you indicated consists mostly of London-based passengers. How do you compete in this market with regional carriers?

When I think about what Virgin Atlantic is all about, it's not just about selling the UK, of course, but our brand resonates biggest in the UK where we have many destinations as opposed to an end point where we only fly to London.

Markets where the British love to fly are markets we need to serve and Dubai is one of those places. We have a pretty good loyal customer

Kids decide, grandparents pay to play

NINETY-ONE per cent of respondents say that they try to take a multigenerational trip every year, it has emerged in a new survey conducted by Preferred Hotel Group in the US. Children are calling the shots these days and grandparents are increasingly funding the cost of the trips.

"While the growth of multigenerational travel has been a buzz in the hospitality industry for several years, shifts in the economy, new technology, and even contemporary parenting have had a measurable impact on how multigenerational travel is packaged, planned, taken and paid for," says Lindsey Ueberroth, president and chief executive officer of Preferred Hotel Group, a global collection of independent hotels and resorts.

The study confirmed a continued desire to "spend more time with family on vacation" – a trend that first emerged as a primary motivation for leisure travel in the aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11. According to the study, this motivation is now amplified by the frenetic pace of contemporary life and corresponding sense of guilt many parents feel about not having enough time to spend with their children.

As a result, travellers who have taken a multigenerational trip previously are "likely" or "very likely" to plan another domestic (86 per cent) or international (48 per cent) multigenerational vacation during the next two years.

Among the key findings:

• **Traditional travel agents make it work** – Multigenerational travellers use the services of traditional travel agents much more often than other leisure travellers. During the past year, 38 per cent used the services of a traditional travel agent to plan a multigenerational vacation, and 41 per cent intend to do so during the next two years – both percentages

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The Queen Mary 2 docked at historic Oslo

From Southampton to Oslo on Queen Mary 2

By Leonie Trubshoe

Catch the next ship

The next Queen Mary 2 world cruise begins from Southampton on January 10 this year, travelling through Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

WITH the fast pace of life in the GCC and Europe, more people are looking for the ultimate relaxation when travelling to the UK either to see relatives or simply to indulge in shopping over the holiday periods. For this reason, cruising has taken on a new light offering the luxury of five-star service, an array of entertainment options and fine dining all while relaxing at sea.

The Queen Mary 2, flagship of the Cunard line and the biggest ocean liner in the world, is not only known for its Trans-Atlantic crossings (having recently celebrated its 10th anniversary of the iconic journey from Southampton to New York) but also offers a range of shorter voyages along the European and Scandinavian ports.

With Emirates flying daily into the Norwegian capital of Oslo, this option has proved popular for those seeking a comfortable taste of the icy comfort, or a brief brush with Viking history.

Known for its ability to go "the extra mile" for its passengers, the Queen Mary 2 can make special arrangements for its Middle East and Muslim passengers given enough advance notice, says Glenn Millway, food and beverage manager. Not only are special dietary requirements catered to, including the provision of halal food, but during such periods as Ramadan, a separate dining area can be set up for Muslim guests so they are able to dine outside of the usual early and late sittings normally offered.

The on-board Canyon Ranch Spa, one of the most luxurious spa groups in the world, also will make special arrangements to fit in around the needs and requirements of all passengers, including Muslim women who may wish to use the spa outside of the hours usually frequented by both male and female passengers. Spa director Amanda Wilson says that private hours can be arranged for women-only groups wishing to indulge in privacy.

The next Queen Mary 2 world cruise begins from Southampton on January 10, 2015 travelling through Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where GCC passengers can embark, or disembark if they wish only to travel a part of the journey.

For families travelling together, there is the option of adjoining suites, connecting state rooms, or a range of classes to

suit both travellers and staff if required.

The range of accommodation is topped by the five Grand Duplexes, which include two staff – a butler and an assistant; two walk-in wardrobes; three bathrooms – one for guests, an en-suite and a full-size bathroom with a spa bath/jacuzzi from where guests can look through the full-size window at the ocean; a range of entertainment and/or work options including iPad, games console, television, DVD player, binoculars to watch the dolphins and whales spotted during the journey, treadmill for private exercise; and also a private food preparation kitchen to cater for snacks and meals and that's not to mention the private deck to sunbathe giving all the privacy such a suite commands.

There is also a full Kids Club catering for children from babies to teenagers with supervised play and entertainment through to meal-times and a structured dinner schedule to fit in with parents' plans. And even the possibility – with enough notice – to charter the whole ship, complete with its 1,253 crew.

Tours are available in every port and every cruise from the two to three day journey from Hamburg to either Southampton or Oslo, through to the longer 26 night breaks. These short cruises are offered on all three Cunard luxury liners in The Norwegian Fjords; The Baltic Sea; Around Britain; The Caribbean; New York, New England and Canada; The Mediterranean; Iberia and the Canaries; not to mention the various legs of the World Cruises.

For those who want to see these distant places, cruising on the luxurious Queen Mary 2 offers a true holiday without the stress of a long flight, as well as the bonus of continuous food service, spa luxury, music and entertainment, a cinema with current movies, games, swimming pools, lectures and classes on everything from dancing to computers and even a planetarium. And expats heading back home, can take their canine friends on board to be looked after by their own Kennel Master. ■

Dreamliner brings good fortune

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base that we market to, who knows what our product is like and love our brand and we are going to keep selling to them.

We would like to expand that over time, but I think by being true to Virgin Atlantic, the product, our service, and our people is what drives people to choose to fly with us and we need to keep making sure we keep upping our game.

It is a competitive business, it always will be and what differentiates us is that experience.

What kind of revenues are you expecting for 2014?

We don't really talk about the financial numbers in detail from a planning perspective, but we are approximately a £2.5 billion to £3 billion (\$3.8 billion to 4.6 billion) business.

We are not growing a lot, we are changing/upgrading our aircraft, but it is one for one replacements, so our revenues will be in that same level, but the key for us will be to be

"One of the great things about being an airline instead of, say, a hotel company, is that we can take the aeroplanes and put them somewhere else"

more profitable as well as to continue to up our game.

The travel trade is still a significant part of Virgin Atlantic's booking channel. Is there anything new you can communicate to the trade?

One of the things about an airline of our size and brand strength is that we recognise that customers

have a lot of different ways to make bookings and we need to be appealing to customers through whatever channel they book. The trade represents a significant majority of our revenue and we are extremely focused on making sure we work successfully with them.

Lastly, what is the best part about working for Virgin?

That is a really easy answer and that is the people, it is a culture of a company where we hire people that like to be around others and it is therefore a very welcoming culture.

How does it differ from your previous company, American Airlines?

It is a much smaller company and, as a consequence, I feel like I get to know people a lot easier and a lot more of them with a company of this size.

It has a true sense of fun and I think it doesn't take itself seriously and that combination appeals to me. ■

Multigenerational travel here to stay



Ellenborough Park in the Cotswolds (UK), is part of the Preferred Hotel Group and a great place for horseback riding and walking breaks

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are twice as high as the incidence of traditional travel agent usage observed among all other leisure travellers.

• **Children relish planning** – 40 per cent of both grandparents and parents say their children "actively participate in or influence vacation planning," specifically with respect to daily activities (77 per cent) and deciding which destinations to visit (62 per cent). Almost half (49 per cent) of all multigenerational travellers agree their grandchildren influence the selection of the hotel or resort.

• **Grandparents pay to play** – grandparents, more so than parents (35 per cent as opposed to 25 per cent), are inclined to pay for multigenerational trips to "help family members enjoy a vacation they otherwise could not afford."

• **Facebook matters** – Facebook is the most popular social site for multigenerational travellers, with 73 per cent acknowledging they have a page posted on this site. And posts in social media exert more influence than ever on this segment's

decision-making, with 40 per cent saying they have "selected a destination based at least partially on the information, photos or videos they viewed on social media websites" and 25 per cent agreeing they have "selected a travel service supplier based on exposure to the same content."

• **Same time next year** – Among travellers who took a multigenerational vacation last year, 77 per cent agreed that taking such a vacation "is something they try to do every year" – a sentiment that is particularly true for Millennials (91 per cent) and Gen Xers (80 per cent).

The Future

As the number of grandparents continues to increase – this demographic segment is growing at twice the overall population growth rate – multigenerational travel will also continue to grow in size and influence. According to the US Census, there will be 80 million grandparents by 2020, accounting for nearly one-in-three adults. In addition, these grandparents are widely expected to work longer, have higher

incomes, and spend more on discretionary products and services than their predecessors.

This demographic shift is reflected in the composition of active US travellers. Specifically, the number of American travellers who have reached the life stage of "grandparent" (25 per cent) has also risen to the highest level recorded in contemporary travel marketing research. Within this demographic group, 35 per cent took at least one vacation with their grandchildren during the previous year (41 per cent for affluent grandparents living in households with an annual income over \$250,000).

Across its worldwide portfolio of independent luxury hotels, Preferred Hotel Group has 283 hotels and resorts that are Preferred Family Certified. Ranging from oceanfront resorts to hotels in close proximity to theme parks to iconic hotels across Europe, Africa and Asia, the properties offer amenities, facilities, programmes, entertainment and services specifically tailored to multigenerational travellers. ■