

MANCHESTER TO BEIJING: FIRST DIRECT FLIGHT OUTSIDE OF LONDON TO CHINA TAKES OFF

- Four times a week service with Hainan Airlines commences and is welcomed by Northern Powerhouse Minister
 - Only direct, scheduled flight in the UK outside of London
- The 10.5 hour journey shaves hours off travel for the North to the Far East
- Journey time savings worth £5m a year, and an economic value of £250m over the next decade
 - UK businesses, tourism bodies and universities champion new route
 - Hainan Airlines is one of only seven airlines with a 5* Skytrax rating

10th June 2016 – Today marks a major milestone in the drive to create a Northern Powerhouse, as the first ever direct, scheduled flight from anywhere outside of London to mainland China launches, from Manchester Airport.

Also hailed as a significant moment for UK aviation, the Hainan Airlines service to Beijing takes off from Manchester Airport today (June 10).

Announced in October 2015 by the President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Xi Jinping, the four times a week route will link Manchester and Beijing, opening up a wealth of trade and tourism opportunities.

The flights will provide a direct connection for the first time, giving the 100,000 passengers travelling each year between the two cities the convenience of direct scheduled services.

The Manchester-Beijing route is worth at least £250 million in economic benefits to the UK over the next decade. Two-thirds of this will be felt directly in the Northern economy in terms of increased jobs, economic activity and tourism. By providing a non-stop service, the new route will also generate journey time savings worth £5 million every year for business passengers and avoid the inconvenience of changing planes at another airport.

It has been welcomed by businesses, universities and tourism bodies across the whole of the North (see case studies below).

Hainan Airlines is China's largest privately owned airline, and since 2011 it has won five consecutive global Skytrax five-star airline ratings. It is only one of only seven airlines in the world to currently have this accolade. Last year it was also rated as the Best Airline in China, by Skytrax.

Transport Minister Andrew Jones said: "The new route between Manchester and Beijing is a testament to the strength of the Northern Powerhouse, opening up the North of England to investment while benefitting the many thousands of people who currently travel between the cities each year.

"Not only will this add an estimated quarter of a billion pounds to the local economy over the next decade, it will open new opportunities for businesses in both countries, boost tourism between China and the UK and will encourage students in both countries to experience studying in a new and different culture. This is an exciting new development for Manchester, the North of England and the UK."

Ken O'Toole, CEO of Manchester Airport said: "Today's inaugural flight with Hainan Airlines is clear evidence of the vital economic role that Manchester Airport plays both nationally and regionally within the UK.

"Providing a direct link between the two cities unlocks significant trade and investment opportunities, which will serve as a shot in the arm to efforts to create a reenergised Northern economy.

"This direct route will also have a significant impact on inbound tourism across the whole of the North.

"And the early indications are good, with summer load factors currently averaging out at more than 80%.

"Finally, it will also deliver a boost to universities, both in terms of providing a vital service for Chinese students and their families, and when it comes to finding commercial applications for the world-leading research being carried out by these institutions."

Xie Haoming, President of Hainan Airlines, said: "We are delighted to commence our direct scheduled service to Manchester. Beijing to Manchester's inaugural outbound and inbound flight load factors have reached over 90%, which is incredibly strong for a new route.

“A great number of travel agencies expressed their strong interest in working with Hainan Airlines, based upon the new route, which is encouraging for future travel between the two cities.

“With the ‘Golden Age’ of travel starting between China and the UK, it is foreseeable that the market between the two countries is entering a prosperous period.

“I am sure the route between Manchester and Beijing will be incredibly popular and we look forward to developing our relationship with the city.”

Sir Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council, said: "Manchester's first route to mainland China is a hugely significant development in our growing links with the world's fastest growing economy. The better connected Manchester is nationally and internationally, the better placed we will be to compete on a world stage, attracting jobs, investment and visitors. This route further strengthens Manchester Airport's status and Manchester's position as a global hub."

Rhys Whalley, Executive Director of the Manchester-China Forum, said:

“Today's launch of a direct route connecting Manchester and Beijing is a significant milestone for the entire region. Given its importance as a catalyst in boosting commercial, tourism, cultural and academic links, securing a direct route into Mainland China has been the Manchester China Forum's number one priority; so to be able to celebrate the launch of a non-stop service to Beijing today is a proud moment.

“Since the Forum's establishment, relations between Manchester and China have strengthened significantly - as evidenced by President Xi Jinping's visit during last year's State Visit. Today's route launch is another major milestone and will continue to drive investment into the city-region as well as open up trade opportunities to what is the world's most important emerging market.

“Hainan Airlines' decision to operate this scheduled route out of Manchester, the gateway to the North, is recognition of the scale of growing traffic and collaboration between our two regions and will be a huge boost to businesses, students and tourists looking for a more convenient connections between Beijing and the North of England.”

The four-weekly service departs on Friday, Saturday, Monday and Wednesday, and will be served by an Airbus A330-300. The cabin will have 32 business class seats and 260 in economy. Return fares start from £487.

For more information see www.manchesterairport.co.uk / www.hainanairlines.com

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For more information contact the Manchester Airport Press Office on 0161 489 2700 / press.office@manairport.co.uk

Notes to editors:

Manchester Airport

Manchester Airport is the global gateway for the North of the UK and the largest airport outside London with over 210 destinations served by 70 airlines.

MAG serves more than 50 million passengers and handles almost half a million tonnes of air freight every year through its ownership and operation of the airports of London Stansted, Manchester, East Midlands and Bournemouth airports.

Hainan Airlines

Hainan Airlines Co., Ltd., founded in January 1993, is committed to providing passengers with safe, comfortable and seamless air travel. Since then, Hainan Airlines has transformed itself from a Chinese local airline into a large multinational group with businesses covering the aviation, industrial, financial, tourism and logistics sectors as well as a number of world-class brands – the HNA Group. In July, 2015, the HNA Group joined the list of Fortune 500 companies for the first time. Now a subsidiary of HNA, Hainan Airlines has been honored as a SKYTRAX 5-Star Airline for five years in a row. In addition, the airline has maintained an excellent safety record for 23 years since its inception and is ranked among the world's top 10 safest airlines by JACDEC.

Hainan Airlines has a young and modern fleet mainly composed of two-class Boeing 737s, 787s and Airbus 330s configured for both passengers and cargo. Aircraft provide economy class seating and international premium business class or domestic first class cabins.

The airline has, to date, launched over 500 inbound and outbound routes connecting passengers to more than 90 cities around the world, with comprehensive coverage across China and extending into Asia, Europe, Australia and North America.

For more information, please visit Hainan Airlines' official global website www.hainanairlines.com.

Business commentary on the announcement of the new route between Manchester and Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK)

General:

VisitEngland/VisitBritain

VisitEngland/VisitBritain Chief Executive Sally Balcombe said:

"We want to deliver a world-class visitor experience for Chinese visitors and making it easier for them to get here is a crucial part of our competitive tourism offer. We want to double the spend from Chinese visitors to £1 billion by 2020 and Hainan's new direct route to Manchester will not only make it easier for visitors to come and explore regional Britain but help us to deliver our ambitious plans for growth for this rapidly expanding market."

Stats according to VisitBritain:

- The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics for 2015 show stellar growth from China with visits up 46 per cent on 2014 to 270,000, and spend up 18% to £586 million, moving China into the UK's top 10 most valuable inbound markets.

Deloitte

Richard Bell, managing partner for regional markets at Deloitte, said:

"The launch of a direct air route to China is key to unlocking more of the potential trade and investment opportunities that exist between the UK and The Far East.

"In particular, access to this route will provide greater scope for businesses across the North to explore the potential of the Chinese market for export, whilst at the same time allowing Chinese visitors an additional gateway into the UK.

"We have already seen the appetite for greater collaboration between the regions and China with strong links being formed between northern UK and Chinese universities, in addition to Chinese investment in key development projects, such as Thorpe Park and Sheffield Digital Campus."

"Having a direct air route should now make such cooperation easier to achieve - but on an even larger scale."

North Wales:

North Wales Tourism

Jim Jones, Managing Director of North Wales Tourism said:

"Everyone in North Wales warmly welcomes our Chinese friends and visitors. We are delighted with the news that Hainan Airlines will be flying direct four times a week into Manchester Airport.

"Manchester Airport is the international gateway for North Wales, which has so much to offer the Chinese visitor. Beautiful landscape, gardens, steeped in heritage and culture, with some of the leading adventure attractions in Europe. Once the new flights start in June it will be much easier for inbound Chinese tourists to access our lovely part of Great Britain."

Bangor University

Frank Fitzmaurice, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications at Bangor University said:

"Bangor University is widely recognised for our internationalisation and for the diversity of our campus, with almost 2,000 students from over 70 countries accounting for over 15% of our student numbers. As an example, we have grown our relationships in China to the point where we now operate a campus in Changsha with our Chinese partner university CSUFT, which further strengthens our position in that country.

"Manchester airport provides us with a vital link to these countries around the world. Combined with fast access via train and motorway, it means that our campus in Bangor in north-west Wales is within easy reach for our students from all over the world. This plays no small part in our successful marketing of the Bangor University brand internationally"

North West:

CBI

Damian Waters, CBI North West Regional Director said:

"Access to key growth markets is vital to the future prosperity of the North West. China is already a key market for many businesses in the region, while many others will be seeking to forge trade links over there in the coming months and years. Because of this, having a direct flight service from the region's primary international gateway to Beijing is of strategic importance and should deliver real economic benefits to all parts of the North West."

IOD

Mike Perls, chair of IoD North West, said

"Transport links are vital in boosting trade and direct flights are particularly important for Northern exporters. China may be the world's second biggest economy, but it is only 6th biggest destination for British goods and services – we export nearly the same amount to Belgium and Luxembourg. There is huge potential for Northern firms in Asia. We excel in financial and professional services, which will be increasingly attractive to these markets and the Manchester-China Forum highlights other key strengths. This isn't just one way. The recent Chinese investments in the Northern Powerhouse asset base shows the potential for international trade that easier access to Asia will unlock."

Marketing Cheshire

Katrina Michel, chief executive of Marketing Cheshire, said:

"Having a direct link to mainland China will deliver a significant boost to Cheshire in a number of ways. Firstly, we know we are home to a wealth of tourist attractions that will be appealing to visitors from the Far East, such as the city of Chester, Chester Zoo, Jodrell Bank, Tatton Park and Cheshire Oaks, to name just a few.

"In addition, the route will be key to our efforts to boost trade between Cheshire businesses and China, as well as attracting inward investment."

Baxi - Preston

David Pinder, CEO of Baxi in Preston said:

"As a business with operations in both the UK and the Far East, the importance of direct connectivity cannot be underestimated. Being able to access a non-stop service to mainland China from an airport within easy reach of our North West/Midlands base(s) will deliver a range of business benefits in terms of productivity and efficiency, which in turn helps drive growth. We hope to see the service go from strength-to-strength in the coming months and years."

ChargePoint Technology - Liverpool

ChargePoint Technology supply precision containment valves to some of the biggest pharmaceutical names across the globe for the development of medicines and vaccines from their premises Liverpool. The USA accounts for almost a quarter of their annual revenue but due to demand for British technology to improve standards of drug processing in China, the firm are seeing rapid growth in the East. The company has an office in Hong Kong and an increasing focus on China.

Tony OSullivan, Global Sales and Marketing Director, said: We are increasingly doing business in China where biopharma and pharma companies want to access our technology as they bring themselves in line with western drug manufacturing regulations in their bid to become major global players in the industry. For ChargePoint this new airlink will save time and money and help us to access directly and more easily one of our key target markets where we have seen business growth of more than 300% in the last 12 months. I have no doubt that it will help continue to grow our business in co-operation with our Chinese sales partners based in Beijing.

This route will also link Northern businesses to the very heart of one of the world's fastest growing economies and is essential in driving a more prosperous region. Similarly with London being the only other UK city to benefit from a direct route to China, it will assist the Chinese in discovering and accessing the wealth of business and visitor opportunities that also exist in the North West and wider North.

University of Liverpool

Professor Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool said:

"We have a large Chinese student population that has grown steadily in recent years. Having a direct flight within easy reach of the University will not only help grow these numbers further, it will be of significant benefit to existing students from the Far East and their families back home.

"The service will also be well used by staff and students travelling to and from our joint venture institution in China – Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University – as well as those involved in collaborations with institutions across China."

North West Business Leadership Team

Geoffrey Piper, Chief Executive of NWBLT said:

"The opening up of direct flights between Manchester and the Far East is one of the most significant developments for the North West's ongoing economic success in the global marketplace. China is one of the UKs - and the North West's key business partners offering massive growth potential and we are now fortunate to have, through Manchester Airport, the opportunity to fully exploit our regions business, academic and cultural excellence going forward."

Cumbria Tourism

Ian Stephens, Managing Director of Cumbria Tourism, said:

"The addition of these new direct flights from China is a really positive boost to Cumbria's £2.62 billion tourism industry, making it easier than ever before for Chinese visitors to explore iconic landscapes including the English Lake District and Hadrian's Wall. Some of our key tourism businesses recently held a showpiece event in London to spread the word about our rich culture and heritage to Chinese tour operators, and the new Beijing flights again underline how well connected and accessible the north of England is to this vital international visitor market."

Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership

Graham Haywood, director of Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, said:

"The start of direct flights between Manchester and Beijing opens up much closer connectivity between Cumbria and the huge Chinese market, which will increase opportunities for the county's businesses.

"It is particularly good news for the tourism industry. Cumbria has a lot that appeals to Chinese tourists, from lovely scenery to great attractions, top quality accommodation and fantastic local food and produce. When you add to that easy access from Manchester, there is potential for a large increase in the number of Chinese tourists visiting the county, which would bring significant economic benefits to the area."

University of Manchester

Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of The University of Manchester, Professor Colin Bailey said:

"The University of Manchester has a long-history of hosting academics and students from China. Our city has one of the largest Chinese communities in the UK, which creates a familiar and comfortable environment for our Chinese students and staff. We are the biggest recruiters of international students in the UK, and China plays a critical part in this international agenda. The University also has close ties with China and a range of prestigious Chinese research institutions. Last year, President Xi Jinping visited the University's National Graphene Institute on the final day of his UK state visit.

"In 2013, our President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell joined Prime Minister David Cameron's delegation to China. She also visited Beijing in September 2015 as did Vice-President and Dean of Humanities Professor Keith Brown in December 2015. Professor Clive Agnew, Vice President of Teaching, Learning and Students visited Wuhan city in March 2015 as part of a civic delegation. Manchester is the proud home to the second Confucius Institute established in the UK, one of more than 500 around the world.

"Hundreds of staff and thousands of students and their families regularly travel between Manchester and China, using a wide range of airlines and routes. This direct route between China and Manchester will reinforce our city's status as an international destination in its own right and further cement the close academic, economic and industrial ties between our two countries."

West Midlands:

Baxi - Warwick

David Pinder, CEO of Baxi in Warwick said:

"As a business with operations in both the UK and the Far East, the importance of direct connectivity cannot be underestimated. Being able to access a non-stop service to mainland China from an airport within easy reach of our North West/Midlands base(s) will deliver a range of business benefits in terms of productivity and efficiency, which in turn helps drive growth. We hope to see the service go from strength-to-strength in the coming months and years."

Yorkshire:

Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

Dr David Smith, Interim Director of Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership, said:

"Access to key global markets is critical to driving growth in the Sheffield City Region, both in terms of increasing exports and attracting inward investment.

China is one of those markets and so having a direct flight service within easy reach has the potential to deliver significant economic benefits to the region.

"There are already strong links between Sheffield and China and this route will contribute to strengthening these connections, at the same time as stimulating fresh trade ties between the region and the Far East."

CIDSI UK

John Lester, CIDSI UK MD, said:

"CIDSI UK, a subsidiary of China's global engineering giant CIDSI, opened its offices in Sheffield because of its expertise in high-tec engineering and its excellent road and rail infrastructure.

"But we make XX trips to China every month and inevitably that has meant wasted hours spent driving to Heathrow or waiting around for connecting flights. We are delighted to learn we are also now within easy reach of direct flights to Beijing. Sheffield City Region companies doing business with China will benefit massively from this in terms of time. It is also sure to further improve established business links and drive growth. We hope to see the service go from strength to strength."

Leo Goodwin, Managing Director for TransPennine Express (TPE) said:

"As the Intercity rail operator for the North and Scotland, we provide fast and valuable connections between towns and cities across the North and into Scotland and the majority of our services operate into Manchester Airport.

"We have a vision to Take the North Further and will be investing more than half a billion pounds in transforming the rail network. In the next four years, we will deliver new trains, more seats, improved integration with other transport modes and faster journey times, creating more opportunities for businesses and communities to connect and prosper.

"In December 2017, we are introducing more direct services from Yorkshire to Manchester Airport.

"We will also be transforming our customer proposition and soon, all of our trains will have free Wi-Fi and media servers allowing the streaming of films and TV shows and plug sockets at every seat.

"The on-board experience will be second to none and we will provide customers with a real alternative to the car and congested road network."

Make It York

Kate McMullen, Head of Tourism, Make It York, said:

"This first ever direct flight to and from Beijing marks a milestone for our relations with China. As a major international gateway into the North of England, a direct flight from Manchester opens up a world of new opportunities for York, Yorkshire and the North of England, both for tourism and for investment generally.

"China has moved rapidly from being York's 11th largest overseas tourism market to a fourth place ranking, behind the US, Germany and France. We know, that whilst actual numbers of Chinese visitors are relatively small, this market is the fastest growing inbound tourism market to the UK and York is set to benefit hugely from this new route. This is excellent news for the city and wider region. This direct flight also means we can work even more effectively with Chinese Tour Operators and it is sure to bring with it an increased interest in York as a must visit city for Chinese visitors."

Chinese Tourism Facts – the national picture -

- Outbound travel from China has grown steadily over the past five years and is forecast to continue to do so for the remainder of this decade. China is now the most lucrative outbound travel market in the world, spending US\$164.9 billion dollars per year on travel.
- During the same period, the number of Chinese visitors to the UK has more than doubled. Growth in tourism from China, however, is still only in its early stages of development. However, the UK has seen 20% year on year growth over the past few years and China has been one of the fastest growing source markets for the UK tourism industry.
- In total there were 185,000 Chinese visitors to the UK in 2014. (In total there were 179,000 Chinese visitors to the UK in 2012) In China, one of the most recent trends is to travel in groups (Mum and dad, two sets of grandparents and child) - often with a view to looking at property in the UK and researching a future University for the child.
- Chinese visits to the UK and to York (according to the International Passenger Survey) peaked in 2013 and dipped slightly in 2014, but are still the second highest ever recorded.

York

- York has 6.8 million visitors annually (latest stats from the Economic Impact Survey 2014). The top five overseas markets showing the highest proportion of visitors to York are the US, Germany, France, China and Australia.
- China is now estimated to be York's 4th largest ranking overseas market and for the first time is featuring in the top five overseas markets coming to York. We estimate China has moved up 6 places in the rankings over the last five years. Previously China was ranked in 11th place.