

SA Airlink now offers city to game lodge flight options

A transaction between Nedbank Capital and SA Airlink will now enable the airline to expand its network of feeder routes within South Africa to include fully integrated city to game lodge flight options.



The transaction sees Nedbank Capital's Aircraft Finance division providing the funding required by SA Airlink, to purchase four new Cessna Grand Caravan aircraft that it will use to fly tourists directly to four upmarket game lodges within the internationally popular Sabi Sands Private Game Reserve.

The acquisition of the Cessna aircraft is the final step in SA Airlink's bold plan to grow its well established feeder flight network by adding flights directly to a number of the most popular game lodge destinations in South Africa.

It comes on the back of the reopening of the strategically important Skukuza Airport in 2014, which was also facilitated by SA Airlink as part of its larger plan to introduce seamless connectivity and convenience for national and international tourists visiting the Kruger National Park. Initially the service will connect visitors from Skukuza and Nelspruit airports directly to the Ulusaba, Singita, Arathusa and Londolozi lodges.

Single booking platform

According to Rodger Foster, CEO of SA Airlink, the full convenience of this new service will particularly be realised for the airline's guests through an integrated flight reservations process that allows them to use a single booking platform to arrange their flights all the way to their destination.

"SA Airlink's code franchising agreement with SAA means that visitors travelling to the four connected Sabi Sands lodges will be able to use the SAA flight reservations facility to book their entire trip, effectively removing the hassle of having to arrange separate road shuttle services or complicated secondary aircraft charters from the main centres to their end-destinations," Foster explains.

James Geldenhuys, head of Aircraft Finance for Nedbank Capital points to this level of innovation and client centricity as being at the heart of SA Airlink's success and growth over the past two decades. He cites this, combined with the strength of management and leadership in the business, as the main reasons why choosing to fund the Cessna acquisitions.

Business partners

"We have had a relationship with the management of SA Airlink since 1992 when they were first establishing their business," he explains. "In that time we have become more like strategic business partners than financiers, so it was clear to us that the purchase of these aircraft was necessary to drive the next chapter in the ongoing SA Airlink success story."

The finance transaction with SA Airlink goes beyond merely providing finance for aircraft acquisition, but also aligns with Nedbank Capital's commitment to funding projects that have the potential to deliver sustainable social and economic benefits for the country.

"According to a report by the World Travel & Tourism Council, travel and tourism directly contributed over 640,000 jobs and more than R103bn of South Africa's total GDP in 2013, and deals like this one give innovative companies like SA Airlink the real potential to significantly raise the extent of their contributions to these vital social and economic growth impacts going forward," Geldenhuys concludes.

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