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Regional Express takes off from Townsville for Cairns

By Rachel Riley

<http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/news/regional-express-takes-off-from-townsville-to-cairns/story-fnjfzs4b-1227431387561>

INTERNATIONAL tourists and Townsville business people were among the first passengers aboard a new direct-flight service to Cairns.

This comes as the city's airport marked less than two months to go before the opening of its international terminal to service flights to Bali.

Regional Express (Rex) will have three return flights each weekday between Townsville and Cairns and the first took off at 7am yesterday.

Fares started at \$123.05 and have increased the number of Rex services between the two northern centres from two to 34 flights a week, adding around 60,000 seats a year.

It had been a turbulent 18 months for the city's regional air market since Virgin Australia's exit in January 2014.

Rex state manager Steve Jones said the company had been "heavily solicited" to start the service and undertook a market-sounding exercise to gauge exact support.

Mr Jones said that backing had translated into strong sales for the first week of flights.

"Clearly the local business community and university have been crying out for a good, reliable operator, who can deliver reasonable fares on the route," he said. "We would hope those flight numbers are sustainable; we need people to support us so we are appealing to businesses and the community to give us a try."

Mr Jones said the new services were estimated to bring savings of around \$4 million to the North's travellers, access to cheaper fares and increased connectivity to other areas.

"These flights are a great way for Townsville to leverage off Cairns' deep roots within the international market already," he said.

Townsville Airport is continuing works to improve the overall "ambience" of the international area before the start of international flights on September 2.

"Townsville Airport management are working with the relevant government agencies to ensure the facility meets all relevant regulatory standards," a Queensland Airports Ltd spokeswoman said.

"A duty-free store and the addition of a cafe will be the two notable additions when the international terminal reopens.

“Townsville Airport is working with government agencies and relevant staff to ensure adequate training in relation to international operations is completed prior to the commencement of services.”

Plans for the airport’s \$40 million redevelopment to existing terminal and apron facilities are ongoing.

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