

## LIAT News July 2009

(Issue 4: July 2009)

Events across our network....

Challenger outlines plans to take LIAT forward

LIAT's acting Chief Executive Officer Brian Challenger has indicated his plans for the future of the airline. "We are very much committed to working with our aviation partners, governments, and the private sector," said Challenger, who took temporary charge in April, following the departure of Mark Darby.

"We recognise that in this difficult economic climate, everybody has to work together to achieve the aims of enhancing profitability and growth. The model we are taking is to be very consultative."

He also revealed that LIAT was exploring new areas of revenue generation.

"We are hoping that we will be able to offer to our network a cargo schedule that will satisfy the demands of shippers and producers in the region," Challenger said. The plan calls for the conversion of one of the company's three Dash-8 100 aircraft into a full freighter.

Pointing out that LIAT is a government-owned company whose primary objective is to provide service, Challenger explained that many of the routes being served by the carrier offered narrow margins of viability.

"On a strictly commercial basis there might not be any justification for them, but as a company committed to serving the Caribbean over the last 50 years we view it as our responsibility to continue to provide services where necessary," he said. "This is a very important aspect of the commitment that we have to the region."

Challenger has taken charge of the day-to-day running of LIAT until a new chief executive is appointed. He has had a long working relationship with the airline, and has been on the board of directors since 2006.

"Working from LIAT's head office in Antigua, Challenger will ensure continuity and will see to the smooth operation of the company as the board continues the process of identifying and putting in place a new chief executive," said Dr Jean Holder, chairman of the airline on his appointment.

Challenger's background is in aviation law. He has been involved in LIAT's operations over the last 10 years in various capacities.

LIAT achieves record on-time performance

LIAT's on-time performance reached record levels during the first quarter of the year. The carrier achieved an overall on-time (within 15 minutes) performance of 87.3 per cent – 2.3 per cent above its set target of 85 per cent, the industry standard. This was the first time LIAT has hit the target since it acquired the assets of former rival Caribbean Star in 2007. "This is no mean achievement for an airline as complex as LIAT," Wilbur Edwards, director of Ground Operations and Quikpak, said. A major milestone was achieved on 17 March when an on-time performance of 96.6 per cent within one minute and 98.3 per cent within 15 minutes was recorded. LIAT offers services to 22 destinations in 21 Caribbean territories, with an average of 130 flights per day.

#### Focus on customer relations

In most organisations employees tend to view their Customer Relations Department as the "Complaints Department". This is where the most irate people are magically transformed into quiet and satisfied customers. At LIAT we are no different.

The department is directed by Sonja John and staffed by Karen Weste, Andretta Phillip, Nutilia Simon and Chane Thomas, and serves as a direct point of contact for customers. Many inquiries involve routine questions and requests such as policy information. However some concerns are more complex and require additional research.

In addressing customer complaints the officers are entrusted to resolve the problems encountered. The information gained by them is critical for guiding the business forward, and can be used as an early indicator to signal future problems. We are also able to improve our product offerings by better understanding customer needs.

#### Explaining the make-up of air fares

LIAT has faced recent criticism over the cost of its flights. However, base fares have increased by less than 20 per cent on most routes over an eight-year period, and while fares have increased on some routes, they have declined on others. The fares charged are a combination of the ticket price and various government taxes.

The biggest jump in the surcharge occurred in 2008 when fuel prices were skyrocketing to over US\$100 per barrel. Since then, the surcharge has been steadily reduced, even though, while the price of crude oil has declined sharply, the price for jet fuel has moved at a somewhat slower pace.

As well as with fuel, LIAT has faced increases in many critical operating costs including aircraft engines, spare parts, ground handling contracts, airport fees and charges. Many of these costs are higher, say, than for a typical US carrier, due to the short haul distances between the islands and the frequency of landings for each aircraft. However, LIAT recognises the needs of its customers and has developed programmes such as "Just Go", whereby passengers may obtain special deals, available online at [www.liat.com](http://www.liat.com).

#### Letters from YOU!

Tell us about your travel experience with LIAT. We want to hear from you. Email: [zest@zingmag.net](mailto:zest@zingmag.net)

#### Reservation confirmed

I made a reservation for a flight but used a 2008 calendar. I confirmed the flight and then noticed the mistake. When I called LIAT to tell them, I was not sure what to expect. However, employee Danica Carelton noticed my good business and waived the \$25 fee. This has shown me that LIAT works with its customers, and I will remember her graciousness

and great attitude.

Jonathan M. Holmes, Netherlands, Antilles

#### Cleared for take-off

What a wonderful lady; the greatest possible advertisement for your airline. We experienced a very long delay after our flights from San Juan to Barbados were delayed/cancelled. Your staff in San Juan were informed of the need for the six of us to make our connection with Virgin Atlantic in Barbados. When we arrived in Antigua, Elizabeth Brown, passenger service coordinator, took immediate control of the situation. She made arrangements for us to be met and looked after in Barbados and rearranged our Virgin flights. She was charming, professional and efficient.

Brian & Julie Camp, Frances & Graham John, Steve & Jackie Jones, Oxton UK

#### An improved service

I have often complained about the service provided by LIAT, but recent experiences mean I must now give you some praise. I was booked to travel to San Juan with American Eagle from Tortola and the flight was cancelled. I then purchased a ticket from LIAT at the airport, and the ground staff were very courteous and efficient. Again travelling from Anguilla to Tortola, the check-in agent in Anguilla was very professional and the cabin crew were a credit to you.

Ian Clark, by email