

EasyJet Sells Tickets for Moscow-Manchester Flights

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easyJet plans to launch its low-cost Moscow-London and Moscow- Manchester flights in March.

British budget airline EasyJet on Wednesday started selling tickets for a Moscow-Manchester service to begin in March, as the no-frills carrier looks set to slash the cost of flying between Russia and Britain.

A one-way trip from Moscow's Domodedovo Airport to Manchester, the third largest city in Britain, starts at \$72.49, EasyJet director Paul Simmons told The Moscow Times. The price for Moscow-London flights, with sales set to begin in mid-January, will be similar.

As of March 18, there will be four daily flights between Moscow and London, leaving London at 7 a.m. and 2:10 p.m. and Moscow at 2:30 p.m. and 9:40 p.m., Simmons said. The Moscow-Manchester service will operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

While there is a fixed quota for tickets sold at the starting price, EasyJet operates a system

whereby fares increase with demand, making them more expensive in peak periods.

The company's first commercial flight from Manchester to Moscow is scheduled for March 28. By mid-afternoon in Moscow a one-way ticket on EasyJet's website was selling for £59.99 (\$96.70).

As well as stealing market share from Russian carriers, EasyJet also expects to boost the numbers of tourists and businessmen traveling between the two countries.

"We will grow the market," Simmons said. "We tend to do that when we go to a new destination."

And the company expects the new routes to be lucrative. EasyJet could reap profits of up to \$2.4 million flying 300,000 passengers annually, he said.

EasyJet was awarded the right to operate the Moscow-London route from Britain's Civil Aviation Authority in October, beating off competition from Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic.

Under a bilateral agreement between Russia and Britain only four carriers can fly between the two countries' capitals. A space became available earlier this year — for the first time since 1998 — after British Airways bought the other British carrier on the route, BMI.

Aside from EasyJet, the other three carriers flying between the two capitals are British Airways, Transaero and Aeroflot.

A one-way ticket from London to Moscow on March 18, the day EasyJet has scheduled for its first service, is currently retailing at 24,475 rubles (\$798) with Aeroflot, \$739 with Transaero and \$1,246 with British Airways.

The appearance of EasyJet as a rival often forces other airlines to cut prices, Simmons said.

The head of national carrier Aeroflot Vitaly Savelyov told President Vladimir Putin in October that a national low cost airline could be set up as early as next year, although the move was dependent on certain amendments to Russian aviation law.

EasyJet is looking to expand the number of routes it flies to Moscow, Simmons said, with the next direct links to the Russian capital likely to be with Switzerland. Edinburgh is another destination the company is considering.

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