

Salt Lake City a 'jewel' of Delta's Tokyo service

Much fanfare to accompany first nonstop trans-Pacific flights to, from Utah.

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The first travelers on Delta Air Lines' new nonstop trans-Pacific flight will arrive in Salt Lake City this morning, four hours before they left Tokyo.

If it were ski season, they could still get in a half day on the slopes.

No matter what the season, the very notion that somebody can get on a plane in Tokyo and get off in Salt Lake City without any stops in between -- and vice versa -- is a source of jubilation for state economic development officials and the companies likely to benefit from this one-and-only direct connection between the Intermountain West and Asia.

"This flight, coming on the heels of the nonstop to Paris, solidifies Utah as a significant hub for Delta," Jason Perry, executive director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, said Tuesday. "It's a huge vote of confidence in the state of Utah's ability to put people on a plane and get out globally. It highlights the increased sophistication of the state."

Perry's enthusiasm was echoed by Bob Cortelyou, a senior vice president over Delta's network of interconnecting flights.

"Denver doesn't have a flight to Tokyo or anywhere in Asia," Cortelyou emphasized. "That makes Salt Lake the gateway to Asia for the whole Intermountain West ... It's a very envious position to be in."

This far-reaching occasion will be marked with considerable fanfare today.

When Flight 4260 lands around 11:30 a.m. at Salt Lake City International Airport, it will be greeted with a water cannon salute from Airport Authority fire trucks. The news media will be assembled to interview disembarking passengers after they clear U.S. Customs checks.

Four Utah women of Japanese descent will perform a traditional Japanese dance in conjunction with a ribbon-cutting at Gate D-6, the airport's boarding point for the first Utahns making the 11-hour, 50-minute flight to Tokyo's Narita airport (the Tokyo-to-Salt Lake flight is an hour shorter because of tail winds; crossing the international dateline accounts for the arrival time in Salt Lake preceding the departure time from Tokyo).

Another water cannon salute will be offered as Flight 4261 taxis to the runway at 1:30 p.m., ready to carry Perry and a delegation of Utah business and government leaders to Japan for a whirlwind goodwill mission.

"It's absolutely essential to establish the right relationships and set the right tone" for future contacts, said Perry.

"As we start introducing our businesses to Japan and Asia, going with the official state seal as the entrée carries a lot of weight," he said.

Spencer Eccles, chairman of the Salt Lake Chamber's international business committee, said the direct flights to Tokyo -- plus Delta connections from there to 14 other major Asian cities -- "cuts substantial travel time and adds a great deal of convenience for company representatives who want to do business in Utah."

That's critical for Utah's economy, which has experienced a 31 percent growth in overall export trade in the

past year, Eccles said. Last year, Japan was Utah's fourth largest export destination in Asia, seventh overall, receiving \$376 million worth of goods.

Increasing imports is an even bigger goal, imports in the form of tourists and skiers. Right off the plane, Utah's delegation will host a luncheon in a downtown Tokyo hotel for tour-group operators, airline booking agents and ski-trip organizers, touting the state's abundant and diverse recreation resources.

"We will show slide shows and videos about the state, its national and state parks, golfing and skiing opportunities -- everything that would make you want to come here as a tourist," said Perry, whose ace-in-the-hole will be Yuichiro Miura, the first man to ski down Mount Everest, and owner of a Park City home. "He has celebrity status over there."

Ski Utah President Nathan Rafferty will be there as well, hopeful the nonstop flight will help the state's 13 active resorts make inroads into Asia.

"Although Japan has not been a significant market for the Utah ski industry, the two destinations do share an Olympic legacy [Nagano hosted the 1998 Winter Games, Salt Lake City the 2002] and a passion for skiing," he said.

To increase the significance of this new route, Delta's Cortelyou said the airline will introduce domestic flights into Salt Lake City from 11 new U.S. cities on Thursday, in addition to adding nine flights from existing sites.

"We're excited about the connection potential," he said. "It's part of our overall strategy of a strong Salt Lake City hub. It's working out well. Salt Lake will be the crown jewel of our Tokyo service."

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