

## Auckland to Gold Coast flights a tourism boon

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DAILY Jetstar flights to Auckland announced yesterday will help change the 'tourism landscape' of the Gold Coast and deliver more overseas visitors, according to Jetstar's boss.

The Coast has been chosen over Brisbane and Melbourne for the direct flights that are due to start in April.

The route, which is the Qantas group's first foray between the two cities, is expected to deliver more Kiwis to the Coast and eventually link with services from Japan.

Overseas visitors make up only about 20 per cent of Gold Coast visitors and New Zealanders are the bulk of that, with 225,000 Kiwis arriving for holidays last year. Japan, which has dwindled in recent years, remains the Coast's third largest market.

In Auckland for the announcement, which included a new Sydney-Auckland connection, Jetstar CEO Bruce Buchanan said he was keen to build up the Coast as one of the budget airline's international 'hubs'.

"We're very excited to think the Gold Coast is coming into its own," said Mr Buchanan.

"It's been a strong domestic hub ... and now we hope to make it a strong international hub. There's a changing tourism landscape on the Gold Coast."

The service will fly afternoons but from next October will switch to a morning departure from Auckland to link better with Japanese flights.

Mr Buchanan said the Japan connection would enable the Asian visitors to 'add a beach holiday' to their New Zealand itinerary, at great benefit to the Coast.

Jetstar also hoped to increase the frequency of its Gold Coast-Christchurch flights which currently leave two to three times a week.

Other airlines to ferry between the Coast and New Zealand include Pacific Blue (Auckland) and Air New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton).

Gold Coast Tourism spokesman Ben Pole said Auckland was ideal for reaching New Zealanders because the city was the main departure point for North Island residents.

Mr Pole said he would 'love to see a time' when the ratio of domestic to overseas visitors was 70-30.

"Not to the detriment of local visitor numbers but from an increased overall pie," he said.

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