

American Airlines will suspend its nonstop flights between Tucson and New York's JFK International Airport from May 5 through December 15, 2017.

Major Points

- Decision to temporarily suspend flights was mutual between American Airlines and the Tucson Metro Chamber.
- Current plan is that last flights will operate May 4 and will resume December 15/16.
- Decision was the result of slower than anticipated passenger response to the new service.
- Summer travel at TUS historically is a slower time of year and at the current pace of bookings, continuing it through the summer could have caused American to cancel the flight entirely by the end of its first year of service.
- Waiting to resume the flights until next winter's busier tourism season, will be a greater benefit to the economy of the Tucson region and assure meeting planners and others can continue recruiting meetings and visitors for next winter.
- American Airlines, Tucson Metro Chamber and Tucson Airport Authority remain confident of the potential for the flight to grow and become successful.
- The goal is to grow passenger demand for the nonstop TUS-JFK flights to become year-round service in the future.

Most importantly: The ultimate long-term success of the flight will depend on passengers' supporting it. People who value the flight for what it brings to the economy of the Tucson region should do what they can to use the flight before it ends on May 4. It's also not too soon to start making plans for December and next winter. If we can build momentum through Spring and next winter we can make a case to keep the flight operating year-round in 2018!

FAQs

Why is the NY flight being suspended?

Passenger demand for the flight has grown slower than was anticipated. Advance bookings from late January into March appear to be strong and there is hope that will remain the case through April.

Didn't you expect that it would take some time for the flight catch on?

Yes and the passenger loads are continuing to grow, but the growth has been slower than was expected.

Why make the decision now when you are seeing growth?

A choice had to be made because airlines have to plan their schedules in advance. One choice would have been to continue the flight, which American was willing to do. By doing so there was the risk of losing the service entirely if passenger numbers remained below projections. By putting the flight on hiatus and bringing it back in December, there is assurance the service will be there for the busy holiday season and into next winter's tourism season, which is so important to Tucson's economy.

Why suspend the flight during the summer when many of us haven't even booked our summer vacations yet?

The summer months are the slowest months of the year for the airport. Let's face it while we Tucsonans know how to handle our summer heat – and even enjoy summer monsoon storms – we haven't convinced the world this is the place to be in June and July. Based on the demand for the flight so far and advance bookings into the future, it was determined the prudent decision was to avoid the risk of losses over the summer.

When it was announced, this was supposed to be year-round service why did you do that if you knew the summer was slow?

Yes, it was supposed to be year-round service and the expectation was that summer would be slower but, as noted earlier, the passenger numbers have been below what was expected. In readjusting projections based on current usage of the service, the summer service was re-evaluated. The ultimate goal remains for this to be year-round service.

What were you expecting?

Currently there are enough people buying tickets to fly between southern Arizona and the New York area to more than justify the nonstop service. In fact, Tucson had been the largest market in the world without nonstop service to New York. Based on previous experience in 2007 and 2008 with nonstop service between TUS and New York, projections were made on how many passengers using connecting flights to any NY airport would switch to the nonstop flight as well as an estimate of the percentage of passengers using the Phoenix airport that would come back to the Tucson airport. Further, the previous nonstop service stimulated additional passenger traffic between TUS and New York by 65%.

So what happened?

Unfortunately it's too soon for detailed reports. Initial data suggests the flights have done well in attracting passengers who would have taken connecting flights to JFK or LaGuardia. The data on passengers using Newark is inconclusive. There is no data yet on how many people in the past who flew to New York out of Phoenix began using the TUS-JFK service or whether it stimulated additional passenger traffic that didn't previously exist.

What is the Tucson Airport Authority's role in this?

The Tucson Airport Authority was made aware of the decision but air service decisions are made by the airlines. In this case, the Tucson Metro Chamber was also involved because of its Air Service Task Force. Under Federal Aviation Administration regulations, TAA's responsibility is to provide a safe, efficient and cost-effective airport for its users, including the airlines.

Did you ever think the fare might have been too high and that's why people took other flights?

Fares were not high. The average airfare paid was less than \$350. That was competitive with fares for both one-stop connections from Tucson and nonstop flights from Phoenix. In many cases nonstop flights can command higher fares for the convenience and time it affords passengers but so far that has not been the case in this instance.

What's in it for me, especially since I have more at stake in another frequent flyer program?

Hopefully anyone who has a stake in the economic well-being of the Tucson region will see the benefit from the flight. As for those who would still remain fiercely loyal to their frequent flyer program over other considerations, it was considered a plus that American Airlines' AAdvantage program has a very large membership base in southern Arizona.

Are you sure the flights will return in December?

The flights are on the schedule and bookable starting December 15 for the first JFK to Tucson and then next day, December 16, from the first Tucson to JFK flight.

Why does the NY flight go to JFK and not LaGuardia or Newark?

JFK is the airport where American Airlines has its largest operation in the New York area. Tucson officials initially targeted presentations to six airlines capable of providing the service. LaGuardia Airport couldn't be considered because of local restriction limiting its flights to no more than 1,500 miles so all of the airlines would have provided service to either JFK or Newark. American was the airline that stepped forward to start the route.

What about people who have already booked flights during the suspension?

Customers ticketed on the route after May 4 and before the resumption of service in December will be contacted by American to make alternative travel arrangements, or to offer a full refund.