

Las Vegas poised for China flights, Phoenix keeps working toward more international routes

Las Vegas is poised to get nonstop flights to China.

The Chinese government has approved Hainan Airlines' application for three times a week direct service from Beijing to Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport, according to reports by the Las Vegas Review-Journal and GGR Asia, a Pacific Rim gaming news service.

The China-to-Vegas flights still need approval from the U.S. government.

Hainan already flies into Los Angeles, Seattle, San Jose, Chicago and Boston. The Chinese carrier also flies into Toronto and is starting service to Calgary this summer.

International carriers have had direct tourism-focused flights into Las Vegas. That list currently includes Korean Air, Panama-based Copa Airlines, British Airways and Germany's Condor Airlines.

But Asian and other foreign airlines have also pulled back on Vegas flights during downturns, health scares and after 9/11.

[Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport](#) is still trying to land service to Asia. Phoenix doesn't have any flights to Asia and only one to Europe via a British Airways flight to London.

"We continue to work closely with the Asian carriers, especially Japan Airlines, given the American Airlines partnership. But we also speak regularly with Hainan, All Nippon and Air China," said [Deborah Ostreicher](#), assistant aviation director for the city of Phoenix which owns and manages Sky Harbor.

The challenge for Phoenix is that other Western markets such as Los Angeles, San Diego and even Las Vegas have larger Asian populations. Asians make up 9.9 percent of the population of Clark County, Nevada versus 4.1 percent in Maricopa County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

International service to Vegas, of course, is mostly driven by tourists.

But having larger Asian populations also helps drive demand from coastal markets such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. Those cities also have large ports and more business ties to Asian markets than Phoenix.

“To date, our business demand is not quite there yet. And our Asian population and tourists must continue to build. But we are getting closer all the time,” Ostreicher said.

Arizona ranked 24th among U.S. states for exports to Asia last year, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Arizona exports sent \$4.7 billion worth of goods to Asia last year.

That is compared to \$5.9 billion in 2007 before the last recession.

By comparison, California had \$67.5 billion and Washington state \$44.6 billion in exports to Asia. Those two coastal, port states ranked first and second in Asian exports.

Still, airport officials and economic developers try to forge greater ties to Asian.

The ambassador of the Philippines to U.S, Jose L. Cuisia Jr., visited Phoenix in late March.

He was hosted by the Greater Phoenix Economic Council and Mayor Greg Stanton.

[Michael Patterson](#), an attorney with the Polsinelli law firm’s Phoenix office, was at those meetings and said he was told there 53,000 Arizonans of Filipino descent. That could make it the largest Asian group in Arizona. Patterson has been involved in growing trade and international investments in the state.

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