

Southwest Airlines announces date and fares for launch of service to Cuba

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Southwest Airlines will launch service to Cuba starting Nov. 13 with flights to Havana starting a month later, the company said Thursday.

The first flights will depart from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to the Cuban city of Varadero on the country's northern coast.

On Dec. 12, Southwest will launch daily service to Havana from Fort Lauderdale and Tampa, Fla.

The airline also plans to launch daily service from Fort Lauderdale to Santa Clara, Cuba, but did not announce details on Thursday.

"Southwest customers can book their tickets now to travel to Cuba with our low fares and no hidden fees, bags fly free, and the best employees in the industry," Southwest CEO Gary Kelly said in a statement. "Cuba will be the ninth country on our route map and Havana will mark Southwest's 100th city, a significant and proud milestone."

Southwest and other U.S. airlines faced a time crunch as they prepared to launch service to Cuba. As part of its Aug. 31 ruling awarding limited Cuba routes to the

various airlines, the Department of Transportation required the airlines to launch service within 90 days.

JetBlue Airways and American Airlines were the first major U.S. carriers to launch commercial service to the island, beginning their flights in late August and early September, respectively.

American, which currently operates to five Cuban cities, plans to launch its Miami to Havana service on Nov. 28. Flights from Charlotte to Havana will begin Nov. 30.

Both carriers benefited from years of experience operating charter flights to Cuba in being the first to launch commercial service, an edge other U.S. carriers didn't have.

The launch of commercial service to Cuba is part of a broader effort by the Obama administration to liberalize relations with the socialist nation. The administration has made it easier for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba, although general tourism to the island is still not allowed.

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