

FlyMontserrat fare hike shocker

A release item from the Government Information Unit on Wednesday this week announced that "Owner of FlyMontserrat Captain Nigel Harris announced that effective immediately ticket prices on the homegrown airline have been increased." This came on the heels of WINAIR's one month notice that they would withdraw from servicing Montserrat as of December 31, 2010, and fully from January 19, 2011.

The release stated that, "Captain Harris has cited the rise in fuel prices over the past several months as a reason for the increase as well as the discontinuation of the Government of Montserrat's subsidy of the airline."

The Government for some time subsidised two flights or four movements daily of Fly Montserrat. "The current seat guarantee is four on each movement outbound and inbound passenger capacities of six or seven respectively. This agreement expires on January 31, 2011," explained

Access Coordinator Vincent Hippolyte.

WINAIR enjoyed a subsidy which according to Montserrat Airways Ltd. (MAL)'s management was much more lucrative than that given to FlyMontserrat.

There was uproar from the public and an outrage at the fare hike, which had already been in effect. The new prices are US\$ 124 or EC\$ 335 one-way which includes the US \$25 Passenger tax and US\$ 223 or EC\$ 605 round trip.

Many persons who launched their feelings on MNIAlive.com and call-in to ZJB radio believe this will make it much more difficult for the everyday traveler to visit Antigua for shopping or medical reasons. Others see the withdrawal of scheduled flights by WINAIR as of January 19 as the main reason for the increase which puts the island at a disadvantage with only one air carrier and no competition to keep prices within reach.

The Montserrat Reporter (TMR) spoke to Nigel

Harris who explained the reasons for the fare hike. He said this was due to: "The withdrawal of subsidies and the fuel increase that we have been having."

He explained further, "Both us and WINAIR were working on a subsidy until the end of September, it then stopped and the ferry ran for a while and then had their problems. They then asked us if we were to do more flights for the basis of subsidies, both us and WINAIR said yes."

Harris said there was then "a reduced subsidy that runs to the end of January."

On Friday The MAL CEO speaking to TMR Roach removed the subsidy argument from the fare hike discussions, since he said that they had advised government that they would not file any claims for the subsidy. The reason for this, "... we're pretty much booked for the next two weeks," he said, explaining that the fare increase, "only for new bookings."

"I need to make that

clear because we are very busy now for the next two weeks and all those people have got their fares at the old price..., so effectively there is the fare increase that we set now, it doesn't actually impact on anyone for two or three weeks."

According to Harris, the new fare, only affects anyone buying new tickets, confirming that the subsidy was on a 'seat guarantee subsidy'. "We advised the government about a week ago that we wouldn't be calling for their subsidy in January," which of course is a non-issue since according to him, FlyMontserrat is fully booked through January.

Harris has complained that the Government (the access coordinator hardly speaks with the airline, even with the problems with the ferry. He said they have been willing to discuss how they can best serve in the circumstances, with the ferry problems, rough seas and WINAIR's withdrawal.

GoM finally through the

access coordinator issued the following in a statement released by GIU regarding the fare increase and government's current arrangement with FlyMontserrat. It confirmed the seat subsidy, but cites the 34% increase and that there has been no "such increase in fares attributable to fuel increase."

"Since the airline's inception in 2009, the government subsidized two flights or four movements daily of Fly Montserrat. "The current seat guarantee is four on each movement outbound and inbound passenger capacities of six or seven respectively. This agreement expires on January 31, 2011," explained Access Coordinator Vincent Hippolyte.

"Fly Montserrat has always agitated for removal of subsidies indicating that they are willing to compete with WINAIR on a level play ground, this was at a base fare of US\$74.00 per leg," the statement read.

"There have been no major increases in oil prices

to warrant an increase in base airfare of 34%. Throughout the airline industry there has not been any such increase in fares attributable to fuel increase.

"Government will continue to put measures in place to ensure that travel between Montserrat remains affordable and that the travelling public is not exploited," the ministry statement ended.

Meanwhile news out St. Maarten regarding WINAIR tells of the airline's restructuring, where "WINAIR Supervisory Board members have been asked to resign in a move intended to facilitate the establishment of a change-management team and a new management and operational structure, in an effort to save the financially-strapped airline..."

TMR recalls a much earlier news item in which WINAIR had been quoted as saying that it had not lost money in servicing Montserrat, but it was nothing to shout about either.

Ministry of Education receives gifts from visiting Montserratians

GIU – The Ministry of Education is appreciative of the many gifts of educational supplies which have been received in recent weeks and throughout the year from visiting nationals.

Minister of Education Colin Riley humbly accepted on Friday a donation 60 notebooks an assortment of stationery, crayons and other supplies from Joycelyn

Graham-Frederick.

Graham-Frederick has Montserratian roots and now lives in Atlanta, Georgia. She has requested that the gifts be given to the vulnerable and needy children on island.

Last December, Janetta Samuel and friends from North Carolina donated a supply of stationery and learning materials to be distributed to both of the public

primary schools.

Earlier this week, the Association of MSS Graduates Inc., donated more EC\$ 12,000 supplies and 15 computers for the Montserrat Secondary School.

Director of Education Glen Francis said the voluntary donations add value to the schools and enhance the learning experience for students.

Flashback

MV Opale Express to discontinue service to Montserrat on Feb. 13

By: Staff Reporter
Mon, January 31, 2005
8:45 PM

After several years of service, the ferry MV Opale Express, which became the major mode of transportation out of Antigua, since the closure of W H Bramble airport in June 1997, as of February 13 will no longer be plying passengers from Montserrat to Antigua.

A press release from the Ministry of Communications and Works stated, "We are currently finalizing arrangements for a new and modern ferry to be bought in so as not to cause any disruption to the weekly schedule of service."

When asked if this new ferry service would be cheaper, Permanent Secretary, Jim Taylor of

the ministry said, "It is expected to be cheaper."

According to the Ministry's press statement, the new ferry is likely to be a Hydrocruiser with the speed of 35 knots, length of 90 feet, seating for 144 passengers, a beam of 30 feet, four caterpillar engines, and be propelled by four water jets.

The vessel, "is outfitted with the newest technology to make it a smooth, comfortable ride between Montserrat and Antigua."

The statement went on to say "that the Government of Montserrat wishes to inform the public of its intention to maintain ferry services until the new airport is completed and commissioned for use later on this year, and that a task force has been

established to study the feasibility of ferry services in the longer term".

Since 2003 when it was expected that the new Gerald's airport would be in operation by November 2004 the British Government agreed to extend the ferry services subsidy to accommodate the Christmas and festival rush of visitors to the island. The ferry services were to end in February, 2005 and it was anticipated that the airport would have been completed by then.

Finding itself in a new fix when delay after delay is preventing the airport from coming into operation in March, PS Taylor said Government has instituted a task force to study a longer ferry service

REGISTERED LAND ACT

SECTION 34

LOST LAND CERTIFICATE

It is notified for general information that the Land Certificate in respect of the following person has been reported lost:-

NAME	REG. SECTION/REFERENCE	DATE ISSUED
Paula Dutcher	Beachettes 12/02/165	January 30, 2006

Unless any objections are received within fourteen (14) days from the date of publication of this notice, a replacement certificate will be issued.

Dated this 5th day of January, 2011.

J. Christopher Gerrald
Ag. Registrar of Lands