

Massachusetts-based Linear Air adds Puerto Rico, Caribbean service

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Private air travel services are a convenient and up and coming alternative to commercially scheduled flights. And despite the steep prices passengers currently pay for the convenience and exclusivity to travel via luxury charter aircraft, such service offerings are expanding in Puerto Rico.

Linear Air, a Massachusetts-based air-taxi service, most recently entered the local market launching Caribbean service in November.

“It’s been a terrific market with passengers typically vacationers, but there’s also a mix of residents looking to travel offshore”, William Herp, president of Linear Air, said Thursday.

Other airlines offering charter services include San Juan Jet Charter which provides jet charter service from Isla Grande to destinations in the Caribbean, North and South America and Europe. Also, locally based M&N Aviation provides jet charter flights — in addition to its scheduled flights between the main island of Puerto Rico

and Vieques — between Puerto Rico and destinations in North, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Linear Air currently operates one 10-person luxury Cessna Grand Caravan (eight-passenger seating capacity and additional seats for two pilots).

Using the Caravan, which Herp said are “well-suited” for the Caribbean market, Linear Air provides charter services from San Juan’s Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport and Isla Grande to the U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic and the St.Maarten in the Lesser Antilles.

“The popularity for charter to service to the destinations is fairly equal, with the Dominican Republic as an up and coming resort area and much demand to go to the Dutch Antilles,” Herp said. Since Linear Air spread its wings over the Caribbean, the airline has been flying an average of two charter flights daily, he added.

Prices to travel round-trip in style aboard the Linear Cessna Grand Caravans planes run \$850 per flight hour between Puerto Rico and the Caribbean destinations.

A round-trip flight with same day return between Puerto Rico and La Romana, Dominican Republic, for example, would cost roughly \$2,500 and double, or \$5,000 for a return flight after a multiple-night stay; the cost for the same trip with a next day return would run more than \$2,500 but under \$5,000.

Meanwhile, in other company news, Linear Air announced on Thursday that it closed \$2.5 million in funding for the initial deposits on 30 next-generation very light jets, or VLJs, from Eclipse Aviation Corp., and to support the company’s expansion in Boston, New York and the Caribbean.

The new Eclipse 500 aircraft, expected to enter the fleet in 2007, will allow the company to expand its existing propjet service to smaller markets within point-to-point 500-mile regional networks and around major metropolitan areas. Linear Air, based in Lexington, Mass., currently operates from Hanscom Field in Bedford, Mass., near Boston, Teterboro Airport in Teterboro, N.J. and Westchester County Airport in White Plains, N.Y., both just outside New York City, and from San Juan, Puerto Rico in the Caribbean.

STAR wire services contributed to this report.