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Canada's West Jet set to begin flights to GB

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Minister of Tourism and Aviation Vincent Vander-pool-Wallace was in Grand Bahama yesterday for the official announcement of Canadian airline West Jet's new flight service to the island.

During a press conference at the Isle of Capri Casino, the Minister explained that the twice-weekly flights from Toronto to Grand Bahama will begin on November 2.

It is hoped that the flights will mean that the island can begin to see an influx of Canadian visitors, he said, similar to what it was like decades ago.

"Many people may not remember, I think it was something of the order of 36 years ago, Grand Bahama island was number one for Canadian visitors in this part of the world," he said, adding that the island is the closest destination to the eastern seaboard of Canada.

"We forget that we were very much alone in the tourism business at that time ... The rate of growth that has happened under our noses for people who are competing with us, was such that we found ourselves receding in the background."

Vanderpool-Wallace said the island's proximity to the biggest market in the world has to be reflected in the price to get to the destination.

None of this can work, he added, unless there are partnerships formed with key stakeholders, such as that formed with West Jet.

He revealed that within hours after the flights were posted online, some 450 round trip tickets had already been sold.

Gregg Saretsky, vice president West Jet said it was a very exciting time for the company as it announces the expansion of its service.

"This aircraft will make two weekly missions from Toronto to Freeport and will offer the market 14,000 seats this season," he explained, adding that the company has forecast that it will bring 12,000 customers to Grand Bahama this winter.

Saretsky said while he was travelling around the island, he noticed that there are a large number of Canadians who own second homes in Grand Bahama.

"One of the biggest inhibitors in their travel to this great part of the world has been the very high airfares associated with getting here. Part of the reason the Minister talked about our initial success without advertising is the very attractive airfares that West Jet offers," he said.

"We are a low cost carrier... and when I look at the size of the

Canadian market to Grand Bahama island and where it was a decade ago and where it is today we have a lot of work to bring it back but I'm confident that with the product that you offer and our new direct air service that our twice weekly service should be four times weekly by this time next year and that's the goal."

The airline is expected to step up its promotional activities in Canada for its new destinations in September.

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