

Service to Phoenix to begin in August

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Traveling is about to get a little bit easier for locals. Starting in August, Gallupians will be able to fly directly to Phoenix, Ariz., and back for a little under \$200.

Advanced Airlines will offer the service daily. Tickets will have a fixed price of \$75 each way, which comes out to \$80.63 with tax for the trip down, and \$90.73 to come back (taxes are higher in Phoenix). Discount booklets will be offered on the company's website soon, said Advanced Air President Levi Stockton, who started the company in 2005 as a charter service.

"The business started with me and one airplane, a King Air 350, flying charters out of Los Angeles," Stockton said. "That's been our core business of aircraft charter, and over the last seven years we've gotten into scheduled service."

Passengers will be allowed 50 pounds of checked baggage and a carry-on item up to 15 pounds, which must be kept in the passenger's lap at all times during the 1-hour-6-minute flights. Travel will be on eight-seat King Air 350 planes. (Technically, the planes have a ninth seat, which doubles as the restroom when the plane has only eight passengers.)

The planes also have wing lockers to carry larger items like guns or sporting equipment, and will offer free beverages (beer, soft drinks, water) and light snacks on all flights.

Passengers will not have to go through TSA inspections leaving Gallup, but will need to go through security for connecting flights after disembarking at Terminal 3 in Phoenix.

Each flight will have two pilots on board.

"We have a pretty exciting program with Southwest Airlines, where pilots come work with us for two years then go to Southwest," Stockton said.

City officials are excited about the new partnership and the economic prospects it brings for the region.

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“I don’t just mean in Gallup, but all the way extending into the tribal lands in the Four Corners region, because there’s so many opportunities for economic growth by using air service,” Gallup’s tourism and marketing manager Jennifer Lazarz said.

The new route will mean more advertising for Gallup’s charms as well as easier access. The two-year deal, which the city council is expected to finalize at its May 24 meeting, will have a marketing budget of \$50,000 a year from each state’s tourism department and the city, plus Advanced will kick in \$25,000 to market its services locally.

Those efforts may include a billboard as well as newspaper, radio and social media advertising.

The biggest advertising boost for the city may be on a service called Boingo, available at Sky Harbor Airport.

“It makes you watch a video before you can sign on for your free Wi-Fi,” Lazarz said. “[It’s] the perfect opportunity to show videos showcasing Gallup.”

Advanced Air is based at Hawthorne Airport in Los Angeles, Calif., which will also create opportunities for Gallup to draft off of the state’s tourism campaign.

“The state tourism department has heavy buys in California. What we’re doing is going to be a strong backup because New Mexico already has a presence,” Lazarz said.

For now, tickets on Advanced Air must be purchased separately from flights on the larger carriers, but a spokesperson said the airline is negotiating with larger carriers to be able to book all connecting flights at once in the future.

Tickets are available for purchase on Advanced Air’s website at www.advancedairlines.com ,

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as well through travel agencies and online booking sites, although Advanced Air “highly recommends booking through our site for expedited service.”

The schedule for Gallup flights is aiming for a late May release.

On social media the company is at @advancedairlines on Facebook and Instagram.

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