

Hawaii

Tribune Herald

Thursday, August 25, 2005

Proudly serving Hilo and the Big Island since 1923

50 cents



Big Isle Arrival

Delta adds flights into Kona International Airport

By **BETSY TRANQUILLI**
Stephens Media Group

Delta Air Lines, the world's second-largest air passenger carrier, will begin flying into Kona International Airport in December, bringing what tourism officials hope will be flocks of visitors from the East Coast and Europe.

Starting Dec. 1, Delta will offer daily direct service on 767-400 aircraft from Atlanta, with a stop in Salt Lake City without a plane change and then on to Kona, Delta spokeswoman Benet Wilson said. The Kona flight will bring the total daily roundtrip flights from the mainland to the Hawaiian Islands to 20. Delta already has flights to Honolulu and Maui.

Delta joins a growing list of major carriers taking advantage of the surge in interest in the Big Island. America West, which recently merged with US Airways, announced in July that it will begin service from Phoenix to Honolulu, Maui and Kona early



File photos

Delta announced that it will add flights to Kona International Airport in the coming months, which may boost tourism to the Big Island.

next year. Service to Honolulu will begin in December, while the Kona flights are to begin March 2. The low-cost airline will fly the 190-seat Boeing 757-200 aircraft

into the islands.

In June, Pleasant Holidays launched nonstop, twice-weekly seasonal service from Los Angeles to Kona.

A new local interisland airline, Fly Hawaii, also announced plans to begin interisland service in early 2006 beginning with the highest-traffic routes and will be arriving at all airports on all islands within the first year of service, spokesman Chris Parsons said.

"Our focus is really going to be on the local residents," Parsons said.

These airlines join Aloha Airlines, American Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines, Island Air, Japan Airlines, Northwest Airlines and United Airlines, and charter flights from Ryanair and North American Airlines, as carriers coming into Keahole Airport.

Kona International Airport District Manager Chauncey Wong Yuen told Stephens Media in June that plans are underway to expand the airport to accommodate the influx of business. The last major expansion was a three-phase project that ran from 1995 to 2000.

See **FLIGHTS** Page A6

FLIGHTS

From front page

“The tourism board has been actively promoting and massively pushing the Big Island, and we’re starting to see the fruits of that effort,” Wong Yuen said in June. “Our time has come. We’re planning terminal expansion now and you’re going to see it soon. Normally, if we started now, it would take five to seven years. This makeover can happen within two to three years.”

While all the islands are seeing an increase in visitors this year so far, the Big Island is the only island in the state seeing double-digit growth in tourism. Visitor arrivals in 2005 rose in Oahu by 7.5 percent and in Maui 2.7 percent, while the Big Island has seen a 16.9 percent increase compared to the same period last

year, according to the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

Tourism officials hope that as more airlines, like Delta, come directly into Kona from new mainland destinations, those numbers will only further grow and fuel the local economy.

“Delta is a lifesend for the island, connecting us with the East Coast and with Europe,” Big Island Tourism Board Executive Director George Applegate said. “We have two-thirds of the land mass in the state and a lot of people want to keep experiencing all of Hawaii. This is the state of Hawaii, but we are the Island of Hawaii.”