

Airline cutting fares for trips to Kelowna and Fort McMurray

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Northwestern Air Lease Ltd. is lightening the financial load for passengers flying between Red Deer and Kelowna or Fort McMurray.

The airline is temporarily offering reduced fares on one-way tickets for the routes. Flights to or from Kelowna, B.C. will cost \$159 during the month of October, down from the regular fare of \$270.90; while one-way trips between Red Deer and Fort McMurray will go for \$199, as compared with a normal rate of \$343.35

The prices include all fees, taxes and GST. Without those additional costs, the base fares for October will be \$84.43 for the Kelowna route and \$139.52 for flights to or from Fort McMurray.

Northwestern has been offering scheduled passenger flights from the Red Deer Airport to Kelowna since April, with round trips on Fridays and Saturdays. Service between Red Deer and Fort McMurray is slated to begin on Oct. 1, with flights on Mondays and Fridays.

The airline uses 15-seat Jetstream 32 aircrafts.

Northwestern general manager Brian Harrold said the motivation for the reduced fares is to raise awareness that Central Albertans have an attractive alternative to Calgary's and Edmonton's airports when travelling.

"If I can get 15 seats full, I'm probably going to break even or might even make a little bit. But the idea is to get people enticed onto the airplane, get them to see the service that we provide, get them to see the airplane, get used to doing that route, that travel; make sure they know it's easy, it's quick, it's efficient."

Those who fly with Northwestern will hopefully become regular customers, he said, and will also tell others about their experience.

Flying out of the Red Deer Airport offers a number of advantages, said Harrold, including avoiding the drive to Calgary or Edmonton, paying for parking, and dealing with the congestion and confusion in a busy international airport.

"We want to make it easy for people."

Northwestern has seen a "slow progression" with respect to use of its service between Red Deer and Kelowna, said Harrold. He's optimistic the Fort McMurray option will prove popular, particularly with those who work in the energy sector.

Northwestern also flew between Red Deer and Dawson Creek, B.C., but suspended that service early this month. The company is currently assessing the route, and looking at additional connections that might make it more attractive, said Harrold.

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