

AIR NZ BOOSTS NORTH AMERICAN NETWORK WITH START ON NEW HOUSTON SERVICE

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Air New Zealand has opened a fifth gateway in North America with the start of flights to **Houston**, Texas.

The airline's inaugural service to the heart of Texas, flight NZ28, departed Auckland at 1830 local time on Tuesday and landed just over 12 and a half hours later at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport a little after 1230 the same day.

The Boeing 777-200ER, ZK-OKF, was greeted by a "kapa haka" group comprised of Air NZ staff performing a traditional Maori dance.

Houston is a major hub for Air NZ alliance partner United, offering lots of connecting opportunities to the rest of the Americas. The oil-and-gas centre joins Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver as part of Air NZ's North American network. The Star Alliance member also recently began flights to Buenos Aires in Argentina.

"This week we mark 50 years of flying to the US – it's a huge milestone and fantastic that as we celebrate this we also celebrate the operational launch of our latest US service which directly connects New Zealand to the heart of America's south," Air NZ chief executive Christopher Luxon said in a statement on Wednesday.

“We are committed to continuing to expand our Pacific Rim network and are excited to give our customers direct access to Houston and beyond.”

United will also codeshare on the Auckland-Houston flights as well as points beyond Auckland as part of an expanded partnership between the two carriers.

Air NZ planned to serve Houston five times a week, and has said previously the new route was about opening up more opportunities for those in the US to make the journey across the Pacific. The US is NZ’s third largest source of visitors behind Australia and China.

Houston Aviation Director Mario Diaz said the start of Air NZ’s flights to Houston strengthened the city’s reputation as a global gateway.

“With the beginning of Air New Zealand’s service from George Bush Intercontinental to Auckland, Houston becomes the only city in North America with nonstop air service available to all six inhabited continents,” Diaz said in a statement.

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