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## Durban to get daily direct flights to and from Dubai

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EMIRATES Airlines, one of the world's top carriers, will make daily direct flights from Dubai to Durban from December.

The announcement yesterday follows lengthy negotiations. The direct link is expected to provide a major boost for tourism and the provincial economy.

Talks initiated by the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government have been taking place for the past few years, and the decision could prompt other international airlines to follow.

The Emirates decision follows its successful commencement of operations in Cape Town earlier this year and will allow for a build-up of passenger traffic ahead of 2010. In a statement issued yesterday, Emirates said Durban's advantageous location made it a natural hub for trade with the Indian Ocean and Asian Pacific countries, boosting its status as Africa's largest port and the world's ninth-busiest.

Emirates president Tim Clark said he was confident that the new service would foster greater business, tourism and cultural exchange and prove an asset in Durban's growth plans.

"Our flights will provide travellers from key cities in Europe, the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East a direct access to Durban and will strengthen inbound tourist arrivals. At the same time, it will open up a direct link to more than 90 global destinations for Durban's outbound travellers, who can now avoid travelling via Johannesburg."

### Expansion

Clark said Africa was key to Emirates' global expansion strategy and the airline operated 86 flights a week to 15 African gateways.

"Owing to the continent's growing economy and demand for air travel, these flights operate at robust seat factors of more than 80%. Emirates will continue to spread its wings in the African skies."

Tourism KZN chief executive Ndabo Khoza said he had been "tracking the negotiations for some time".

"One of the things we also started doing was look to a number of tour operators in the UK, Scandinavia and Germany to route people through Dubai and direct to Durban," he said.

Khoza said he had received positive feedback from such tour operators. Dubai had become a busy hub for travellers and the potential decision to fly directly to Durban boded well for tourism in the province.

"It also bodes very well for the new airport being built, with one international airline already seeing the potential. This will give other airlines that pulled out of Durban the opportunity to reassess their case," he said.

Dube Tradeport chief executive officer Rohan Persad said the aggression with which the airline was "coming into Durban" was "absolutely fantastic" and there could now also be the possibility of airlines from India, the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe making Durban a direct destination.

"For a long time, people have said that there was no international market for Durban. Now we can feel vindicated."

Emirates will serve Durban with an Airbus A330-200 aircraft offering 27 business class and 251 economy class seats.

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