



Business

Flying American Airlines on Saturday? You may want to check in early



American Airlines has begun construction work at O'Hare International Airport's Terminal 3, moving ticket counters and upgrading its gate areas ahead of October's combination with US Airways.



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The US Airways brand will fly into the sunset Saturday as American Airlines embarks on the perilous task of integrating passenger reservation systems.

Fliers of the world's largest airline won't have to do anything differently, although checking in early and leaving extra time is probably wise.

US Airways will cease to exist Saturday as far as customers are concerned. The combined airline moves to one website, one mobile app, and a single set of travel policies and frequent-flier benefits. Fort Worth, Texas-based American and US Airways merged in late 2013.

Behind the scenes Saturday, American will be combining reservation systems, often called the computer backbone or brain of an airline.

In other airline mergers, combining systems has caused problems. Notably in 2012, Chicago-based United Airlines combined reservation systems, moving to Continental's. It resulted in months of rampant delays and cancellations that led to customer defections and damaged profits.

American Airlines officials say they have spared no expense to decrease the chances the airline will have trouble Saturday but can't guarantee complete success. Here's what American has done so far:

- It switched to the larger airline's reservation system, which requires moving less data and less retraining of employees.

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- In July, it began draining US Airways reservations from the system, leaving fewer records to migrate, just 4 percent of all reservations.

- American did six full-scale tests of the migration with 5 million mock plane reservations.

- Staffing levels at airports will be increased 20 percent Saturday.

- American's flight schedule Saturday has been reduced by some 200 flights.

- Airport agents and reservation agents had extra training.

- USAirways.com will automatically redirect to AA.com on Saturday, and the US Airways mobile app will be disabled.

In airports, including O'Hare International, American has already combined ticket counters and gates with US Airways. American uses O'Hare as a hub and is the second-largest airline there, next to United.

Several years of other behind-the-scenes integration work is left to complete, involving flight attendants, pilots and maintenance teams. It will take a couple of years to repaint US Airways aircraft.

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percent next year.

Business travel spending rising

slower: U.S. business travel spending will increase by 3.1 percent in 2015 and 3.7 percent in 2016, a downward revision of previous estimates, according to the Global Business Travel Association. While the number of business trips is up, total spending per trip is down, it said. That can be linked to growing risk associated with the global economy, especially in China, Russia and the Middle East, along with the global collapse in oil prices, it said. Previously, it projected increased spending of 4.9 percent this year and 5.4

United takes on more Dreamliners: United Airlines took delivery of two more 787 Dreamliners in September, bringing its fleet of the customer-pleasing, fuel-efficient plane to 22. It has 12 787-8 aircraft and 10 of the longer-body, longer-range 787-9. It mostly uses 787s on international routes.

Finnair adds frequencies: Finnair of Finland said it will increase weekly flights between O'Hare and Helsinki from three this summer to five in summer 2016. Flights to

Chicago O'Hare will be operated from Helsinki on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Volaris adds flights to Chicago: Mexican low-cost carrier Volaris Airlines said it will add new service between Midway Airport and Durango, Mexico, starting Dec. 8, with twice-weekly flights, on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Volaris operates at O'Hare and Midway to a total of five destinations in Mexico.

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