

## YAHOO! TRAVEL

## Virgin's Little Red takes flight in UK

By Bekah Wright | Compass – 3 hours ago

Bagpipes, kilts and a signature Dewar's cocktail were in full sway Monday as Virgin Atlantic celebrated the inaugural flight of its first short-haul, domestic arm – Little Red. The flight departed from [London](#) Heathrow Airport en route to [Edinburgh, Scotland](#).

Little Red will operate 26 flights per day within the UK, including routes to [Manchester](#) and [Aberdeen](#). The move, rather than merely being focused on city-to-city service, is intended to improve connectivity as well as adding more traffic and customers to the Virgin network. Sitting in Little Red's first row – Virgin founder Sir Richard Branson.

One of Branson's goals for Little Red is to help Virgin Atlantic compete properly with British Airways.

"It's been 30 years since we first tried to get permission to fly domestic routes," Branson said. The hold-up, he said, had been waiting for slots from Heathrow, which only recently became available with the demise of British Midland Airways. The result, said Branson, "A few crumbs came on the table and we hope to put those crumbs to good use."

One way Little Red is already putting those crumbs to use is with the creation of 375 jobs, including 20 with the three new Virgin Holidays locations in Scotland. Also new to Virgin Atlantic is its current CEO, Craig Kreeger. Formerly with American Airlines, Kreeger replaced Virgin's recent chief executive, Steve Ridgeway, on Feb. 1.

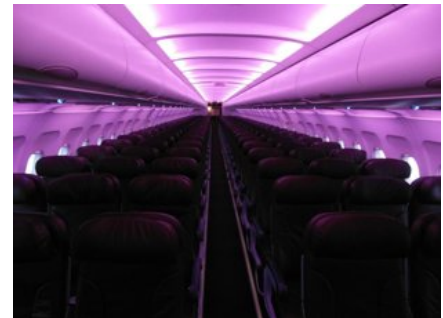
Kreeger sat down with Yahoo! Travel to discuss Virgin Atlantic's current endeavors as well as future possibilities. "I see Virgin Atlantic as a company that's made a number of very key strategic decisions over the last year or so to position the company for future success," he said. Among those decisions – securing a fleet of fuel-efficient airplanes. "We've taken 10 A330s and we've got 787-NFFs coming next September."

Also key is creating partnerships. Already in the news was a deal brokered in December during which Delta Airlines purchased Singapore Airline's 49 percent stake in Virgin Atlantic. In process are anti-trust clearances.

"With Delta we have a huge opportunity to offer new destinations with our great service to customers in the UK connecting onto Delta's flights, and to offer Delta's loyal frequent flyers, corporate partners and agency partners, access to Heathrow, which I think they will find a preferred service once they try it. That will generate more revenue for us from the United States than we currently receive."

Exploring other potential partners in the future was also hinted at during the press conference, something Kreeger expanded on with Yahoo! Travel. "We will certainly explore the possibility of Air France KLM, and we might very well find others that make sense to augment our great service, our culture and our people with more connectivity around the world."

Today, though, was all about Little Red. Now that those routes are under way, new planes are forthcoming and the Delta deal is done, Kreeger has set his sites on what's next. "For me, as the new CEO, to take a fresh eye to everything else we do to see if there are other opportunities," he said, "I don't see there being one big thing, I see executing the excellent strategy we've already embarked upon, then finding a few little things here and there that get us the rest of the way we need to be."



(Photo: Courtesy of Virgin Atlantic)

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