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Remote Access

Four Canada-based airlines provide service to some of the country's most remote towns, filling a need for travelers who would otherwise have little or no travel options.

■ By Rick Dietert, Holly Burkholder and Michelle Priller | *Ascend* Contributors

Canada, because of its expansiveness and the remoteness of some of its towns and cities, has a rich airline history. And while most people around the world will recognize the Air Canada brand and most likely the up-and-coming low-cost carrier WestJet, there are several smaller niche carriers that serve a vital transportation need for many Canadian citizens.

Some of these regional carriers, such as Canadian North, Central Mountain Air, Bearskin Airlines and First Air, while small compared to traditional airlines, strive to provide the same or even better service than their larger international counterparts. In doing so, they are investing in state-of-the-art technology to help enhance customer service and continue to

provide vital air links to remote areas within Canada that would otherwise be lacking.

Canadian North

Yellowknife, Canada-based Canadian North serves the Northwest Territories, which is 1,346,106 square kilometers (538,442 square miles) with a population of about 42,000, and the Nunavut Territory, which is 2,093,190 square kilometers (837,276 square miles) with 29,300 citizens. The region is primarily inhabited by native residents including Inuvialuit and Inuit.

Originally created by Canadian Airlines in 1990, Canadian North was purchased in 1998 by the Air Nortera Group, a holding company that is 100 percent owned by more than

30,000 Inuvialuit and Inuit shareholders. In fact, the carrier's motto is "Your North, Your Airline," and its tail motif is a polar bear in front of the midnight sun.

Canadian North operates five 737-200 combis, a 737-200 and a Fokker 28 and serves remote cities, including Yellowknife, Ranklin Inlet, Hay River, Norman Wells, Cambridge Bay, Inuvik and Iqaluit. The airline also serves Calgary, Ottawa and Edmonton.



Photo by Chris Sand/JetPhotos.net

Several Canada-based regional airlines, such as Canadian North, serve some of the country's most remote cities and towns, such as Yellowknife (right).



Photo by JuppImages/Corporation

Many of Canada's small, remote northern towns rely on air service from airlines such as Central Mountain Air to connect them to other parts of the country.



Photo by Jupiterimages Corporation



Photo courtesy of Central Mountain Air

it can offer a range of other customer services such as fare-led itinerary searches. The airline will also implement several other solutions, including:

- *Sabre® Virtually There®* Web site, which enables customers to automatically receive reservations confirmation via e-mail as well as obtain information about their destination such as local weather and flight status,
- *Customer Insight*, a module of *SabreSonic™ Res* that provides an integrated customer relationship management tool that enables consistent customer service regardless of the method customers use to book their flights,
- *Web Check-in*, a module of *SabreSonic™ Check-in* that enables customers to check in from remote locations via the Internet.

While Canadian North has carved out a niche market in a remote area of Canada, its desire to provide an exceptional level of service, in part, through its recent technological advancements, will help strengthen its brand and encourage repeat business.

The carrier has partnerships with other regional airlines such as Kenn Borek Air Ltd., Aklak Air, Calm Air, Air Tindi and North-Wright Airways, and it accepts connections from Air Canada and has supported EDIFACT through check-in capabilities with the airline for a number of years. As the International Air Transport Association's mandate for 100 percent electronic ticketing approaches, Canadian North is also preparing to set up an interline electronic ticketing agreement with Air Canada via the *Interline Electronic Ticketing Hub*, a module of *SabreSonic™ Ticket*.

While Canadian North has always done everything possible to provide excellent in-flight service, which includes hot meals with exotic dishes such as bison pot pie and an excellent choice of wines on most flights, it is expanding its customer-service offerings to include improved online flight booking features and Web-based check-in processes. Canadian North has offered Web booking options for several years and will soon utilize *SabreSonic™ Web*, an advanced booking engine, so

Central Mountain Air

Central Mountain Air was established in 1987 as a charter airline flying DC-3s and float planes to northern British Columbia to mining and guide outfitting areas. It is a privately owned airline that serves more than 17 communities in British Columbia and Alberta. The carrier employs more than 300 people and is headquartered in Smithers, British Columbia, with sales and marketing offices in Calgary.

Central Mountain Air operates 14 18-seat Beech 1900Ds and a Dornier 328. Some of the cities served by Central Mountain Air in British Columbia include Campbell River, Comox, Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, Quesnel, Smithers, Terrace, Williams Lake and Vancouver. Kamloops and Kelowna are especially popular destinations with rapidly expanding tourism and skiing operations. Other communities served in Alberta include High Level, Lloydminster, Rainbow Lake, Calgary and Edmonton. Several scheduled flights are operated under Air Canada flight numbers as part of a codeshare agreement.

Central Mountain Air has recently selected the *Res* component and utilizes the *Web* component for its online booking engine. In addition, Central Mountain Air is also setting up interline electronic ticketing with Air Canada via the *Interline Electronic Ticketing Hub*.

Bearskin Airlines

Founded in 1963 by John Hegland, Bearskin Airlines — nicknamed the "Bear" — was named after Bearskin Lake located in northern Ontario and is another Canadian regional airline that primarily serves the needs



Photo courtesy of Bearskin Airlines

Bearskin Airlines, or "The Bear," operates more than 200 daily departures, servicing remote towns and cities throughout northern Ontario and Manitoba with its fleet of more than 30 aircraft.



of the First Nation population of northern Canada. Bearskin Airlines has more than 375 employees and its main offices are in Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay, Ontario. Today, Bearskin Airlines operates more than 200 daily departures that serve northern Ontario and Manitoba communities including Dryden, Fort Frances, Flin Flon, Kapuskasing, Kenora, North Bay, Lynn Lake, Red Lake, Sioux Lookout, Sault St. Marie, Sudbury, The Pas, Timmins, Thunderbay, Ottawa and Winnipeg.

Bearskin operates a diverse fleet of more than 30 aircraft that includes seven Fairchild Metroliners, six Beech 99s, four Beech King Air 100s, four Pilatus PC-12s, and a number of Piper Aztecs and Cessna 337s.

Bearskin Airlines strives to offer excellent customer service to its passengers, and it produces its own in-flight magazine, *Bear Country*, which promotes tourism to northern Ontario and Manitoba and highlights the unique culture of the First Nation tribes. Bearskin Airlines also has a commercial agreement with Air Canada and participates in the Aeroplan frequent flyer program.

The carrier has turned to the *Sabre Airline Solutions*[®] business to provide additional passenger service features that include reservations, departure control and *Web* components within the *SabreSonic*[™] *Passenger Solutions*. Bearskin is also the launch customer for the new *Sabre Airline Solutions* travel bank feature that enables airlines to refund tickets



Photo by Michael Durning/Airlines.net

First Air, which provides scheduled services, freighter operations and charter service to the remote cities of the Northwest Territories, operates Boeing 737 aircraft, which display a tall Inukshuk on every tail.

into a personal travel bank that can be used for future online bookings. In addition, Bearskin Airlines is improving its service by setting up interline electronic ticketing with Air Canada.

As the employees of Bearskin Airlines like to say, "When flying in Bear Country, let the 'Bear' take you there."

First Air

First Air, another northern Canada operator, serves the remote cities of the Northwest Territories and proudly displays a tall Inukshuk, which is a traditional Inuit marker, on the tails of its Boeing 737 aircraft. First Air evolved

from Bradley Air Services, founded by Russ Bradley almost 60 years ago, and later expanded through acquisition of other airlines including Ptarmigan Airways and NWT Air. Today, the company is owned by the Makivik Corp., an Inuit corporation, and operates under the motto, "First Air, the Airline of the North."

First Air combines a mix of scheduled service, freighter operations and charter service that is supported by more than 19 aircraft, including Boeing 737-100s/200s combis, Boeing 727-200 combis and freighters, ATR-42s, HS-748s, and a Lockheed 382 Hercules. Its charter service mainly supports the Canadian government and mining operations in the northern Arctic. The scheduled service and cargo operations serve more than 225,000 passengers and 22 million kilograms (24,200 tons) of freight in a year. Service is provided to connect more than 24 northern cities including the major cities of Ottawa, Montreal, Winnipeg and Edmonton.

First Air also partners with Air Canada and participates in its Aeroplan frequent flyer program. A long-time user of the *Res* component, First Air has also been taking advantage of some of the new tools that *Sabre Airline Solutions* has rolled out including its new *Web* component booking engine and is also setting up functionality to allow interline electronic ticketing with Air Canada via the *Interline Electronic Ticketing Hub*.

As these carriers' capitalize on advanced technology, they'll continue to provide links between remote communities as well as the business centers of the country. **F**

Inuvik, Canada, served by Canadian North, is located on the Mackenzie Delta, Canada's largest fresh-water delta, close to the Arctic Ocean. A remote destination with a view of the Richardson Mountains, Inuvik is the gateway to other northern communities in Canada.



Photo by i4photomages Corporation

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