

Press release

Liege Airport, March 10, 2015

Liege Airport first in Europe to receive charters from Chinese Tour Operators

From April 20, 2015 Liège will be closer to China. The towns of Shenyang, Tianjin and Xian (25 million people in total !) will be linked to Liege Airport every week by 'u-tour', one of the top player among Chinese tour operators. From Liege, Chinese tourists will be able to visit Belgium and several European countries (France, Germany, Sweden, Italy...).

These new air links are opening up Europe a little more to the promising Chinese tourist market. Chinese tourists will fly in on board of the Airbus A330-300 from russian company I-Fly, which has a capacity of 387 seats. There will be three weekly flights between Shenyang, Tianjin, Xian and Liege.

For 2015, this means more than 50,000 extra passengers who will transit via Liege Airport.

"This is a great development for our airport. Chinese tourism is booming. Before the end of 2014, it will amount to a 100 million trips abroad. Knowing that this part of Europe is only 3.5% of the continent, one sees here a potential measure of growth to attract the new Chinese middle class," explained Luc Partoune, Managing Director of Liege Airport.

The Belgian Embassy in Beijing has been very proactive in attracting this operation to Belgium. Ambassador Michel Malherbe and his team have been involved from the very start of the negotiations with u-tour. "The visa procedure for the Chinese tourist to visit Europe offers the flexibility and reliability needed for an operation of this size", said Mr. Malherbe. "We have invested in this procedure, as this operation is a big step to put Belgium on the map of the Chinese tourists. Liege Airport and the Belgian Embassy will keep working hand in hand, to make this a long term success, and a basis for closer ties between China and Belgium."

Close partnership

"This is a European premier for u-tour. They have been attracted by the flexibility, the hospitality, the timetables and the infrastructure. Other strengths were close partnership and close cooperation with the airport, to accommodate u-tours requests. We are working to adapt our terminal for this new flow of tourists," added Luc Partoune.

It's not only a *pax* operation but also a freight operation. About ten tonnes of goods are carried by aircraft. I-Fly, a Russian company, has contacted the sales agents to load the cargo on board too.

Searching for charter operations in Asia was included in the commercial airport strategy since 2012. With AWEX Asia and its Hong Kong's office, Liege Airport welcomes for the first time in Europe charter flights from the largest economy in the world. 'u-tour', supported by I Fly and Liege Airport, is a pioneer that brings Chinese outbound tourism to a new level.

Liege affirms itself as international crossroad

For Jean-Claude Marcourt, vice-president of the Walloon government and minister of economy, this project is a major step forward in the relationships shared between Wallonia and China: "I have had the opportunity to go to China to defend Wallonia's interests several times and in particular for the partnership that we are officialising today. It is an important moment for Wallonia and the Liege region. This commercial agreement proves, once again, that Wallonia's assets are crucial when it comes to attracting foreign investors. Liege Airport is today at a crossroad and, as we all wish, will experience an important growth both in cargo and passenger traffic in the coming months. Besides the positive impact on the economy and the employment, it is also a great opportunity for Liege to affirm itself as an international crossroad by welcoming hundreds of Chinese every week."

About u-tour :

Utour International Travel Service Co., Ltd. (Utour) is a joint-stock enterprise with independent legal status established with the approval of the National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and Beijing Administration for Industry and Commerce. The company is committed to providing Chinese citizens with entry & exit and domestic travel services on a concessionary basis. The company mainly engages in outbound travel wholesale, retail, and incentive, business travel and meetings. Utour headquartered in Beijing, and branched in Shanghai, Chengdu, Shenyang, Harbin, Xi'an, Tianjin, Xiamen, Chongqing, Hangzhou and Wuhan.

About Liege Airport :

Liege Airport is the largest cargo airport in Belgium and a European leader, with 590,000 tons of cargo in 2014. Passenger transport is also one of its major development targets, with a modern, friendly and accessible terminal that can accommodate 1.5 million passengers every year. The airport's exceptional location covers a particularly dense catchment area in Belgium, in Germany and the Netherlands. The model developed by Liege Airport over the last twenty years is based on flexibility and simplicity, and it has demonstrated its effectiveness by delivering the best solutions for its clients and generating more than 10,000 direct and indirect jobs.

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