

WTM Africa 2016: LATAM Airlines ready to introduce itself to the world

 By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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On the first day of World Travel Market Africa 2016, LATAM Airlines introduced itself and its intention to connect Latin America to Africa with its first international route to Africa launching in the second half of 2016 which will offer three weekly flights between O.R. Tambo International in Johannesburg, South Africa and Guarulhos International Airport in São Paulo, Brazil.



Martin Modarelli, Commercial Director UK, Nordic Countries and Africa, LATAM

Led in by the sound of drums, Martin Modarelli, globe trotter and commercial director UK, Nordic countries and Africa for LATAM airlines was quick to show us how and why LATAM is ready to grow. We caught up with Modarelli at the LATAM stand to get some more inside info.

Tell us a bit about LATAM and its culture.

Martin Modarelli: LATAM Airlines is the result of the merger between LAN and TAM Airlines. Together, we have an unrivalled network, flying to 135 destinations across 24 countries. We are 52,000 employees that transported 68 million passengers in 2015.

The LATAM culture is actually a result of the cultures of Latin America as a whole. With our on board service, we are proud to show the best food, wine, and charm of the Latin American culture. LATAM culture should be understood as the merger between LAN and TAM, so the new LATAM culture is a mix of the best attributes of both companies.

That is why it's very important for us that we have passion that drives everything, that we have security as the number one attitude, efficiency and attentiveness. So for sure we want to differentiate ourselves in how we treat people.



There are some things in which we want to be best in class, for example, on contingencies. When a passenger has a problem, we want to be best in class in protecting that passenger. We strongly believe that the passenger gets to know the company when they have a problem. That's why we have an app where passengers can choose what to do – be it a refund or changing a flight. We have invested a lot of time and effort to become good in contingencies.

■ ***What do you hope to gain out of your participation in WTM Africa?***

Modarelli: It is the first year we participate in World Travel Market Africa. We usually participate in most of the fairs we have in Europe for instance, because we understand that this is the place where we should introduce ourselves to the market. So far, I've only been here a couple of hours, but I'm really impressed by all the interest that has been shown. It's good that the market here shows the same interest as the one that we have. People from both South Africa and Africa as a whole already came to the stand to see in which way we can work together.

■ ***Why is it important to connect Africa and Latin America directly? Why now?***

Modarelli: I think the timing is right. Mainly because we, as a company, after the merge, focused ourselves for two to three years on actually finalising and organising the new hub that we have in São Paulo to match all the itineraries of two very big airlines in South America, implementing a new culture for LATAM, implementing a new brand that is actually only going to be implemented in May. We don't use the brand you see here yet, this is quite an exception.

I think that we are now ready to introduce ourselves to the world. We've been busy doing some housekeeping and now we are ready for growth which is why we've been receiving all the planes. Before, our priority was to replace existing planes with new planes, and now the new planes are for growing our routes. 2015/16 will see us opening 11 routes in total which is much more than we opened in 2012 or 2013.

■ ***Tell us more about your position on the [Dow Jones Sustainability Index](#) and your efforts to remain a sustainable airline.***

Modarelli: We do lots of things with regards to the environment. I think the fact that we're operating new planes and more environmentally friendly planes is a huge contribution we can make from the airline. That's why we fly Airbus 350 and Dreamliner, instead of older planes. We are also changing more of our domestic fleet and buying new versions that is

much more efficient with regards to fuel consumption.

For the sustainability index, it's fair to say that we were the first airline in Latin America and second in the world to be part of this sustainability project.

Another thing we do locally in the countries that we work is we take care of the destination we fly to. We often do projects with maintaining the environment.

▣ ***What will LATAM bring to the table for tourists and tourism?***

Modarelli: I think for both sides there is a huge opportunity. People in South America love to travel and for us to introduce to them a completely new continent to go to, that should be a huge opportunity. Every year, people are used to going to the United States or the Caribbean. Giving them the correct connectivity to come to South Africa will make it a huge top of mind destination for South American people.

It's a very affordable destination and the currency makes a difference. To go out for dinner in Cape Town costs the same as a dinner in Buenos Aires – it's not more expensive. When you go Europe and other places... it's a lot more.

Furthermore, I have meetings with different embassies in the coming week to start conversations with them to see what we can do to improve the trade between the economies of South Africa and South America.

▣ ***You said that you also do cargo. How big is the Logistics side of LATAM's business?***

Modarelli: Originally, LAN was a cargo company. On most of our routes, we fly with planes that take both passengers and cargo, therefore, cargo is very important for us. For the last two years the cargo industry slowed down, but today we still work with between 65% and 70% of cargo in our planes, which is quite interesting for us.

We also manage a lot of foods that need to be fresh by the time it arrives at its next destination, so we manage to sell lots of food and cargo. For regional economies within South America, we really make a difference by helping, for example, the apples of a specific place go to a supermarket. We also have lots of export in wine and salmon.

So cargo is part of the DNA of LATAM and that is why we fly to even more countries with cargo than with passengers.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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