



Business Focus Story

# Touchdown Timor

## Qantas launches new commercial air services to Dili

As an island nation, improving air connectivity is crucial to develop Timor-Leste's small but growing tourism sector. Only 74,000 total visitors arrived per year pre-COVID-19. Timor-Leste needs more regular flights, especially to Australia, which is the source country of 40 per cent of its leisure travellers. In January 2022, the Governments of Timor-Leste and Australia signed an air service agreement, opening the possibility of more commercial flights.

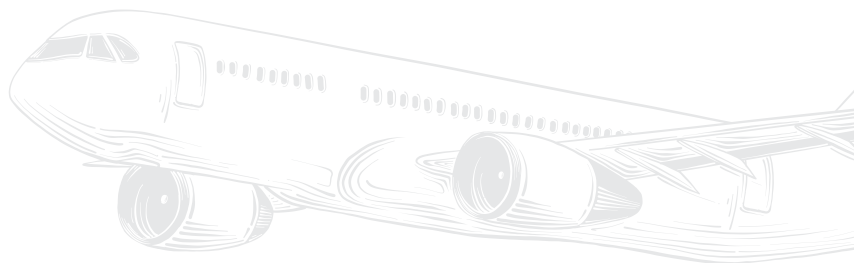
Following this agreement, Qantas Airways, Australia's largest airline, commenced service from Darwin to Dili in March 2022. The 70-passenger flight flew three times per week. Although Darwin and Dili were already connected through a semi-regular flight from AirNorth, Qantas' new flight is less expensive and allows easier bookings from major Australian hubs.

MDF and Qantas seized on the launch event to boost the country's tourism profile. Qantas arranged for five travel journalists from major Australian news media—Channel Nine Australia, Escape (News Corp.), Traveller, NT New and Territory Q—to take the first flight. MDF, The Asia Foundation and local operators also arranged local tourism experiences. Dubbed Taste of Timor, the first flight took the five journalists on a whirlwind tour of Timor-Leste's food culture, coral reefs, history and coffee farms.

Following the visit, the journalists published online, print and video stories that showcased the culture and people of Timor-Leste, promoting the 'discover the undiscovered' aspect of one of Australia's closest neighbours. The media coverage spanned national consumer media and Australia's premier travel publications and targeted Darwin media. This coverage included cover stories in the Territory Weekend Magazine and Sunday Traveller, Northern Territory-wide TV news on the night of the flight launch, and a four-minute national feature on Timor-Leste tourism on Today. Qantas estimates that this level of coverage is equivalent to USD1.2 million (AUD1.8 million) in advertising value.

Since starting the service in March, Qantas has expanded to daily flights.

Looking ahead, MDF will continue to promote Timor-Leste as a new, adventurous destination. This will include general marketing, like the work done with Qantas, and driving bookings to increase arrivals.



The Taste of Timor media famil (familiarisation trip) helped us showcase Timor-Leste to Australia and promote our new Darwin–Dili service. The trip generated 150 media mentions and a potential audience of up to 12 million people. Working with MDF helped us to plan and execute a successful visit. The new route is performing strongly and has expanded service from three return services per week to six.

**Henry Budd,**  
Qantas Senior Manager Corporate Communications

## Taste of Timor in the media

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### Channel 9 News



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### Escape Magazine



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### NT News



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### Traveller

