



United Airlines

United Airlines is a major U.S. airline based in Chicago, Illinois and was the largest airline in the world for many years. United traces its roots to five airlines that were established in the latter 1920s; Boeing Air Transport with a route from San Francisco to Chicago, Pacific Air Transport with a route from Seattle to San Diego, National Air Transport with routes from Chicago to Dallas and New York, Stout Air Lines with routes from Chicago to Detroit and Cleveland, and Varney Air Lines with a route from Salt Lake City to Seattle. Boeing Air Transport created a holding company in 1928 called United Aircraft Transportation Company (UATC), and purchased the other four carriers. National and Stout later merged and in 1931 the four carriers were assigned under a second subsidiary holding company, United Air Lines Inc. The four were all merged in 1934 and United Air Lines began operating a transcontinental route from San Francisco to New York by way of Salt Lake City, Cheyenne, Wyoming, Omaha, Chicago, and Cleveland. The stop at Cheyenne was later replaced with Denver which became a major hub for United. Chicago and San Francisco also became major hubs.

United began operating to Albuquerque on June 15, 1982 with flights to Denver using Boeing 727 aircraft and soon added flights to Chicago and San Francisco as well as to El Paso which was an extension for flights to and from the Denver hub. The carrier had initially planned to begin Albuquerque service in late 1981 but was forced to delay their service due to an illegal strike by air traffic controllers which caused restrictions on the number of flights operated by air carriers. Boeing 737's were added to the schedule in the mid-1980s followed by Boeing 757's in 1998. The flights to Chicago, San Francisco, and El Paso were all dropped by 1990 but flights to Denver were increased to as many as nine per day by 1999, four of which operated with the larger Boeing 757's. In the late 1990's, United had planned to switch all Albuquerque service to "Shuttle by United", a new low-cost airline within an airline which operated all

737 aircraft however these plans were not carried through. New Airbus A319 and A320 aircraft began appearing at Albuquerque in 1999 and the Boeing 727 fleet was quickly retired after the tragic events of 9/11/2001.



United Boeing 727-200 at Albuquerque in the carrier's initial livery worn when United first began service to the city in 1982.



United Boeing 737-500 at Albuquerque in the "Battleship Grey" livery worn by the carrier from 1993 through 2004.

Service to Chicago was reinstated in 2002 and during the 2000's decade, many flights from Albuquerque to Chicago and Denver were replaced by regional carriers, primarily Mesa and SkyWest Airlines, operating on behalf of United as "United Express". New United mainline service to Washington Dulles Airport was added in 2006 and new United Express service to Los Angeles and San Francisco was also added in the mid-2000's. The United Express operation at Albuquerque as well as other cities in New Mexico that have been served is discussed below in more detail.



United Boeing 757-200 in the "Rising Blue" livery worn from 2004 through 2012. United flew 757's to Albuquerque from 1998 through 2011.



United Express Canadair CRJ-200 at Albuquerque. United Express began regional jet flights at Albuquerque in 2003.

United merged with Continental Airlines in 2012 adding new service to Houston, Texas for United's operation at Albuquerque. United continued a Continental tradition by adding more flights and larger aircraft to the schedule during the Albuquerque International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta, Albuquerque's largest annual event held in early October of each year. Service at Albuquerque peaked in 2013 with 17 flights per day to six destinations however the flight to Washington Dulles was discontinued in 2014 and for a period in 2014-2015, all United flights at Albuquerque were operated by United Express. United gradually added mainline jets back to the Albuquerque schedule through the latter 2010's and Express service to Los Angeles ended in 2019. In early 2020, twelve daily flights were operating at Albuquerque including two on United mainline jets. Nonstop service is flown to Denver, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco, four of United's primary hubs.



United Boeing 737-800 at Albuquerque wearing the adopted colors of Continental Airlines after the two carriers merged in 2012.

In March 2020 as the COVID-19 virus outbreak struck, air travel plummeted by more than 95 percent and United cut back on its schedules at Albuquerque in April, 2020 to only a single daily flight to Denver using a United Express 50-seat CRJ-200 aircraft. A few other flights resumed during the summer months however the Albuquerque Hot Air Balloon Fiesta was cancelled for 2020 so no additional service was added like United had routinely done. Traffic slowly rebounded over the next year and by fall 2021, most all service to Albuquerque had been restored to levels seen prior to the pandemic including a handful of United mainline jets. United also added many extra flights and larger aircraft during the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta of 2021. As 2022 rolled in, a new problem arose as a shortage of pilots began to plague the industry, especially for the regional airlines operating as United Express. United then began to

upgrade service at Albuquerque with more mainline aircraft but fewer flights. By the spring of 2023, United was operating eight daily flights at Albuquerque, seven on mainline jets and only one United Express flight.



United Airbus A319 at Albuquerque now in the current “Evolution Blue” livery that was adopted in 2019. United has been flying Airbus A319’s and larger A320’s to Albuquerque since 1999.

Since United inaugurated service to Albuquerque in 1982, the carrier has seen five different paint schemes. Some aircraft have special schemes which have been seen at the Albuquerque Sunport including an Airbus 320 painted in United’s “Friendly Skies” scheme of the early 1970’s and a Boeing 737-800 in the “Star Alliance” scheme which is a global marketing alliance of airlines that United is a member of. Through the merger with Continental, United also inherited and preserved a Boeing 737-900 painted in a classic Continental Airlines scheme from the 1950’s.



United Airbus A320 at Albuquerque in a retro early 1970's "Friend Ship" livery.



United Boeing 737-800 in a special livery commemorating United's membership in the Star Alliance consortium of major global airlines.



United Boeing 737-900 at Albuquerque displaying the retro "Blue Skyway" livery of Continental Airlines.



United Express

United Express, a code-share feeder service operated by several smaller regional airlines on behalf of United Airlines, began appearing in New Mexico by the mid 1980's. Service by Aspen Airways operating as United Express began from Farmington, New Mexico to Denver in 1986 using 50-seat Convair 580 prop aircraft and 85-seat British Aerospace 146 regional jets. Aspen also made a brief appearance to Albuquerque during the winter of 1989/1990 with a single Convair 580 flight to Durango, Colorado. In 1990 the United Express service at Farmington changed hands from Aspen to Mesa Airlines using 19-seat Beech 1900's, 30-seat Embraer 120 Brasilia's, and 37-seat De Havilland Dash -8 commuter aircraft. United Express service by Mesa Airlines was added from Santa Fe to Denver in 1995 using Beech 1900D aircraft. United Express service at both Farmington and Santa Fe was changed to Great Lakes Airlines in 1998 using all Beech 1900D aircraft. All service at Farmington and Santa Fe ended in 2002 when United decided against having commuter airlines with 19-seat aircraft operating as United Express.



United Express Convair 580 operated by Aspen Airways at Albuquerque in 1990.



Aspen Airways flew 85-seat Bae-146-100 regional jets as United Express to Farmington, New Mexico during the latter 1980's.



Mesa Airlines flew Beech-1900's and this Embraer 120 Brasilia as United Express to Farmington during the early 1990's.



United Express De Havilland Dash-8 operated by Mesa Airlines served Farmington in the mid-1990's.



Great Lakes Aviation operated Beech 1900D's as United Express from both Farmington and Santa Fe to Denver from 1998 through 2002.

Several different carriers operating as United Express using regional jets with 50 to 76 seats began serving Albuquerque in 2003 supplementing and/or replacing some of the United mainline flights to Denver and Chicago. New United Express service to San Francisco began in 2005 followed by new service to Los Angeles a year later. 30-seat Embraer 120 Brasilia prop aircraft were used on a select few flights to Denver in 2003 and 2004. Flights to San Antonio, Texas were operated by United Express regional jets for a brief time in 2006. Service to Houston from both Albuquerque and Hobbs, New Mexico was inherited from the merger with Continental Airlines in 2012 and United Express service from Santa Fe to Denver returned in 2013 with 50-seat regional jets. Large prop aircraft came to Albuquerque in 2012 with the 74-seat De Havilland d Dash-8-Q400 however these aircraft were retired in 2016 and replaced with regional jets. Service at Santa Fe had grown to as many as five flights per day to Denver at times and new service from Hobbs to Denver was added in late 2019.



United Express Canadair CRJ-700 operated by SkyWest Airlines at Albuquerque. CRJ-700's also occasionally fly into Santa Fe.



United Express De Havilland Dash-8-Q400 operated by Republic Airlines at Albuquerque.

After the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly reduced air travel in 2020, United had applied to discontinue all service to Santa Fe but was ordered to stay by the Department of Transportation. The carrier reduced service at Santa Fe to a single United Express flight to Denver which only operated three days per week. The Hobbs schedule was also reduced to only one flight on three days per week to Houston. United Express service was set to return to Farmington in October, 2020 with a single flight to Denver on a SkyWest Canadair CRJ-200 regional jet but that flight was put on hold indefinitely and ultimately cancelled. Service from Roswell, New Mexico to Denver was also planned for 2020 but shelved as well. By 2022 service to Santa Fe rebounded to two daily flights to Denver and service to Hobbs was up to one daily flight to Houston and a flight to Denver on three days per week. As a shortage of pilots began to put a tremendous strain on regional air carriers beginning in late 2021, United began replacing the United Express flights at Albuquerque with more United mainline aircraft but with fewer flights. Two Express flights had been flown to San Francisco but were replaced with one United flight.

The airlines that have been contracted to operate as United Express include SkyWest, Mesa, CommuteAir, Republic, Chautauqua, Shuttle America, GoJet, ExpressJet, Trans States, Aspen Airways and Great Lakes Aviation. A separate column will be written on each of these carriers under the “Major airline regional partners” link. As of 2023, SkyWest and Mesa are providing United Express service at Albuquerque while CommuteAir provides service to Santa Fe and Hobbs.



United Express Embraer 175 operated by Mesa Airlines at Albuquerque. SkyWest also flies the Embraer 175 for United Express at Albuquerque.



A SkyWest Canadair CRJ-200 landing at Albuquerque. SkyWest has also flown the CRJ-200's for service to Santa Fe and Hobbs, New Mexico. Service to Farmington was due to commence in 2020 but cancelled largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



CommutAir Embraer 145 at Santa Fe. CommuteAir also operates United Express flights at Hobbs.