

American Airlines leads pilot hiring surge as US airlines set traffic records



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By Kyle Arnold, Seattle Times, Dec. 16, 2019

Lead-in

What do you know about the situation on the global job market for pilots at the moment? What is the outlook for pilots according to you?

I. Read the text. What do the following figures refer to?

1. 65
2. 3.9%
3. 925
4. 41
5. March 13
6. \$100,000
7. 4,000
8. 390
9. \$22,000
10. \$229,000

Air carriers are on pace to hire nearly 5,000 pilots this year, even after canceling thousands of flights from the grounding of the Boeing 737 Max.

Airline hiring will top more than 4,000 pilots by year's end for the fifth straight year, a pace not seen since before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. That was before mergers halved the number of major air carriers and airlines were comfortable flying planes with more empty seats.

The industry is trying to keep up with a record number of passengers and more pilots retiring as they hit the mandatory age 65 retirement limit, said Louis Smith, president of the Nevada-based aviation hiring firm Future & Active Pilot Advisors.

"Airlines need a lot of pilots," Smith said. "As long as the economy is good and pilots keep retiring, someone has to fly planes."

The surge in hiring comes with an increase in commercial air traffic throughout the country. U.S. air carriers have shuttled about 848 million passengers this year through November, 3.9% more than the same period in 2018.

That includes about 75 million passengers this year at DFW International Airport.

Fort Worth, Texas-based American Airlines, which still has the most employees of any carrier, also has hired the most pilots this year, bringing on 925. American hired 894 pilots in 2018, FAPA's data showed.

American also plans to hire more pilots in 2020 than it did this year, said American Airlines spokeswoman Lanesha Gipson.

Southwest Airlines, which is headquartered at Dallas Love Field, has actually cut back on hiring this year, adding only 390 through November after bringing on 759 in 2018.

Southwest, which owns the most grounded Boeing 737 Max planes, delayed first officer training in late 2019 and doesn't plan to hold another class again until February. It also put off some pilot promotions to the captain position.

Southwest was supposed to get about 41 more 737 Max planes this year, but the aircraft has been sidelined by the Federal Aviation Administration since March 13 and the agency is taking its time to get it back into service.

However, Southwest is still making plans to boost pilot hiring in the future. In July, the airline launched a recruitment program called Destination 225 to partner with universities and flight schools. The program is intended to give pilots a direct path to flying for Southwest Airlines after they complete flight school.

Airlines have been facing a potential shortage of pilots during the next few years, mostly from retirement. Some 2,000 to 3,000 pilots a year at the country's 11 biggest airlines will turn 65 and age out of the system.

Airlines have been upping efforts to get students into pilot training programs and regional airlines, where starting pay was as low as \$22,000 a few years ago, said Mike Sykes, CEO of US Aviation Academy in Denton.

Now, pilots can make \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year in their first and second years, including big signing bonuses that first year. In 2016, American Airlines regional subsidiary Envoy Air started offering signing bonuses of up to \$22,100 for new pilots and retention bonuses of \$10,000 after the first year of flying. Envoy is also willing to pay up to \$45,000 in signing bonuses for experienced pilots.

"I would say it's been a good five years since students with enough flight hours had to work really hard to get a regional pilot position," Sykes said.

Pilot pay at mainline airlines such as American is good, but many inexperienced pilots were looking at up to \$100,000 in debt for flight school and then careers where many are "just scrapping by," Sykes said.

But Sykes said rising pay has helped lure more students. He said financial institutions that dropped out of lending for flight schools are reentering the market.

At American Airlines, average pilot pay hit \$229,000 a year in 2018, up from \$138,000 a decade ago, according to the MIT Airline Data Project. The pay at Southwest was \$234,000 for the average pilot, \$52,000 better than in 2008.

“The money is really good once you get to the mainline,” Sykes said. “It used to be that you had to suffer through flying for a regional with low pay, but that’s not the case anymore.”

I. Find grammar structures which refer to the following:

1. Prediction for future
2. Current process
3. Completed past action/state
4. Action which began in the past and still continues
5. Action/state in an unspecified moment in the period from the past until now

II. Complete the sentences with appropriate forms of the verbs in brackets.

1. A new list _____ (reveal) the safest airlines for 2020 and there are some surprising results.
2. Qantas _____ (be) the lead airline in virtually every major operational safety advancement over the past 60 years and has _____ (not have) a fatality in the pure-jet era.
3. The Ethiopian Airline pilots, never _____ (tell) MCAS _____ (be) on board, _____ (did) all they could do, but not knowing about MCAS, they _____ (be) unable to fight it off.
4. In the French Alps last summer, a plane _____ (set) seven new world records. The two-seater aircraft _____ (climb) more than 20,000 feet in under two minutes, and _____ (reach) speeds of 142 miles per hour.
5. In 20 years, you _____ (be able) to buy a ticket for a flight on an electric airplane capable of commuting 100 passengers.

III. Complete the sentences with words from the text. Sometimes you will have to change the form of the verbs. Use between one and two words.

1. Figures unearthed by freedom of information campaigners show 142 of 434 of the air force’s planes have been _____ and are not in service.
2. Brazil is determined to _____ airlines to operate domestic flights in Latin America’s largest aviation market.
3. _____ carriers typically operate between hub airports within their network and on international or long-haul services, using narrow-body and wide-body aircraft.
4. Pilots at Mesa Air Group, which offered the lowest starting wages in the industry at \$22 hourly, according to Cowen, earlier in July ratified a new contract _____ that to \$36 per hour and offering as much as \$42,100 in bonuses.

5. As airlines lose pilots who are _____ of the system, the bench of waiting replacements is not deep enough to keep up.
6. Private-Jet Deliveries _____ Just as Global Economy Cools Off.
7. A bus _____ passengers back and forth from the station to the terminal.
8. The Air Force has dramatically reduced its pilot _____ since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as the war on terror has inspired higher _____ rates and the voluntary return of hundreds of pilots who had left the service.
9. Airlines are _____ for their worst year since 2014.
10. A series of bankruptcies and _____ over the last 12 years has taken what had been 10 major U.S. airlines down to four mega-carriers which dominate the market.

IV. Below you will find some of the authentic questions asked during job interviews as part of the recruitment process for pilots in one of the major low cost-carriers. How would you answer the questions?

1. Why did you choose our company?
2. How did your adventure with aviation begin?
3. What are your plans for future?
4. You do realize that the base of your preference is not an option at the moment.
How do you feel about that?
5. How do you deal with stress?
6. What is your biggest drawback?
7. What is your biggest advantage?
8. What makes a good FO/CPT?
9. What does CRM consist in according to you?