

# Unique Logistics books dozens of Asia cargo jets for peak season

Pittsburgh airport picked as 1 of 3 import destinations, further raising its cargo profile

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Qatar Airways is one of three airlines Unique Logistics is chartering for several months to provide airlift from Vietnam to the U.S. (Photo: Qatar Airways Cargo)

Large logistics providers have responded to the dearth of air cargo capacity during the coronavirus pandemic by leasing entire planeloads with crews to make sure they can meet customers' transport requirements. Not to be outdone, New York-based Unique Logistics International has been one of the most aggressive midsize freight forwarders in locking up capacity, contracting for more than 150 freighter flights from Asia in the second half of the year.

Beginning June 13, Qatar Airways will operate twice-weekly service from Singapore to Pittsburgh International Airport for Unique Logistics using Boeing 777-300 passenger-freighters with seats removed to carry lightweight boxes stacked on the cabin floor, in addition to heavy freight in the hold.

Unique Logistics (OTCMKTS: [UNQL](#)) has also chartered 44 flights from Cathay Pacific Airways running twice a week through the end of December from Hanoi, Vietnam, to Pittsburgh via Hong Kong, Marc Schlossberg, executive vice president air cargo and sales, told American Shipper. Cathay will also use 777 mini-freighters capable of floor-loading.

Other capacity arrangements are still being finalized, he added.

“The reduced capacity combined with surging demand from a robust U.S. economy has led Unique Logistics to charter considerably more aircraft than previous years to service our customers,” Schlossberg said in an email.

Demand is expected to increase further in the months leading up to the holidays as retailers stock up on merchandise.

Among the shippers that will benefit from access to reliable capacity amid a global shortage of aircraft supply due to widespread grounding of passenger fleets is HP Inc. The computer maker recently signed a multimillion dollar airfreight contract for Unique to manage shipments from the Asia-Pacific region to the Americas for the next year.

The addition of Unique-controlled capacity to Pittsburgh comes on the heels of last month’s news of an agreement with Korean Air to provide 52 flights from Vietnam to the U.S. between Aug. 1 and year’s end. The airline is operating cargo-only 777s with the capability to load cargo on the passenger deck.

The Korean deal represents a continuation of existing weekly flights from Hanoi to Los Angeles and Ho Chi Minh City to Rickenbacker International Airport, a cargo-oriented facility near Columbus, Ohio. Korean took over the Hanoi-LAX flights in March when Cathay Pacific backed out because Hong Kong quarantine requirements for returning crews designed to contain the spread of COVID virus severely limited the number of pilots available to operate aircraft. The [Hong Kong government](#)

[loosened the rules in mid-April](#), but Cathay at the time said the quarantine caused a 25% reduction in freighter capacity.

[Unique first used Pittsburgh as an import gateway for Vietnam-origin goods for three months](#) late last year, with service from Ho Chi Minh City provided by Cathay Pacific. In December, it switched the destination to Rickenbacker airport and the carrier to Korean Air.

The logistics provider's return to Pittsburgh is an endorsement of the airport's cargo advantages, including lack of landside congestion commonly experienced at major international airports, fast turnarounds for clearing and releasing cargo, and location within a one-day truck drive of two-thirds of the U.S. population. In March, air cargo volume at Pittsburgh grew 29% compared to 2020 as cargo carriers increased operations there and utilized larger aircraft, according to the airport authority. Last month, Amazon's (NASDAQ: [AMZN](#)) private cargo airline [began daily service to Pittsburgh](#).

The ability to prioritize cargo tenants and quickly process shipments is why more logistics providers and cargo airlines are increasingly turning to tier-two airports such as Pittsburgh and Rickenbacker.

Unique Logistics International was integrated last year into a single U.S. entity through a reverse merger. The original parent company was founded in Hong Kong in 1983 and set up three separate subsidiaries in the U.S. In 2020, the New York office acquired its Atlanta and Boston counterparts, with the Hong Kong holding company retaining a minority interest. Under the deal, the U.S. company has firm options to acquire several Unique Logistics companies in Asia that remain under the original ownership.

The company tripled revenue to \$273 million over the previous three quarters compared with the combined numbers of the three separate U.S. companies in the comparable 2019 period. Last month it also signed AutoZone (NYSE: [AZO](#)) to a 12-month ocean freight contract on the trans-Pacific trade lane.