

FAIRER AIRFARES

July 2024



Central Highlands Development Corporation (CHDC) is calling on government and airlines to support the region by providing more reasonable airfares and reliable services. These measures are crucial for the long-term sustainability of the workforce, residential population, and visitor economy.

An effective aviation industry not only connects regional communities with family, friends, and essential services such as healthcare but also drives economic growth, enhances productivity, and supports key commercial sectors such as tourism. The role of the Emerald Airport and its ability to provide reliable, fair, and efficient air travel is indispensable.

Emerald Airport handles almost 150 flights each month, including both commercial and charter services, and plays a vital role in supporting the Royal Flying Doctor Service. With over 15,000 passengers passing through the airport monthly, Emerald ranks as the 14th most frequented destination from Brisbane Airport.

Airfare prices fluctuate greatly, a challenge the community has faced for over a decade. Research

indicates that more affordable fares are available to those who book well in advance or can be flexible with their travel dates. Unfortunately, many residents face unpredictable travel needs that prevent them from benefiting from these savings.

Currently, booking at least a month in advance can secure a weekend return flight for \$600. However, last-minute bookings can triple the cost to \$1,800. Families needing urgent travel for medical or family reasons may face expenses exceeding \$7,000.

Despite the introduction of the Embraer E190 by Qantas in May 2024, which expanded seat capacity, pricing during peak periods remains unchanged.

CHDC believes that a balance can be reached and is calling for action to make airfares fairer for all.

Emerald AIRPORT



148

flights
per month*



2 – 9

flights
per day



15,000

passengers
per month*

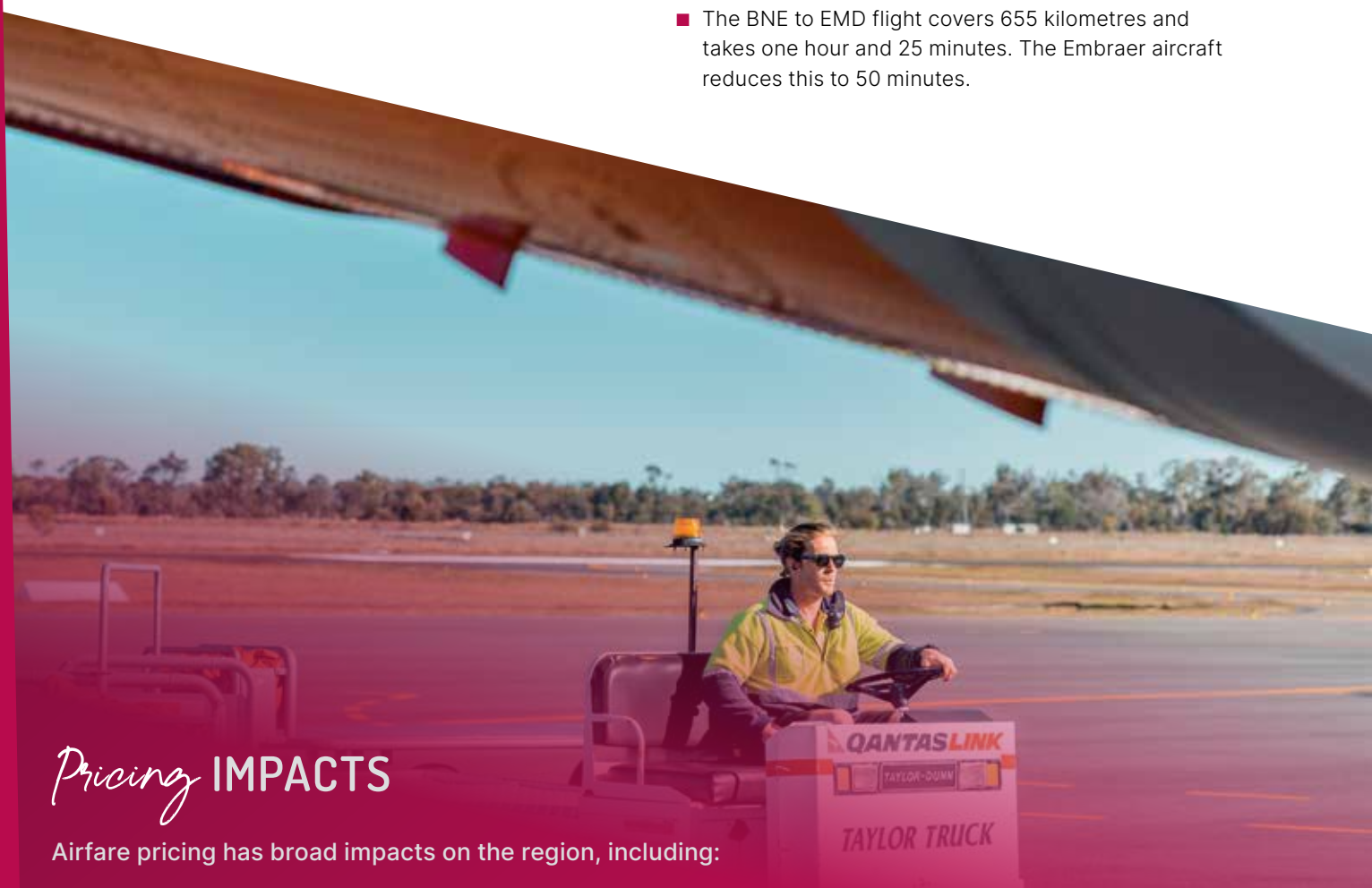
*average

- The peak day is Wednesday, with seven to nine flights, closely followed by Monday and Tuesday.
- A majority (82%) of flights are delivered by Qantas.
- The average capacity is 63% across all flights.
- Brisbane (BNE) to Emerald (EMD) flights operate at over 95% capacity on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.
- EMD to BNE return flights operate at over 95% capacity on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.
- Emerald ranks as the 14th most popular destination from Brisbane Airport, ahead of Darwin, Roma, Hervey Bay, Hobart, Mt Isa, and Moranbah.
- Three types of aircraft service Emerald: Dash 8 (74 seats), Fokker 70 (80 seats) and Embraer E190 (96 seats).
- The BNE to EMD flight covers 655 kilometres and takes one hour and 25 minutes. The Embraer aircraft reduces this to 50 minutes.

Pricing IMPACTS

Airfare pricing has broad impacts on the region, including:

- Challenges in retaining and attracting permanent workforce and residents.
- Added financial strain in an already costly environment.
- Disrupted connections with family and friends, especially in times of emergency.
- Hindered access to critical medical care.
- Limited access to personal development and employment training.
- Missed or restricted business opportunities.
- Confusion regarding availability of discounted fares and sales for residents.
- Increased dependence on expensive air travel during natural disasters and road closures.
- Decreased tourism potential, including the attraction of major events and conferences.
- Difficulties for families with children in boarding schools.
- Fewer chances to participate in sports and social activities.



Pricing INSIGHTS

CHDC has monitored flights and fares, both historical and forecast, and concluded:

- The most expensive flights are:
 - » BNE to EMD on Mondays, and
 - » EMD to BNE on Wednesdays and Thursdays.
- The cheapest flights are:
 - » BNE to EMD on Thursdays, and
 - » EMD to BNE on Tuesdays.
- Fares can vary significantly across the day, with early morning and late afternoon flights generally more expensive. Price differences can range from \$300 to \$500 per flight.
- BNE to EMD flights are generally at capacity on Mondays, and EMD to BNE on Thursdays. This is reflected in the fares.
- Booking flights in advance tends to result in lower prices.
- Sales do occur, although they are not well advertised, so it is worthwhile doing the research.
- Virgin Velocity Members residing in the Central Highlands are entitled to discounted regional fares; however, the number of flights provided is limited.
- Qantas currently does not offer discounted resident fares.



COST OF RETURN FLIGHT (AVERAGE) FROM BNE, 2024

Rockhampton	\$224.25	525km
Roma	\$288.50	439km
Moranbah	\$403.00	785km
Emerald	\$453.25	655km
Longreach	\$456.00	994km
Mt Isa	\$467.67	1,578km

This data is based on a 12-month period, encompassing both historical pricing and future published rates. It represents the average across all flights. The data for Rockhampton includes Bonza which is no longer operational.



TOTAL SEATS MARCH TO AUGUST 2024

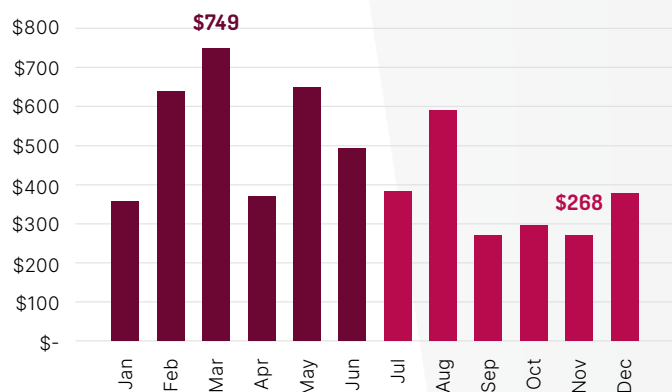
10,674 March **11,404** April **12,376** May
12,010 June **14,160** July **13,724** August

The Embraer E190 began servicing Emerald on 14 May 2024, increasing the number of seats available. It operates every weekday.

This data has been collated both on historical flight schedules, fleet type and proposed flight schedules and based on full availability of all aircraft.



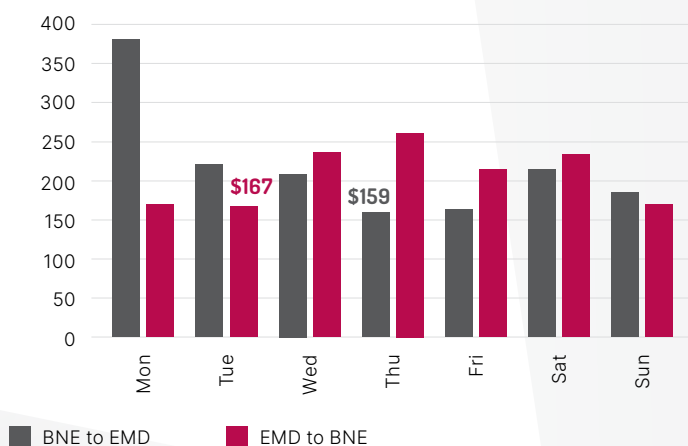
COST OF RETURN FLIGHT (AVERAGE) EMD TO BNE, 2024



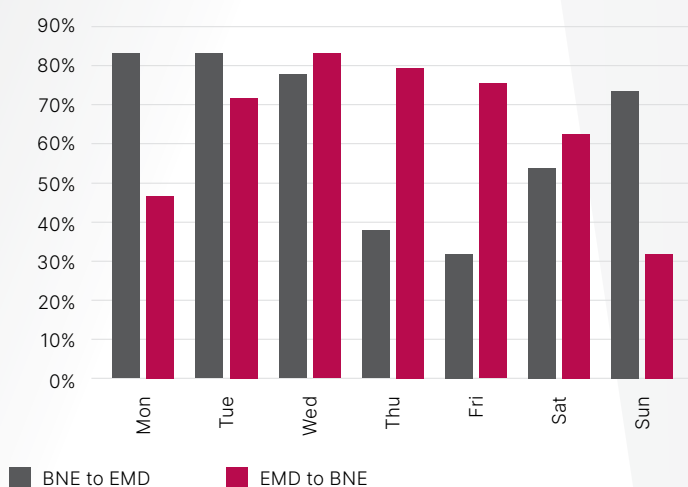
- Future flights, from July onwards, are likely to see price increases as the travel date approaches.



LOWEST AIRFARE BY DAY (AVERAGE) JULY TO DECEMBER 2024



AVERAGE CAPACITY MAY 2024



These graphs have been prepared using a range of sources, including airline websites, Skyscanner, and information provided by Emerald Airport on passenger numbers. They are accurate at a point in time and may not reflect pricing at a future date. Data was collected from April to June 2024.

EMERALD AIRPORT

Call to ACTION



The Department of Transport and Main Roads to investigate the inclusion of Emerald in the regulated air services.



Qantas to include Central Highlands postcodes in its Discounted Fares for Residents program.



Virgin Australia to increase the number of flights to and from the region from one daily (return) to two daily on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.



All airlines to be more transparent and actively engage with the local community to explain cost drivers.

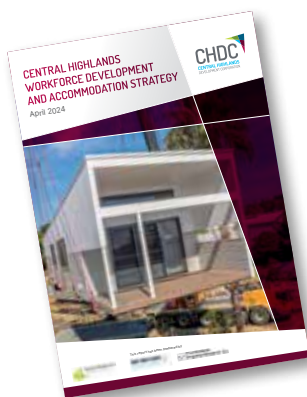


All airlines to implement targeted sales and promotions within the region.



Central Highlands Regional Council, as owner and operator of the Emerald Airport, to review and investigate opportunities to support airfare pricing.

Fairer Airfares is an action of the Central Highlands Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy. The full strategy and action updates can be found at chdc.com.au.



ACTION 8 Fairer Airfares

CHDC to develop a position paper to work directly with the airlines to find solutions for reducing the cost of airfares and expanding regional subsidy schemes for residents. Monitoring of the new fleet and its impact on costs and availability of flights will also be undertaken, with any improvements appropriately communicated to the community.