TO celebrate the start of the new Virgin Australia route to the Red Centre, the airline has announced a 20-day sale in which airfares between Alice Springs and other Australian destinations any time this year will be reduced by at least 20 per cent.

The airline’s arrival on Monday could also mean better connections to Asia, according to chief executive of NT Airports Ian Kew. “Adding services on this important route creates options for Territory travellers, as well as inbound tourism and business segments,” he said.

“With a total of 41 weekly return services to the Northern Territory, Virgin Australia and its partner airlines are now well positioned to enhance international visitor opportunities to the NT.”

High-flying Territorians gathered together at the Alice Springs Desert Park on Monday to herald the arrival of the first Virgin flight from Darwin. Business and political delegates who rode on the inaugural flight were invited to attend the gala lunch.

They celebrated the arrival of the airline and the potential boon it could bring to the local tourism industry with a few drinks, and speeches from the likes of Chief Minister Adam Giles.

The new flights will be operated by Virgin Australia’s 176-seat Boeing 737-800 aircraft, which include complimentary wireless in-flight entertainment for all passengers as standard.

For more information, visit virginaustralia.com.au/flynt.

Giovina D’alessandro, Barry Coulter and Clare Gardiner-Barnes.

Rob Price, Jim Parashos, Michael Tenant and Tom Slattery.

Rachel Turner, Denis Maher and Sandra Lew-Fatt.

Phil Dandy and Greg Buxton at the Virgin gala luncheon.

Craig Reid and Des Friedrich share a tipple at the Virgin lunch.

Todd Grierson and Ken Johnson.

John Di Maria and Chris Barlow.

Julie Ross, Howard Mitchell, Judith Crompton, Kevin Peters and Desert Park handler Adam Bean with his wedge-tailed eagle, Yarrum.