

What you need to know: Airline operations: Middle East

September 11, 2020

As demand declines and governments around the world restrict travel, airlines are adjusting their operations, and, in some cases, suspending all services.

This report summarizes what airlines in the Middle East are doing and planning.

Major carriers

Airline	Action and plans
Emirates	Progressive resumption of services will see 86 cities served by mid-September
Ethad Airways	Rebuilding network to 60 scheduled destinations by mid-September
Qatar Airways	Network rebuilt to 86 destinations by mid-August
Turkish Airlines	Domestic flights resumed June 4. Limited European flights restarted mid-June. Most international destinations restored to network during July and August

Emirates

Emirates suspended most passenger operations from March 25.¹ Increasing travel restrictions – including the March 19 suspension of all entry visas to the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) – forced it to curtail its operations substantially.

Emirates resumed passenger service to nine destinations from May 21: Chicago, Frankfurt, London Heathrow, Madrid, Melbourne, Milan, Paris, Sydney and Toronto. Because of existing travel restrictions, the airline carried passengers outbound and cargo inbound.

The U.A.E. Federal Government's decision to lift restrictions on transit passenger services prompted Emirates to resume service to 20 more destinations in June, but only for passengers connecting over Dubai to other Emirates destinations. Flights resumed to Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, Manila, Amsterdam, Bahrain, Brisbane, Copenhagen, Dublin, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manchester, New York JFK, Perth, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Vienna and Zurich. The airline reminded customers to check entry and exit requirements at either end of their connecting journeys.²

During the first half of July, Emirates restarted flights to 13 more destinations: Amman, Athens, Cairo, Glasgow, Khartoum, Larnaca, Male, Osaka, Rome, Tokyo and Tunis, bringing its network to 52 destinations. In the second half of the month, it resumed service to Geneva, Los Angeles and Tehran.

During August, Emirates resumed service to 18 more destinations, rebuilding its network to 70 cities: Addis Ababa (Aug. 1), Baghdad (Aug. 10), Basra (Aug. 10), Boston (Aug. 15), Cebu (Aug. 20), Dar Es Salaam (Aug. 1), Guangzhou (Aug. 8), Houston (Aug. 23), Kuwait City (Aug. 5), Lisbon (Aug. 16), Nairobi

¹ [Breaking Travel News](#), March 22, 2020

² [Gulf News](#), June 4, 2020

(Aug. 2), Oslo (Aug. 4), Peshawar (Aug. 16), Prague (Aug. 2), Sao Paulo (Aug. 2), Seychelles (Aug. 1), Stockholm (Aug. 1) and Toronto (Aug. 16).³

During September, Emirates has announced the restart of services to nine more destinations: Birmingham and Bangkok (Sept. 1), Conakry in Guinea and Dakar in Senegal (Sept. 3), Accra and Abidjan (Sept. 6), Amman (Sept. 8), Moscow (Sept. 11) and Casablanca (Sept. 18), bringing its network to 86 destinations.

Etihad Airways

Following a U.A.E. government decision to suspend all flights to, from and via Abu Dhabi, Etihad Airways stopped all services on March 26, initially for 14 days.⁴ To minimize any disruption to passengers following further extensions of its grounding, the airline has been only permitting bookings for flexible and refundable fares for travel between June 16 and August 31.⁵

Reacting to an easing of travel restrictions by the U.A.E. government, Etihad restarted flights to link 20 cities in Europe, Asia and Australia via Abu Dhabi from June 10.⁶ The airline now serves 41 destinations, many with special flights:

- Africa: Cairo, Seychelles
- Southeast Asia: Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Singapore
- Europe: Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Belgrade, Brussels, Dublin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Geneva, London Heathrow, Madrid, Manchester, Milan, Munich, Paris Charles de Gaulle, Rome, Zurich
- Middle East: Bahrain, Beirut, Kuwait City
- North America: Chicago, New York, Toronto, Washington DC
- Northeast Asia: Seoul, Shanghai, Tokyo
- South Asia: Colombo, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Male,
- Southwest Pacific: Melbourne (outbound only), Sydney

From September, by adding new destinations and converting special flights to regular services, a further 19 destinations will be added to Etihad's scheduled network.

- Africa: Casablanca, Rabat
- Europe: Baku, Moscow
- Middle East: Amman, Dammam, Istanbul, Jeddah, Muscat, Riyadh
- South Asia: Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Kochi, Kolkata, Kozhikode, Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram

From August 17, the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) suspended Etihad's services until at least the end of August, after two of the airline's flights were found to be carrying passengers infected with COVID-19.⁷

³ [Breaking Travel News](#), July 16, 2020

⁴ [Etihad Airways](#), March 23, 2020

⁵ [Arabian Business](#), April 29, 2020

⁶ [Breaking Travel News](#), June 4, 2020

⁷ [The National](#), August 26, 2020

Qatar Airways

The airline currently advises that passengers from all destinations served can still travel and transit through Doha, subject to entry restrictions at their final destination.⁸

As at August 20, 2020, Qatar Airways was serving the following 86 destinations/airports (weekly frequency in brackets):⁹

- Africa: Addis Ababa (3), Dar Es Salaam (7), Djibouti (3), Kigali (3), Kilimanjaro (4), Nairobi (14), Tunis (3), Zanzibar (4)
- Americas: Boston (4), Chicago (7), Dallas Fort Worth (7), Houston (3), Los Angeles (7), Montreal (4), New York JFK (12), Philadelphia (4), Sao Paulo (7), Washington DC (7)
- Asia Pacific: Bangkok (10), Cebu (7), Clark (5), Colombo (7), Dhaka (4), Guangzhou (1), Hong Kong (7), Ho Chi Minh City (4), Islamabad (14), Jakarta (11), Karachi (14), Kuala Lumpur (11), Lahore (14), Male (7), Manila (14), Peshawar (7), Seoul (7), Singapore (7), Tokyo Narita (7)
- Europe: Amsterdam (7), Athens (7), Barcelona (10), Belgrade (4), Berlin (4), Brussels (3), Budapest (3), Copenhagen (5), Dublin (3), Edinburgh (3), Frankfurt (14), Helsinki (3), Larnaca (2), London Gatwick (7), London Heathrow (21), Madrid (7), Manchester (14), Milan Malpensa (10), Munich (7), Oslo (7), Paris (14), Prague (3), Rome (9), Stockholm (7), Vienna (5), Zagreb (3), Zurich (7)
- Middle East: Ankara (3), Antalya (2), Baghdad (7), Basra (4), Beirut (14), Bodrum (2), Erbil (7), Isfahan (2), Kuwait City (14), Istanbul (14), Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen (11), Mashhad (4), Najaf (2), Shiraz (2), Sulaymaniyah (4), Tehran (20)
- Southwest Pacific: Adelaide (2), Auckland (3), Brisbane (3), Melbourne (7), Perth (4), Sydney (7)

On September 10, Qatar Airways relaunched flights to Lagos, Nigeria.

Turkish Airlines

From March 27, Turkish Airlines temporarily suspended all international flights.¹⁰ It continued to operate domestic flights on a limited basis to Adana, Ankara, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri, Konya, Malatya, Samsun, Trabzon and Van. All other domestic services were suspended until May 1. On April 28, Turkish Airlines suspended all flights until May 28.¹¹ This suspension was then extended to June 4 for domestic services and to June 10 for international flights.

On June 4, Turkish Airlines resumed domestic operations, initially offering single daily flights from Istanbul to Ankara, Antalya, Izmir and Trabzon.¹² By June 13, it was flying from Istanbul to 40 domestic destinations, many with a daily service.¹³

Turkish Airlines resumed international services in mid-June, and from the beginning of August it will be flying to most destinations on its network, albeit with reduced frequencies.¹⁴

- Africa – Abidjan (4 per week), Addis Ababa (3), Bamako (3), Borg El Arab (4), Cairo (10), Dakar (4), Dar Es Salaam (3), Djibouti (3), Douala (3), Kinshasa (2), Khartoum (5), Libreville (2), Mogadishu (3), Nairobi (3), Nouakchott (4), Yaoundé (3)

⁸ [Qatar Airways](#), March 23, 2020

⁹ [Qatar Airways](#), June 30, 2020

¹⁰ [Turkish Airlines](#), April 1, 2020

¹¹ [Turkish Airlines](#), April 28, 2020

¹² [Turkish Airlines](#), June 1, 2020

¹³ [Turkish Airlines](#), June 2, 2020

¹⁴ [Turkish Airlines](#), June 23, 2020

- Asia – Delhi (6), Dhaka (4), Hong Kong (4), Islamabad (4), Jakarta (3), Kabul (3), Karachi (3), Kuala Lumpur (3), Lahore (3), Manila (4), Mumbai (6), Seoul (3), Singapore (3), Tokyo (2), Ulaanbaatar (2)
- Europe – Amsterdam (21), Athens (7), Baku (7), Barcelona (7), Belgrade (7), Berlin (21), Birmingham (4), Bologna (4), Brussels (10), Basel (7), Chisinau (7), Cologne (11), Copenhagen (7), Dublin (4), Düsseldorf (14), Edinburgh (3), Frankfurt (14), Geneva (7), Gothenburg (3), Hamburg (14), Hannover (10), Helsinki (4), Kharkov (4), Kiev (11), London (28), Luxembourg (3), Lyon (10), Madrid (10), Malaga (4), Malta (6), Manchester (7), Marseille (5), Milan (10), Minsk (5), Moscow (21), Munich (14), Naples (4), Nice (4), Nicosia (28), Nürnberg (5), Odessa (10), Oslo (4), Paris (28), Rome (10), Sarajevo (7), Stockholm (7), Stuttgart (11), Toulouse (4), Valencia (4), Venice (4), Vienna (10), Zurich (14)
- Middle East – Abu Dhabi (3), Almaty (5), Bahrain (5), Beirut (14), Bishkek (6), Doha (7), Dubai (9), Erbil (4), Kuwait City (10), Nur-Sultan (1), Tel Aviv (10)
- North America – Chicago (3), Houston (3), Los Angeles (5), Miami (4), Montreal (3), New York (7), San Francisco (4), Toronto (5), Washington DC (5)

During August, Turkish Airlines is resuming service to the following destinations:

- Africa – Abuja (3), Accra (4), Algiers (7), Casablanca (4), Conakry (1), Constantine (4), Cotonou (4), Freetown (1), Lagos (4), Marrakech (3), N'djamena (1), Niamey (3), Oran (4), Ouagadougou (2), Tunis (7)
- Asia – Taipei (2)
- Europe – Bucharest (10), Budapest (2), Cluj-Napoca (2), Kazan (3), Kherson (2), Krasnodar (3), Lisbon (5), Ljubljana (3), Lviv (2), Podgorica (5), Prague (3), Pristina (5), Riga (3), Rostov-on-Don (2), Salzburg (3), Skopje (5), Sochi (3), Sofia (5), St. Petersburg (5), Tallinn (3), Vilnius (3), Warsaw (3), Zagreb (4), Zaporizhzhia (3)
- Middle East – Baghdad (3), Dammam (7), Dushanbe (2), Jeddah (7), Riyadh (7), Shiraz (4), Tabriz (4), Tashkent (4), Tehran (14)
- North America – Atlanta (3), Boston (3)

Other airlines

Airline	Action and plans
Air Arabia Abu Dhabi	Proceeding with launch in second quarter of 2020
Air Astana	Resumed domestic flights from May 1, with international services following in June
El Al	All flights suspended until September 30
Gulf Air	Operating flights to 13 destinations
Jazeera Airways	All flights grounded indefinitely
Kuwait Airways	Flights gradually resuming from August 1
Middle East Airlines	Resuming international operations during July
Oman Air	Resuming services from October
Pegasus	Resumed limited domestic and international flights during the first half of June
Royal Jordanian	Domestic flights resumed on July 23. Most international services suspended until the end of July
Saudia	All international flights suspended. Domestic flights resumed in June
Wizz Air Abu Dhabi	Before launching later in 2020, European operation starting flights to Abu Dhabi from June

Air Arabia Abu Dhabi

Etihaad Airways and partner Air Arabia have no plans to delay the launch of new low-cost carrier Air Arabia Abu Dhabi. The airline was originally due to launch in the second quarter of 2020.¹⁵

Air Astana

Kazakh airline Air Astana resumed limited domestic services from May 1, offering three frequencies per day between Almaty and capital city Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana).¹⁶

Air Astana has been gradually resuming international flights since June. On August 18, the airline restarted international flights from Nur-Sultan to Frankfurt. Initially flying four-times weekly, Air Astana intends to operate daily during September. The Frankfurt service will be joined by flights to the German city from Almaty from the start of October.

El Al

Israeli flag carrier El Al initially suspended all remaining flights on March 26 until April 4.¹⁷ The airline has since posted a succession of extensions of its grounding to May 2, May 16, June 30, July 31, August 31 and, most recently, until September 30.¹⁸

Gulf Air

Bahraini carrier Gulf Air currently operates flights to the following destinations:¹⁹

- Africa - Cairo
- Asia – Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Manila, Peshawar
- Europe – Athens, Frankfurt, London, Paris
- Middle East – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Kuwait City

Kuwait Airways

Having suspended all flights from March 13, Kuwait Airways resumed limited scheduled flights to certain destinations on August 1. It will gradually increase commercial operations. The airline will initially link Kuwait with Amman, Bahrain, Baku, Beirut, Bodrum, Cairo, Chennai, Delhi, Doha, Dubai, Geneva, Istanbul, Kochi, Lahore, London, Mumbai, Munich, Sarajevo, and Trabzon.²⁰ Plans to resume service to Damman and Riyadh have been delayed.

Middle East Airlines

Lebanese carrier Middle East Airlines (MEA) resumed operations during July and currently operates the following schedule to 25 destinations:

- Africa – Abidjan (1 per week), Cairo (daily), Lagos (1)
- Europe – Athens (3), Brussels (3), Copenhagen (2), Geneva (2), Larnaca (3), London (daily), Madrid (1), Milan (1), Paris (daily), Rome (1), Yerevan (1)

¹⁵ [Breaking Travel News](#), April 16, 2020

¹⁶ [Breaking Travel News](#), April 28, 2020

¹⁷ Cirium, March 26, 2020

¹⁸ [El Al](#), August 25, 2020

¹⁹ [Gulf Air](#), August 28, 2020

²⁰ [Kuwait Airways](#), COVID-19 Updates

- Middle East – Abu Dhabi (5), Amman (6), Baghdad (2), Basra (2), Dammam (daily), Dubai (daily), El Najaf (2), Istanbul (daily), Jeddah (daily), Kuwait City (daily), Riyadh (daily)

Oman Air

As COVID-19 spread around the world, Oman Air progressively suspended services to a number of markets. From March 23, only Omani nationals could travel to the country. Oman Air suspended all remaining passenger services from Muscat from March 29.²¹ Oman Air domestic flights to and from Musandam Governorate (the northern peninsula separated from the rest of Oman by the United Arab Emirates) continued to operate as normal.

After the Oman Civil Aviation Authority in September cleared the way for the resumption of air services, Oman Air outlined plans to resume scheduled flights from the start of October. It will initially link Muscat with Delhi, Kochi, Mumbai, Islamabad, Lahore, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, London, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Cairo, Doha and Dubai. Services to India are conditional upon Indian authorities lifting restrictions on schedule international passenger services. Oman Air will also operate domestic services between Muscat and Khasab.

Pegasus

Turkish low-cost carrier Pegasus relaunched domestic flights on June 1 with plans to serve 39 routes linking 27 destinations.²² It restored international flights on June 13, resuming services to Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.K. It will gradually increase its schedule subject to approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation in Turkey.

During August, Pegasus was operating only 29% fewer flights than it did in 2019.²³

Royal Jordanian

Royal Jordanian resumed services on the domestic route linking Amman and Aqaba on July 23 with three weekly flights.²⁴ The airline has suspended international services to the following destinations until the end of July:

- Europe – Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Frankfurt, Geneva, Larnaca, London, Madrid, Moscow, Munich, Paris, Rome, Vienna
- Middle East – Dammam, Jeddah, Riyadh, Tel Aviv
- North America – Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, New York
- Northeast Asia – Hong Kong
- Southeast Asia – Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur

The airline has also cancelled its services to Copenhagen until the end of August.

²¹ [Breaking Travel News](#), March 25, 2020

²² [Pegasus Airlines](#), June 4, 2020

²³ [Anna.Aero](#), September 7, 2020

²⁴ [Travel Daily News](#), July 21, 2020

Saudia

On March 15, Saudia (Saudi Arabian Airlines) suspended all international flights for 14 days. By March 21, the airline had also suspended all domestic flights for 14 days.²⁵ On March 29, Saudia announced an extension of the suspension of all international and domestic flights until further notice.

In mid-June, Saudia resumed domestic operations, flying to 11 of Saudi Arabia's 28 airports.²⁶ It resumed flights gradually, with two local flights added daily until all routes return to normal capacity. International operations remained suspended. On July 22, Saudi Arabia's General Civil Aviation Authority (GACA) confirmed the suspension would continue.

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi

Wizz air's new Abu Dhabi-based airline will commence services in October 2020, initially focusing on destinations in the eastern Mediterranean and Caucasus. Its initial six destinations comprise Alexandria, Athens, Kutaisi, Larnaca, Odessa and Yerevan.

Note

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and the situation is changing on almost an hourly basis. The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at September 11, 2020. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report? Please email mike.eggleton@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

²⁵ [Saudia](#), March 20, 2020

²⁶ [Arabian Business](#), June 15, 2020