

What you need to know: Airline operations: South Asia

September 4, 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 South Asia are doing and planning.

Major airlines

Airline	Action and plans
Air India	All flights suspended until May 31
Biman Bangladesh	Domestic flights resumed June 1. International flights banned until June 15
PIA	International operations grounded until May 31. Domestic flights resumed on May 16
SriLankan Airlines	Up to September 30, flights operated to eight destinations available for connections over Colombo only

Air India

As India entered an initial 21-day lockdown period, Air India suspended all scheduled domestic and international flights from March 24 until midnight on April 14.¹ With the national lockdown progressively extended until May 3, then until May 17, and most recently until the end of May, Air India had not planned to resume domestic or international flights until May 31. Air India has yet to respond to government plans to allow the restart of domestic flying earlier than planned on May 25.

Biman Bangladesh

Biman Bangladesh initially stopped flights on 15 of its 17 international routes for varying time periods, depending on the length of travel restrictions imposed by individual countries. Service on its two remaining routes to London and Manchester ended on March 30.

Biman Bangladesh then ceased all flights. While international flights are suspended until at least June 15, the Bangladeshi flag carrier restarted domestic services on June 1. From capital city Dhaka, Biman Bangladesh is planning to offer flights to Chittagong, Sylhet and Saidpur.

PIA

In accordance with instructions from the Government of Pakistan and the Civil Aviation Authority of Pakistan, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) initially suspended all international flights until April 4.² On April 6, PIA extended the suspension until April 11 and grounded its remaining domestic services.

On April 18, the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority extended the flight ban until April 30,³ with the Aviation Division of Pakistan then further extending the ban on international flights until May 31.

¹ [CNBC](#), March 26, 2020

² [PIA](#), March 29, 2020

³ [ARY News](#), April 18, 2020

From May 16, Pakistani authorities allowed the country's airlines to resume domestic services from five major airports: Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. PIA has already resumed service between Karachi and Lahore.⁴

SriLankan Airlines

SriLankan Airlines scaled back all international operations from March 19, when the Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka banned passenger arrivals from overseas.⁵ During the ban, which was originally due to end at midnight on April 7, SriLankan continued to operate some flights from Colombo to London, Melbourne and Tokyo (Narita). Passengers could continue to depart from or transit through Colombo airport.

SriLankan suspended all operations for two weeks from April 8 until April 21 due to travel restrictions introduced at the remaining destinations it was serving. On April 25, SriLankan extended the suspension of all passenger flights until May 15.⁶

With some travel restrictions being relaxed, SriLankan Airlines has, since May 28, offered flights from Colombo to Hong Kong, London Heathrow, Tokyo Narita and Melbourne.⁷ This schedule remained in place until June 15. Returning flights from London, Melbourne and Tokyo could only carry passengers transiting via Colombo within 12 hours.

Until September 30, SriLankan Airlines will operate flights to Colombo from Frankfurt, London, Male, Melbourne, Milan, Paris, Sydney and Tokyo. Tickets are available for transiting passengers only, who must connect over Colombo within 12 hours of arrival.⁸

Low-cost carriers

Airline	Action and plans
AirAsia India	All flights suspended from March 25 until May 31
GoAir	All flights suspended from March 25 until May 31
IndiGo	Resuming some domestic flights from May 25
SpiceJet	All flights suspended from March 25 until May 31

AirAsia India

In line with India's nationwide lockdown, AirAsia India suspended all flights, initially for three weeks, from midnight on March 24. It must now wait until May 25 before being allowed to resume operations.

GoAir

Indian low-cost carrier GoAir initially suspended all international operations from March 17 until April 15. Effective from midnight on March 24, the airline added all domestic services to the suspension.

⁴ [Economic Times](#), May 16, 2020

⁵ [SriLankan Airlines](#), March 29, 2020

⁶ [SriLankan Airlines](#), April 25, 2020

⁷ [SriLankan Airlines](#), May 29, 2020

⁸ [SriLankan Airlines](#), September 2, 2020

By April 8, the airline was accepting bookings for domestic flights from April 15, followed by international services from May 1. This proved to be a premature move, with India suspending all flights until May 31. Although the date for the resumption of domestic flights has been brought forward to May 25, GoAir's website still shows the airline grounded until May 25.

IndiGo

India's largest airline IndiGo cancelled its Delhi-Istanbul and Chennai-Kuala Lumpur flights from March 18 until the end of the month. From March 25, IndiGo followed other Indian carriers in suspending all operations until midnight on April 14.

IndiGo resumed some domestic services from May 25, six days earlier than previously announced. It has yet to announce its schedule.

SpiceJet

Low-cost carrier SpiceJet suspended the majority of its international flights from India between March 21 and April 30. It then suspended all remaining international operations and its entire domestic schedule from midnight on March 24, with flights set to resume on April 15. SpiceJet had not intended to resume service until May 31, but it brought this forward to May 25.

Other airlines

Airline	Action and plans
Nepal Airlines	All international flights cancelled until August 31
Vistara	Domestic operation resumed during May. Limited international service restarting in September

Nepal Airlines

Nepal Airlines cancelled its Indian services from Kathmandu to Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai until April 15. The airline also suspended its international services to Bangkok, Guangzhou, Doha, Dubai, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Tokyo Narita until the same date. Flights have since been suspended until August 31, and it's possible that the airline's grounding may continue until October.

Vistara

Indian full-service airline Vistara suspended all international operations from March 22 until April 15. Domestic services were suspended from March 25, also until April 25. Vistara resumed domestic operations on May 25, but international services are generally suspended.

At the end of August, Vistara launched a brand-new thrice weekly service between Delhi and London Heathrow, operated until September 30 under a bilateral "transport bubble" arrangement.⁹ The airline is in discussions to launch long-haul services to other European countries. Vistara is planning special flights to Frankfurt and Paris.

⁹ Cirium, August 28, 2020

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 4, 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.

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