

What you need to know: Airline operations: Southwest Pacific

October 27, 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 Southwest Pacific are doing and planning.

Australia

Airline	Action and plans
FlyPelican	Operating limited service on eight routes
Jetstar	All international flights cancelled until October 25
Qantas	All scheduled international flights suspended until at least the end of October 2020; possibly until July 2021. Domestic flying resumed during June
Regional Express	80% reduction in flights with most routes maintained. Revised schedule from April 1
Tigerair Australia	Grounded from March 25
Virgin Australia	All international services and most domestic suspended until mid-June. Airline has filed for administration. Building domestic schedule to 320 weekly flights by early July

FlyPelican

Newcastle-based regional airline FlyPelican suspended 90% of its flying until the end of May.

Up to July 19 (airline has yet to update its schedule beyond this date), FlyPelican was operating the following services:

- Newcastle-Ballina (3), Canberra (5 per week), Dubbo (4), Sydney (5)
- Sydney-Cobar (3), Mudgee (4), Taree (2)
- Canberra-Ballina (3)

Jetstar

Due to ongoing border closures as a result of COVID-19, Jetstar has cancelled all international flights until October 25, 2020, including services between Australia and New Zealand.¹ As the situation is constantly and rapidly changing, the airline has yet to decide on its international services beyond this date.

Qantas

Once Australia's federal government recommended against all overseas travel, Qantas Group suspended all Qantas and Jetstar international flights from late March until at least the end of May. The group also cut domestic capacity by 60%. Both airlines further adjusted their schedules after the Australian government's March 22 announcement of a tightening of restrictions on domestic travel.

As social distancing measures and travel restrictions ease, Qantas and Jetstar increased domestic and regional flying in June and July, lifting capacity by 5-15% by the end of June. By the end of July, Qantas

¹ [Jetstar](#), August 13, 2020

hoped to be operating 40% of its pre-COVID-19 capacity. There will be more flights between Melbourne and Sydney and from Canberra. Qantas also plans to restart eight other domestic routes and increase intra-state flights in Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. The airline will gradually rebuild its domestic schedule until October 2020.²

Following an announcement by the Australian government that borders will remain closed until 2021, Qantas suspended all scheduled international flights, including those between Australia and New Zealand, until at least the end of October 2020.³ In August 2020, Qantas CEO Alan Joyce suggested that the airline might not resume international services until July 2021.⁴

Joyce has since suggested that the restart of flights to the U.K. and U.S. will require a vaccine to be widely available, and therefore does not think services will resume potentially until the end of 2021.⁵

Regional Express

Thanks to a regional airline financial assistance package unveiled by the Australian government, Regional Express (Rex), the country's largest independent regional carrier, pledged to maintain routes and jobs. It had been planning to shut down, but continued operations in almost its entire network of 59 destinations.⁶ While it maintained its network, the airline still cut flights by around 80%.

As it rebuilds its operation, Regional Express has had to respond to increased services from QantasLink on competing routes, increasing its own services on five routes from Sydney (Albury, Ballina, Dubbo, Orange and Wagga Wagga), three from Adelaide (Kangaroo Island, Port Lincoln and Whyalla) and one from Melbourne (Mildura) from July 6.⁷ On the same date, Rex expanded its operations in Western Australia, doubling weekly return services from Perth to Albany and Esperance to eight, and increasing flights from Perth to Carnarvon and Money Mia from 3 to 5 per week.⁸

Tigerair Australia

Tigerair Australia suspended all operations from March 25, as part of deeper capacity cuts by parent company Virgin Australia. The low-cost carrier attributed the decision to expanded travel restrictions imposed by federal and state governments and territories. The grounding affects key trunk routes including Melbourne to Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sydney, and Sydney to Brisbane and Gold Coast.

Virgin Australia

The airline had planned to suspend all international flying and cut domestic capacity by 50%; both from March 30 until June 14. Following the escalation of state border controls within Australia, Virgin Australia was forced to suspend almost its entire domestic flying schedule from March 27. Timing for the resumption of both domestic and international services remains mid-June.

Virgin maintained service to 17 Australian destinations for essential services, critical freight and logistics.

² [Qantas](#), Australian domestic network changes

³ [Qantas](#), International Network Changes, July 21, 2020

⁴ [Business Travel News](#), August 20, 2020

⁵ [Business Travel News Europe](#), October 26, 2020

⁶ Cirium, March 30, 2020

⁷ [Regional Express](#), June 5, 2020

⁸ [Regional Express](#), June 30, 2020

The future of Virgin Australia is now uncertain after the carrier entered voluntary administration on April 21, having failed to secure a A\$1.4 billion (US\$890 million) bailout from the Australian government. The airline’s biggest shareholder with a 25% stake, Etihad Airways, was unable to provide further funding while dealing with COVID-19’s impact on its own business. Etihad, however, remains “open for constructive discussions on a potential relaunch of [Virgin Australia].”

As travel restrictions begin to ease, Virgin Australia will double its domestic capacity by early July, operating 320 flights per week.⁹ There will be more connections and frequencies between Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. Virgin Australia will also resume services from Brisbane to Adelaide, Canberra and Perth, and from Perth to Sydney. It will also offer more flights on intrastate Queensland and Western Australia routes.

New Zealand

Airline	Action and plans
Air New Zealand	Minimal international operations until August 31. Operating 70% of pre-pandemic domestic capacity. Limited long-haul services resume from November 2020
Jetstar	Operating 90% of domestic network between August and October

Air New Zealand

Air New Zealand’s domestic routes are safeguarded by the New Zealand government, but the airline cut capacity by 30% in April and May. It continued service on just five domestic routes: Auckland-Christchurch, Auckland-Wellington, Wellington-Christchurch, Wellington-Nelson and Christchurch-Dunedin.¹⁰ By June, Air New Zealand had ramped up its domestic network, offering flights from Auckland to 14 destinations, from Wellington to nine and from Christchurch to nine.¹¹ During July/August, it will serve 16 domestic destinations from Auckland, 12 from Wellington, and 12 from Christchurch. Under Alert Level 1, Air New Zealand is currently operating a reduced domestic schedule.¹² It had planned to operate 55% of scheduled domestic capacity in July and August, with more than 880 weekly return flights from Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington.

It subsequently increased its planned capacity for August to 70% of its pre-pandemic level. To cope with increased demand, it is operating an extra 408 one-way flights from Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington to other domestic points.

On March 16, Air New Zealand announced an 85% cut in its long-haul network from March 30 until June 30. Route suspensions included Auckland to Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Buenos Aires, Vancouver, Tokyo Narita, Honolulu, Denpasar and Taipei, as well as London-Los Angeles.

From Auckland, the airline will until October 24, 2020, operate flights to just six long-haul destinations: Hong Kong (3 per week), Los Angeles (7 pw), San Francisco (3 pw), Seoul (1 flight per 3 weeks), Shanghai

⁹ [Virgin Australia](#), June 15, 2020

¹⁰ [Air New Zealand](#), April 2, 2020

¹¹ [Air New Zealand](#), June 10, 2020

¹² [Air New Zealand](#), July 24, 2020

(1 pw) and Tokyo Narita (1 pw).¹³ It also operates one-way transit services linking Auckland and Christchurch with Singapore.

As it believed demand would be slow to recover, Air New Zealand permanently ended its Auckland-Buenos Aires and Los Angeles-London routes. It has also postponed the start of Auckland-New York services due on October 29, 2020, until late 2021.

Air New Zealand cut trans-Tasman capacity to Australia by 80% until the end of June 2020. Through October 24, it maintained flights from Auckland to Sydney (9 return services pw), Brisbane (4 pw) and Melbourne (7 one-way services per week).¹⁴ Air New Zealand also maintained weekly flights from Auckland five Pacific Island destinations: Apia, Nadi, Niue, Rarotonga and Tonga. It also operated two weekly services to Norfolk Island from both Brisbane and Sydney.

Between October 25, 2020 and March 27, 2021, Air New Zealand plans to operate the following schedule, including the resumption of some long haul services :

- Trans-Tasman: Auckland– Brisbane (4), Melbourne (7), Sydney (8)
- Pacific Islands: Auckland– Apia (1), Nadi (1), Niue (1), Rarotonga (1), Tonga (1) ; Norfolk Island– Brisbane (1), Sydney (1)
- Long-haul: Auckland – Seoul (1 per month from November 13), Hong Kong (3 per week), Los Angeles (3), Shanghai (2), Tokyo Narita (1)

At present, the airline does not expect a return to long haul flying of any note until 2021.¹⁵

Jetstar

Qantas-owned low-cost carrier will resume about 90% of its domestic schedule from August through October. It will operate more than 100 return flights weekly across six domestic routes, flying from Auckland to Christchurch, Dunedin, Queenstown and Wellington, and from Wellington to Christchurch and Queenstown.

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 October 27, 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.eggleson@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

¹³ [Air New Zealand](#), August 8, 2020

¹⁴ [Air New Zealand](#), Upcoming international schedule

¹⁵ Cirium, June 8, 2020