

# Emirates to help clear backlog

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Dubai: Emirates on Monday said that it will deploy additional flights to the United Kingdom and other European countries to clear the passenger backlog as soon as flights resume.

Etihad, the UAE flag carrier, said, it will fast-track transit passengers' schedules once flights resume.

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To date, over 250 Emirates flights have been cancelled and more than 80,000 passengers have been affected by the ongoing disruption.

"Emirates is working on a contingency plan to ensure that it gets flights and passengers moving as quickly as possible as airspace reopens," the airline said in a statement.

"This will include extra flights. However, like every carrier, we cannot fully activate contingency plans until we receive clearance from European air traffic control authorities. Until this happens, we are unable to give firm time-scales," the airline said.

## Close monitoring

Emirates is closely monitoring the evolving airspace situation across Europe, going into a fifth day of cancellations caused by volcanic ash emanating from Iceland.

"The airline is not accepting passengers for travel to any European destinations apart from Moscow, Athens, Larnaca, Malta and Istanbul until April 21," the statement said.

"Customers affected by the disruption can cancel their bookings or change their onward destinations without charge. Emirates has waived all re-issue and cancellation fees while the disruption is ongoing."

Twenty per cent of the Emirates fleet — or 30 aircraft — remain on the ground with much of Europe's airspace still closed.

"The disruption has cost the airline somewhere in the region of \$50 million. Emirates continues to provide hotel accommodation in Dubai for thousands of passengers who were in transit when the disruption began," the airline added.

James Hogan, Etihad chief executive officer, said the situation was changing.

"We encourage customers to check our website for the latest flight cancellations or contact us on our dedicated 24-hour customer assistance lines if flying to these destinations," Hogan said.

He added that bookings for passengers currently in transit would be a priority for the airline as services were reintroduced.

Hogan added that Etihad staff would be communicating directly with those travellers that were accommodated in Abu Dhabi and other cities to advise them of their updated travel arrangement, once they become available.

### **Exemption**

Meanwhile, Germany's aviation authority broke the flight deadlock yesterday, granting Lufthansa an exemption to fly 50 long-haul planes carrying 15,000 passengers back home below the cloud of volcanic ash.

Britain chimed in with more good news, saying flight restrictions over Scottish airspace will be lifted today at 7am local time and other British airports could reopen later in the day as well.

The government also sent Royal Navy warships to rescue those marooned across the Channel by flight cancellations.

However, the aviation industry blasted European officials, claiming there was "no coordination and no leadership" in the crisis that shut down most European airports for a fifth day.

Lufthansa spokesman Jan Baerwald said the planes, scattered around the world, would start getting ready "right now."