

During pandemic, Qatar Airways repatriates passengers and carries 70,000 tonnes of medical equipment and aid relief

During this extremely challenging time for the aviation industry, with most of the world having closed their borders to varying degrees in addition to closed airports and airspace, Qatar Airways has continued to maintain operations wherever possible, despite plunging passenger traffic.

The airline has carried over one million people home plus transported over 70,000 tonnes of medical equipment and aid relief. In order to provide this passenger and cargo service, Qatar Airways has operated with a mix of scheduled and charter services plus extra sectors.

Repatriation and stranded passengers

The airline has helped repatriate 45,000 passengers home to France, 70,000 home to Germany and over 100,000 customers back to the United Kingdom. Additionally, by working with governments and group travel companies around the world, the airline operated over 90 charters and extra sector flights, taking home over 26,000 stranded travellers.

The demand to help stranded passengers has seen Qatar Airways operate flights to new destinations such as Brisbane, Christchurch and Toronto, while operating 60 scheduled flights per day to approximately 40 destinations.

Cargo Operations

As air freight capacity has declined with the drastically decreased number of passenger flights, Qatar Airways Cargo has increased operations to ensure the continuity of global trade and movement of essential medical and aid supplies. The Group's cargo division is utilising passenger aircraft as freight-only aircraft to destinations in China, Europe, India and the Middle East.

The Qatar Airways Cargo schedule is significant, with nearly 100 flights each day. The airline has worked closely with governments and NGOs to transport over 70,000 tonnes of medical and aid supplies to impacted regions around the world on both scheduled and charter services.

Staff solidarity

The balance of keeping staff while attempting to defer costs is a difficult one. Qatar Airlines has worked alongside staff to implement a "Solidarity Programme" to see mid-level and above Doha-based staff defer a portion of their basic salary. The salaries of mid-level employees and above will be subject to a 50% deferral, starting from April 2020 for three months, subject to review. The company will credit this salary back as circumstances allow. Other work groups have taken voluntary salary deferrals in solidarity with their colleagues.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, said: "The entire team at Qatar Airways has worked incredibly hard to take people home over the past few weeks. We have built a strong level of trust with our passengers, governments, travel trade and cargo businesses as a reliable partner when we were needed the most and we continue to offer a schedule where possible and allowed by governments.

“I know many of our Qatar Airways employees have left family and friends at home to commit to building this airline with me and we will always do what is in the best interest of both the business and our committed and hard-working staff, I could not be more proud of our team who have worked incredibly hard to build even greater trust with the travelling public.”

Safety measures

Qatar Airways continues to maintain the highest possible hygiene standards:

- The regular disinfection of aircraft
- The use of cleaning products recommended by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the World Health Organization (WHO)
- The thermal screening of crew
- Qatar Airways aircraft feature the most advanced air filtration systems, equipped with industrial-size HEPA filters that remove 99.97% of viral and bacterial contaminants from re-circulated air, providing the most effective protection against infection
- All the airline’s onboard linen and blankets are washed, dried and pressed at microbial lethal temperatures
- Its headsets are removed of ear foams and rigorously sanitized after each flight
- These items are then sealed into individual packaging by staff wearing hygienic disposable gloves
- Its Food Safety Management System meets the highest standards, with ISO22000:2018 certification from Bureau Veritas with UKAS accreditation
- All meal service utensils and cutlery are washed with detergents and rinsed with demineralized fresh water at temperatures that kill pathogenic bacteria.
- All sanitized equipment is handled by staff wearing hygienic disposable gloves.

Hamad International Airport (HIA) is also robustly minimising any risks to the health and safety of passengers and staff. The airport is staying open to take people home to their family through Doha, and to ensure food security of Qatar through cargo.

The airport has implemented stringent cleaning procedures and closed most of the non-essential passenger facilities.

- All passenger touchpoints are sanitized every 10-15 minutes. All boarding gates and bus gate counters are cleaned after each flight.
- Staff working at the airport have been provided additional training in terms of protecting themselves and others in light of the current situation and implementing the highest health and safety measurements.
- Hand sanitizers are provided at immigration and security screening points.
- A social distancing policy has been implemented at the airport
- Staff are allowed to wear masks and disposable gloves to protect them from any infection.
- All staff are briefed to change their masks in line with WHO recommendations.