

British Airways suspends direct flights between Durban and London

KwaZulu-Natal Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs MEC, Ravi Pillay, has warned that plans by British Airways to suspend 13 destinations, including the Durban - London direct route from its network, will hamper the growth of international air services into the region post-Covid-19.



sjr4x4 via [Rxabay](#)

This follows reports that British Airways plans to suspend the direct flight route between Durban and London for the upcoming summer season, as part of efforts to cut costs and adjust to the lower level of travel demand in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pillay said British Airways' decision should be seen in the broader context of an organisation that has worked hard to keep flying, despite the pandemic affecting its entire global operations.

"This organisation has had to make extraordinary sacrifices, letting go of some 12,000 staff and retiring 31 aircraft.

"The UK has just emerged from its second lockdown, which has meant there simply aren't that many people flying at the moment," Pillay said on Monday.

Pillay said KZN remains confident that British Airways will resume direct flights to Durban "once greater certainty has returned to the world and once the aviation industry regains momentum".

"Our social and economic links to the UK are enduring. This will translate itself into continued demand for flights between Durban and London for tourism, trade and visits to friends and family," the MEC said.

Dube TradePort Special Economic Zone (SEZ) CEO and Durban direct co-chair, Hamish Erskine, said the route development committee understands the reasoning behind British Airways' decision.

"The impact of Covid-19 and subsequent travel restrictions globally have resulted in low anticipated demand. It is therefore not unreasonable that an airline like British Airways reduces the routes in its network.

"However, from a Durban Direct route development committee's perspective, we are confident in the resilience of the KwaZulu-Natal markets and their ability to sustain direct air services between Durban and London," Erskine said.

Pre-Covid-19, Erskine said British Airways experienced very strong load factors, which were a testament to the demand for the route, supported by cargo volumes that were almost at capacity.

"The reality on the ground is that Durban remains connected with London by flights from Emirates, which has recently increased its frequency to four flights a week, and Qatar Airways.

"Over the last 10 years, we have worked tirelessly to develop this market and post-Covid-19, we are committed to taking our experience and rebuilding this route.

"At the moment, we have two strong hub carriers in the form of Qatar Airways and Emirates, servicing Durban and collectively connecting KwaZulu-Natal to over 250 destinations around the world right now.

"That gives us a reasonably good base on which to drive business and leisure travel, as well as cargo growth," Erskine said.

Meanwhile, due to the resurgence of Covid-19 in South Africa and elsewhere around the world, Turkish Airlines has also decided to suspend its two weekly flights to Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban for the December-January holiday season.

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