

Ryanair gets ready to fly more often in July (Update)

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Budget airline Ryanair says it will begin operating nearly 1,000 daily flights starting in July, assuming government restrictions on flights within Europe are lifted after the shutdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The carrier, which was Europe's busiest airline before the pandemic, said Tuesday it will restore 90% of its pre-COVID-19 route network, though with less frequency. The airline has been operating with a skeleton schedule since mid-March, with some 30 flights daily between Ireland, the U.K. and Europe.

"After four months, it is time to get Europe flying again so we can reunite friends and families, allow people to return to work and restart Europe's tourism industry, which provides so many millions of jobs," Ryanair Chief Executive Eddie Wilson said.

The strategy is not without risk. Health Secretary Matt Hancock warned Tuesday that people were unlikely to be able to go on foreign holidays this summer.

Asked whether "summer was cancelled," Mr Hancock told ITV: "I think that's likely to be the case."

"It is unlikely that big, lavish international holidays are going to be possible for this summer," he said. "I just think that's a reality of life."

Aviation has been among the hardest hit industries in the pandemic, with aircraft around the world grounded by travel restrictions. Many have cut costs and staff to respond.

The latest example is Belgium's Brussels Airlines, which on Tuesday unveiled a cost-cutting plan that will result in the reduction of 25% of its workforce.

The Lufthansa subsidiary, which employs 4,000 people, has suspended its flights as a result of the pandemic. The carrier, which also suffered amid the bankruptcy of travel operator Thomas Cook last year, plans to reduce its fleet from 54 to 38 aircraft.

Brussels Airlines says it is losing 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) a day because of revenue losses, aircraft leasing and maintenance costs. The company has asked the government for 290 million euros in aid.

Ryanair, warned, meanwhile, that flying would not be the same as it once was.

On the plane, lining up for toilets will be forbidden, though access to bathrooms can be made on request. Crew members will wear masks and offer limited services. Cash will no longer be accepted. It did not specify if some seats would be left empty.

The airline also announced that passengers flying in July and August will be required at check-in to state the length of their planned visit and give an address for their destination. The information will be given to governments in the event they want to monitor the passenger for isolation requirements.

William Ryder, an equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown said Ryanair's announcement seems "optimistic," though "fortune favors the well prepared."

"Ryanair won't be caught napping if flights are resumed this summer," he said in a statement. "While preparing to get planes back in the air will cost money, which will be wasted if restrictions aren't lifted, management clearly feels this is a risk worth running."

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