

Emirates to serve all 'network destinations' by summer 2021

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The Middle East's largest carrier Emirates says it expects to serve 143 destinations by summer next year, compared to 157 before the coronavirus pandemic

Dubai-based airline Emirates expects to resume flights to all "network destinations" by summer 2021, its chief operating officer said Thursday, after the coronavirus pandemic halted most global air travel.

The Middle East's largest carrier, which has a fleet of 270 wide-bodied aircraft, halted operations in late March.

Shortly afterwards, it resumed limited passenger flights focused on repatriations and has since been gradually expanding its network after Dubai eased travel restrictions to revive its tourism industry.

"I think we can easily say by summer 2021, we'll be serving 100 percent of our network destinations," Adel al-Redha told CNBC.

Redha said the airline will serve 143 destinations by summer next year, down from 157 before the pandemic.

"Obviously the... frequency of flights per day will depend on the demand and some of the restrictions that will need to unwind from some airports and some countries."

According to the Emirates website, the airline currently serves 70 destinations.

"If I compare our performance now with a month ago, we have almost doubled the number of passengers we have been carrying onboard our aircraft," Redha said.

He said the recent announcement by Israel and the United Arab Emirates that they have agreed to normalise ties will be beneficial for business.

"Before we plan any flight between here and Israel or Tel Aviv, there will be an agreement (that) needs to be put in place and approval between the two cities, but for sure our eye is on that," said Redha.

"I think the demand will come from... both sides of the regions, and there will be quite a lot of opportunity for trading and businesses between the two cities and the two countries."

He said that Emirates, which has a fleet of 115 A380 superjumbos, the largest in the world, would continue to operate the aircraft up until at least 2035.

However, he added there was a "plan to retire some of them".

Emirates president Tim Clark has previously said that it could take up to four years for operations to return to "some degree of normality" and the airline could lay off up to 15 percent of its staff.

The airline has announced several rounds of layoffs, without disclosing numbers.

Before the virus hit, Emirates employed some

60,000 staff, including 4,300 pilots and nearly 22,000 cabin crew, according to its annual report.

Tourism has long been the economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed more than 16 million visitors last year. Before the pandemic crippled global travel, the aim was to reach 20 million this year.

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