

## European airlines continue to avoid Iran and Iraq despite airspace reopening

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**Dhaka: European airlines like Wizz Air, Lufthansa, and British Airways dodged Iraqi and Iranian airspace today, January 15, according to flight tracking websites, opting instead for routes over Afghanistan and Central Asia in an effort to mitigate risks associated with the ongoing geopolitical turmoil in Iran and the Middle East.**

Iran closed and then reopened its airspace after nearly five hours yesterday, January 14, amid concerns about possible military action between the US and Iran that forced airlines to cancel, reroute, or delay flights. Despite the airspace reopening, many airlines, including Singapore Airlines and TUI, continued to use alternative routes, according to Flightradar24.

In the last two years, many Western airlines have changed their routing

in the Middle East, with several flying over Afghanistan more often despite ongoing Taliban rule, in an effort to avoid other more turbulent conflict zones.

Earlier on Wednesday, January 14, Germany issued a new directive cautioning the country's airlines against entering Iranian airspace, shortly after Lufthansa rejigged its flight operations across the Middle East amid escalating tensions in the region.

"We avoid Iraqi and Iranian airspaces, therefore some westbound flights from Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports will have to make (refuelling and crew change) stops in Larnaca, Cyprus or Thessaloniki, Greece," a Wizz Air spokesperson said today.

A spokesperson for British Airways owner IAG said all British Airways flights to Bahrain were cancelled up to and including January 16.

"KLM is currently avoiding Iranian airspace as a precaution—a route we already rarely use. Last night's closure of Iranian airspace, therefore, did not affect our operations," a KLM spokesperson said.

Finnair has stopped flying through Iraqi airspace, travelling to Doha and Dubai over Saudi Arabia instead, the company told local media today. The carrier had already been avoiding Iranian, Syrian, and Israeli airspace for security reasons.

Carriers like Ryanair have moved routes away from the Middle East in recent months, and others, including Air France, have long avoided Iranian airspace.

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