

US airlines begin new year with operations in chaos

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Dhaka: US airlines suspended about 29,000 flights over the Christmas and New Year's holiday travel season. From December 20 to January 2 US airlines suspended 28,646 flights, according to reports.

This works out to an average of 2,046 suspended flights a day with most attributed to Omicron, although bad weather, including a snowstorm in the Pacific Northwest, contributed to the disruptions.

Globally, just over 8 per cent of all flights were suspended during the period.

However, in reality over 91 per cent of all flights to US airports were completed over the period, reports added. That percentage only fell to 85 per cent on January 1.

Nevertheless, January looks promising. Most airlines, and public health experts, forecast Omicron cases peaking in the first few weeks of January. This will ease the number of staff out on Covid-19 related sick leave.

In addition, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's shortening of the required quarantine window to five days from 10 after a positive test on December 27 is already helping airlines get staff back into the air faster.

Airlines have already begun reducing their January schedules in preparation for continued disruptions. Before New Year's, JetBlue Airways suspended 1,300 flights through mid-January citing an elevated number of "sick calls."

Also, both Spirit Airlines and United Airlines are offering pilots extra pay to fly in January to help ensure a reliable schedule.

Yet, reports added that airlines and analysts remain confident on the outlook for 2022. Reports forecast "modest profits" at US airlines in 2022. Delta called 2022 "one of the most pivotal years" in its history.

Moreover, investors appear untouched by the turmoil: stock prices for Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, Southwest, and United — the six largest US carriers — were all up on January 3, the first trading day of 2022 in the US.