

Tickets go cheaper as Chinese airlines restore overseas flights

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Major Chinese airlines have announced plans to largely restore international flights from later this month to further boost cross-border exchanges amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State Council, or China's Cabinet, has called for an "orderly increase in the number of domestic and international flights, while taking convenience measures for the travel of foreign company staffers."

"China's civil aviation regulator will keep negotiating with other countries to gradually increase the number of international flights," said Xu Qing, director of the transport department of the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Xu told the CAAC's monthly press briefing that regular international passenger flights will be restored smoothly to meet the demand of overseas Chinese students and other personnel who need to return or leave China.

The country's three largest airlines — China Eastern, China Southern and Air China — along with some other domestic carriers have released their flight adjustment plans for the upcoming winter-spring aviation season from October 30, with more international routes to be restored.

Shanghai-based China Eastern plans to operate 108 international flights per week from the end of the month, doubling the current 54 weekly

international flights.

The restored overseas services include popular routes between domestic cities (including Shanghai, Qingdao in Shandong Province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province, Nanjing in Jiangsu Province, and Kunming in Yunnan Province) and Bangkok, Tokyo, Seoul, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City as well as Dubai.

Many of the routes have been suspended due to travel restrictions since the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020.

Guangzhou-based China Southern plans to restore or increase the frequency of flights between Guangzhou and Jakarta, Tokyo, Dubai, Manila, Bangkok and Phnom Penh. The number of international flights will rise to 86 from 71 at present during the new flight season.

Air China, the nation's flagship carrier, will restore multiple routes between Beijing and international cities, such as Manila, Jakarta, Tokyo, Warsaw, Athens, Vancouver, Los Angeles and Toronto.

Spring Airlines, China's biggest budget carrier, will mainly restore its short-haul overseas services to Hong Kong, Macau, Osaka, Tokyo, Seoul and Bangkok, while Juneyao, another Shanghai-based private carrier, will resume its Nanjing-Seoul and Nanjing-Osaka flights.

With the number of international flights surging, ticket prices will largely drop.

Air China's Beijing-Tokyo one-way economy-class ticket, for instance, is being sold at 2,080 yuan (US\$289).



Passengers check in at an airline's counter at Pudong airport for an overseas trip. — Ti Gong

Spring Airlines' Shanghai-Macau ticket costs 99 yuan.

"I spent 30,000 yuan to buy a direct flight ticket from London's Heathrow airport to Shanghai's Pudong airport in August, but still felt quite lucky to be able to buy the air ticket and fly home," said Xue Yuqi, a Chinese student studying in London.

A London-Shanghai China Eastern ticket sold for over 90,000 yuan in July, despite the transfer-transit process, compared with about 10,000 yuan for the direct service between the two countries that resumed in late August.

International airlines have also been given the nod to gradually restore or increase flights to the mainland.

Etihad Airways Flight EY868 from Abu Dhabi to Guangzhou landed at Baiyun International Airport on October 11, marking the airline's first restored flight to the Chinese mainland since the COVID-19 outbreak. It plans to further restore its regular services to Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

Budget carrier Scoot Airways has restored flights from Singapore to seven mainland cities, including Tianjin in the north and Chengdu in Sichuan Province.

About 35 international flights with 10,000-plus seats were operated on the Chinese mainland daily in September, up by a quarter month on month, according to flight data provider Flight Master.