

Home > Personal Finance

British Airways and Air Canada halt flights as U.S. warns travelers to avoid China — how airlines are responding to coronavirus

By Meera Jagannathan

Published: Jan 29, 2020 3:28 p.m. ET



United, Delta and American Airlines are waiving some cancellation fees; some cruise lines are canceling trips



Chaideer Mahyuddin/AFP via Getty Images



Airports around the world are screening passengers for coronavirus.

U.S. government officials are warning Americans to avoid unnecessary travel to China as the country grapples with a deadly coronavirus outbreak. A growing number of airlines and cruise lines are responding to travel restrictions, and travelers who choose to go to China should be ready for the possibility that the Chinese government could curtail their movements with little warning, U.S. State Department officials said.

British Airways **IAG, -0.07%** said **Wednesday** it would temporarily suspend flights to and from Shanghai and Beijing and reassess the situation on Friday. Air Canada **AC, +1.11%** said it **would halt all flights** to Beijing and Shanghai from Jan. 30 to Feb. 29, after the Canadian government cautioned against non-essential travel.

United Airlines **UAL, -0.51%** suspended some flights between Feb. 1 and Feb. 8, **citing** a decline in demand for air travel to China. Cathay Pacific **293, -3.24%**, Finnair **FIA1S, -1.08%**, Air France **AF, -0.14%** and Lufthansa **LHA, +1.03%** have all either suspended flights or reduced flights to and from China.

While officials' efforts to control the virus's spread will hopefully succeed, it's "too soon to say right now" whether that will be the case, Scott Weisenberg, a clinical associate professor of medicine and director of NYU gone Health's travel medicine program, told MarketWatch.

"Right now it's very early in the course for this, so it's unclear how contagious [this coronavirus] will be with routine public-health measures that China and other countries are applying," Weisenberg said.

Don't miss: As coronavirus infections exceed 4,500, here's how the illness has spread across

The new coronavirus was first detected in China's Wuhan City, a transportation and manufacturing hub, with cases later reported in the U.S. and several other countries including Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, Vietnam and Singapore. This strain of coronavirus had killed at least 132 people in China as of Wednesday, and Chinese officials **said** there had been 5,974 confirmed cases. Confirmed cases outside of China total 56, according to the **World Health Organization**, including at least five in the U.S.

What U.S. government agencies have told American travelers

The U.S. State Department **urged travelers** to "reconsider travel to China" in a travel advisory Monday, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised travelers to avoid all nonessential travel to China. China had earlier placed Wuhan and several surrounding cities **under a travel ban** that spanned air, rail and public transport.

Travelers should be aware that China's government could keep them from entering or leaving parts of Hubei province, which includes capital Wuhan, and "be prepared for travel restrictions to be put into effect with little or no advance notice," the department added. China has also suspended all overseas tour group and package flight/hotel vacation packages.

Also see: Mayor of Wuhan, epicenter of coronavirus outbreak, says 5 million people left the city before travel restrictions were imposed

Airlines are responding with flight suspensions and change-fee waivers

Officials are screening travelers for the virus at airports in five major U.S. cities to which flights from Wuhan had been routed, according to the **Associated Press**: New York's JFK Airport, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta and San Francisco. The CDC is also increasing its staff at 20 U.S. airports to expand its screening efforts, **the Washington Post** reported Monday night; those airports receive 90% of air travelers from China, Vice President Mike Pence said.

Several airlines are accommodating travelers who want to reschedule China-related travel plans. American Airlines **AAL, -0.37%** **said it would allow passengers** who were traveling to, through or from Beijing or Shanghai and wanted to reschedule their trip to waive a change fee, given certain stipulations. The airline will also waive change fees for passengers who want to delay

Delta Air Lines **DAL, -1.44%** said it would waive change fees for passengers traveling to, through or from Beijing or Shanghai who made a one-time change to a different flight. Travelers can also cancel their trip and apply the unused value to a future flight for up to a year.

United Airlines also issued travel waivers in response to the outbreak, including refunds for unflown flights to Wuhan, and is waiving change fees for certain flights related to the Beijing, Chengdu and Shanghai airports, with some restrictions. Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific **CPCAY, +1.59%** said it would waive rebooking, rerouting and refund charges for bookings to and from mainland China on certain conditions; German airline Lufthansa **DLAKY, +0.52%**, meanwhile, is allowing certain passengers free rebooking or refunds for their flights in and out of mainland China.

Some cruise lines are canceling trips

The cruise lines Costa Cruises, Royal Caribbean **RCL, +1.00%** and MSC Cruises have collectively canceled at least a dozen trips to and from China in response to the outbreak, according to a Monday roundup by the cruise-review site **Cruise Critic**, a subsidiary of TripAdvisor **TRIP, -1.70%**.

Norwegian Cruise Line **NCLH, +1.85%** is reportedly also denying boarding to people who have traveled from Wuhan or been there in the past month, as well as to people embarking from Chinese ports who display a temperature of at least 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit on a non-touch temperature screening, according to Cruise Critic.

A number of Chinese tourist sites have temporarily closed

Several top historical and tourist attractions in China, including the Forbidden City, a stretch of the Great Wall of China near Beijing, Shanghai Disney Resort **DIS, -0.07%**, the National Library of China and the National Museum of China, have closed as officials try to stem the spread of coronavirus, **The Wall Street Journal** reported.

McDonald's **MCD, +1.92%** had closed its stores in Wuhan as of Friday, the Journal reported, while Starbucks **SBUX, -0.14%** extended its earlier Wuhan closings to all Hubei province stores.

U.S. travelers who still must travel to China should “remain alert” and discuss their travel plans with a health-care provider; avoid contact with people who are sick; stay away from dead or live animals, animal markets and animal products like raw meat; and frequently clean hands using soap and water (for at least 20 seconds) or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, **the CDC said**. Older travelers and those with underlying health problems could be at greater risk for disease, the agency added.

“Person-to-person spread is occurring in China,” the CDC said. “The extent of person-to-person spread outside of China is unclear at this time.”

The CDC also offered guidance for people who had traveled to Hubei Province in the past two weeks and had symptoms of cough, fever or difficulty breathing: Avoid contact with other people, call ahead to the doctor or emergency room and seek medical attention immediately, avoid travel, cover your nose and mouth area with a sleeve or tissue while sneezing or coughing, and practice frequent hand-washing.

Official recommendations could change at any time

There’s a lot that public-health officials still don’t know about this virus, and the CDC’s recommendations are likely to evolve quickly, Weisenberg told MarketWatch.

With that said, travelers who do still travel to China should take some precautions, he said: “I would wash my hands regularly, and I would try to avoid people who seem to have fever or who are coughing — or at least stay a few feet away from them.”

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Join the conversation

COMMENT

QUOTE
REFERENCES

UAL
-0.38 -0.51%

293
-0.33 -3.24%

SHOW ALL REFERENCES ▾

MOST POPULAR



There's only one stock millennials prefer over Amazon and Tesla



Hackers are ramping up attacks on retirement accounts — how to keep yourself safe



Air Force vet after learning how much the Rolex he bought for \$345 in 1974 is worth today: 'You gotta be sh*ing me?'**



Tesla surges after earnings beat, vows to sell more than half a million vehicles this year



Analysts divided on how much further Apple shares can climb after 'blowout results'

Conversation (7)

COMMUNITY GUIDELINES • FAQs

Sort by **Newest** ▾



Add a comment...

C Baskin ★ Leader · 4h

airlines have become way overvalued even before this.

Reply · Share ·





last year. It needs a cooler name or something so we can all be scared of it instead.

Reply · Share · 5 Likes ·

David M · 8h → You elected a moron

80K died because over 10 million people had it... compare mortality rates and it is a different story

Reply · Share ·

Paul Pena ★ Leader · 1d

Remember the killer bees???

Reply · Share · 1 Like ·

CC W ★ Leader · 1d

The end is near, everyone sell your stocks and hide.

Reply · Share ·

Jim C ★ Leader · 1d

Warn (?) ... reconsider (?) ... how about - if you go, you don't come back 'till a vaccine exists and the spread is obviously under control.

Reply · Share · 5 Likes ·

Ray L ★ Leader · 1d → Jim C

One way ticket :-))

Reply · Share · 3 Likes ·



[Sign Up](#) • [Log In](#)



[Help](#)

[Dow Jones](#)

[The Wall Street Journal](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Barron's](#)

[Newsroom Roster](#)

[Corrections](#)

[Financial News London](#)

[Virtual Stock Exchange](#)

[Reprints & Licensing](#)

[realtor.com](#)

[BigCharts](#)

[Your Ad Choices](#)

[Mansion Global](#)



Copyright © 2020 MarketWatch, Inc. All rights reserved.

By using this site you agree to the [Terms of Use](#), [Privacy Notice](#) UPDATED 1/23/20 , and [Cookie Notice](#) UPDATED 1/23/20 .
[Do Not Sell My Personal Information.](#)



Intraday Data provided by [FACTSET](#) and subject to [terms of use](#). Historical and current end-of-day data provided by [FACTSET](#). All quotes are in local exchange time. Real-time last sale data for U.S. stock quotes reflect trades reported through Nasdaq only. Intraday data delayed at least 15 minutes or per exchange requirements.