



LAPTOP BAN 'INTOLERABLE' FOR AIRLINES, SAYS AVIATION INDUSTRY CHIEF

News / Airlines



The US and UK bans on laptops on flights from countries in the Middle East has helped to create an "intolerable" situation for aviation, which has already been rocked by a number of shocks this year, said the head of the industry's world governing body.

Alexandre de Juniac, the International Air Transport Association's chief executive, said that such policy decisions, made without consulting airlines, have added to the uncertainties facing the sector and risked damaging public confidence.

"The introduction of restrictions on the carry-on of large electronic devices was a missed opportunity and the result was a measure that cannot stand up to the scrutiny of public confidence in the long term. We all want to keep flying secure. And we can do that most effectively by working together," said Mr de Juniac.

Gulf carriers have been working hard to maintain passenger confidence in the wake of the laptop ban. As of Wednesday, premium class passengers on Emirates' US-bound flights are now able to borrow tablets to continue working on board. From yesterday, Qatar Airways started loans of

laptops to first and business travellers and last week Etihad Airways began providing iPads and free Wi-Fi access to premium passengers on its flights to the US.

According to Saj Ahmad, chief analyst at StrategicAero Research, Gulf carriers should continue to outperform their rivals regardless of the laptop ban, as long as they lead the way in terms of pricing, cabin services and cuisine.

"GCC airlines are largely thus far shielded from financial angst because there are other, far bigger markets [than the US and UK] that they serve and generate income from," he said. "If the ban starts to expand worldwide, then the repercussions are far more profound."

Iata's Mr de Juniac urged governments to consider less disruptive ways to improve security. He highlighted Australia's decision to conduct additional security checks on passengers flying from the Arabian Gulf, including screening their electronic devices, but without banning them outright.

"Although Australia's measures were also implemented without consulting the industry, they at least demonstrate the potential to mitigate the threat with less disruptive means," he said.

Also adding to the general "ambiguity" are the attempted ban on travel to the US by citizens of six countries, implications of Brexit and a growing mood of protectionism around the world.

"We must find a better way" – [Alexandre de Juniac's earlier remarks on the ban](#)

However, Mr de Juniac conceded that the attempted US travel ban has so far not impacted air traffic.

"Overall travel demand continues to grow at a robust rate," he said.

Iata estimates that allowing for inflation, the price of air travel has fallen by more than 10 per cent in real terms over the past year, stoking demand.

In February, international passenger demand rose 5.8 per cent compared to the same month a year earlier. Adjusting for the leap year in 2016, growth in February this year also accelerated slightly compared to January.

Middle East carriers had the strongest growth globally in February, with a 9.5 per cent jump in demand year-on-year. Capacity rose 7 per cent, helping the load factor to climb for a fourth consecutive month to 74.3 per cent, up 1.8 percentage points over last year.

Next month, at an industry gathering in Chicago, Iata will push for countries to agree to share more information on security issues to improve cooperation.

"The security experience of recent years should compel states to support this," said Mr de Juniac.

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