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Russia's Aeroflot Still Flying Limited International Routes Despite Virus Grounding Order

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Aeroflot says it will continue operating flights to major world capitals to allow people to return to their home countries. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's state carrier Aeroflot is continuing to operate a limited number of flights abroad despite the Russian government's order to ground all international flights that took effect at midnight Friday.

The government decree published Thursday orders aviation authorities to halt all regular and charter flights to and from other countries, with the exception of special flights evacuating Russian citizens from abroad. Russia had already suspended most flights to coronavirus-hit countries in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus within its borders.

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As of Friday, Aeroflot's website says the airline is continuing to operate limited flights from Moscow to major world capitals and cities including Amsterdam, Bangkok, Beijing, Berlin, Dublin, London, Paris, New York and Tokyo.

An employee at Aeroflot's call center confirmed this information to The Moscow Times, adding that call center staffers haven't received notification of the complete grounding of Aeroflot's international fleet.

According to the Aeroflot staffer, these flights are mainly being used to "evacuate" Russian citizens from abroad if they need to come home. Because the European Union has closed its borders to non-EU citizens, these flights are mainly operated for EU citizens and residents seeking to return to their home countries. Russian citizens and other foreigners will be unable book any of Aeroflot's flights to Europe.

Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport, Aeroflot's hub airport, also confirmed to The Moscow Times that it would continue to operate a limited number of international flights in the coming weeks.

Both the airport and Aeroflot urged travelers to regularly check their websites for updates because the "situation may change at any moment."

Russian low-cost airline Pobeda – a subsidiary of Aeroflot – has reportedly followed the government's order and will suspend all international flights starting April 1, the RBC news website said Friday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Russia has seen a significant uptick in coronavirus infections over the past week, confirming a total of 1,036 cases so far.

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