The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Aeroflot Poised to Return to Kazakhstan Despite Legal Risks

The airline canceled flights to the country last year, fearing its leased aircraft could be seized.

January 30, 2023



An Aeroflot Airbus A320. **Aleksandr Markin (CC BY-SA 2.0)**

Russia's largest airline, Aeroflot, is poised to resume regular scheduled flights to Kazakhstan, despite a substantial chunk of its fleet being at the heart of legal action from plane-leasing firms seeking the return of their aircraft.

The airline said in a statement on Jan. 27 that it is already selling tickets for flights from Russia to Astana, Almaty and Atyrau, which are due to restart on Feb. 1. Aeroflot says it will use Airbus A320 planes on those routes.

An official in Kazakhstan's government has told Eurasianet that only aircraft previously purchased outright by Aeroflot from foreign leasing companies will be permitted to service those flights.

“The planes that we will allow to fly into Kazakhstan are purely Russian-owned, so they have been bought out from the leasing companies,” the official said.

Related article: Bermuda Suspends Licenses for Hundreds of Russian Aircraft

Reuters reported in May that Aeroflot had bought eight Airbus A330 models from foreign leasing companies. It is uncertain, however, that these are the same planes that will be used to carry passengers to Kazakhstan, since Aeroflot referred in its statement to A320s, which are designed to complete shorter-haul flights.

Aeroflot says it plans two daily flights to Astana, three to Almaty, and two flights per week to Atyrau.

The number of leased planes that Russia has bought from lessors is only a fraction of the total of around 400 or so that were stranded there after aircraft leases were terminated as a result of European Union sanctions. In the wake of those sanctions, Russian airlines refrained from traveling to most foreign destinations out of concern that the aircraft could be seized.

Reuters reported in December that aircraft leasing firms are seeking $8 billion in damages from dozens of insurers over their unwillingness to pay out compensation for loss of the planes. The news agency cites insurers as arguing that the planes may yet be returned.

At present, Aeroflot subsidiary Rossiya Airlines is the only Russian-owned carrier to offer direct flights to Kazakhstan. The only alternative is Kazakh-owned SCAT Airlines, which operates flights from the capital, Astana, to Moscow.

This article was originally published on Eurasianet.org.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/01/30/aeroflot-poised-to-return-to-kazakhstan-despite-legal-risks-a80079