EMIRATES, EUROPEAN CARRIERS AVOID SINAI AFTER RUSSIAN JET CRASH

News / Airlines

Emirates Airlines said it will avoid flying over Egypt's Sinai peninsula, where a Russian-operated jet went down on Saturday, becoming the third carrier to shun that route until more is known on the cause of the crash, which killed all 224 passengers and crew.

Dubai-based Emirates said in a statement Sunday that it is "closely monitoring" the situation. Air France, the French unit of Air France-KLM Group, and Deutsche Lufthansa AG said on Saturday that they'll be diverting planes. Preliminary investigations indicate the plane, an Airbus 321 operated by Russia's Metrojet, went down because of a technical problem, the state-run Ahram Gate website said, citing Egyptian security officials.

Flight paths became an issue of public debate after a Boeing Co. 777 wide-body jet came down last year over eastern Ukraine, an area some airlines were already avoiding because of fighting there between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists. The July 2014 crash that killed 298 people was later described as having been caused by a missile launched from rebel-held territory. While Ukraine had blocked air traffic below a certain threshold, it had allowed airlines to fly at

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cruising altitude above conflict zones.

Precautions

“It makes sense now for airlines to display an abundance of caution,” said Robert Mann, an aviation consultant in Port Washington, New York. “But I’m not aware of anything suggesting a ground-to-air missile.”

The Russian plane crashed 23 minutes after taking off from Sharm el Sheikh, a popular Red Sea resort. The airliner, which took off at 5:51 a.m. Cairo time heading for St. Petersburg, had reached a cruising altitude of 31,000 feet, Egypt’s Civil Aviation Ministry said.

Airlines propose their own flight routes, which have to be approved by air-traffic control authorities or air-navigation services providers.

A Qatar Airways spokesman said there were no changes to Egyptian airspace rules and therefore no changes in the airline’s flight schedules.

At KLM, a spokeswoman said the airline had no flights scheduled in that area Sunday so there was no need to review flight paths. She said the airline would exercise caution in any future flights in the area.

At British Airways, a spokeswoman said the airline “would never operate a flight until it was safe to do so,” declining to discuss specific routes, citing company practice.

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