HOW FOG CAUSED RECENT FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS AT UAE AIRPORTS

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Fog has been the cause of flight delays, diversions and cancellations in recent days, which prompts the question, why?

Most people would assume that fog would not pose much of a hindrance to technologically advanced aircraft, but that has been disproved.

At Abu Dhabi International Airport on New Year’s Day, three flights were diverted – two were because the pilots were not certified to land in foggy conditions.

The diversions "were at the request of the airline, as the pilot was not certified to land in low visibility conditions", said a spokeswoman for the airport.

The airport’s CatIIIB landing equipment enables aircraft to land "in very low visibility conditions, minimising disruption to flight schedules", the spokeswoman said.

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However, not all pilots are CatIIIB-certified, so those who are not trained to use it have to seek a diversion to another airport.

On New Year’s Day, there were about 80 flight delays in Abu Dhabi, which were partly the result of the enforcement of safety measures "because of the increased spacing between aircraft due to General Civil Aviation Authority regulations".

Aircraft that have been diverted are not in the correct location for their next journey, triggering further delays.

"This can have a knock-on effect on our schedule until the planes are brought back in line with their departure and arrival locations and schedules," the spokeswoman said.

Flight disruptions continued at airports in Dubai and Abu Dhabi on Monday because of that.

Dubai Airports said that it was "in recovery mode and focusing on clearing the backlog of flights disrupted as a result of bad weather persisting since December 28".

There were no new weather-related flight diversions or cancellations at Dubai International Airport on Monday morning or Sunday night, a Dubai Airports spokesman said.

Abu Dhabi Airports reported a few minor delays and one diversion on Monday.

Etihad Airways said a small number of flights departing experienced short delays owing to the fog but there were no cancellations.

An incoming flight from Cochin was diverted to Muscat due to an aircraft technical issue and the fog at Abu Dhabi Airport on Sunday morning, a spokesman said.

Emirates reported no significant delays to operations.

Flydubai, however, experienced about 70 cancellations on Sunday, with the company saying it would continue to monitor the weather and amend its schedule in the hope of returning to normal operations as soon as possible.

There was, however, some good news for Australian families left stranded in Dubai hotels for New Year after a technical problem with their aircraft.

A Qantas spokeswoman said: "Qantas flight QF2 from Dubai to Sydney is due to land in Sydney today [January 2] following a delay due to an engineering issue with the aircraft.

"Throughout this delay our customers were accommodated in hotels and provided with meal vouchers. We thank everyone for their patience."

The foggy weather also affected fishermen on the UAE’s east coast, causing them to stop work for three days. They have since taken to sea again.

All fishing activities were put on hold on Friday after several vessels collided in the sea because of poor visibility.

Six Asian seamen suffered minor injures and 10 fishing boats were damaged in the early hours of Friday, said the Fujairah Fishermen Association.

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The association’s manager said that about 50 fishermen were sailing that day from Fujairah and some were rescued by coastguards.

Salem Obaid, one of the fishermen at sea on Friday, said that visibility was less than 10 metres. "You can see absolutely nothing in front of you. The fog started at about 3.30am and lasted until 9am," he said.

"My boat was damaged and it will cost me about Dh10,000 to Dh15,000, but some fishermen might have to pay up to Dh40,000 to repair their boats."

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