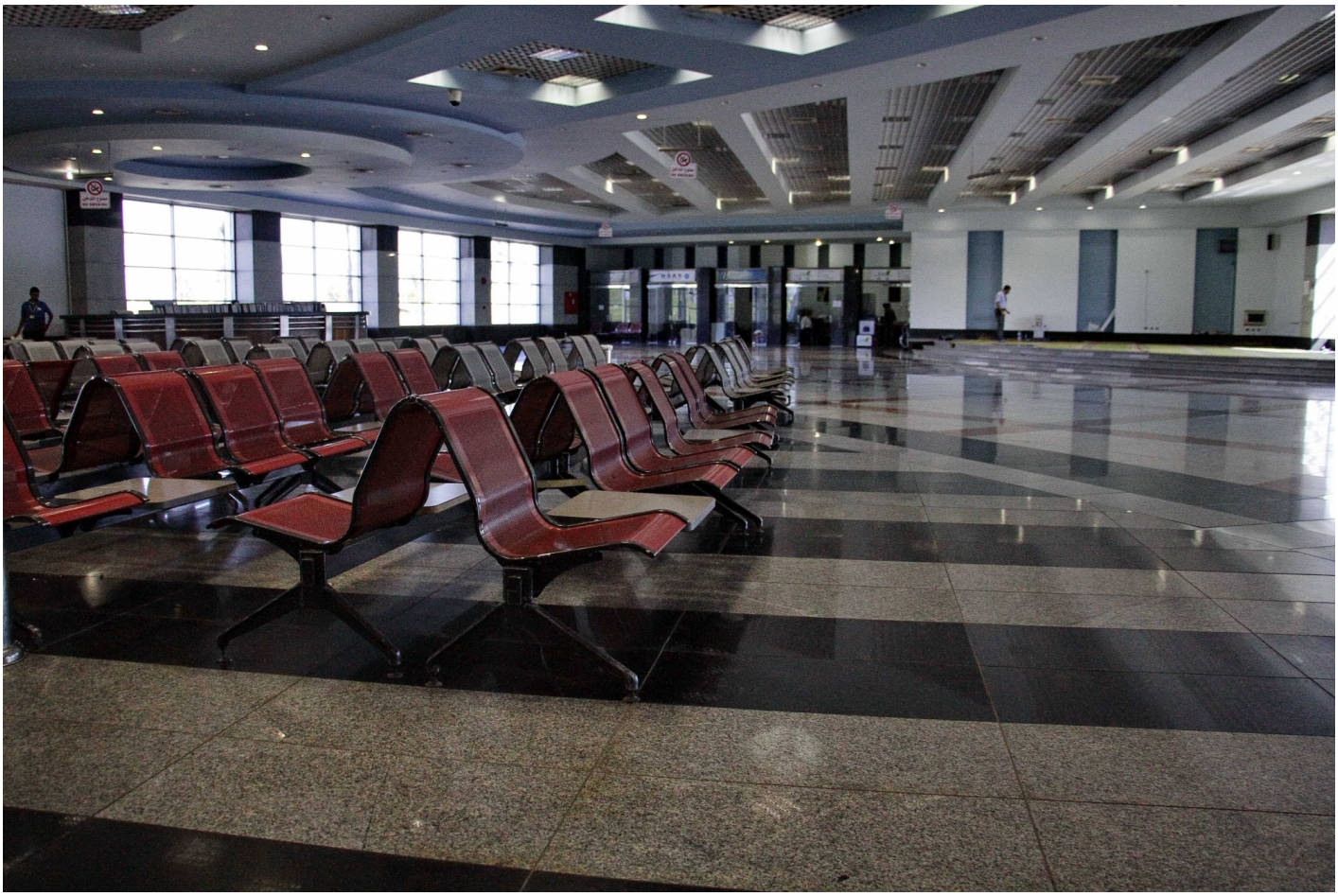
EGYPT PLANE CRASH: AIRLINES EXTEND SUSPENSION OF SHARM EL-SHEIKH FLIGHTS

News / Airlines



Travel firms Thomson and Thomas Cook have extended a suspension of flights to the Egyptian holiday resort of Sharm el-Sheikh until at least 23 March.

The UK government suspended flights to the Red Sea resort in November after the suspected bombing of a Russian passenger jet killed 224 people.

So-called Islamic State militants claimed responsibility for the attack.

Over 16,000 Britons stranded in the area were brought home on a series of rescue flights amid increased security.

No flights have operated between the UK and Sharm el-Sheikh since 17 November, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all but essential travel using the resort's airport.

British Airways has said it will not operate flights to the Egyptian resort until after 13 February at the earliest, while Monarch services are currently suspended up to 24 January.

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EasyJet has stopped services until 29 February, while Thomson and Thomas Cook this week both extended their suspension of services until 23 March.

Security checks

The Association of British Travel Agents has said the decision about whether to use Sharm el-Sheikh airport is being made by the UK authorities rather than the airlines.

Travel analyst Bob Atkinson, from Travel Supermarket, said the length of the suspension suggested that security issues at the airport were proving difficult to solve.

He said services would resume "at some point", but added: "The longer it goes on makes you think, 'Why are they delaying it so long if it's as simple as making sure security checks are in place?'"

But the Egyptian authorities would be doing "everything possible within their powers" to give the UK confidence about the safety of its citizens, so as not to lose out on tourist trade, he added.

On Tuesday, the Egyptian government announced it had hired global risk and security consultancy firm Control Risks to conduct a review of airports across the country.

The announcement was welcomed by British ambassador to Egypt, John Casson, who said he hoped flights would resume "as soon as possible".

"Britain was the first to raise security concerns about Sharm airport and Britain wants to be the first to restart flights, so that tourism can lead the revival of Egypt's economy," he said.

The crash on 31 October involved an Airbus A321, operated by the Russian airline Kogalymavia, which had taken off from Sharm el-Sheikh for St Petersburg, but crashed into the Sinai desert killing everybody on board.

UK investigators believe the crash was caused by a bomb put in the hold of the plane prior to take-off.

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