

France Air Strike Affects British Flights and Travelers



Paris, February 6 (RHC)-- Hundreds of British tourists going to and from France have experienced frustration as flights between the two neighboring countries faced severe disruption because of a strike by French air traffic controllers.

On Thursday, British airlines grounded most of their flights to and from France. Many more services into Europe were also delayed as they were re-routed to avoid French airspace.

British Airways cancelled 93 flights planned for the 12-hour walkout, which began at 6 p.m. on Thursday and finished at 6 a.m. on Friday. British Midland called off 13 flights while low-cost carrier easyJet was forced to scrap 22 services. Moreover, 40 flights were cancelled and others were delayed at the second largest airport in Britain -- Gatwick. Passengers at Manchester Airport also faced delays of between two and three hours.

Air France desks stood empty of people at Terminal Two of London's Heathrow Airport, which is the busiest airport in the United Kingdom and the third busiest airport in the world.

"It is very disappointing that the French air traffic controllers have chosen to come out again on strike, particularly given the problems the aviation industry is suffering since September 11," a spokesman for Britain's Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions said on condition of anonymity.

The French air strike is in protest at the liberalization of European airspace by the European Union, which would eliminate national air traffic controls in favor of an "open sky" plan.

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