

# Virgin Atlantic to end London Gatwick LGW operations

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Virgin Atlantic plans to exit its base at London Gatwick (LGW) as part of a series of measures being implemented to help the airline survive the coronavirus crisis.

The leisure carrier will consolidate its operations in the UK capital at London Heathrow (LHR) but intends to retain its slot portfolio at LGW “so it can return in line with customer demand.” It will also keep its existing base at Manchester (MAN).

The decision to end flights from LGW comes just days after it emerged British Airways may pull out of the airport, with a leaked memo to staff saying there was “no certainty as to when or if these services can or will return.”

Virgin Atlantic also plans to cut up to 3,150 jobs and accelerate the retirement of some of its fleet. The carrier will no longer use all of its seven Boeing 747-400s, with four A330-200 aircraft retiring in early 2022 as planned.

“Uncertainty around when flying will resume, coupled with unprecedented market conditions brought on by the pandemic, has severely reduced revenues for the global aviation industry and Virgin Atlantic,” the airline said in a statement.

“Accordingly, the airline has taken decisive action to reduce costs, preserve cash and to protect as many jobs as possible. Virgin Atlantic continues to explore all available options to obtain additional external funding.”

The carrier, which believes it will take up to three years for traffic to return to pre-COVID-19 levels, added it was in funding talks with several stakeholders, including the UK government.

Data from OAG Schedules Analyser shows that Virgin Atlantic was the eighth largest operator from LGW in 2019 with 597,494 available departure seats. However, it holds just 2.3% of overall capacity.

During the year the airline offered eight routes from LGW, with more than 260,000 seats deployed on transatlantic flights to Orlando (MCO). It also served Caribbean destinations Antigua, Barbados, Cancun, Havana, Hewanorra and Montego Bay along with Las Vegas.

Virgin Atlantic’s overall capacity in 2019 totaled 7.2 million seats, up from 6.9 million the previous year. It

offered 23,930 flights, with 3,194 departures and arrivals at LGW.

From LHR, Virgin Atlantic offered 4.7 million departure seats across 36 routes. New York John F Kennedy (JFK) was the airline's largest market in 2019, accounting for almost a quarter of capacity from the airport.

