

## Asia Pacific region shows passenger traffic plunge but stable cargo figures for February

By **Hibah Noor** on March, 26 2020 | Industry News



The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) today released preliminary figures showing a dramatic drop in passenger numbers in February, 2020, as the COVID-19 crisis developed globally, causing widespread travel disruptions.

The number of international passengers in the region for that month fell 43.9%. Demand measured in revenue passenger kilometres (RPK) fell by 34.8%, and seat capacity fell by 20.6%. This resulted in a 14.4% drop in international load factor, to 66.6%

Despite widespread factory closures and lockdowns in China that affected the supply and distribution of products not only throughout the country and the region but also the world, cargo traffic in Asia Pacific declined only 3% year on year, freight tonne kilometres (FTK) terms. This is in part due to the higher demand for pharmaceuticals and food supplies.

As freight capacity fell 13.5% in this time, with belly-hold capacity declining in tandem with the number of passenger flights over the course of the month, the average international freight load factor increased by 6.5 percentage points to 60.3% for the month.

Mr. Andrew Herdman, AAPA Director General, said, "Since February, we have seen a further sharp deterioration in the overall situation. As COVID-19 became a global pandemic, severe travel restrictions and falling demand have forced steep capacity cuts across the majority of airline route networks, with some airlines virtually halting all international flights, whilst others are planning to maintain minimal levels of connectivity by operating a small number of passenger services in the coming months. Asian airlines are also working closely with governments and related stakeholders to mount a number of humanitarian and evacuation flights to bring home stranded nationals."

Herdman added that demand for air cargo remains relatively unaffected; because passenger air traffic has dropped so dramatically, this means airlines with the capability of doing so are operating supplementary cargo flights using passenger aircraft to help meet demand. "Every effort is being made to ensure that shipments of critical relief supplies including medical equipment, and food products can continue to be transported safely and efficiently around the world. Asian airlines account for over one third of global air cargo flows, and operate large numbers of dedicated freighter aircraft."

Herdman concludes: "The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges, both operational and financial, to the airline industry and the wider travel and tourism sector worldwide. Whilst some governments have moved quickly to provide measures of financial support, much more needs to be done to reduce the risks of permanent damage to critical sectors of the economy."