

Ash cloud shuts Spanish airports

Spain has closed 19 airports as a cloud of ash from an Icelandic volcano drifts south over Western Europe.

Spain's second biggest airport at Barcelona is among those affected, the National airport management agency Aena said on its website.

The restrictions would be in place until at least 1800, Aena added.

Most flights between Europe and North America are being diverted because of the ash cloud's latest drifting, officials at Eurocontrol said.

Flights are being rerouted north and south of the 1,200 mile (2,000km) long cloud.

On average, 600 airliners make the Atlantic crossing every day, correspondents say.

Aena said the airports affected were Barcelona, Girona, Sabadell, Bilbao, San Sebastian, Vitoria, Zaragoza, Huesca, Pamplona, Logrono, Santiago, La Coruna, Vigo, Asturias, Santander, Leon, Valladolid, Burgos and Salamanca.

Nine were closed early on Saturday with a further six shut from 1200 local time (1000 GMT). The remainder - including Barcelona - were grounded at 1330 GMT.

Eurocontrol, the agency that co-ordinates aviation safety in Europe, said airports were also expected to close in northern Portugal and parts of southern France.

In the UK, some flights to Spain were being affected.

At London Stansted, 22 Ryanair flights to the Canary Islands, mainland Spain and Portugal were cancelled, along with three EasyJet flights.

Flights from Gatwick to Portugal, Alicante and Madrid were cancelled and at Heathrow some flights to La Coruna in northern Spain were also grounded.

Last month, thousands of travellers were stranded after ash shut down airspace across Europe.

Recent images have shown activity in the Eyjafjallajokull volcano intensifying.

Experts at the UK's Met Office said it was sending ash up to heights of 30,000 ft (9,100m).

Flights across Ireland and parts of the UK were disrupted earlier this week.

Are you in Spain? Have you been delayed by the ash cloud? Send us your comments.

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Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/8669610.stm>

Published: 2010/05/08 13:59:07 GMT

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