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Qantas flight makes emergency landing in Azerbaijan after fault indicator



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A Qantas flight to London has had to make an emergency landing in Azerbaijan after pilots received an intermittent fault indicator in the cockpit.

The Airbus A380 “QF1” was forced to land at Heydar Aliyev International Airport in Baku at about 2.15pm (EST) and was met by emergency services on arrival after making a 180-degree turn near the Georgian border.



QF1 on the tarmac at Baku airport in Azerbaijan after making an emergency landing. NIK LONG

The aircraft's sensor light alerted the pilots to the potential of smoke in the cargo hold, but the airline has found no evidence of smoke so far and believe it was likely a sensor fault. "Initial investigations have found no evidence of smoke in the cargo hold," a spokesperson said.

The airline said it was working to get passengers back on their flight as soon as possible. The airline confirmed that while the fault was seemingly a false alarm, the aircraft's pilots had acted in accordance with the airline's safety protocols. Qantas has never had a fatal jet airliner accident.



Qantas staff and passengers at Baku airport after their flight made an emergency landing en route from Singapore to London. NIK LONG

Nik Long from Sydney, who is travelling with four family members, said passengers were being put up in hotels as Qantas staff apply in bulk for visas to allow them to stay in Azerbaijan.

"Looks like we're not getting out of here until 10:30 pm on Christmas eve," he said.

"Most of us are still in limbo waiting for details for connecting flights, so Christmas may be spent in the air/immigration."

The wide-body Airbus aircraft had been scheduled to arrive at Heathrow Airport at 6.15am (GMT) on Friday after leaving Singapore's Changi Airport just after midnight.

The QF1 was nine hours into the 13.5 hour flight when it was forced to turn around above Tbilisi, Georgia.

Heydar Aliyev International Airport has one of the longest runways in the region and often hosts unsuspecting aircraft when forced to make emergency landings.

It's not yet known how long the A380 will remain in Baku but passengers may face more delays upon arrival at Heathrow as UK Border Force officers are currently in the midst of a strike over pay and conditions.

UK Border Force chief operating officer Steve Dann said he couldn't rule out closures after the onset of Friday's strike and warned travellers to expect disruptions. About 1000 Border Force staff have committed to striking every day from Friday (Saturday EST) to the end of the year, except for December 27.

"We have a reasonable expectation that by using a contingency workforce we will be able to deliver a service that keeps most, if not all, ports open. However, the general public should expect disruption," Dann said on Thursday.

The airline was forced to ground its fleet of 12 Airbus A380s at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and has stored them in the Californian desert for the better part of two years. Qantas is now close to returning the fleet to service now the demand for travel has returned with the exception of 2 A380s that will be retired.

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