



## Strike looms for British Airways

*By Jeffrey Stinson and Barbara De Lollis, USA TODAY*

LONDON — British Airways continued talks Sunday to try to avert a strike by flight attendants on Tuesday and Wednesday that already has disrupted travel plans for about 140,000 passengers. In anticipation of a strike, the airline has canceled 1,300 flights at its London airports for the two days, including about 180 to North America, and it urged affected passengers to make other travel arrangements.

All British Airways departures from London Heathrow are canceled both days, and only some scheduled to arrive on Tuesday will land.

At London Gatwick airport, some overseas flights will operate. They include flights to Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Orlando but not Tampa. All flights within the United Kingdom and Europe are canceled.

British Airways spokeswoman Laura Goodes said the airline was uncertain how many of the flights could get back in the air quickly if an agreement with the union representing cabin crews is reached before the strike takes effect.

"At the moment, we're focusing on the talks," she said. "If there's an agreement, we'll let everyone know right away."

The airline said it acted to avoid possibly stranding of thousands of passengers and that it has been notifying passengers on affected flights.

BA's labor troubles might not end this week. Unless the carrier reaches a deal with the union representing British-based cabin crews, it faces more possible walk-outs. The union, at odds with management over issues including pay and sick time, has scheduled two additional walkouts: Feb. 5-7 and Feb. 12-14.

If the dispute continues, airline management will decide Wednesday whether to scrap hundreds more flights the following week. Passengers can check the status of their flights by calling the airline at 800-247-9297 or looking on the website, [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com). The airline said affected passengers are being allowed to cancel, re-book or re-route without penalties.

"It makes it a very, very challenging week for business travelers," says Michael Steiner of Ovation Travel, a New York-based corporate travel firm. "A lot of our clients' trips are deal-related. They've got to get there."

BA is the biggest carrier in the U.S.-London air market, with an average of about 39 daily non-stop flights departing from U.S. airports, according to a USA TODAY analysis of January data from schedule tracker OAG (formerly, Official Airline Guides). American Airlines, the market's second-biggest carrier, has an average of 17 daily flights this month.

At Heathrow on Sunday, BA passenger John Rudosky, 35, of Boston says he received the airline's warning early enough to re-book his flight segment from Paris to London, which has been scheduled for Tuesday. "At least they warned everybody," said Rudosky, who works for a computer-chip maker.

Other passengers say they appreciate that work stoppages were announced for certain days rather than being ongoing and open-ended.

"That was very civilized," said Dallas engineer Pete Evans, 45, en route to Cairo. "If the fight is between management and labor, it's not good to take it out on customers."

*Stinson reported from London and De Lollis from McLean, Va. Contributing: Barbara Hansen in McLean.*