

Ryanair warns of more COVID-19 turbulence ahead after Omicron 'hysteria' hit bookings

Ryanair has warned of more COVID-19 turbulence ahead as it blamed "hysteria" over the Omicron variant for a collapse in bookings over Christmas and reported a quarterly loss of €96m.

The airline said demand had improved since the recent [lifting of travel restrictions](#) but prices were having to be cut to fill up planes over the next couple of months after the recent slump.

However finance director Neil Sorahan told the Reuters news agency said there "absolutely could be upward pressure on fares" over the summer after rivals cut capacity.



Image:

Mr O'Leary said the Omicron variant had generated "media hysteria"

Ryanair chief executive Michael O’Leary said: “We would caution all shareholders to expect further COVID disruptions before we here in Europe and the rest of the world can finally declare that the COVID crisis is behind us.”

The carrier had [warned last month](#) of a hit to bookings and cut flights in January by a third.

Advertisement

Commenting on the latest results, Mr O’Leary pointed to “the sudden emergence of the Omicron variant and the media hysteria it generated in December” which he said “forced European governments to reimpose travel restrictions in the run-up to Christmas”.

He said this had “significantly weakened” peak last-minute bookings and fares over Christmas and new year, cutting December traffic and load factors – a measure of how full planes are.

More from Business



Kremlin says UK economic sanctions are attack on Russian businesses



Passengers delayed by more than an hour on domestic flights could be entitled to compensation



Vodafone shares rise on report of stake acquired by activist Cevian

“While recent bookings have improved, following easing of travel restrictions... Q4 traffic requires significant price stimulation at lower prices to quickly recover load factors which suffered steep declines due to the Omicron collapse in bookings over the Christmas/New Year period,” he added.

Ryanair expects to have carried just under 100 million passengers for its full-year to the end of March – at a loss of €250m-€450m.

Please use Chrome browser for a more accessible video player



'Many people haven't had a holiday for two or three years':
Jet 2 sees pent-up demand

The Dublin-based carrier hopes the roll-out of booster jabs and evidence about Omicron being less virulent than other variants will see more restrictions ease and restore consumer confidence ahead of Easter.

It sees capacity this summer topping pre-pandemic levels.

But Mr O'Leary cautioned that the outlook was "hugely sensitive to any further positive or negative Covid news flow".

The airline's loss of €96m for the third quarter to the end of December is narrower than the €321m loss it suffered a year earlier.

Customer numbers, at 31.1 million, were more than three times higher, and revenues of €1.47bn were 331% up on 2020 levels.

But the emergence of the Omicron variant meant it was a weaker than hoped for quarter after a promising start to the period when UK "traffic light" travel restrictions [were scrapped](#) in October.