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Episode #002

The Places In The World Where Planes Can't Fly

December 3, 2019



[00:00:02] Hello and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:08] I'm your host, Alastair, Budge, and today we are going to be talking about some of the places in the world where aeroplanes aren't allowed to fly.

[00:00:17] Some of them you may be able to imagine, but some of them, well, they may just surprise you.

[00:00:24] Before we get right into it though, I just want to remind those of you listening on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you may get your podcasts, that you can get the transcript and keep vocabulary for this podcast on the website, so that's leonardoenglish.com. There's also a whole load of information on how to use podcasts to learn English over on the blog.

[00:00:44] So that's well worth a look as well, if you haven't already.

[00:00:48] Okay. Back to the matter at hand, the places in the world where planes can't fly,

[00:00:54] So there are a few categories of places where planes can't fly.



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[00:00:59] Firstly [airspace](#)¹ where countries don't allow other countries aeroplanes to fly for political reasons.

[00:01:07] Countries own the sky that's above them and they can choose to allow planes from other countries to use it, or they can choose to not allow them to use it. A country might choose to not allow planes from another country to use its airspace if that country isn't an [ally](#)². So, for example, Taiwanese aeroplanes can't fly over China, Israeli aeroplanes can't fly over several Arab states, and vice versa, of course.

[00:01:35] Nowadays, there aren't actually that many countries which [ban](#)³ the use of their airspace to other countries. Also not allowing planes to go into your [airspace](#) means losing out on [revenue](#)⁴ because every time an aeroplane goes into the airspace of another country, that country charges a fee for it.

[00:01:55] But even 30 years ago, things were very different. Russia and China didn't allow Western aeroplanes to use their airspace, meaning that planes from Europe wanting to go east, for example, would need to make a big [detour](#)⁵ to avoid [airspace](#) belonging to the vast Soviet Union and China.

[00:02:14] For example, a flight from London to Tokyo , and remember that the Japanese economy was [booming](#)⁶ in the eighties so this was a very [desirable](#)⁷ route.

¹ space in the air above a country, piece of land or sea

² a state formally cooperating with another for a military or other purpose

³ restrict the use of

⁴ income, especially when of a company or organization and of a substantial nature

⁵ a long or roundabout route that is taken to avoid something or to visit somewhere along the way.: "he had **made a detour to** a cafe".

⁶ having a period of great prosperity or rapid economic growth

⁷ wished for as being an attractive, useful, or necessary course of action



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So a flight from London to Tokyo would have to go from London to Greenland, then over Alaska, and then come down to Tokyo.

[00:02:32] If you could imagine a world map or a globe, that's really not a direct route.

[00:02:37] Now, of course, they just fly over Russia and China. So that's one reason.

[00:02:44] Secondly, there is the category of places that are considered dangerous for commercial planes to fly over for geographical reasons. One you might be familiar with, or at least could imagine is Tibet.

[00:02:57] So, Tibet is located on the [lofty](#)⁸ Tibetan plateau on the northern side of the Himalayas and is joint home to Mount Everest, along with Nepal.

[00:03:07] Now, why can't planes fly over Tibet? Well, there are several reasons.

[00:03:12] Firstly, Tibet is very high, with an average [elevation](#)⁹ of almost 5,000 metres. And if you think Mount Everest is 8,800 metres, then that really gives you an idea of quite how high Tibet is. Given that planes fly anywhere from nine and a half to eleven and a half kilometres high, that's actually pretty close to the ground in Tibet.

[00:03:36] There isn't just the risk that you're close to the top of the mountains, but also the risk that if anything goes wrong, well, you'd be in trouble for a few reasons.

[00:03:46] Firstly, oxygen.

[00:03:48] Aeroplanes do of course have oxygen masks, but these only have enough oxygen for 15 to 20 minutes.

⁸ very high in altitude

⁹ height above a given level, especially sea level



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[00:03:54] There is a [regulation¹⁰](#) that requires airline operators to be able to descend to around 3000 metres to ensure that passengers have enough oxygen, and given that the average height of the ground in Tibet is 5,000 metres, well, going down to 3000 metres is a bit of a problem.

[00:04:13] Secondly, if anything goes wrong and a plane is required to make an emergency landing, well that's not very easy in the Himalayas.

[00:04:22] So that's why no planes are allowed to fly over Tibet.

[00:04:25] There are a few other reasons. So installing and maintaining a radar network in Tibet would be incredibly expensive. And so China just doesn't do it in the Himalayas.

[00:04:37] If there's no radar network, then there's no way of guiding and supporting pilots and so they just don't do it in the first place.

[00:04:45] I should point out that there are flights to Lhasa, which is the capital of Tibet. These will all fly from within China, and as Lhasa is on the Eastern side of Tibet, these flights avoid most of the very mountainous region. In any case, you can't fly to Tibet from the West for many reasons that we could group together and say, "you might crash into the mountains and not be able to breathe", which seems after all pretty sensible.

[00:05:11] It's for similar reasons that you might think that commercial flights don't fly over Antarctica.

[00:05:17] However, there's another more practical reason and it's actually an economic reason.

[00:05:23] It's that there just really isn't the demand for flights to go over Antarctica. If you take out a globe, you'll see that the only real practical flight would be from

¹⁰ a rule or directive made and maintained by an authority.: "planning regulations".



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somewhere like the bottom of South America to Australia, but there just isn't enough demand to [warrant](#)¹¹ the investment in radar stations and equipment to support these routes.

[00:05:44] So that's our second category.

[00:05:46] Places where it's just not safe enough to fly over for natural geographical reasons, reasons that are very sensible, such as you may crash into a mountain.

[00:05:56] Thirdly, there are those places where commercial airlines can't fly because the countries that own the airspace and own the ground underneath it aren't considered safe enough for passengers.

[00:06:09] What's called 'no fly zones' are implemented and then removed on a regular basis and subject to political events. Libya, for example, was subject to a no fly zone in 2011 and then again in 2018 and 2019.

[00:06:25] Other areas that have been subject to no fly zones include Iran, Mali, Yemen, North Korea, the list goes on.

[00:06:32] The reason that from time to time, of course, flying is [prohibited](#)¹² over these areas is pretty simple. The possibility that the plane might be shot down or that if it has to make an emergency landing, the passengers will not be given the warmest of welcomes when they land in that country.

[00:06:52] Finally, our fourth category may just surprise you. Now, if you're wondering what Disneyworld, Disneyland and Buckingham Palace have in common, nope, I'm not going to make any jokes here about the [inhabitants](#)¹³. I'll leave that to your own

¹¹ justify or necessitate (a course of action)

¹² not allowed, restrict

¹³ people who live in a place



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imagination. Disneyworld, Disneyland and Buckingham Palace all have no fly zones above them, meaning that no planes are allowed to travel at whatever height.

[00:07:18] In the case of Disneyland and Disneyworld, it's [ostensibly](#)¹⁴ from a security perspective. As this came into place after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

[00:07:28] However, other theme parks were a bit annoyed when this happened as they used to fly adverts for their parks above Disneyland and Disney world. Now, of course they can't.

[00:07:41] These aren't the only tourist sites with no fly zones, though - Machu Picchu in Peru has one, as does the Taj Mahal in India and the Parthenon in Greece.

[00:07:51] In fact, the entire city of Paris has one. So if you'd been in Paris, looked up at the sky while you were enjoying your vin rouge and camembert or coffee and croissant and wondered where all the planes were, well, now you've got your answer.

[00:08:07] I think we'd all agree that being able to enjoy these attractions without aeroplanes flying overhead is, is a good thing.

[00:08:14] And if it reduces the possibility of any kind of terrorist attack, well that's a positive thing as well.

[00:08:21] Okay. I hope this has been interesting.

[00:08:23] We've taken a good look at the places in the world where planes can't fly, and now you know what Disneyland, Disneyworld and Buckingham Palace all have in common.

[00:08:33] Stay tuned as we've got another podcast in the pipeline about who owns the sky.

[00:08:38] I don't know about you, but I find this stuff pretty fascinating.

¹⁴ as appears or is stated to be true, though not necessarily so; apparently



[00:08:42] As always, if you've enjoyed this podcast and wanted to get notified whenever we release a new one, then just hit that subscribe button. If you're looking for the key vocabulary and transcript for this podcast, you can grab those over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:08:58] As a final thought, please do consider taking 20 seconds out of your day and leaving a review. Each review helps people find out about the podcast and the more people who listen well, the better it'll get for everyone.

[00:09:10] It's been an absolute pleasure and I'll catch you in the next episode. You've been listening to me, Alastair Budge, and this has been English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

| <u>Word</u> | <u>Definition</u> |
|--------------------|---|
| Airspace | space in the air above a country, piece of land or sea |
| Ally | a state formally cooperating with another for a military or other purpose |
| Ban | restrict the use of |
| Revenue | income, especially when of a company or organization and of a substantial nature |
| Detour | a long or roundabout route that is taken to avoid something or to visit somewhere along the way.: "he had made a detour to a cafe". |
| Booming | having a period of great prosperity or rapid economic growth |
| Desirable | wished for as being an attractive, useful, or necessary course of action |
| Lofty | very high in altitude |
| Elevation | height above a given level, especially sea level |
| Regulation | a rule or directive made and maintained by an authority.: "planning regulations". |
| Warrant | justify or necessitate (a course of action) |
| Prohibited | not allowed, restrict |
| Inhabitants | people who live in a place |
| Ostensibly | as appears or is stated to be true, though not necessarily so; apparently |



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