

Chinese maritime drills might impact flights

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24 March, 2022



China has been carrying out a lot of military exercises over the South China Sea of late. Most of these are maritime, but that doesn't mean they won't have some impact on aviation as well.

So here is a look at what is going on and where to watch out for...

The Exclusion Zones.

When China carry out their military drills **they establish exclusion zones.** These definitely apply to maritime traffic, but it is a lot less clear whether they apply to civilian aviation traffic as well. Some of them also lie in **particularly close proximity to the airspace of International airports.**

So best know about them just in case.

The Current Activity (that we know about).

- **Number 1**

The latest one is taking place in the **northern region of the South China Sea**, and will run through to at least 18:00z on April 9. The no-go zone is about 90km or so in size, southwest of Sanya which means traffic in and out of **ZJSY/Sanya Phoenix International** may be disrupted.

There could also be an increase in helicopter traffic, so keep an eye on that TCAS and remember your contingency procedures for Sanya Oceanic, and China in general.

- **Number 2 & 3**

Drills were planned in two areas - one in the **Bohai Sea, and one in the Beibu Gulf** (northern South China Sea). These were due to run through March 27, but have been extended to April 10.

ZYTL/Dalian Zhoushuizi International airport and **ZGBH/Beihai Fucheng** airport maybe impacted by the exclusion zones.

- **Number 4**

This one was announced quite late, and will take place in the **South China Sea, off the coast of Shantou**, Guangdong Province, through March 26. As with all the others, it isn't clear what the impact to flights will be beyond possible disruption if flying into **ZGOW/Shantou Waisha** Airport, and a likely increase in helicopter traffic.



Some of the known exclusion zone approximate areas.

China in general...

China have a huge number of **unmapped military bases**. In fact their entire airspace is basically one giant military zone. This means you might often find yourself **descended early** if heading in, **kept very low** when heading out, or given **big detours** which seem to make no sense.

All of this means a much higher fuel burn (which can be very hard to plan for!)

We wrote some stuff on China Ops a while back so take a look her for more info, but this is the bit to really think about:

China only allow certain airways for usage by non Chinese registered aircraft. These mostly run north-south. It is often recommended to offset 1-5nm due congestion, but this is **only allowed by ATC**. Don't apply SLOP without confirming with ATC first. Any other airway requires you to have a Chinese navigator onboard, and you generally won't find these published in your Jeppesen or LIDO manuals. The same goes for some smaller domestic airfields.

There are **multiple restricted areas across the country**. Some of them are not always obvious... which means you will rarely get "Direct To..." clearances, and may often find your levels are restricted or you are given seemingly random re-routes. Fuel planning is critical, as is accurate route tracking.

Good to know.

While the **ZJSA/Sanya FIR** includes an oceanic portion in the South China Sea (a "marginal sea" that is part of the Western Pacific Ocean (marginal meaning: *would just be the ocean only a bunch of islands and archipelagoes sort of divide it off a bit*), the don't apply standard ICAO Oceanic contingencies in it.

Instead, you'll be expected to turn **90 degrees** right or left, **offset by 25nm** and then climb or descend 500ft. China are pretty strict on deviations and detours. They even use different sized airways in some spots. So **check their AIP and China specific Rules and Regs** before a flight to make sure you get it right.



ZJSA/Sanya FIR does not apply standard ICAO contingency procedures.