Saudi Arabia Overflights – Free Route Gotcha

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23 April, 2024

Key Points

- **The Southeastern section of the OEJD/Jeddah FIR is now Free Route Airspace.**
- **It's not straightforward. New procedures have been published in the Saudi AIP.**
- **If your flight plan does not comply, you are likely to be instructed to descend below FL300.**

Background

We've received a new report from an OPSGROUP member after a recent run-in with ATC in the **OEJD/Jeddah FIR**.

The problem stemmed from a small (and confusing) change that became effective on April 18.

Essentially, ATC were upset that their filed route did not comply with newly published **Free Route Airspace (FRA)** procedures buried deep within the bowels of the Saudi AIP.

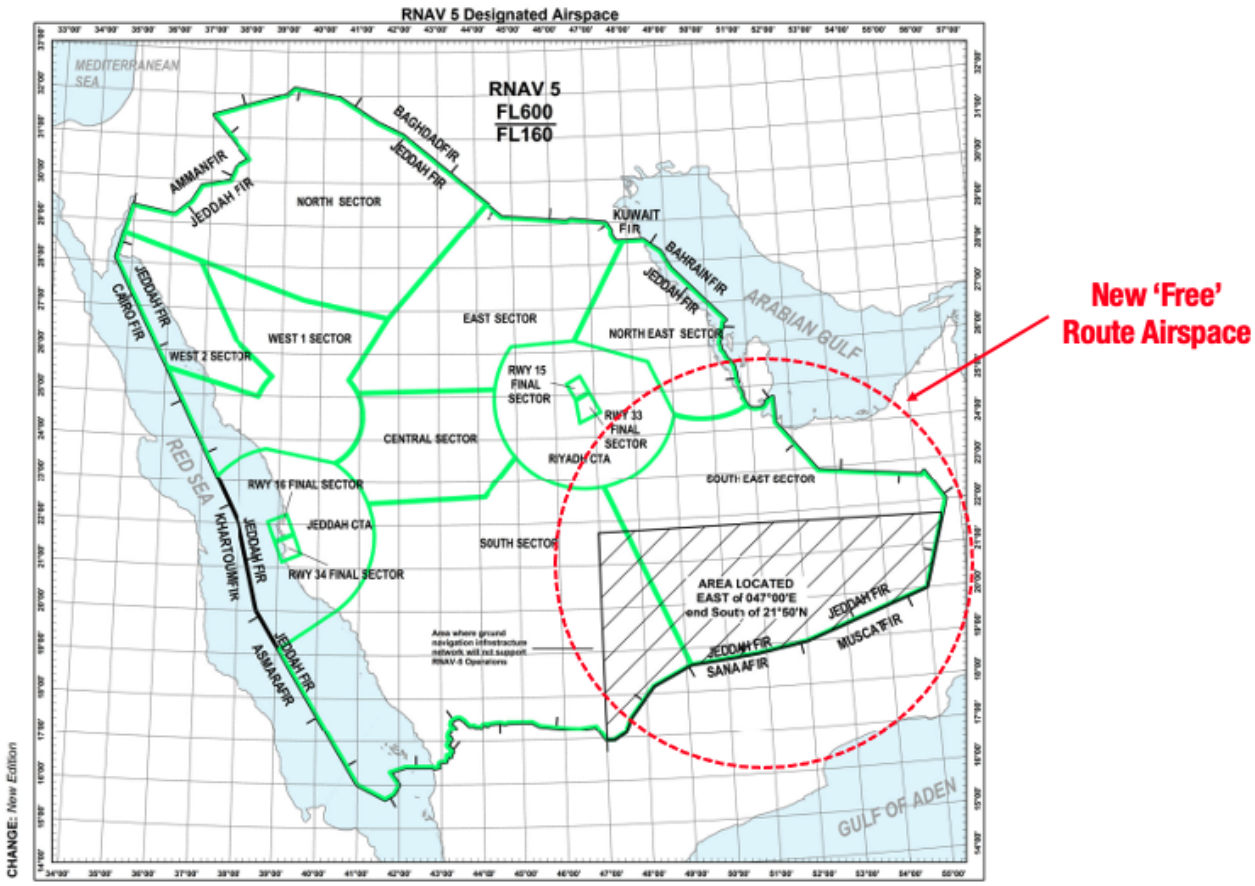
The fallout of non-compliance is the ATC equivalent to the 'naughty corner' with aircraft directed to **descend below FL300** for the duration of their crossing of the affected airspace.

In this case, the member was able to negotiate to remain at their preferred level but not before a fair amount of head scratching as to why they got in trouble in the first place.

As large amounts of traffic are now **transiting Saudi Arabia to avoid Iran** further north, it is especially relevant right now.

New Free Route Airspace

On April 18, a large chunk of Southeastern Saudi Arabia (known as the **SE Sector**) became Free Route Airspace (FRA).



Typically, FRA means that pilots can freely plan any route they like between defined entry and exit points without reference to the ATS route network. This saves both money and time – simple.

However, this is where things get hazy.

The change was notified in this **easily overlooked FIR Notam**:

A0648/24 NOTAMN Q)
OEJD/QOATT/IV/BO/E/000/999/2501N04522E005 A)
OEJD
B) 2404180000 C) 2405012359
E) TRIGGER NOTAM - PERM AIRAC AIP AMDT 04/24
WEF 18 APR 2024 IS PUBLISHED AND CONTAINS:
1- UPDATE ON DEP PROCEDURES FOR OEGS.
2- UPDATE ON ATC SURVEILLANCE PROC FOR OETB.
3- UPDATE ON LVP FOR OERK.
4- IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE ROUTES AIRSPACE IN THE SE SECT.

This directs you to the **Saudi AIP.** This is great if you have a spare half an hour to prove who you are, download a special app and access it. To save you the trouble, the relevant bit is ENR 2.2.4 which you can find here.

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2.2.4 Free Route Airspace General Procedures

2.2.4.1 Free Route Airspace (FRA) Concept Definition

FRA is a specified volume of airspace within which users may freely plan a route between a defined entry point and a defined exit point, with the possibility to route via intermediate (published or unpublished) waypoints, without reference to the ATS route network, subject to airspace availability. Within this airspace, flights remain subject to air traffic control.

FRA enables airspace users to fly as close as possible to what they consider the optimal trajectory without the constraints of a fixed route network structure.

2.2.4.2 Area of application

FRA procedures are applicable in the Jeddah ACC South-East Sector (ENR 2.1) of Jeddah FIR between FL300 and FL600. Please note that outside of the FRA, published ATS routes remain applicable.

2.2.4.3 Flight Procedures

2.2.4.3.1 General requirements

Navigation: RNAV 5

Communication: DCPC (Voice)

Route adherence: Fly directly between waypoints. Any deviation from the track between waypoints must be done with ATC clearance.

2.2.4.3.2 Contingency

In the event of Communication, Navigation or Surveillance failure, the aircraft must seek an alternative ATC clearance or follow the published contingency procedures.

2.2.4.3.3 Enroute frequency change methodology

a) VHF air-ground communication in the South-East sector is covered by different stations (ENR 6).

b) To maintain continuous direct communication between the controller and pilot, the pilot must change frequencies along the route (refer to Table 1 of this section).

Sample phraseology: SVA783 on 132.9, FL360 DCT to XXX01.

c) The pilot must also maintain listening watch on the next frequency as the secondary, and/or any adjacent frequency as indicated in table 1.

2.2.4.3.4 Routing in FRA

a) The following standard routings (refer to Table 1) apply for traffic in the FRA.

b) FPL must include routes via adjoining ATS route before the Entry waypoint and after the Exit waypoint.

c) Segments between waypoints must be indicated by using "DCT" (direct) notation.

d) Waypoints along the enroute may be used to indicate speed and level changes.

Table 1

Entry point	Routing	Exit	Control Frequencies	Remarks
PEKEM	DCT MEDPO DCT	SITUK	134.5* 132.9**	@MEDPO change to 132.9
	DCT MEDPO DCT	ITRUX		

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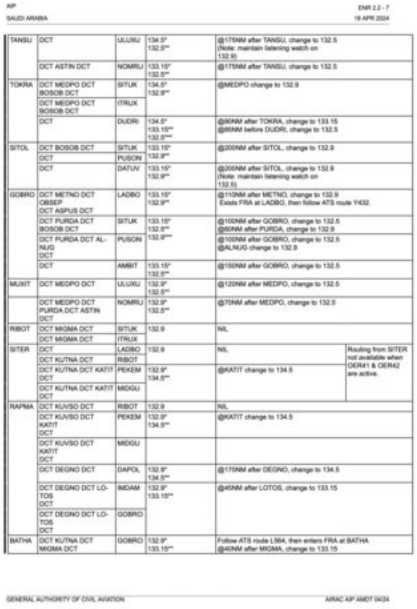

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TANSU	DCT	ULUGU	134.5* 132.5**	@175NM after TANSU, change to 132.5 (Note: maintain listening watch on 132.9)
	DCT ASTIN DCT	NOMRU	133.15* 132.5**	@175NM after TANSU, change to 132.5
TOKRA	DCT MEDPO DCT BOSOB DCT	SITUK	134.5* 132.9**	@MEDPO change to 132.9
	DCT MEDPO DCT BOSOB DCT	ITRUX		
	DCT	DUDRI	134.5* 133.15** 132.5***	@80NM after TOKRA, change to 133.15 @85NM before DUDRI, change to 132.5
SITOL	DCT BOSOB DCT	SITUK	133.15* 132.9**	@200NM after SITOL, change to 132.9
	DCT	PUSON		
	DCT	DATUV	133.15* 132.9**	@200NM after SITOL, change to 132.9 (Note: maintain listening watch on 132.9)
GOBRO	DCT METNO DCT OBSEP DCT ASPUS DCT	LADBO	133.15* 132.9**	@110NM after METNO, change to 132.9 Exists FRA at LADBO, then follow ATS route Y432.
	DCT PURDA DCT BOSOB DCT	SITUK	133.15* 132.5**	@100NM after GOBRO, change to 132.5 @50NM after PURDA, change to 132.9
	DCT PURDA DCT ALNUG DCT	PUSON	132.9**	@100NM after GOBRO, change to 132.5 @ALNUG change to 132.9
	DCT	AMBIT	133.15* 132.5**	@150NM after GOBRO, change to 132.5
MUKIT	DCT MEDPO DCT	ULUGU	132.9* 132.5**	@120NM after MEDPO, change to 132.5
	DCT MEDPO DCT PURDA DCT ASTIN DCT	NOMRU	132.9* 132.5**	@70NM after MEDPO, change to 132.5
RIBOT	DCT MIGMA DCT	SITUK	132.9	NIL
	DCT MIGMA DCT	ITRUX		
SITER	DCT	LADBO	132.9	NIL — Routing from SITER not available when OER41 & OER42 are active.
	DCT KUTNA DCT	RIBOT		
	DCT KUTNA DCT KATIT DCT	PEKEM	132.9* 134.5**	@KATIT change to 134.5
	DCT KUTNA DCT KATIT DCT	MIDGU		
RAPNA	DCT KUVSO DCT	RIBOT	132.9	NIL
	DCT KUVSO DCT KATIT DCT	PEKEM	132.9* 134.5**	@KATIT change to 134.5
	DCT KUVSO DCT KATIT DCT	MIDGU		
	DCT DEGNO DCT	DAPOL	132.9* 134.5**	@175NM after DEGNO, change to 134.5
	DCT DEGNO DCT LOTOS DCT	IMDAM	132.9* 133.15**	@45NM after LOTOS, change to 133.15
	DCT DEGNO DCT LOTOS DCT	GOBRO		
BATHA	DCT KUTNA DCT MIGMA DCT	GOBRO	132.9* 133.15**	Follow ATS route L564, then enters FRA at BATHA @40NM after MIGMA, change to 133.15

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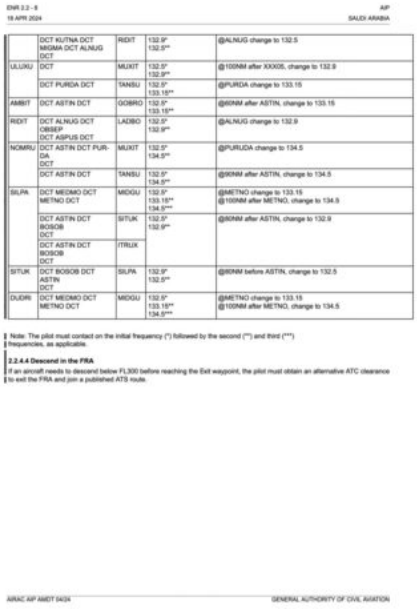

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	DCT KUTNA DCT MIGMA DCT ALNUG DCT	RIDIT	132.9* 132.5**	@ALNUG change to 132.5
ULUGU	DCT	MUKIT	132.5* 132.9**	@100NM after XXX05, change to 132.9
	DCT PURDA DCT	TANSU	132.5* 133.15**	@PURDA change to 133.15
AMBIT	DCT ASTIN DCT	GOBRO	132.5* 133.15**	@80NM after ASTIN, change to 133.15
RIDIT	DCT ALNUG DCT OBSEP DCT ASPUS DCT	LADBO	132.5* 132.9**	@ALNUG change to 132.9
NOMRU	DCT ASTIN DCT PURDA DCT	MUKIT	132.5* 134.5**	@PURUDA change to 134.5
	DCT ASTIN DCT	TANSU	132.5* 134.5**	@90NM after ASTIN, change to 134.5
SILPA	DCT MEDMO DCT METNO DCT	MIDGU	132.5* 133.15** 134.5***	@METNO change to 133.15 @100NM after METNO, change to 134.5
	DCT ASTIN DCT BOSOB DCT	SITUK	132.5* 132.9**	@80NM after ASTIN, change to 132.9
	DCT ASTIN DCT BOSOB DCT	ITRUX		
SITUK	DCT BOSOB DCT ASTIN DCT	SILPA	132.9* 132.5**	@80NM before ASTIN, change to 132.5
DUDRI	DCT MEDMO DCT METNO DCT	MIDGU	132.5* 133.15** 134.5***	@METNO change to 133.15 @100NM after METNO, change to 134.5

Note: The pilot must contact on the initial frequency (*) followed by the second (**) and third (***) frequencies, as applicable.

2.2.4.4 Descend in the FRA

If an aircraft needs to descend below FL300 before reaching the Exit waypoint, the pilot must obtain an alternative ATC clearance to exit the FRA and join a published ATS route.

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Here's the kicker – it's Free Route Airspace, but not really. **You still need to plan and file via the standard routes** found via the link above.

In other words – '*fly whatever route you like, as long as it is one of these ones.'*

Turns out if you don't, they will want you out of the 'FRA' which means a descent below FL300 (or a climb above FL600 if you're piloting the Space Shuttle).

Keep listening out.

There are also some really specific **comms requirements** you need to follow along each route as the sector is controlled by several VHF frequencies. It seems you cannot rely on ATC to tell you when to switch.

"Normal" routes.

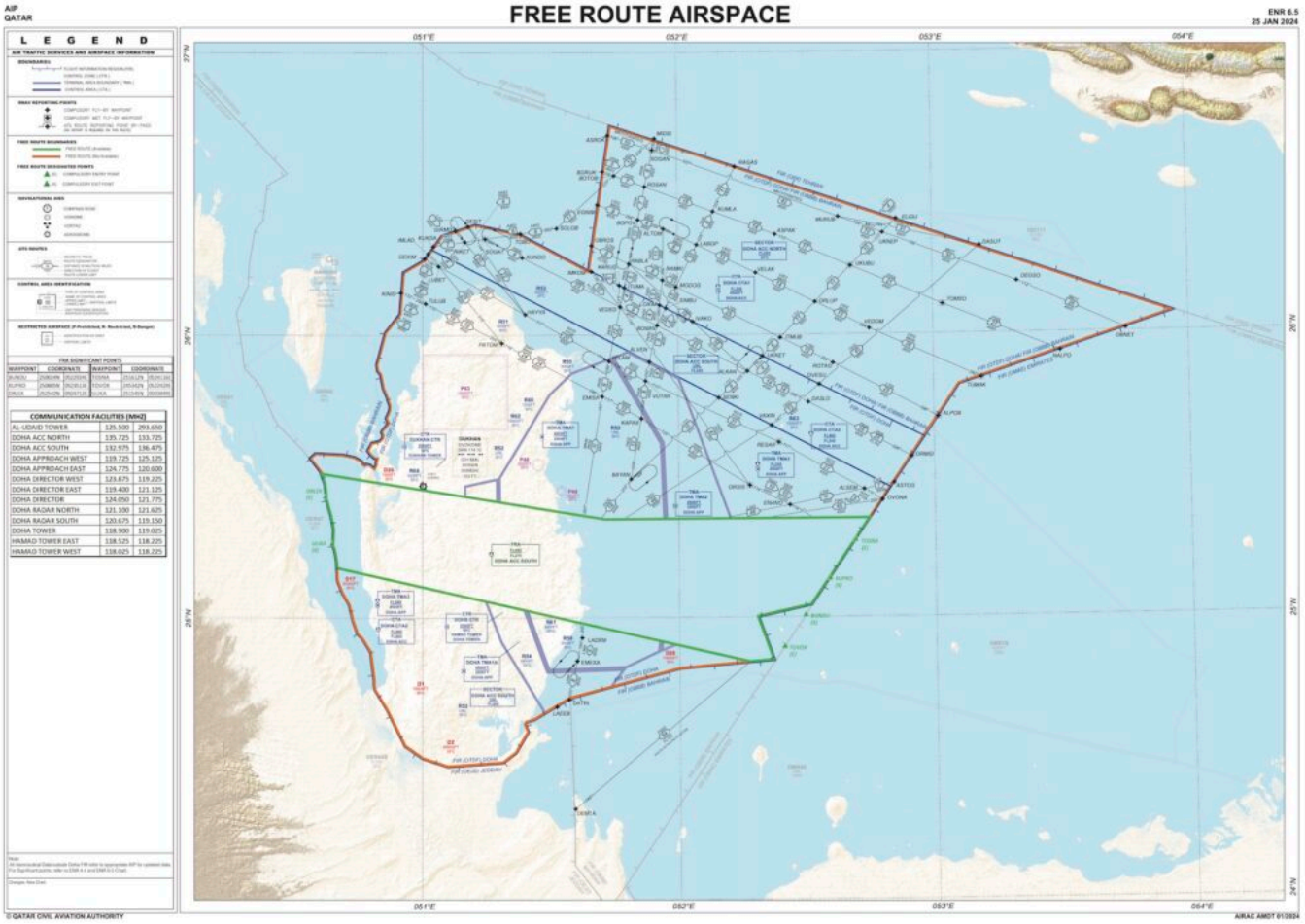
Don't forget the **Free Route Airspace only applies to the SE Sector** of the Jeddah FIR. Everywhere else in Saudi airspace, you'll need to follow **"normal" ATS routes as per usual.**

But even these "normal" routes are a pain. Saudi Arabia (like many other countries in the region) has **preferred routes** depending on where you're flying from/to – so you'll need to make sure you file on one of these. For some reason Jeppesen recently stopped publishing them, so now you have to get them from (yes, you guessed it) the **Saudi AIP!** SUP 8/24 talks about it. You basically download this Route Availability Doc and work out a route from there.

Other Free Route Airspace in the region.

Qatar and the UAE are the only other countries in the Middle East that have implemented FRA, and unlike Saudi Arabia, both seem fairly straightforward.

Qatar – has implemented a corridor of FRA straight through the middle of the OTDF/Doha FIR, available from FL275-460. The Qatar AIP does not currently list any restrictions on its use.



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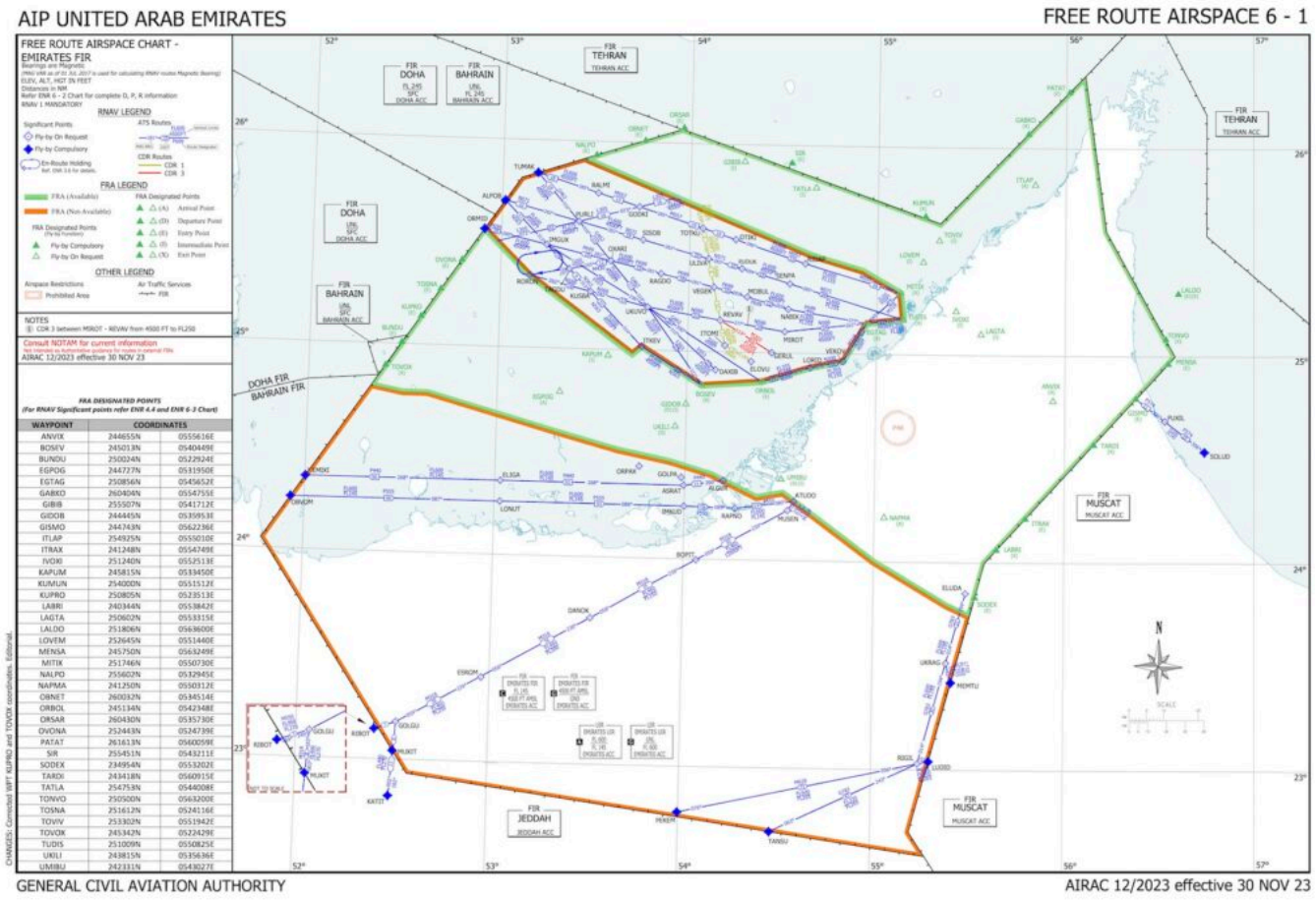
The UAE – has implemented FRA in parts of the OMAE/Emirates FIR from FL355-600 – basically the parts around all the airports, and the airspace connecting with the OOMM/Muscat and OIIX/Tehran FIRs. Like Qatar, the UAE AIP does not currently list any restrictions on its use.



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Please report back.

Thank you to the member who got in touch.

These changes can be hard to spot. Especially when you pay an operational penalty for procedures like this one that are poorly written, hard to find, or obscure.

We need your help to spread the word whenever you come across something different – in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. Thousands of other like-minded pilots will thank you later.

If you have something you'd like to share, you can reach us on team@ops.group. We'd love to hear from you.