

Saudi Arabia Overflights - Free Route Gotcha

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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.

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between a defined entry point and a defined exit point, with the possibility to route via intermediate (published or unpublished) waypoints, without reference to the ATS route network, subject to airspace availability.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, rights 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/Nav/5

Communication/Com/5 (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).

(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 routes (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.

Entry point	Routing	Exit	Control Frequencies	Remarks
PEKEM	DCT MEDPO DCT	BITUK	134.9°	@MEDPO change to 132.9
	DCT MEDPO DCT	ITRUX	133.9°	

SANBU	DCT	ULURU	134.9° 132.9°	@110NM after SANBU, change to 132.9 Note: maintain listening watch on 132.9
	DCT ASTN DCT	NOMRU	133.9° 132.9°	@110NM after SANBU, change to 132.9
TOKRA	DCT MEDPO DCT	BITUK	134.9° 132.9°	@MEDPO change to 132.9
	DCT MEDPO DCT	BOBOS	132.9°	
	DCT	ITRUX	133.9°	
	DCT	DUORI	134.9° 133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after TOKRA, change to 133.15 @10NM before DUORI, change to 132.9
BITOL	DCT BOBOS DCT	BITUK	133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after BITOL, change to 132.9
	DCT	PUSON	132.9°	Note: maintain listening watch on 132.9
	DCT	DARIV	133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after BITOL, change to 132.9
GORRO	DCT METNO DCT	LADBO	133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after METNO, change to 132.9
	DCT ASTN DCT	OBSEP	132.9°	Enroute FRA at LADBO, then follow ATS route Y433.
	DCT PURDA DCT	BITUK	133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after GORRO, change to 132.9
	DCT BOBOS DCT	BOBOS	132.9°	@10NM after PURDA, change to 132.9
	DCT PURDA DCT	PUSON	132.9°	@ALNUG change to 132.9
	DCT	AMBIT	133.9° 132.9°	@10NM after GORRO, change to 132.9
MUKIT	DCT MEDPO DCT	ULURU	132.9° 132.9°	@120NM after MEDPO, change to 132.5
	DCT PURDA DCT	NOMRU	132.9° 132.9°	@10NM after MEDPO, change to 132.5
RIBOT	DCT MIBMA DCT	BITUK	132.9	NL
	DCT MIBMA DCT	ITRUX	132.9	
SIFER	DCT	LADBO	132.9	NL Routing from SIFER not available when QERR4 & QERR2 are active.
	DCT KUTNA DCT	RIBOT	132.9°	
	DCT KUTNA DCT	PEKEM	130.9° 134.9°	@RAIT7 change to 134.5
	DCT KUTNA DCT	MEDSU	134.9°	
BATHA	DCT KUNSO DCT	RIBOT	132.9	NL
	DCT KUNSO DCT	PEKEM	132.9° 134.9°	@RAIT7 change to 134.5
	DCT	MEDSU	134.9°	
	DCT KUNSO DCT	MEDSU	134.9°	
	DCT DEBNO DCT	DAPOL	132.9° 134.9° 132.9°	@110NM after DEBNO, change to 134.5
	DCT DEBNO DCT	MEHAM	133.15°	@10NM after LOTOS, change to 133.15
	DCT DEBNO DCT	GOBRO	132.9°	
BATHA	DCT KUTNA DCT	GORRO	132.9° 133.15°	Follow ATS route L384, then enter FRA at BATHA @10NM after MIBMA, change to 133.15

	DCT KUTNA DCT	REDIT	132.9° 132.9°	@ALNUG change to 132.5
ULURU	DCT	MUKIT	132.9° 132.9°	@10NM after XXX05, change to 132.9
	DCT PURDA DCT	SANBU	132.9° 133.15°	@PURDA change to 133.15
AMBIT	DCT ASTN DCT	GORRO	132.9° 133.15°	@10NM after ASTN, change to 133.15
REDIT	DCT ALNUG DCT	LADBO	132.9° 132.9°	@ALNUG change to 132.9
	DCT ASPUS DCT	MUKIT	132.9° 134.9°	@PURDA change to 134.5
NOMRU	DCT ASTN DCT	PURDA	132.9° 134.9°	@PURDA change to 134.5
	DCT ASTN DCT	SANBU	132.9° 134.9°	@10NM after ASTN, change to 134.5
SILPA	DCT MEDNO DCT	MEDSU	132.9° 133.15° 134.9°	@METNO change to 133.15 @10NM after METNO, change to 134.5
	DCT ASTN DCT	BITUK	132.9° 132.9°	@10NM after ASTN, change to 132.9
	DCT ASTN DCT	ITRUX	132.9°	
BITUK	DCT BOBOS DCT	SILPA	132.9°	@10NM before ASTN, change to 132.9
	DCT	REDIT	132.9°	
DUORI	DCT MEDNO DCT	MEDSU	132.9° 133.15° 134.9°	@METNO change to 133.15 @10NM 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 Descent 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.

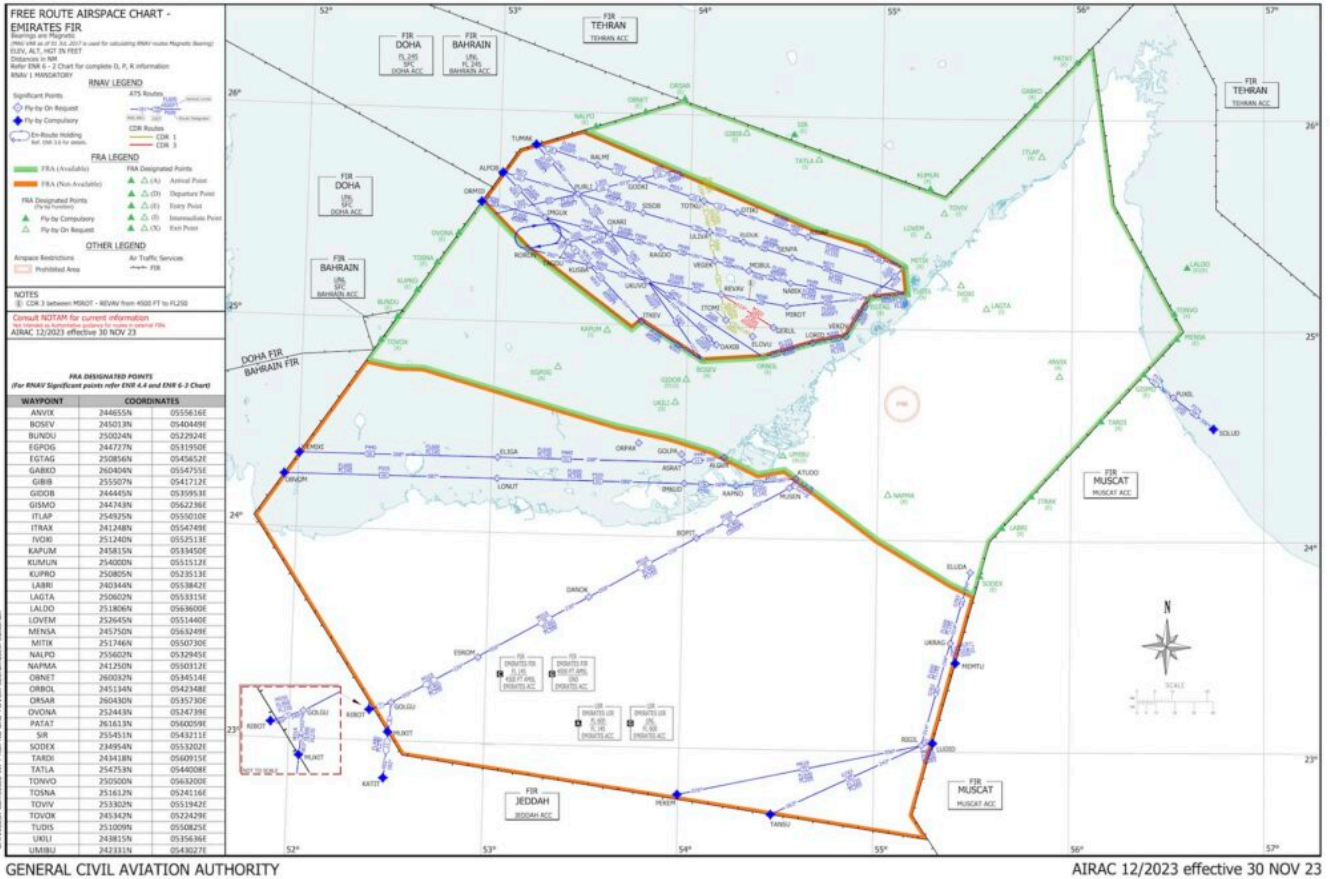
Don't forget the **Free Route Airspace only applies to the SE Sector** of the Jeddah FIR. Everywhere else in Saudi airspace, you'll need to follow **"normal" ATS routes as per usual.**

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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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.