

Box lines launch Red Sea services despite Houthi risks

January 30, 2024



Mainline operators which are still offering Red Sea services are configuring their routes to transit the troubled region.

Hapag-Lloyd has launched an ad hoc Jeddah Express (JDX) service calling at Tanger Med, Damietta, Jeddah, Damietta, Tanger Med to enable cargo connections to Jeddah that have been affected by the Red Sea blockade.

The service will connect to Jeddah via the Suez Canal from the north, allowing it to avoid the Gulf of Aden.

The 4,252 TEU Seaspan Hamburg has been deployed on the JDX since 31 December 2023, with the 2,518 TEU Zhong Gu Xiong An joining the service on 29 January. The service has a three-week turnaround, with a round trip of 21 to 25 days.

Ocean Network Express (ONE), which is suspending its joint Red Sea service with Taiwanese operator Wan Hai Lines, has also launched its own Jeddah-bound feeder service, with the 6,492 TEU Argus temporarily operating as a shuttle connecting Damietta and Jeddah from 27 January. The ship turns around in 12 to 14 days.

Meanwhile, Wan Hai has teamed with Feedertech and X-Press Feeders to launch a new Red Sea-Gulf-India service that connects Mundra, Nhava Sheva, Jebel Ali, Jeddah, Sokhna, Jeddah, Jebel Ali, Mundra from 15 January.

The service has a five-week turnaround, with five ships of 1,800-3,200 TEU assigned. Feedertech and X-Press are each contributing two ships (the 1,732 TEU Hansa Rotenburg and 2,824 TEU Addison, together with the 3,158 TEU X-Press Altair and 2,756 TEU X-Press Mekong) while Wan Hai will contribute the 2,646 TEU Wan Hai 316.

Ships crossing the Red Sea have been broadcasting AIS signals asserting that they are not going to Israel, or that their crew are all Chinese.

Consultancy Linerlytica noted that, unlike Asia-Europe lanes, for Asia-Red Sea routes, diversions to the Cape of Good Hope are uneconomical.

Linerlytica said, "Some carriers are opting for relays via the Mediterranean to connect to the Red Sea region via the southbound Suez transit, while others are opting for feeders from India and Dubai directly to the Red Sea but requiring passage through the Gulf of Aden."

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