

# BMI airline wipes Israel off the map

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mel bezalel , THE JERUSALEM POST

Israel has been excluded from digital maps displayed for passengers on British airline BMI flights from London Heathrow to Ben-Gurion Airport.

Instead of viewing Tel Aviv or other Israeli cities signposted on screens, customers flying on two BMI-owned Airbus A320 airplanes have instead been exclusively shown Haifa, spelled "Khefa" - the Arab name of the city before 1948.

BMI, which runs flights to Ben-Gurion Airport twice daily, has declared that the maps are the result of a logistical error due to the company's failure to modify the system created by British airline BMED (British Mediterranean Airways), now defunct, from which BMI acquired the planes two years ago.

BMED, formerly a franchise of British Airways, was absorbed into BMI in October 2007.

BMED flew primarily to the Middle East - notably to Amman, Beirut and Damascus, but not Israel. The maps were therefore tailored to its Muslim passengers, and also highlighted Islamic holy sites, BMI spokesman Phil Shepherd said.

He told *The Jerusalem Post* on Thursday that the "old maps" were due to be deactivated that night and new maps, which will label Israel and Tel Aviv, are set to appear on screens in two weeks.

"Because of the routes that [BMED] flew at that time, that's why the digital map was showing what it was showing... When we bought [BMED] out, we integrated it into BMI... The moving map should have been disabled when the software was updated, so the moving map shouldn't have been operating at all. It only came to light recently that it was still showing.

"We had a procedure to switch it off... when we started the Tel Aviv route... but for some reason it wasn't disabled."

British Airways declined to comment on the BMED maps, stating that the airline was simply a franchise that was not run by British Airways.

BMI also made headlines lately for firing a staff member for refusing to fly to Saudi Arabia.

Flight attendant Lisa Ashton was told to wear an *abaya*, a black robe which covers everything but the face, feet and hand, in public places in Saudi Arabia. She was also instructed to walk behind her male colleagues, irrespective of rank.

Ashton, a practicing Christian, filed for unfair dismissal at a UK employment tribunal earlier this year; the court dismissed the case, stating that BMI was justified in imposing "rules of a different culture" on staff.

Ashton may seek a judicial review of the decision and has been in consultations with human rights organization Liberty.

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