

Air India launches Airbus A350-900 on Delhi-London route

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New Delhi: Air India has introduced its latest wide-body flagship—the Airbus A350 aircraft—on the Delhi-London Heathrow route, marking the long-haul debut of the A350—the first new aircraft type to be introduced by an Indian airline in over a decade.

In December, the carrier started receiving the long-range A350 aircraft—part of its mammoth order of 470 Airbus and Boeing planes. Of the 40 A350s ordered by the airline in 2023, six have already joined its fleet.

The A350 aircraft, with which the Tata group carrier introduced its new brand identity and upgraded product this year, was so far used to operate domestic flights and the short international hop from Delhi to Dubai. These operations were mainly seen as a precursor to the aircraft's deployment on long-haul routes. The long range of the aircraft allows them to operate flights to most global markets where Air India

currently operates.

In a standard three-class configuration, the A350-900 can carry 300-350 passengers and has a flight range of over 15,000 km, per data available on the Airbus website. Air India's A350-900 aircraft come in a three-class cabin configuration with a total of 316 seats—28 in business class, 24 in premium economy, and 264 in economy class.

“The deployment of the flagship A350s on the Delhi-London Heathrow route marks a significant milestone for Air India. It demonstrates Air India's commitment to elevating the travel experience of our guests to truly world-class standards and to going beyond just meeting customer expectations as we continue to grow and renew our fleet,” said Air India's Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Campbell Wilson.

Starting this month, Air India's A350-900 aircraft replace the Boeing 777-300ER and Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner planes on 14 of 17 weekly flights from Delhi to London Heathrow. As a result, an additional 336 seats will be available on the Delhi-London Heathrow route each week.

With the deployment of the new aircraft, Air India will upgrade 90 per cent of all its flights to London Heathrow. The carrier deployed leased Boeing 777-300ER aircraft with elevated cabin interiors on the Mumbai-London Heathrow route a few months ago.

Many of Air India's existing fleet of aircraft comprises older planes that were inducted when it was under government control. A bulk of these aircraft were in a rundown state due to the financial stress the airline was under before the Tata group took over in January 2022.

Air India's massive order of 470 planes—250 with Airbus and 220 with Boeing—is key not just to the Air India group's capacity and network expansion plans, but also to its ambition of offering a world-class product to flyers. Air India's Airbus order consists of a total of 40 A350 planes and 210 planes of the A320neo family of narrow-body aircraft. The six A350s delivered to Air India so far were originally meant for Russian flag carrier Aeroflot, but were offered to the Indian carrier due to the West's sanctions on Moscow over the war in Ukraine.

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