

Air India launches major refurbishment program

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Mumbai: Air India has launched a \$400 million refurbishment programme to overhaul 67 of its older aircraft while it seeks to grow into a world-class airline.

The Tata-owned airline's programme will begin with 27 narrow-body Airbus A320neo planes, followed by 40 wide-body Boeing aircraft. This is part of the former state-run carrier's multi-million dollar transformation as it needs to meet the demands of a market where customers are increasingly favoring premium options.

This phased revamp, aims to introduce the new Air India experience, featuring a modern three-cabin layout with updated seats, carpets, curtains, and upholstery, the company said in a release.

The first narrowbody aircraft to commence the refit program is VT-EXN, a single-aisle A320neo that went into the hangar on Monday. After

prototyping and necessary regulatory approvals, VT-EXN is expected to re-enter commercial service in December 2024, joining the eight recently-delivered and operational Air India A320neo aircraft that already feature the upgraded cabin interiors and configuration.

Following VT-EXN, between three and four aircraft per month will undergo retrofit, with upgradation of the full narrowbody fleet expected by the middle of 2025.

“The commencement of interior refit of the narrowbody fleet is an important step in our journey of enhancing the flying experience of our customers. Over time, all the legacy widebody aircraft will also be refitted. This comprehensive upgradation of Air India’s physical product is an important component of Air India transforming into a world-class airline,” said Campbell Wilson, Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, Air India.

Since taking over the airline in 2022, Tata has invested millions of dollars in ordering hundreds of new jets, updating the carrier's logo and branding, and making other operational improvements.

The upgraded A320neo aircraft will have eight luxury seats in Business Class, 24 extra legroom seats in Premium Economy, and 132 comfortable seats in Economy, providing more options for passengers. Features like spacious legroom, modern lighting, USB ports (Type A and C) for charging, and holders for devices will enhance the in-flight experience. New carpets, curtains, and upholstery will also reflect the airline's updated design.

Business Class will offer 40-inch seats with adjustable armrests, recline, and charging ports. Premium Economy will feature larger seats with adjustable headrests and 32-inch legroom, while Economy will have ergonomic seats with a 28-29-inch pitch and additional legroom.

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Over 15,000 new-generation seats will be installed across Premium Economy, Business, and Economy Class as part of this upgrade.

At the same time, the airline is preparing to fully upgrade the interiors of 40 older widebody Boeing 787 and 777 planes. They have chosen top-quality seats and inflight entertainment systems, and the designs are finished. The airline is now working with seat manufacturers to get

approval and speed up production. If everything goes as planned, the first widebody aircraft will begin its upgrade in early 2025.

The upgrade is seen as a much-needed move for the airline as it seeks to ramp up international travel amid increasing competition. Moreover, offering more luxurious facilities is key when India is seeing a rise in income and there is a rapid drive to opt for more premium products.

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