

## **Air India reduces flights to four countries over plane, crew shortage**

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New Delhi: Air India will reportedly reduce the frequency of flights to four Middle Eastern countries over shortage of planes and crew. The destinations are Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Oman.

Reports said, Air India has cancelled one weekly flight on both sides between Delhi and Muscat, Delhi and Dubai, and Delhi and Abu Dhabi from the last week of April to May.

Air India issued circulars to travel agents. Air India will not be operating its weekly Delhi-Muscat flight on Saturdays from April 29 to May 27 and its weekly Delhi-Doha flights on Sundays from April 30 to May 28, reports added.

The Tata-owner airline will not be operating its Delhi-Dubai flight on Tuesdays from May 2 till May 30, and its Delhi-Abu Dhabi flights on Wednesdays from May 3 to May 31.

Reports cited an official saying that Air India will slash flights to the Middle East after Eid al-Fitr as traffic falls drastically after the Eid holidays in those countries whereas domestic summer traffic in India will rise due to school vacations.

During Eid al-Fitr, Air India increased the frequency of flights between India and the UAE due to high traffic.

Air India Express has also increased the services from Thiruvananthapuram to Dubai and Abu Dhabi from five to six.

Moreover, the report said that in the next few months as Air India and AIX Connect (AirAsia India) align their networks, several flights between India and West Asian countries would be affected.

The airline is struggling with crew and plane shortages for the last six months as the airline looks to expand its international operations and grow under its new owners the Tata Group.

In March, 2023, Air India's CEO Campbell Wilson said that the airline would reduce the frequency of flights to the United States (US) due to crew shortage.

Wilson said, "Six weekly flights to the US - three to Newark and three to San Francisco - will be trimmed due to crew shortage for the coming two-three months."

Air India's crew shortage began after 1,500 staff accepted the voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) offered by the airline in June 2022.

The airline launched the first phase of VRS to 4,500 eligible employees above 40 years and who have completed 20 years of continuous employment.

It further announced the VRS for 2,100 additional employees.

As per the airline's memo, the airline had about 12,085 employees of whom 8,084 were permanent staff.

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