

IndiGo to begin long-haul operations

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Mumbai: India's largest airline by market share, IndiGo, is set to introduce its first widebody aircraft, marking a major milestone in its expansion into long-haul operations. The airline plans to commence these services as early as next month.

As part of this move, IndiGo has entered into a strategic partnership with Norwegian low-cost long-haul carrier Norse Atlantic Airways to wet lease a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner.

The aircraft is expected to arrive in India in the coming weeks and will operate under a damp lease agreement with Norse Atlantic Airways. Unlike a full wet lease, a damp lease includes the aircraft and cockpit crew but excludes cabin attendants.

According to a recent filing by Norse Atlantic, the Boeing 787-9 is expected to begin long-haul operations in March 2025. While IndiGo has not specified the exact routes it plans to operate with the Dreamliner,

the airline has indicated that the aircraft will be used for long-haul services out of India.

Pieter Elbers, CEO of IndiGo, said, "As part of our broader strategy to significantly expand our international network, we are pleased to confirm this damp lease of one Boeing 787-9 aircraft from Norse Atlantic Airways."

He said, "Our vision is to transform into a global player by 2030 while having strong roots and continuous expansion in India, and we are strategically moving ahead in that direction."

This move is part of IndiGo's broader strategy to tap into new, underserved international markets, particularly those with large Indian diaspora populations.

Elbers emphasized the strategic importance of this partnership during the airline's earnings call in January. "We are actively exploring interim solutions to introduce long-range aircraft to our fleet," said Elbers.

The airline said it remains focused on expanding its international network, especially in key European cities such as London and Paris in mind.

The partnership with Norse Atlantic is set for an initial term of six months, with the possibility of extending the agreement up to 18 months, pending regulatory approvals. IndiGo has also expressed interest in further contracting additional aircraft from Norse Atlantic to strengthen its long-haul operations.

IndiGo's foray into long-haul travel comes after successful fleet diversifications. In 2023, the airline wet-leased Boeing 777-300ER aircraft from Turkish Airlines to service routes between India and Turkey. In 2024, it expanded its fleet with 737 MAX-8 aircraft leased from Qatar Airways and Corendon Airlines for regional routes.

Looking ahead, IndiGo has also placed a firm order for 30 Airbus A350-900 widebody aircraft, with an option for an additional 70, set to be delivered starting in 2027.