

Vistara cancels over 50 flights amid crew shortage

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 02 April, 2024



Gurugram: With a large number of its flights cancelled and delayed on Monday (April 1) amid a protest by its pilots, Tata group airline Vistara has decided to temporarily curtail its daily flight schedule, apart from deploying larger aircraft on select domestic routes in order to combine flights.

According to industry sources, numerous Vistara pilots did not report to work on Monday, ostensibly to register their protest against the new pay structure that is in line with that of the Tata group's flagship airline Air India. Vistara is set to merge with Air India.

As of 10 pm Monday, over 50 Vistara flights were cancelled and nearly 180 delayed from the airline's schedule of over 300 daily flights, as per flight tracking data. Over the weekend too, a number of Vistara flights were either delayed or cancelled, although the number of affected flights was significantly lower than the disruptions witnessed on

Monday.

Vistara also acknowledged “crew unavailability” as one of the reasons for the recent disruptions.

“We have had a significant number of flight cancellations and delays in the past few days due to various reasons including crew unavailability. We acknowledge and are deeply concerned about the inconvenience this has caused to our customers. Having said that, our teams are working towards minimising the discomfort to the customers. We have decided to temporarily reduce the number of flights we operate, to ensure adequate connectivity across our network,” a Vistara spokesperson said.

The airline, however, did not specify how many flights it planned to cut and for how many days will this truncated schedule be in effect.

“We have also deployed larger aircraft like our B787-9 Dreamliner and A321neo on select domestic routes to combine flights or accommodate more number of customers, wherever possible. Furthermore, we are offering alternate flight options or refunds to affected customers, as applicable. Once again, we understand that these disruptions have caused immense discomfort to our customers, and sincerely apologise to them for the same. We are working towards stabilizing the situation and will resume operating our regular capacity very soon,” the airline’s spokesperson said.

Over the weekend and on Monday, social media platform X had a large number of posts from irate passengers expressing their frustration and anger due to flight cancellations and delays.

According to sources, at the heart of the issue is discontent among a large number of Vistara pilots over the new pay structure, as per which, their minimum guaranteed flying allowance would reduce substantially. According to the new pay structure for Vistara pilots announced in February, they will be eligible for guaranteed pay for 40 hours, down from the 70 hours in their earlier contracts with the airline. This, many pilots fear, could lead to a notable cut in their take-home salaries.

A number of Vistara pilots had called in sick in the first week of March as well, again allegedly to protest against the new pay structure. At the time, the airline did not cite crew shortage as a reason for flight cancellations and delays. Later in March, the Vistara management is

learnt to have given an ultimatum to unhappy pilots to accept the new pay structure, or give up the one-time payout that came with it and also the opportunity to work with Air India post its merger with Vistara.

The Air India-Vistara merger, which is expected to be completed in 2025, is part of the ongoing consolidation of airlines under the Tata umbrella.

The Tata group is already in the process of merging its low-cost carriers Air India Express and AIX Connect (formerly Air Asia India). Once both the mergers are complete, the Air India group will have a full-service carrier Air India and a low-cost airline Air India Express. Singapore Airlines, which has a 49 per cent stake in Vistara, will own 25.1 per cent of the merged Air India.

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