

India-China Flights Resume After 5 Years: What It Means for Airlines and Travellers

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India-China Flights Latest News

- After more than five years, India and mainland China are set to restart direct flights by the end of October 2025.
- The Ministry of External Affairs announced that both nations have agreed to resume air services under the upcoming winter schedule, which begins on October 26.
- The resumption will depend on the commercial readiness of designated airlines and compliance with operational requirements, marking a key step toward restoring normal connectivity disrupted since 2020.

India-China Flights Set for Revival Amid Diplomatic Thaw

- The resumption of direct air connectivity between India and China comes amid improving bilateral ties, even as India's relations with the US face minor strains.

- Following the MEA's announcement, IndiGo became the first airline to confirm operations, with daily Kolkata–Guangzhou flights starting October 26.
- The carrier also plans future routes from Delhi, while Air India is preparing to launch Delhi–Shanghai flights by year-end.
- Chinese airlines, which dominated the route before the pandemic, are expected to re-enter the Indian market soon.
- The absence of direct flights since 2020 has led to inflated airfares and long travel times, as passengers relied on transit hubs in Southeast Asia.
- With direct routes returning, airlines anticipate strong demand — especially from business and trade travelers — and expect to regain significant passenger traffic previously diverted to foreign carriers.

India-China Direct Flights: From Suspension to Resumption

- Direct air connectivity between India and China was **suspended at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic**, which halted international travel worldwide.
- However, while other countries gradually restored air routes, flights between India and China remained grounded due to deteriorating bilateral ties following the **2020 Line of Actual Control (LAC) standoff**.
- India's reluctance to resume direct services stemmed from ongoing border tensions and diplomatic friction, even as China consistently pressed for their reinstatement.

Early Signs of Thaw and Diplomatic Engagements

- With bilateral relations showing signs of improvement in 2024–25, the two sides began to explore ways to normalise travel.
- The first major breakthrough came during Foreign Secretary's visit to Beijing in January 2025, where both nations agreed "in principle" to resume direct flights.
- This momentum continued in August, when Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi led to an agreement to restart air services "at the earliest" and ease visa procedures for tourists, businesspersons, journalists, and other travellers.

Ongoing Negotiations Through 2024

- Throughout 2024, the issue of flight resumption featured in multiple rounds of discussions between Indian and Chinese foreign and aviation officials.
- Despite limited progress, both sides continued engagement.

Final Diplomatic Push in Late 2024

- Momentum built toward the end of 2024, when External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi met in Rio de Janeiro on the sidelines of the G20 Summit.
- Their discussions followed a key breakthrough — a border patrolling arrangement, signalling de-escalation along the LAC.

- Soon after, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met at the BRICS Summit in Russia, effectively paving the way for direct flight resumption — a symbolic and practical step toward normalising India-China ties.

Direct Flights to Boost Connectivity and Competition

- Both Indian and Chinese airlines are poised to benefit significantly from the resumption of direct air connectivity between the two countries after a five-year hiatus.
- Before the pandemic, direct flights accounted for over 45% of all India-China passenger traffic — a market both sides now aim to reclaim and expand.
- The suspension of direct routes, combined with strict visa norms, had forced passengers to rely on connecting flights through hubs in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong.
- As a result, airlines from these regions captured the market, with **Hong Kong remaining the top transit point** due to its separate visa regime.
- Currently, India-China passenger traffic stands at less than half of 2019 levels, but demand remains robust, especially for business and trade-related travel.
- With the return of direct flights, passengers will benefit from greater convenience, reduced travel time, and lower fares as competition intensifies among Indian, Chinese, and third-country carriers.
- The renewed connectivity is expected to not only revitalise air travel but also strengthen bilateral trade and people-to-people exchanges.

Chinese Airlines Held Majority of Pre-Pandemic India-China Traffic

- Before the Covid-19 pandemic, **Chinese carriers dominated direct air traffic between India and China, operating nearly 70% of the total flights.**
- Beijing's strong push for resuming direct air connectivity and easing visa restrictions stems from this pre-existing advantage.
- However, industry analysts believe the balance may shift once flights resume.
- India's aviation landscape has evolved — Air India, now privatised and financially stronger, is aggressively expanding its international footprint, and IndiGo is prioritising global routes.
- This could enable Indian airlines to reclaim a larger share of the India-China travel market.

Source: IE

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