

IndiGo Flight Disruptions Explained: FDTL Rules, Crew Shortages & DGCA Action

December 5, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com



IndiGo Flight Disruptions Latest News

- IndiGo has faced widespread flight cancellations and delays in recent days, disrupting thousands of passengers.
- The core reason is an acute crew shortage triggered by the rollout of the **new Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms**, whose final phase took effect last month.
- India's largest airline, which handles over 60% of domestic traffic, was not adequately prepared for the stricter duty and rest requirements.
- As a result, punctuality has collapsed — only 19.7% of flights were on time on December 3.

Why IndiGo Is Hit Harder Than Other Airlines

- The new FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limitation) rules technically apply to all domestic airlines, but IndiGo has suffered disproportionately. Industry insiders point to several reasons:

- **Massive Scale and High-Frequency Network** – IndiGo operates the largest network and highest number of daily flights in India. This amplifies the impact of crew shortages compared to smaller carriers.
- **Heavy Late-Night and Early-Morning Operations** – IndiGo runs a significant share of “red-eye” and early-morning flights—segments most affected by stricter rest requirements under the new FDTL norms.
- **Extremely High Crew and Aircraft Utilisation** – IndiGo’s operational model relies on squeezing maximum utilisation from crew and aircraft. This leaves little slack in the system when new regulations reduce permissible flying hours.

Why Other Airlines Are Less Affected

- Other carriers currently have lower-than-optimal aircraft utilisation, largely due to:
 - Delayed new aircraft deliveries
 - Aircraft grounded for refits
- This means more pilots are available per aircraft, giving them greater flexibility in rostering and making it easier to absorb the impact of the new FDTL norms.

What the New FDTL Norms Changed

- The revised Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms introduced multiple fatigue-mitigation measures:
 - **Weekly rest** increased from 36 to 48 hours
 - **Night landings** capped at two, down from six
 - Definition of **night hours** extended by one hour
- These changes significantly tightened crew availability and operational flexibility, particularly for airlines with heavy night operations.

Implementation Timeline and Industry Pushback

- The norms were originally planned for June 2024, but airlines—including IndiGo—opposed immediate rollout, arguing they needed more crew and a phased transition.
- The DGCA implemented the rules in two phases (July and November) after a Delhi High Court directive.
- **Phase 1:** Longer weekly rest — IndiGo handled this relatively well
- **Phase 2:** Stricter night-time limits — hit IndiGo disproportionately

Operational Domino Effect: Why Delays Turn Into Meltdowns

- IndiGo primarily operates narrow-body A320s, each flying multiple legs a day.
- If a crew hits its duty limit due to earlier delays, the airline must scramble for replacements.
- With minimal buffer staff and high utilisation:
 - Small delays cascade into major disruptions
 - Crew shortages intensify
 - Cancellations multiply rapidly
- This structural sensitivity explains why IndiGo’s operations unraveled faster than those of other carriers.

Scale of Disruptions and Decline in On-Time Performance

- In November, IndiGo recorded 1,232 flight cancellations.
- IndiGo's on-time performance (OTP) fell sharply from 84.1% in October to 67.7% in November, and has deteriorated further in December, undermining its long-held reputation for punctuality.

IndiGo's Explanation: Multiple Operational Stress Points

- The airline attributed the disruptions to several "unforeseen operational challenges", including:
 - Minor technology glitches
 - Winter schedule adjustments
 - Adverse weather conditions
 - Rising congestion in the aviation system
 - Full implementation of the new FDTL rules
- Together, these factors compounded crew shortages and amplified delays.

Steps IndiGo Is Taking to Stabilise Operations

- According to the DGCA, IndiGo has initiated corrective actions, including:
- **Strengthening Crew Planning and Rostering** – Better alignment of crew assignments with FDTL rest and duty requirements.
- **Improving Coordination with ATC and Airports** – Enhanced communication to manage airspace constraints and reduce avoidable bottlenecks.
- **Enhancing Turnaround and Disruption Management** – Accelerating ground processes and improving responses to cascading delays.
- These measures aim to gradually stabilise IndiGo's operations while staying compliant with FDTL norms.

Pilot Bodies Blame IndiGo for Poor Preparedness

- Pilot associations argue that IndiGo was not prepared for the new FDTL rules despite having ample notice.
- They said the disruptions reflect failures in proactive resource planning, suggesting airlines may be trying to pressure the DGCA into diluting the norms.
- They accused IndiGo of operating with a "prolonged and unorthodox lean manpower strategy", especially in flight operations.
- They claim the current crisis is the direct result of:
 - A hiring freeze despite a two-year runway
 - Non-poaching agreements
 - Pilot pay freeze
 - Short-sighted planning and underinvestment in staffing

Source: **IE** | **LM**

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/indigo-flight-disruptions-explained-fdtl-rules-crew-shortages-dgca-action/>

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