

An Air India Saga... A journey unforgettable!!!

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Date: Middle of October, 2011

Time: Evening

Purpose: Buy air tickets from Cochin to Delhi. I went in search of the cheaper tickets. I wanted to be in Delhi during the first week of November. When I checked different travel websites, I found out that there is not much difference in the price amongst the budget airlines. Since I want to attend the office during the day of the flight, I thought of paying extra few hundreds to book my ticket in Air India Express scheduled for November 2, 2011. The flight is scheduled in the evening around 8 pm and expected to arrive in Delhi at around 11 pm.

I went to Air India Express website and to buy the tickets. It surprises me that we need a login name and password to book the tickets on this website. Tickets were purchased for my return trip from Delhi to Cochin also. It is scheduled for November 6, 2011. Departure time is at 6.40 in the morning and the expected arrival time is 9.45 am in Cochin. Immediately, I noticed that there is no web email confirming the ticket being sent. If I want a print out, I can login using user name and password and flash the screen!!

Date: October 28, 2011

Time: Evening

I received a call from Air India office in Kochi. They informed me that both the flights are cancelled. They are ready to credit my account with the ticket charges. Previously, we have a bad experience with Air India where the money was not paid us back for the cancellation of the flights. We lost the money at the end of one year as no one tried to help us from Air India office. Remembering this incident, I asked them to reschedule the flights for me. Finally they came back to me with a new schedule.

Cochin- Delhi on November 1, 2011 at 7 20 am and Delhi – Cochin at 7 pm on November 5, 2011.

Air India informed me that these are Air India flights and not Air India express.

What is next? I thought they would send me an email giving details about the rescheduled timings. But the lady at the other end of the phone told me very politely that there is no provision for sending an email. All of a sudden, I realised that I am in a fix as I don't have any proof for ticket to enter the airport premises. She told me that I could note down the PNR. I don't have any other choice but to look for pen and paper.

I kept the paper very carefully for the next one week and I learnt how I could be pious over these matters. Date : November 1, 2011

Time: 5.45am, CIAL

I had been told that I should get the print out telling PNR at Air India counter. When I went there, the counter was closed. I enquired and was asked to get it done from International terminal. I scrolled my luggage to international airport terminal Air India counter. They wanted to know more about the ticket though I had only PNR with me. Finally, luck mattered (I started thinking like that from that time onwards, and it was proven right later!) to get the print outs for both the directions.

Date: November 5, 2011

Time: 5.15 pm, IGIA I went to Air India counter and presented the print I had from Cochin. I was advised to meet duty manager to get the boarding pass after getting FIM. I did not bother to ask her what FIM is all about. I approached her and she told me that she could not do anything as such as I need to get it from another counter. I was surprised why I am asked to go from one counter to another. As I moved to the next, they asked me to contact customer care of Air India. I was reminded of my experience in Kochi airport. To my utter frustration, customer care told me that they did not have anything to do with this ticket. I asked why I am dragged like this. They explained; "your ticket is against the cancelled ticket in Air India Express. Air India Express operates from International terminal and the rescheduled flight is from domestic terminal. So these changes at the administrative level of the booking of tickets should happen in the software's related and

unfortunately it has not happened yet”. I approached an Air India staff and explained the situation. Looking at the print out, she asked me to get FIM. I asked her; “what is FIM?”, she does not know!! This time I used my Smartphone to find what is FIM; it is Flight Interruption Manifest... Now, i decided to let loose as it is already 6 pm. I shouted at a few of Air India staff members. Immediately, they took me to another counter. I explained my cause the gentleman sitting there. He promised and asked me not to worry. He pulled out a FIM sheet in front of me. When i am curiously looking at FIM, he wrote the details of the cancelled flight and the rescheduled flights in the tabular format. I was thinking why cant they do it online? I did not ask any of them as i have already lost my hope..

Boarding pass was issued. Mean time, i noticed that I am not alone. There are fellow passengers who also struggle with FIM !!! in another Air India counter, a family is shouting at Air India staff !! WHY? Their flight was scheduled at 5 in the evening but when they reached it had already left. I dont know which Air India flight is it but the answer from Air India crew was baffling; from November 1 onwards, there are changes in the time table. The perturbed family was asking why they were not contacted for the change in the schedule. I did not wait for the answer as I have already experienced such situations and mode of answers.. Time 6.45 PM

A large number of passengers waiting at gate no 31 for the boarding announcement. On our boarding pass, it is written as half past six. There comes the announcement; ‘flight is not ready for operational reasons and there will be another announcement of the scheduled departure after some time’. I thought the air craft has some technical glitch. No, it is not technical reasons; lack of crew on the board. Instead of four, only three are present. I found it very funny and irresponsible. Many fellow passengers started shouting at the gate keepers. Many started discussing whether the flight will get cancelled. No, there comes another announcement that the boarding will start at 7.45 pm... all of us are relieved. This time, no problem. Flight took off at 8 pm. Later cabin crew told the passengers that non-vegetarian food is not available on board adding dismay to the disgruntled passengers !

Now, you tell me how did you enjoy your flights with Air India? For me, it was a nightmare coming true...