

# 11 Rights for Your Flights



Wednesday Wisdom  
04-03-2026



On a late-night flight, passengers were suddenly informed at 10:30 PM that their departure had been postponed “due to operational reasons.” No further details were provided. On airport, there was chaos as the display boards showed only DELAYED, help desk was overcrowded and there were no meals available at that time.

There was no precise timeframe given. An hour went by.

Children slept on luggage, elderly passengers struggled to find seats, and business travelers worried about missing morning meetings. Every announcement raised more queries, but there were no responses.

Recently, this scene unfolded for several days as IndiGo flight operations were disrupted due to internal operational issues. As passengers, it is important that we understand our rights so that in situations like these, we are better prepared to assess our options and seek appropriate remedies.

### **Key Air Passenger Rights**

In February 2019, the Ministry of Civil Aviation introduced the Passenger Charter of Rights, 2019 (India)<sup>[2]</sup> to clearly define the entitlements of travelers flying on scheduled domestic services within India. The document brings together various passenger-related rules into one comprehensive and user-friendly framework, promoting clarity, accountability, and fairness in airline practices. The protections guaranteed under the Passenger Charter of Rights are firmly backed by regulatory mandates such as the DGCA Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR), Section 3, Series M, Part IV<sup>[3]</sup>.

The Charter is designed to educate passengers about their rights in circumstances such as flight delays, cancellations, denied boarding, baggage concerns, refunds, and complaint resolution processes. It also requires airlines to proactively inform travelers about these rights during booking and in the event of service disruptions.

[1] The article reflects the general work of the authors and the views expressed are personal. No reader should act on any statement contained herein without seeking detailed professional advice.

[2] Passenger Charter of Rights, 2019 -<https://www.civilaviation.gov.in/ministry-documents/passenger-charter-of-rights>

[3] <https://www.dgca.gov.in/digigov-portal/Upload?flag=iframeAttachView&attachId=we1PSIOuQhYdHcwKKrm7ew%3D%3D>

## UNDERSTANDING THE PASSENGER CHARTER (MOCA INDIA, FEB 2019)

### KEY RIGHTS FOR AIR TRAVELERS IN INDIA

TICKET CANCELLATION & REFUNDS	DENIED BOARDING	FLIGHT DELAYS	FLIGHT CANCELLATIONS	BAGGAGE LIABILITY	PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY (PRMs)
<p><b>Zero Cancellation Charge</b> within 24 hours of booking (if flight is 7+ days away)</p>	<p>If an alternate flight is 24+ hours later, <b>compensation up to Rs. 20,000</b></p>	<p><b>Food &amp; water for delays</b> (2-4 hours, depending on distance)</p>	<p><b>Alternate flight or full refund</b></p>	<p><b>Compensation for Lost or Damaged baggage</b></p>	<p><b>Free assistance</b> from airport to flight seat</p>
	<p>If <b>1 hour delay</b>: refreshments, <b>1-3 hours</b>: food/water, <b>&gt;3 hours</b>: compensation</p>	<p><b>Hotel accommodation</b> for overnight delays</p>	<p><b>Refreshments/food</b> for delays. Free hotel if cancellation is &lt;24 hours before flight</p>	<p><b>Delayed Baggage:</b> Up to Rs. 3,000 to purchase essential items</p>	<p><b>Wheelchair</b> provision</p>
		<p>Passengers <b>informed 24 hours in advance</b> if delay is known</p>		<p><b>Free assistance</b> from airport to flight seat</p>	<p><b>Priority check-in</b> and boarding</p>

FOR DETAILED RULES, VISIT THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION WEBSITE

### 1. What are the rights and remedies available to passenger's in the event flight is delayed?

When a flight is delayed, passengers are entitled to following rights and remedies depending on the length of the delay and the circumstances.

1. Right to free meals and refreshments: Airlines must provide free meals and refreshments if a passenger has checked in on time and the airline anticipates a delay beyond the original scheduled departure time or any revised departure time of:
  - a. **2 hours or more**, in the case of flights with a block time<sup>[1]</sup> of up to 2½ hours; or
  - b. **3 hours or more**, in the case of flights with a block time of more than 2½ hours and up to 5 hours; )
  - c. **4 hours or more**, in the case of flights not covered under clauses (a) and (b) above.

2. Right to alternative flight or refund: If a domestic flight is expected to be delayed by more than 6 hours from the published scheduled departure time, or from a previously revised departure time (provided such revision was communicated at least 24 hours before the original scheduled departure), the airline must offer the passenger the option of either an alternative flight within 6 hours or a full refund of the ticket.
3. Right to Free meal and Accommodation: When the total delay exceeds 24 hours from the published scheduled departure time, or exceeds 6 hours for flights scheduled to depart between 20:00 and 03:00 hours, the passenger shall be offered, free of charge, the following:
  - a. Meals and refreshments appropriate to the waiting time; and
  - b. Hotel accommodation, where necessary, including transfers



**EXCEPTION:**

When is an airline not required to provide these rights and remedies to passengers? An airline is not obligated to provide these rights and remedies to passengers when the delay or disruption is caused by extraordinary circumstances beyond its control. Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to, political instability, natural disasters, civil war, insurrection or riots, floods, explosions, government regulations or orders affecting the aircraft, strikes or labor disputes resulting in work stoppages or slowdowns, or any other factors outside the airline's control.

**2. What rights and remedies are available to passengers in the event of flight cancellation?**

Airline must inform passengers of the cancellation at least two weeks before the scheduled departure and offer an alternative flight or a refund, as per the passenger's preference. If the cancellation is communicated less than two weeks and up to 24 hours before the scheduled departure, the airline is still required to provide an alternative flight or a full refund, according to the passenger's choice.

**3. What happens if the airline fails to notify the passenger about a flight cancellation in a timely manner?**

If passengers are not informed of flight cancellation in a timely manner, the airline must either provide an alternative flight acceptable to the passenger or offer compensation in addition to a full refund of the ticket, as follows:



- INR 5,000 or the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, whichever is less, for flights with a block time of up to 1 hour.
- INR 7,500 or the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, whichever is less, for flights with a block time of more than 1 hour and up to 2 hours.
- INR 10,000 or the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, whichever is less, for flights with a block time of more than 2 hours.

Airline shall not be liable to pay such financial compensation to passengers in case passenger has not provided adequate contact information (such as an email ID or phone number) at the time of booking or when the ticket for confirmed travel is issued.

#### **4. What are the passenger's rights if the airline fails to notify them of a flight cancellation and the passenger has already reported for the canceled flight and waiting for alternative flight?**

In such event airline shall provide:

- a.Meals and refreshments appropriate to the waiting time; and
- b.Hotel accommodation, where necessary, including transfers.

#### **5. What happens if Passenger has a confirmed ticket but cannot board due to overbooking?**

Airline must arrange alternative flight scheduled to depart within one hour of the original schedule departure time of initial reservation. In the event Airlines fails to arrange alternative flight within one hour, airline shall be liable to give compensation.

## **6. How is compensation calculated if the alternate flight is delayed beyond one hour?**

- a. Compensation depends on the timing of the alternate flight:
  - i. Alternate flight within 24 hours: Up to 200% of the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charges, maximum INR 10,000.
  - ii. Alternate flight after 24 hours: Up to 400% of the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charges, maximum INR 20,000.
  - iii. If the passenger chooses not to take an alternate flight, they are entitled to a full refund of the ticket along with compensation equal to 400% of the booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charges, subject to a maximum of INR 20,000.

## **7. Whether airline can be held responsible for loss, delay, or damage to baggage?**

An airline is responsible for loss, delay or damage to baggage if the incident occurs while the baggage is on board with the aircraft or under the airline's custody.

## **8. What is the maximum compensation for lost, delayed, or damaged baggage during international travel?**

For domestic travel, compensation for baggage is limited to ₹20,000 per passenger. If cargo is lost, delayed, or damaged, the airline's liability is capped at ₹350 per kilogram. For international travel, compensation for lost, delayed, or damaged baggage is capped at 1,131 Special Drawing Rights (SDR) per passenger.

## 9. What are the rights available to passengers with disability?

The DGCA has issued Revision 08 of the Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) — Section 3 (Air Transport), Series ‘M’ Part I[5], on the Carriage by Air of Persons with Disability (Divyangjan) and/or Persons with Reduced Mobility. It introduces updated standards to ensure non-discriminatory and dignified air travel for such passengers and their escort which includes:

- Airlines must accommodate passengers with disabilities, including their assistive devices, guide dogs, or escorts, and gather information about special needs when booking.
- If boarding is refused, the airline must provide written reasons.
- No medical certificates are required, and suitable seating and support must be provided free, with prompt assistance during check-in and baggage handling.

Passengers should inform about his requirements to the airline at least 48 hours before travel. Escorts should be seated nearby whenever possible, and cabin crew must explain safety procedures and available assistance.

## 10. Can a passenger claim a refund upon cancellation of their ticket?

Yes, the passenger can claim refund all statutory taxes, including the User Development Fee, Airport Development Fee, and Passenger Service Fee. This applies to all fare types, including promotional and special fares, although the basic fare itself is non-refundable. Passenger may choose to receive the refund as airline credit, but this is optional and not the default method. No additional charges should be applied for processing the refund.

## 11. Can a passenger request a name correction or cancel or modify ticket without extra charges?

Passenger can request a name correction within 24 hours of booking, without any extra fees. Additionally, Passenger can cancel or modify your ticket without any charges within 24 hours of booking. Such facilities are generally available up to seven days before the scheduled departure of the first leg of your journey.

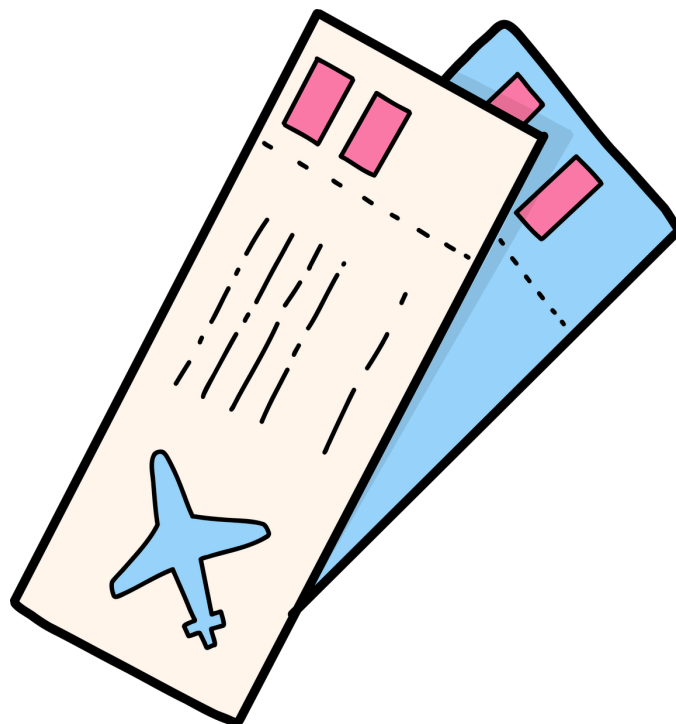
The DGCA under CAR section 3, series M, Part II has issued new guidelines on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2026<sup>[6]</sup>, which provides a 48 hour lock-in-period effective from 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Passengers booking directly through airline's website may cancel or modify tickets within 48 hours without extra charges, except fare difference. It does not apply to flights departing within 7 days (domestic) or 15 days (international). After 48 hours, usual charges apply. The guidelines also include provisions addressing cancellations in cases of medical emergencies.

In **IndiGo (InterGlobe Aviation Limited) vs. Pyarelal Jain<sup>[7]</sup>**, the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum, Tiruvallur examined a complaint arising from a delayed onward flight and the cancellation of a return flight involving a group of 39 passengers. The complainant contended that the airline failed to provide adequate assistance or timely alternative arrangements, compelling him to organise bus transportation at his own expense. Upon review, the Forum held the airline guilty of deficiency in service, observing that it had neither sufficiently justified the disruption nor extended reasonable support to the affected passengers. Consequently, IndiGo was directed to refund the ticket fares, reimburse the cost of alternative travel arrangements, and pay compensation of Rs.5,00,000/- (Rupees Five Lakhs Only) along with litigation expenses.

[6] CAR section 3, series M, Part II

[7] Complaint Case No. RBT/CC/137/2022

Further, after recent indigo airline disruption, as part of corrective measures and in line with the DGCA's Charter of Passenger Rights, IndiGo agreed to process refunds for all cancelled flights, with remaining amounts expected to reflect shortly. The airline also clarified that passengers who booked through online travel agencies or third-party platforms are eligible for refunds, and necessary steps have been initiated to ensure they receive due payments. The episode, however, serves as a reminder that adherence to the Charter of Passenger Rights extends beyond financial reimbursement — requiring timely updates, adequate on-ground support, and proactive contingency planning to safeguard passenger trust during operational crises.



**Conclusion:-**

Air passengers in India are not without recourse when disruptions occur. All airlines are required to maintain a structured grievance redressal mechanism. Travellers should first lodge a complaint with the airline's customer support team, typically through an online form or official email channel. If the response is unsatisfactory, the matter can be escalated to the airline's designated Nodal Officer and thereafter to its Appellate Authority, whose contact details are published on the airline's website. Maintaining proper documentation of all correspondence is essential.

Simultaneously, passengers can register their complaints on AirSewa[8], the government's aviation grievance portal, which is monitored by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and often facilitates faster responses from airlines. Should the issue remain unresolved, consumers have the right to approach the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission under the Consumer Protection Act for claims up to ₹1 crore, as airlines fall squarely within the definition of "service providers" and can be held accountable for deficiencies in service.

Air passenger rights play a crucial role in protecting travellers from unfair treatment and unexpected disruptions. Strengthening awareness and enforcement of these rights not only builds trust in the aviation industry but also promotes a more reliable and passenger-focused travel experience for everyone.

[8] <https://airsewa.gov.in>.

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