

Business dreams too fly high with 80 executives on board

A contingent of 80 business executives also boarded the flight, raising visions of the now sleepy Agra expressway resembling the Dwarka or Gurgaon expressways in the coming years with both sides of the stretch getting developed. Among my co-passengers was a couple inspired by newspaper profiles of a commuter who was on the first service of every route launched by Delhi Metro. Another couple from Mumbai had dressed their three-year-old daughter as a pilot — who later proved to be the star attraction on board — to be on not only this flight but also fly out to Amritsar from NIA.

IndiGo captains Ranjeev Kapoor and Prateek Tripathi announced the inaugural route's 450km journey will take about 45-50 minutes. My co-passenger "accidentally"

happened to have two firsts to her credit. "I was making a Lucknow-Bengaluru-Kuala Lumpur booking on IndiGo. I was booked on this flight as the same aircraft will proceed to Bengaluru. So, I am one of the first transit passengers from NIA," beamed Lucknow's Tanisha Srivastava,

ON BOARD 6E 2278

who is pursuing an undergrad course in London.

Thereafter, we began our descent into NIA. Instead of seeing a dust bowl that north India is at this time of the year, the view was of green fields, thanks to rain over the past few days. Amid applause on-board, the aircraft smoothly touched down to a water cannon salute by NIA's fire tenders. So excited were the travellers on this flight that most of them stood up even as the aircraft was still taxiing.

Standing up before plane doors open is an inexplicable Indian habit, but that happens after the plane has come to a halt. So, on a day of firsts at Noida airport, this was another — one that it would not want to see repeated.

The NIA terminal's current capacity of 1.2 crore passengers annually is the same as that of IGIA's Terminal 2. It was a 5-7 minutes' walk to the baggage carousel area. NIA tries to impress with its business-like efficient, fast passenger movement, not its looks — unlike Bengaluru airport or Mumbai airport's Terminal 2. For a glimpse of the Taj Mahal, drive 140km towards Agra. NIA will ensure you exit quickly and board that car.

Despite the long delay in its opening, parts of the terminal are not ready yet. Work is in progress there as well as at the carousels. With no carpets, pushing baggage with wheels

is not a drag. I exited the airport in under 15 minutes as there was no baggage to be collected but the new facility demanded time. The only mode of transport right now and for the foreseeable future is private vehicles, cabs and buses, whose availability was not fully tested on Day 1 as many passengers had cars waiting for them. Ditto for me. Luckily, NIA has mobile network, unlike Navi Mumbai airport.

The flight from Lucknow to NIA took about 50 minutes. The drive from the airport to my house in Delhi near AIIMS, 78km away, took about 100 minutes in the peak morning-hour traffic. Connectivity will be a make-or-break for the new airport in the initial phase as even for most Noida residents, IGIA is closer. Else, like Neil Armstrong after his "giant leap", the journey home will be long, arduous, and expensive.