

Year End 2023 | A look at India's aviation sector. Did the industry take flight amidst twists and turns?

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The year 2023 witnessed several notable developments and achievements in the Indian aviation sector, reflecting its resilience and adaptability amid global challenges. Despite ongoing challenges posed by the global pandemic, Indian airlines continued to navigate the complexities, gradually recovering and adapting to the evolving travel landscape. Introduction of new routes and expansion of services to enhance connectivity within the country and internationally.

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The aviation sector attained new wings and expanded at a high speed. Let us take a look at some of the major achievements:

RCS-UDAN

Launched in 2016, the RCS-UDAN initiative aims to facilitate air operations on routes that were previously unserved or underserved, connecting diverse regions. Its objectives include promoting balanced regional growth and making air travel more affordable for the general public. RCS-UDAN operates as a self-financing scheme, incorporating a nominal levy for each departure on main (trunk) routes to cross-subsidize the operations of UDAN flights.

From January 1, 2023, to December 21, 2023:

- 60 new RCS routes were introduced.
- Operations were initiated at six airports: Rourkela, Hollongi, Jamshedpur, Cooch Behar, Utkela, and Shivamogga.
- In the North Eastern States of the country, 12 new RCS routes were launched.
- Additionally, 154 new RCS routes were awarded under UDAN 4.2 and 5.0.

Digi Yatra

Digi Yatra is a project designed to facilitate contactless and seamless processing of passengers at airports by leveraging Facial Recognition [Technology](#) (FRT). The primary goal of the project is to enable travelers to navigate various airport checkpoints effortlessly and without physical documentation, using facial features for identity verification. Passengers have the convenience of enrolling on the platform from the comfort of their homes, and to date, the Digi Yatra app has been downloaded by over 35 lakh users.

The rollout of Digi Yatra has been implemented at 13 airports on a phased basis:

- Delhi, Bengaluru, and Varanasi airports – December 1, 2022
- Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata, and Vijayawada airports – March 31, 2023
- Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Cochin, Guwahati, Jaipur, and Lucknow airports – August 2023
- Since its initiation, more than 91 lakh passengers have utilized the Digi Yatra facility for seamless airport travel. The project aims to cover all airports gradually, ensuring a comprehensive implementation of Digi Yatra across the country.

Greenfield Airports

The Government of [India](#) introduced the Greenfield Airports Policy in 2008, outlining guidelines, procedures, and conditions for establishing new Greenfield Airports in the country. As part of this policy, the government has granted 'in-principle' approval for the development of 21 Greenfield Airports nationwide. These airports include Mopa in Goa, Navi Mumbai, Shirdi, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, Kalaburagi, Vijayapura, Hassan, and Shivamogga in [Karnataka](#), Dabra (Gwalior) in Madhya Pradesh, Kushinagar and Noida (Jewar) in Uttar Pradesh, Dholera and Rajkot in [Gujarat](#), Karaikal in Puducherry, Dagadharthi,

Bhogapuram, and Oravakal (Kurnool) in Andhra Pradesh, Durgapur in West Bengal, Pakyong in Sikkim, Kannur in Kerala, and Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh.

Among these, 12 Greenfield airports—Durgapur, Shirdi, Sindhudurg, Pakyong, Kannur, Kalaburagi, Oravakal, Kushinagar, Itanagar, Mopa, Shivamogga, and Rajkot—have been operationalized. Notably, in 2023, three Greenfield airports, namely Mopa, Shivamogga, and Rajkot, have commenced operations, contributing to the growth and connectivity of the aviation infrastructure in the country.

Passenger traffic

On November 19 of this year, Indian airlines carried a total of 456,910 domestic passengers. This achievement marked the highest single-day air traffic since the onset of the pandemic, showcasing a notable 7.4% increase above pre-COVID averages. The surge in passenger numbers serves as a clear indication of recovery and resilience in the aviation sector.

The inauguration of the fourth runway and Eastern Cross Taxiway at Delhi Airport.

- The launch of the new T2 terminal with both domestic and international operations at Bangalore Airport.
- The expansion of the terminal building at Hyderabad Airport.
- The reorganization of the Pre-Embarkation Security Check area at Mumbai Airport.

Under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, it is anticipated that a capital expenditure (CAPEX) exceeding Rs. 91,000 crore will be invested from the fiscal year 2019-20 to the fiscal year 2024-25. Of this, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) is expected to incur approximately Rs. 25,000 crore, while the remaining expenditure will be undertaken by airport developers through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. As of November 2023, approximately Rs. 65,000 crore has already been spent, including around Rs. 11,000 crore in the fiscal year 2023-24.

Green Energy

The predominant source of carbon emissions at airports is the use of conventional energy sources. Substituting these with green energy plays a pivotal role in mitigating the carbon footprint associated with airports. Consequently, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has recommended that all operational airports with scheduled services and developers of forthcoming Greenfield Airports strive to attain Carbon Neutrality & Net Zero. This encompasses a commitment to incorporating green energy practices. Currently, 66 airports nationwide are operating with the exclusive use of 100% Green Energy.

Congestion at airports

During the festive season/Winter 2022, significant congestion issues were observed at major airports, causing concern due to prolonged waiting times for passenger processing at various touchpoints.

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