

AIR INDIA's Rebranding

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Nearly 18 months after the Tata Group took back possession of Air India under a government-led strategic divestment programme, the erstwhile state carrier has been given a new branding and a new logo. As part of the branding, the iconic Maharaja, who has been almost synonymous with the airline, has taken a back seat or, rather, been consigned to just being part of the cutlery.

THE MAHARAJA's JOURNEY

Air India was founded by renowned Indian industrialist and aviator J.R.D. Tata as Tata Airlines in 1932. The current logo of Air India has been in use since 2014 and is the eighth logo of the airline since its inception. The logo, which is visible on the current fleet, shows a red flying swan with the orange Konark wheel. This is also visible on the tail of the aircraft. Since 1946, iconic mascot Maharaja with his twirled moustache has been associated with the idea of delivering a unique and luxurious service experience to flyers. It was conceptualised by Bobby Kooka, who was then employed as the Commercial Director of Air India. The design was then sketched by Umesh Rao, an artist at J Walter Thompson, Mumbai.

While the Maharaja has also seen several changes in his style over the course of nearly 77 years, the airline often demonstrated that he had the ability to look like a local of any country that the airline was flying to. This was often visible in various creatives of the Maharaja in local attire and style of a foreign country.

On its part, the airline has said that the reason behind leaving the Maharaja in the background is that it is not understood in the same manner abroad as it is in India.

NEW DESIGN

On 11 August, the airline unveiled its new logo called 'The Vista', which draws inspiration from the iconic Indian window design used by the erstwhile Air India.

The airline said the new logo signifies limitless possibilities, progressiveness, and a bold outlook for the future. Under the new strategy, the airline has relegated the Maharaja to the background, reserving its "silhouette" for aircraft crockery and glassware.

The new logo has been designed in partnership with a brand transformation company called FutureBrand. The new livery features a palette of deep red, aubergine, and gold highlights, as well as a chakra-inspired pattern. The new font for Air India is also a "custom-made Air India Sans" font. The new livery will first be seen on the A350 that is set to arrive before December.

FEEDBACK

While the airline announced the new logo and rebranding among much fanfare in the attendance of Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran, senior executives from Air India, and top heads from the Indian aviation industry, it is rather clear that the loyalty towards the airline will develop on account of on-time performance, reliable flight operations, a wide network that gives passengers the most feasible flight timings, and clean aircraft with interiors in acceptable condition.

Industry experts suggest that while the rebranding has been done to announce a transformation and refresh the mindset among flyers towards Air India on a global scale, it is also to do with telling the employees of the airlines under the Air India umbrella that a new Air India with a more efficient, technology-enabled and modern system is now running the show.

On social media platforms, several aviation enthusiasts have liked the new design and colour schemes, but an equal number or more have also expressed their reservations against the rebranding, doing away

with the iconic window frames on the aircraft while deriving the inspiration of 'The Vista' from the 'Jharokha'-themed windows.

Some have even spotted similarities of the new design with those on liveries from airlines such as Iberia and Emirates.

The airline has not explicitly said that it has derived the colour of aubergine from Vistara, another full-service carrier under the Tata Group; it calls it a nice coincidence.

"The process of integrating Air India with Vistara is subject to regulatory approvals. But Vistara is part of the Tata group; we wanted to ensure that in any future Air India, there was a representation of erstwhile Air India and other carriers from the Tata group. It is of course a royal rich luxurious colour that is worthy of Air India anyway, but it is a nice coincidence that it also carries some legacy of Vistara as well," Air India CEO Campbell Wilson had said.