AIRPORT AGONY: HONG KONG CARRIERS AMONG WORLD'S WORST FOR DELAYED DEPARTURES

News / Airports / Routes

Air traffic control delays on the mainland mean Hong Kong and mainland airlines are among the world's worst for on-time departures, as the number of affected flights has soared.

A Sunday Morning Post study of aviation data from travel industry monitor FlightStats ranks Hong Kong Airlines and Dragonair among the poorest performers based on flights departing within 15 minutes of the scheduled departure time, which is considered on time. Both airlines are heavily reliant on flights to the mainland.

Of the data on 106 major airlines, Xiamen Airlines is bottom of the league with an average of 36 percent of on-time flights in the last 12 months.

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Hong Kong Airlines ranked 100th with 47 percent of departures leaving on schedule, followed by Dragonair at 95th with 54 percent. From 95 to 106 in the punctuality table there is only one non-Chinese airline.

Air traffic restrictions are frequent on the mainland, where only 20 percent of airspace is available for civil aviation. The rest is controlled by the military.

Civil Aviation Department statistics show 2,518 flights from Hong Kong, or 13 a day, between January and June suffered delays as a result of mainland air traffic control restrictions. Last year, eight flights a day, or 3,249 for the year, were affected. The figures suggest air traffic management delays are rising, following 2,639 delays in 2012 and 2,937 in 2013.

Hong Kong Airlines disputed the statistics, claiming its internal figures showed 65 percent departing "on time".

To tackle its punctuality problem, the airline said on Thursday it was increasing official flight times by up to 30 minutes on services to mainland cities such as Beijing. Despite padding the schedules, the airline said its efforts were "not working well because delays are just too long".

"Other than adding more time to our schedule, especially to afternoon flights, we have also raised our concerns to mainland aviation authorities about flight delays caused by air traffic control. We hope the situation could be improved if more airspace is released for civil aviation," a spokeswoman said.

Hong Kong Express played up its high-performing punctuality rates, citing FlightStats data, with 82 percent of planes leaving on time, faring better than rivals Cathay Pacific and Dragonair. The budget carrier did not reference its sister company, Hong Kong Airlines. Both are part of the Hainan Airlines Group.

Dragonair said it would consolidate flights and upgrade to larger aircraft to minimise the impact when air traffic control delays occurred."We have done everything possible in dealing with the operational challenges and minimising inconvenience to affected passengers. These delays and cancellations are beyond the airline's control," a Dragonair spokeswoman said.

06 SEPTEMBER 2015

SOURCE: WCARN
ARTICLE LINK:
https://ids.50skyshades.com/news/airports-routes/airport-agony-hong-kong-carriers-among-worlds-worst-for-delayed-departures

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