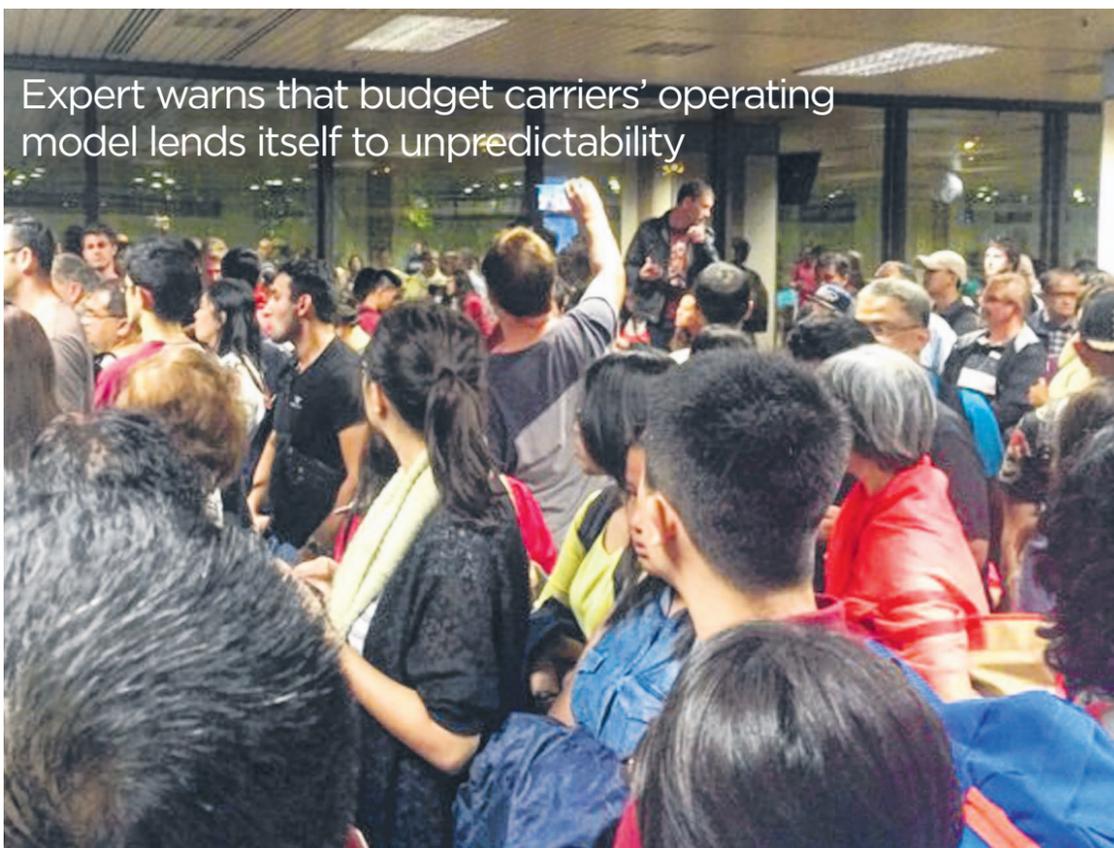


BY THE
NUMBERS

87

Number of complaints Consumers Association of Singapore received against budget airlines in 2014 — a rise from 62 in 2013. In contrast, only 18 complaints were received against full-service airlines in 2014 and 22 in 2013.

Expert warns that budget carriers' operating model lends itself to unpredictability



PAST SCOOT DELAYS

October 2014

A glitch in Scoot's check-in system affected five regional flights. Airport staff manually checked in passengers, causing delays of up to nine hours.

February 2013

More than 400 passengers on a Singapore-Qingdao-Shenyang flight were stranded at Changi Airport for 15 hours when a maintenance check revealed a problem with the plane's fuel tank.

January 2013

A faulty emergency slide on Scoot's Bangkok-bound plane forced the airline to reduce the number of passengers in order to fly safely. It took seven hours before 23 passengers voluntarily gave up their seats.

Second delayed flight in 2 days due to HK disruption

The Singapore-Perth flight TZ8, pushed back by more than 22 hours on Saturday, was Scoot's second delayed flight in as many days.

TZ221 was scheduled to leave Hong Kong at 7:10am on Friday, but was delayed for more than a day.

In a statement yesterday, Scoot's chief executive officer Campbell Wilson said: "The principal cause of the disruption was a technical fault experienced upon arrival of TZ221 at Hong Kong on Friday morning.

"Initial attempts to resolve the issue failed and ultimately, a spare part and team of engineers had to be dispatched from Singapore."

He added that this created a chain reaction of schedule adjustments, with technical and labour issues further compounding the delays.

"With a small fleet and one aircraft out of action in Hong Kong, a number of flights were rescheduled, including Saturday's Singapore-Perth TZ8.

"During checks prior to this flight, a tyre issue was detected. It took three hours for the tyre to be changed.

"This new delay meant that the operating crew could not complete the flight in their legal duty time and had to stand down. And due to earlier rescheduling of flights, no standby crew was available. Consequently, TZ8 was delayed overnight until a new, rested crew was available."

TOOK OFF

TZ8, scheduled to leave Singapore at 12:10pm on Saturday, eventually took off at 10:42am the following day.

Mr Wilson said: "Scoot deeply regrets the disruption to affected guests. We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused to their travel plans."

He added that Scoot's increased fleet size will better equip the company with future delays.

"Occasional technical issues nonetheless happen to any airline and the smaller the fleet, the larger the effect on schedules.

"As Scoot's fleet grows from six to 11 aircraft this year, our ability to absorb such events will significantly improve. Scoot is also reviewing the handling of these two flights to refine our processes and procedures."

Mr Wilson stressed: "We apologise to those affected, assure them that their safety was at the core of our actions at all times and commit that we will learn from this experience."

Budget flight delayed? Too bad

Reports by GODWIN NG
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Travellers, be prepared for delays when flying on budget carriers.

Associate Professor Terence Fan, a transport specialist from the Singapore Management University, said that the operating model of these airlines lends itself to unpredictability.

The service of budget carriers have raised the ire of travellers after Scoot delayed Singapore-Perth flight TZ8 for more than 22 hours on Saturday.

Scoot cited a technical issue for the delay. (See report at right.)

Affected passengers were outraged by the multiple delays and Scoot's subsequent compensation.

Prof Fan told The New Paper: "Budget airlines typically aim to maximise their fleet utilisation, possibly leaving little spare equipment for live swops.

"Likewise, they also tend to maximise their crew utilisation such that any delays of several hours could push the crew's working hours beyond the predetermined limit."

This combination of factors means that budget airlines are not as well-equipped as their full-service counterparts in dealing with operational irregularities, explained Prof Fan.

"Also, full-service carriers tend to have reciprocal links with other full-ser-

vice carriers such that in the event of serious delays, they can put their passengers on a partner airline's flight.

"Budget carriers are known not to practise such interline cooperation.

"It's a 'buyer beware' situation."

The outrage over Scoot's delayed flight is just the tip of the iceberg.

Numbers from the Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) indicate that aviation-related complaints have risen since 2012.

COMPLAINTS

Between January and May this year, Case received 34 complaints against both budget and full-service airlines.

Case's executive director Seah Seng Choon said: "In general, airlines would usually offer alternative transport arrangements for the consumers to get to their destination, usually on the next available flight, or travel vouchers as a form of compensation."

Passengers of TZ8 were given lounge access, and food and beverage vouchers at Changi Airport.



It's a 'buyer beware' situation.

— Associate Professor Terence Fan, a transport specialist from the Singapore Management University, on budget flights

Scoot has also reached out to them with travel vouchers, said Scoot's chief executive officer Campbell Wilson

"Scoot has never shied away from the fact that low airfares come with a quid pro quo, which is that hotel accommodation is not assured in the rare event of disruption and that travel insurance is highly recommended," he added.

"These conditions are made known to and are acknowledged by every passenger at the time of booking."

Lawyer Raphael Louis of Ray Louis Law Corporation agreed, pointing out that Scoot's conditions of carriage absolve it from liability.

Scoot's conditions of carriage state: "Except as provided in a Convention or applicable law, we will not pay any costs or expenses you incur as a result of the uncontrollable delay or cancellation."

Mr Louis explained: "It's a contractual issue. Both parties have agreed to the terms, so it's difficult for the passengers to demand anything from Scoot.

"Their best bet is to insure themselves before travelling."