# In-Flight Safety Reassessed: The Fallout from Singapore Airlines' Turbulence Policy



Source: Pexels (2022)

## **Background**

Following an extreme turbulence incident on May 21, 2024, which resulted in the death of a 73-year-old passenger and injuries to over 40 others on a Singapore Airlines flight from London to Singapore, the airline decided to tighten its in-flight safety guidelines by suspending meal services during turbulence (Sky News, 2024). While this policy change demonstrated the airline's willingness to act to ensure the safety of both staff and passengers, its implementation faced significant challenges (Business Insider, 2024).

The policy change impacted the carrier's service offerings and increased stress levels for cabin crew. As they were instructed to stop all services while the seat-belt sign was on, flight attendants expressed concerns and difficulties in carrying out meal service with little time remaining when turbulence persisted (The Straits Times, 2024). This problem occurred most often on shorter regional flights, where turbulence can last for up to one third of the total flight time (NDTV, 2024).

Moreover, the industry also questioned the effectiveness of SIA's new policy in mitigating turbulence risk. Turbulence is sudden and almost unpredictable. Given that the pilots involved in the incident were only able to turn on the seat belt sign seconds before the turbulence hit, industry experts challenged the feasibility of halting meal service and retrieving food carts in time before the imminent impact (SCMP, 2024).

On the other hand, some passengers did not understand the importance of the service policy change. Apart from the underlying danger of turbulence, many passengers do not realize that the priority of a flight attendant is not serving food and drinks, but keeping everyone safe (Business Insider, 2024). As customers value the service of an airline, negative feedback often results after flights where service was affected by turbulence (NDTV, 2024).

Given the disruption and frustration caused to passengers and cabin crew, SIA removed the policy regarding the suspension of meal service during turbulence in August 2024, ten weeks after the fatal incident (The Straits Times, 2024). The carrier has now given the decision to suspend or continue in-flight services back to the pilots.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- 1. What factors led Singapore Airlines to suspend meal services during turbulence?
- 2. What challenges did cabin crew face in implementing the new policy?
- 3. What alternative strategies could airlines consider to enhance passenger safety during turbulence without significantly impacting service quality?
- 4. How can airlines effectively educate passengers about the importance of safety measures during turbulence to manage their expectations and reactions?

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# **Keywords**

- Airline
- Safety Policy
- Risk Management
- Turbulence
- In-flight service
- Cabin crew