



ISTANBUL'S AIRPORT BEATS FRANKFURT TO BECOME EUROPE'S THIRD BUSIEST AIRPORT

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Istanbul's Ataturk Airport overtook Frankfurt to enter the European top three for the first time in 2015 as Turkish Airlines continued its rapid expansion and strikes at Deutsche Lufthansa AG hurt the German hub.

London Heathrow, the main base for British Airways, remains Europe's busiest airport, even as it struggles to add flights on runways that are effectively full, while Paris Charles de Gaulle, ranked second, suffered two months of falling numbers for the first time in almost two years after November's terror attacks.

Frankfurt's passenger tally increased 2.5 percent to 61.04 million, short of its 4 percent target, after walkouts cost Lufthansa 4,700 flights in November, mostly at its main base. Ataturk, which passed Madrid and Amsterdam in 2014, posted an 8.2 percent jump to 61.32 million, cementing its status as a global hub to rival those of Gulf carriers such as Dubai-based Emirates.

Istanbul Ataturk has now added more than 16 million passengers in three years, compared with less than 4 million at Frankfurt. With Turkish Airlines planning to almost double the fleet to about 440 jets by the end of 2021 the hub seems set to challenge Heathrow and Charles de Gaulle — to

which it is linked by a stake held by Aeroports de Paris in its owner — within a few years.

Fraport AG'S Frankfurt is also suffering as Lufthansa cuts unprofitable services at its main airline brand, based there and in Munich, while beefing up its Eurowings low-cost arm that has bases including Cologne and Vienna.

London Heathrow had the lowest growth rate among the European Top 10, lifting passenger numbers 2.2 percent to just short of 75 million. The increase was achieved as airlines deployed bigger jets such as the Airbus Group SE A380 to beat the runway cap, with the number of flights increasing just 0.3 percent.

Plans for Heathrow, owned by interests including Ferrovial SA and overseas pension and sovereign-wealth funds, to add a third runway, backed by a state-appointed commission, suffered a setback at the end of last year when the U.K. government said a decision would be delayed until after London's mayoral election in May. The rival Gatwick base, where the world's busiest single runway is also full, remains a contender for expansion.

Turkey, by contrast, is building a new hub 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of Ataturk, slated to have an annual capacity of 150 million passengers, or twice the figure at Heathrow today. Still, the bombing this week in Istanbul that killed 10 Germans, the biggest visitor group, may test the strength of the country's travel market.

Charles de Gaulle handled 3.4 percent fewer passengers in December after a 1.3 percent drop the previous month, when terrorists killed 130 in the French capital. That was the first two-month decline since heavy snow in early 2013.

Spain last year continued to recover from its second recession in seven years, helping both Barcelona and Madrid to above-average growth rates. Madrid also benefited from Iberia lifting capacity by 10 percent as owner IAG SA sought an outlet for growth away from BA's crowded Heathrow base.

Figures at Amsterdam were lifted by extra flights by EasyJet Plc, as Europe's second-biggest discount carrier adds more services at major airports.

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