Cultural Daily

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Istanbul's new airport expected to be world's largest

R. Daniel Foster · Wednesday, April 24th, 2019

Billed as "the largest move in the history of global civil aviation," the phase one transfer of Istanbul's airport to a new location is complete. The new airport, 22 miles north of Istanbul, reached a fully operational stage in early April. Upon completion, the airport is expected to be the world's largest flight point.

In early April, the country's flagship carrier, Turkish Airlines, served its first one million passengers; the airline operates daily non-stop flights from Los Angeles' LAX to Istanbul, among other U.S. cities.

Turkey's former Atatürk International Airport closed on April 6 after Turkish Airlines was moved overnight to the new 29.5 square-mile airport that, when finished, will outsize Manhattan island.

The airport's first phase opened on October 29, 2018, the 95th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. A rushed three and one-half year build for a nearly $12 billion project that would normally take a decade has been beset by labor disputes (protests erupted last year with hundreds arrested); officials report 27 fatalities during construction, but local trade unions counter with a count of more than 400.

The airport's design reflects the country's deep heritage: riffs on striking mosques, domes, baths, and Islamic art. Photo courtesy iGA

President Erdogan's mega projects

Three additional phases of the airport will rollout through 2027, at which time the hub will transport 200,000 passengers a day, rivaling that carried by the world's largest hub, Atlanta. The completed airport will serve 350 destinations with an annual capacity of 200 million passengers—it currently serves 90 million a year.

The airport tops the list of mega projects pushed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, driven to transform Turkey's infrastructure during his 16 years in power. The country bills the airport as "the greatest project in the history of the republic." It's expected to employ 225,000 by its completion.

While the airport's construction speed could indicate Erdogan's trademark bravado and desire for symbolism, the previous Ataturk airport was old, tired and burdened. Several international carriers have been turned away for lack of capacity.


Istanbul’s new mega-airport is now fully operational. Photo courtesy iGA.

Turkey’s strategic international location

Strategically, the finished airport may help Turkey edge out Qatar and the UAE as Eurasia’s premier transit hubs. Turkey is optimally located at a major hub: the intersection of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

It’s also hoped that the new airport will help further brand Turkish Airlines as a global aviation leader, given the airport’s geographical advantage and the airline’s current extensive narrow body flight range.

The airport’s architecture reflects the country’s deep heritage and includes riffs on mosques, domes, baths, and Islamic art. The air control tower is inspired by Istanbul’s premier symbol: the tulip.


Turkish Airlines is the country’s flagship carrier. Photo courtesy Turkish Airlines.

Turkish Airlines launched in 1933

Turkish Airlines launched with a flight between Istanbul and Ankara in 1933. The airline first served just Izmir, Istanbul, Ankara and Adana; it now serves 55 countries and 103 destinations. Its famed narrow body range capability carries more than 40% of the world’s international traffic and flies to more than 60 national capitals.

The airline has undergone rehabilitation in recent decades following passenger complaints and mishaps in the 1980s and 90s. More recently, the U.S. Federal Aviation Authority temporarily banned flights between the United States in Turkey following the 2016 Turkish coup d’état attempt—the ban was lifted in July 2016

Turkish Airlines operates nine U.S. gateway cities: Los Angeles, New York, Washington DC. Chicago, Boston, Houston, San Francisco, Miami, and Atlanta.


Turkish Airlines’ Twitter feed was buzzing with airport transfer news. Photo courtesy Turkish Airlines.

Resources

Istanbul’s new airport and a map.

About the airport’s phased build, to be complete in 2027.

Information on Turkish Airlines’ business class, including hotel service for those traveling between international points, and transfers from Turkey.

The airline’s flying chefs inflight catering service – a popular social media post.

The airline’s sizable business lounge seats 765 and includes a museum, private suites, and other amenities.

The domestic lounge includes meeting rooms and a playroom for children.

Information about visiting Istanbul

• Top image courtesy iGA.

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