

Istanbul Airport surpasses Heathrow as Europe's busiest hub

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Dhaka: Istanbul Airport (IST) has officially overtaken London Heathrow (LHR) to become Europe's busiest airport, according to the latest data from aviation analytics firm OAG. The Turkish megahub now leads the continent in both international and domestic seat capacity.

OAG's October 2025 report shows Istanbul handled 4.53 million one-way seats, a 9 percent increase year-on-year, while Heathrow followed closely with 4.47 million. Paris Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt, and Amsterdam rounded out the top five.

The shift marks a major milestone for Istanbul, which only opened in 2019 but has grown rapidly thanks to Turkish Airlines' global expansion and the airport's strategic location bridging Europe and Asia. Turkish Airlines now flies to over 350 destinations in 125 countries, operating nearly 500 aircraft and aiming for 800 by 2033.

In comparison, Heathrow's strength has long been its airline diversity — hosting 89 carriers to 214 destinations — while Istanbul functions as a fortress hub dominated by Turkish Airlines, similar to Atlanta's Delta-led model.

Infrastructure has also played a decisive role. Istanbul already has three runways (with five planned by 2028), compared to Heathrow's two. Its domestic network, covering over 50 cities, gives it a strong traffic base that Heathrow cannot match.

The airport's ongoing Phase Three expansion (2025-2028) will raise annual capacity to 120 million passengers, with plans to reach 200 million by 2033 — potentially making it the world's largest airport.

Istanbul's secondary hub, Sabiha Gökçen Airport (SAW), also entered the European top 10 for the first time, ranking 10th with 2.56 million seats — a 19 percent increase over last year, fueled by low-cost carriers like Pegasus Airlines and AJet.

With record growth, expanding global connectivity, and large-scale infrastructure projects underway, Istanbul is cementing its position as not just Europe's busiest airport, but one of the world's leading aviation hubs.

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