

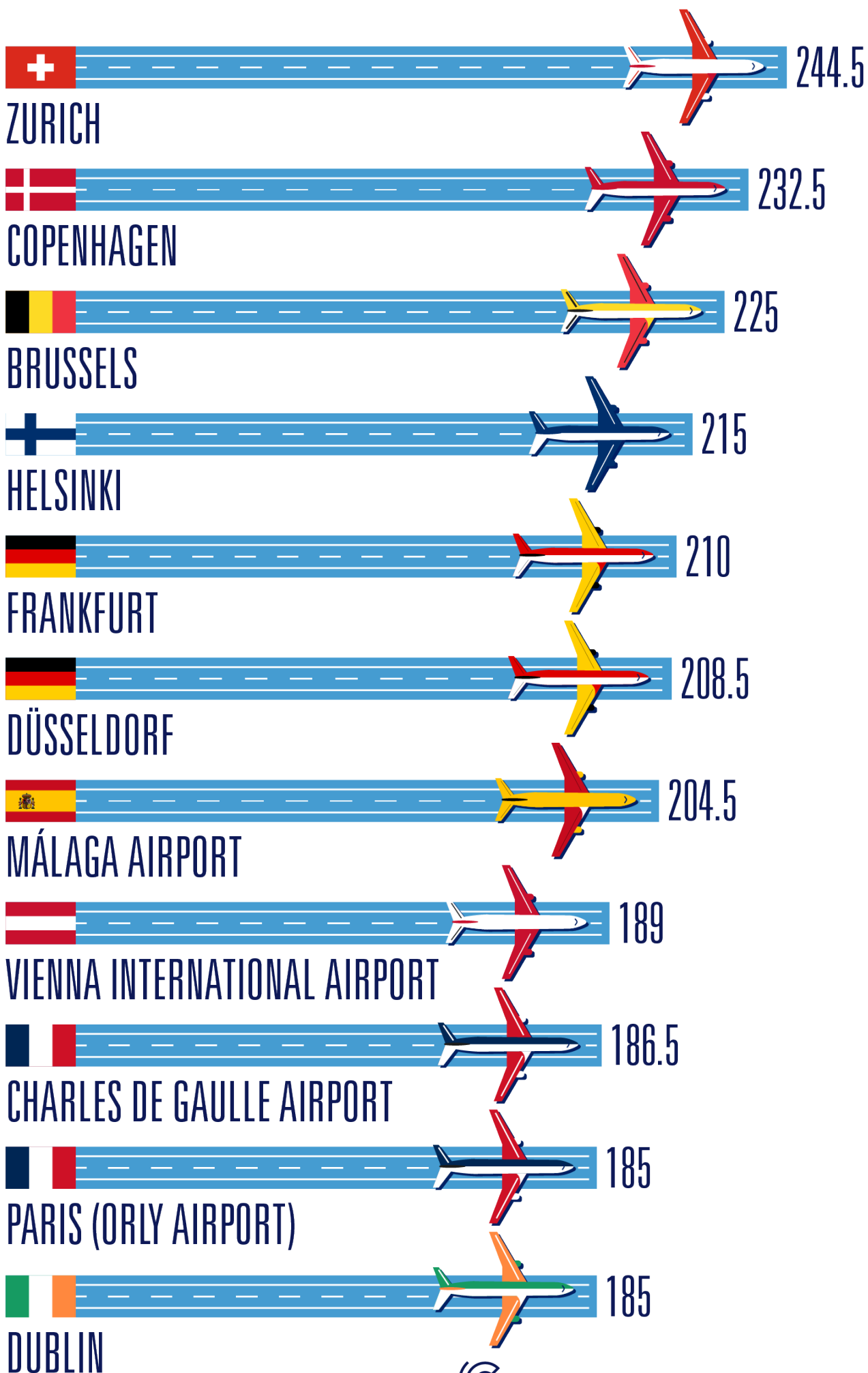
# EUROPE'S MOST PASSENGER-FRIENDLY AIRPORTS 2024

AUTHORS: EMIL PANZARU, AMJAD AUN

ZURICH STAYS  
NUMBER  
ONE!



## OVERALL SCORE: TOP 10 AIRPORTS FOR PASSENGER CONVENIENCE IN EUROPE



This is the year airports leave behind the dreary legacy of COVID-19. According to the [European branch of Airport Council International](#)'s estimates, passenger traffic in 2024 will finally surpass 2019 levels by at least 1.4% (even in its most pessimistic model) to a maximum of 3.4% (in the most optimistic scenario). However, as we have often noted at the Consumer Choice Center, airport capacity lags behind the increase in traffic. Our index reflects this issue. Top contenders from past rankings retain their pole positions: Zurich comes first, with Brussels in the third spot (the latter only slightly down from its number two spot in 2023). Some airports have adapted quicker to the return of growth – Copenhagen climbs from fourth to second place. Dusseldorf sees a strong rebound, from 16th in the previous years to 6th place now, and Malaga a jump from 19th to 7th. Frankfurt slightly drops from number three to number five. At the other end of the spectrum, London Stansted, Antalya, Madrid-Barajas, and Mallorca are stuck in their previous positions, not having expanded to accommodate higher passenger volumes.

Looking ahead, other challenges could yet darken travel prospects. Broader geopolitical tensions are only intensifying, sowing uncertainty regarding oil supplies, driving European jet fuel prices above the global average by [3-6%](#), and consequently undermining the European airline sector's competitiveness. Meanwhile, [environmental policies and capacity shortages](#) are set to bite harder. The European Union's decision to cut one-quarter of the free emissions allowance for airlines in the [EU Emissions Trading System](#) will translate into higher prices for passengers.

Given these challenges, we ranked Europe's thirty busiest airports (measured by passenger volume) to prevent negative consumer experiences and help travelers pick the best hub for their next trip. We used several factors ranging from location and transportation options to the availability of services (restaurants, lounges, shops), security waiting times, and the average proportion of flight delays. With this information, consumers can quickly and reliably identify the airport of their choice.

Our fourth annual edition of the European Consumer Airport Index refines and updates our analysis using data provided to us by airports, annual reports, online statistics, and our own research. Passenger volumes reflect the years 2021-2023. We consolidated the distance category into one measurement by car and one value for absolute distance in a straight line. Both now count towards the final score for each airport. We added compound annual growth rate percentages to track the growing influx of European passengers better. The figure also allows us to measure the impact of changing policies in concrete numbers for future indices.

Similar to the previous entries, seven of the ten contenders (Zurich, Copenhagen, Brussels, Helsinki, Dusseldorf, Malaga, and Vienna) are quieter airports, ranging from 15.3 million in the case of Helsinki to 29.5 million passengers in the case of Vienna International Airport. Their volumes are one-third to half the size of heavyweights like Charles de Gaulle (67.42 million), Madrid-Barajas (60.2 million), and London Heathrow (the largest at 79.2 million). Such has been the surge, though, that what counts as quiet today would have been moderate to extreme in our older indices. The average compound annual growth for all seven venues is 145.5%, from 122.40% for Helsinki to 167.31% for Vienna. Bigger venues like Heathrow have seen an even more impressive rise in traffic, swelling by 291.05% to quadruple the numbers of 2021.

The dramatic increase has had a mixed effect on scores. Despite awarding more points than ever, a fifth of the total results have either stayed the same or declined, as the influx of extra passengers drove points for flyers per shops and restaurants, lounges, and jet bridges down. Moreover, average delays continued to rise for poor performers. For instance, London Stansted hit an average of 57% in 2024, 11% higher than in 2023.

Of course, individual adverse events also played a role in some cases. On June 23, 2024, a power outage occurred in Manchester Airport, canceling [66 departures and 50 arrivals](#) in terminals 1 and 2 and rendering general security and baggage systems inoperable. Approximately 90,000 passengers were affected, having to wait in extremely long queues with no certainty that they could board their flight. Though accidents happen, there was an evident lack of communication with those affected, with many eyewitnesses reporting that nobody had informed them about an outage. Furthermore, [luggage mishandling](#) remained a problem, as most travelers were not told their luggage never made it to the plane. Many have yet to see their possessions returned.

In far more positive news, four-fifths of contenders saw their tallies rise. The best performers have significantly reduced airport security waiting times and average delays. Zurich had an average security waiting time of 12 minutes in 2023, but it only registered a 1-minute waiting time in 2024 (when the data was retrieved on July 1, 2024). That most airports have managed to weather the storm is a testament to the sector's competitiveness. Future airport travel policies should encourage this adaptive competitive capacity via regulatory streamlining and clear general rules.

## IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS FOR CONSUMERS

There are several benefits to choosing one of the top five arrival or departure points, such as more flight options, destinations, and airlines, less hassle getting to and from the airport, more restaurants, lounges, and shops, less congestion on aircraft bridges, more accessible connections to terminals, and less downtime due to delays and security checks.

- The top 5 (and top 10) selections offer the best experience all around
- Northern and Central venues overwhelmingly provide more convenient connections compared to Southern and Eastern hubs
- Bigger is not necessarily better, especially when it results in worse infrastructure, fewer flight connections, crowded airports, and long security lines
- Though we have generally seen improvements in scores, no single hub earned maximum points, meaning there is always room for improvement

### RESEARCH NOTE

*We strive to improve the quality of this index's underlying data every year and aim to further refine its methodology. We often faced contradictory information and indicators measured differently by different airports. For instance, the number of destinations can refer to either average destinations throughout the year, charter destinations, or the total connected annually. We preferred to leave an entry empty where we found little or unreliable information (as was the case for some airports and average security time). We ask the index readers to acknowledge the difficulties in working with heterogeneous data and caution users to be aware of the underlying complications.*

*Furthermore, what makes an airport "good" for each individual can have a distinct qualitative element. Please remember, then, that our assessments are strictly quantitative and non-normative. We are not passing moral judgment on airports' goodness and badness or downplaying personal experiences by ranking one airport lower than another. We are simply highlighting measurable conclusions based on the data available at the time of this index.*

## OVERALL SCORE

Ranking	Airport	Points
1	Zurich	244.5
2	Copenhagen	232.5
3	Brussels	225
4	Helsinki	215
5	Frankfurt	210
6	Düsseldorf	208.5
7	Málaga Airport	204.5
8	Vienna International Airport	189
9	Charles de Gaulle Airport	186.5
10	Paris (Orly Airport)	185
10	Dublin	185
12	Amsterdam (Schiphol)	184
13	Manchester	182.5
14	Stockholm (Arlanda)	178.5
15	Heathrow (London)	177.5
16	Lisbon	176.5
17	Rome (Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport)	176
18	Barcelona (Barcelona-El Prat Josep Tarradellas Airport)	173.5
19	Malpensa (Milan)	170
19	Warsaw Chopin Airport	170
21	Munich	168.5
22	Istanbul	164
23	Athens	155
24	Oslo	151.5
25	Berlin Brandenburg Airport	145.5
26	London (Gatwick)	138
27	Madrid (Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas)	129
28	Antalya Airport	127.5
29	Mallorca (Palma de Mallorca)	105
30	London (Stansted)	85

## Methodology

### 1. DISTANCE TO THE CITY CENTER (BY CAR)

This category gives an airport a maximum of 30 points. A shorter ride to or from an airport by car saves substantial commute time, allowing you to make the most of your day abroad.

It reflects the relative distance to the city center judging by major routes (main roads or highways). The score for each entry reflects the average between the available avenues. For instance, the average distance across all three options for Dusseldorf results in 9.3km, earning the venue 30 points.

≤ 10km = 30 points

≤ 15km = 22,5 points

≤ 20km = 15 points

≤ 25km = 10 points

≤ 30km = 4 points

≤ 35km = 2 points

> 35km = 0 points

### 2. DISTANCE TO THE CITY CENTER (STRAIGHT LINE)

The variable measures the absolute distance in a straight line from the airport to the city center. Distance affects more than just commute time; it influences the type and number of services, the on-site infrastructure, and the attractions available. It nets an airport a maximum of 30 points.

≤ 10km = 30 points

≤ 15km = 22,5 points

≤ 20km = 15 points

≤ 25km = 10 points

≤ 30km = 4 points

≤ 35km = 2 points

> 35km = 0 points

### 3. PASSENGER VOLUME (MILLIONS)

We refer to the available numbers on passenger volumes for the past three years (2021,2022, and 2023) to determine the thirty busiest airports in Europe. The tallies also suggest the pace of the airline and airport sectors' post-pandemic recovery.

This section is purely descriptive and does not award any points.

#### 4. COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE PERCENTAGE

The figures represent passenger volumes' mean annual growth rate over the last three years. Similar to the previous category, this section is purely descriptive and does not award any points.

#### 5. RIDE-HAILING AVAILABILITY

If apps like Uber, Bolt, Lyft, and others can be used to pick you up from the airport, then the venue receives an extra 15 points. We have discounted this in cases where ride-sharing services are more expensive than licensed taxis (Mallorca), major apps are unavailable, and where we know de-facto carpooling is controlled by taxi companies (Istanbul).

#### 6. DIRECT ACCESS TO METRO/LIGHT RAIL

Nets an airport 15 points if present.

#### 7. DIRECT ACCESS TO NATIONAL RAIL SERVICES

Awards an airport 15 points. Edge cases received more marks depending on how comprehensive the connections were. If they were present but modest (Helsinki, Munich, Antalya), the hub only received 5 points. If ties had improved, though they still needed to 10 catch up regarding access (like at Gatwick), the airport received 10 points.

#### 8. PASSENGERS BY TOTAL LOUNGES

Can get an airport a maximum of 15 points. More lounges mean less time going to departure gates and more space for lounge visitors. Figures from the previous year's index were included in a separate column for comparison (they do not count towards the points for this category).

≤ 2.5mn = 15 points

≤ 5.0mn = 10 points

≤ 7.5mn = 5 points

> 7.5mn = 0 points

#### 9. PASSENGERS PER JET BRIDGE

Gets an airport a maximum of 40 points. Aircraft Bridges allow passengers to board a plane directly from the terminal, sparing them a walk over the tarmac or a longer shuttle ride to an off-gate parking position. Figures from the previous year's index were included in a separate column for comparison (they do not count towards the points for this category).

≤ 500k = 40 points

≤ 750k = 20 points



≤ 1.000k = 10 points

> 1.000k = 0 points

## 10. CHOICE OF AIRLINES/MARKET SHARE – COMPETITION SCORE

This category can get up to 15 points. The larger the market share of the leading airline (group) measured in the percentage of seats offered by the most prominent airline compared to total capacity (a proxy for competition density), the more they can dictate ticket fares. Airports with healthy competition among airlines allow consumers more choices and tend to offer lower fares. Figures from the previous year's index were included in a separate column for comparison (they do not count towards the points for this category).

<25% = 15 points

<40% = 10 points

<55% = 5 points

>55% = 0 points

## 11. PASSENGERS BY TOTAL SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS

Can get an airport a maximum of 20 points. More shops and restaurants mean more choices for consumers.

Figures from the previous year's index were included in a separate column for comparison. Furthermore, we added the percentage change of passengers between 2022 and 2023 to give readers a sense of the yearly increase in airport traffic, even when looking at just shopping and dining venues. The older numbers and the percentage change do not count toward the points awarded to each airport.

≤ 200k = 20 points

≤ 250k = 15 points

≤ 300k = 10 points

≤ 400k = 4 points

≤ 500k = 2 points

> 500k = 0 points

## 12. ON-SITE AIRPORT HOTEL

An airport can earn up to 10 points in this section. Scoring depends on the degree of accessibility. The hub receives total points if the hotel is directly at the airport. If it requires a long walk, it only receives 5 points. If the inconvenience is minor (like a very short shuttle ride), it receives 7.5 points.

### 13. THE NUMBER OF AIRLINES

Can get an airport up to 20 points. More airlines catering to the same airport leave passengers with more choices, better departure times, and more destinations.

≥ 30 = 20 points

≥ 25 = 15 points

≥ 20 = 10 points

≥ 15 = 5 points

### 14. THE NUMBER OF DESTINATIONS

Nets an airport up to 20 points. More destinations usually mean more direct flights and thus fewer needed connections at another airport.

≥ 90 = 20 points

≥ 75 = 15 points

≥ 55 = 10 points

≥ 25 = 5 points

< 25 = 0 points

### 15. EASY CONNECTION BETWEEN GATES AND TERMINALS

Can get an airport up to 15 points. Connecting between terminals or just gates within one terminal can be very stressful. This indicator scores convenience during layovers and low barriers (e.g., not having to walk out of the terminal building, cross the street, and go through security again).

### 16. BONUS POINTS FOR AIRPORTS THAT:

- Have a CBP Preclearance Facility allowing passengers to clear US customs before even boarding their trans-Atlantic flight (Dublin) = 10 points.
- For security waiting times ≤ 3 minutes, the score was 2 points.
- For delays, we considered the proportion of flights that experienced postponements averaging more than 30 minutes. The points were distributed in the following manner:

≤ 25% = 5 points

≥ 40% = 2.5 points

> 40% = 0 points

- We strive to always listen to consumer feedback. As such, we deducted 15 points from Manchester Airport for its poor handling of consumer complaints and travelers' luggage following a power blackout in June 2024.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



## Emil Panzaru

Emil is Research Director at the Consumer Choice Center. He successfully defended his PhD in Political Economy (Research) at King's College London in 2022. Prior to working at the Center, Emil was a Teaching Assistant at King's College London, where he taught students on contemporary issues at the intersection of philosophy, politics and economics. He was also a Frederic Bastiat Fellow/Research Fellow at George Mason University's Mercatus Center. In the past, he has published and helped publish academic research on incentives, knowledge problems and public policy.



## Amjad Aun

Amjad is a Master's student in international business economics at Ilmenau university of technology. He has an interest in economic policy and innovation economics.



# ABOUT THE CONSUMER CHOICE CENTER



The Consumer Choice Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to defending the rights of consumers around the world. Our mission is to promote freedom of choice, healthy competition, and evidence-based policies that benefit consumers. We work to ensure that consumers have access to a variety of quality products and services and can make informed decisions about their lifestyle and consumption.

As an independent nonprofit organization, the Consumer Choice Center relies on support and funding from private donors. As described in our Code of Ethics, we strictly maintain editorial independence and do not give our funders any influence on editorial decisions. Our support comes from corporations, individuals, and foundations. We have a tiered membership model available to members who support us on a yearly basis, equalling silver, gold, and platinum status.

In the past and currently, we have received funding from multiple industries, such as energy, fast-moving consumer goods, nicotine, alcohol, airlines, agriculture, manufacturing, digital, healthcare, chemicals, banking, cryptocurrencies, and fin-tech.

Find out more at [www.consumerchoicecenter.org](http://www.consumerchoicecenter.org)





CONSUMER  
CHOICE  
CENTER

*info@consumerchoicecenter.org*  
*www.consumerchoicecenter.org*

---

712 H St NE PMB 94982  
Washington, DC 20002