JULY| 2026

Consumer Choice Center's

WORLD CONSUMER AIRPORT INDEX 2026

DÜSSELDORF AND BARCELONA TOP THE CHARTS

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Introduction

The 2025-2026 interval is another time of high highs and low lows for airports. The challenging environment makes the resilience of many entries in the list all the more remarkable. The standout case is Dubai International Airport, which reported an average of 0% delays on the 30th of May 2026 (the day the index measures delays) after once again becoming operational. That it managed to rank 22nd in the overall rankings and be the 10th best among larger airports attests to the quality of the hub despite being the direct target of drone attacks during the Iran War. Düsseldorf returns as the number one option among smaller hubs and is the best airport in the general rankings, boasting the highest I-distance value of 26,861. It is followed closely by Zurich (25.511) in second place, and Copenhagen (24.509) in third. Barcelona El Prat ranked fourth in the general list, and first among the largest entries at 23.835. Rome-Fiumicino (22.948) and Los Angeles International (22.204) rounded the podium among larger venues.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are entries that have not navigated this changing environment well. The lowest three in the overall rankings and among smaller airports are Seoul Gimpo (6.859), Punta Cana (12.496), and London Stansted (12.838). Their equivalents for larger venues are Antalya (14.345), Guangzhou Baiyun (15.113), and Frankfurt (15.754). Expectedly and similar to previous years, low scores are due to extreme distances from city centers, no ride-hailing options separate from taxi companies, poor access to other options like national rail or light rail, poor competition across airlines (with one company regularly dominating activity), overcrowded shops and restaurants, long security wait times, and a high percentage of average delays.

Falling in between are well-known entries like Charles de Gaulle Airport (12th overall at 21.814), London Heathrow (14th in the general ranking at 21.447), Tokyo Haneda (21st at 20.49), Amsterdam Schiphol (24th at 20.146), Singapore Changi (28th at 19.155), Melbourne (38th at 18.191), and Ezeiza (43rd at 16.996).

Some hubs broke last year's passenger volume records. Such was the case for Heathrow (84.46 million), Mumbai (55 million), Vienna International (36.4 million), and Copenhagen (32.4 million). Other trailblazers include Dublin (36.43 million), Barcelona-El Prat (57.48 million), Humberto Delgado (36.1 million), and Stansted (30 million). At the same time, other airports have not seen significant increases in travelers; such is the case for Frankfurt Airport, whose 2025-2026 levels are still 10% below pandemic levels.

Despite increases in passenger numbers in some cases, global passenger traffic declined 3.4% year on year in early and mid-2026. The decline in passengers

is complicated by an already aging fleet that has yet to be renewed; the estimated backlog in 2026 will be 17,000 aircraft, equivalent to 14 years of current production capacity, and equal to 60% of the active fleet (far above the historical ratio of 30 to 40%). For airports, this raises the maintenance costs of keeping old planes running and coordinated, with the average age of an airplane rising to 15 years. Maintenance queues turn into multi-year affairs, straining airport ground operations and parking slots. In turn, general revenues from services such as dining, car parking, and retail decline as fewer passengers flow through the hub, leaving airports struggling to make ends meet. Conversely, for airports that experience record increases in traffic, longer maintenance queues result in crowded spaces full of passengers waiting for delayed flights.

A decline in global passenger demand is particularly challenging when combined with the energy supply shock resulting from current geopolitical tensions. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz on the 28th of February 2026 cut oil supply by around 10 million barrels per day, or 10% of global consumption, leading to jet fuel prices almost doubling in May 2026 compared to previous years. That means fewer planes can fly as airlines begin rationing supplies by eliminating underperforming routes and reducing flight frequencies. It also means higher ticket prices for a single journey, further depressing passenger demand, and longer redirected flights, which increase operating costs.
The geopolitical situation leaves airports in some world regions more affected than others: major hubs in the Middle East face major obstacles due to war-related closures and airspace restrictions. By contrast, Asian airports benefit from the redirected flow of traffic, yet simultaneously struggle to secure enough planes to operate due to energy constraints.

Given these circumstances, the Consumer Choice Center examined 60 airports worldwide to help passengers pick the easiest route to navigate this summer's holiday or business trip, based on 16 criteria, ranging from car distance to the city center to security wait times.

Our second edition of the World Consumer Airport Index introduces advanced statistical methods, including the Ivanovic distance metrics, inspired by the same technique in our Sharing Economy Index and by co-authored academic analyses on how to improve indices. The ranking has been updated to include 10 additional airports representing major venues outside Europe and North America. The threshold for what is considered a large hub has been updated to reflect the increase in entries. The cutoff point is now at 47.2 million passengers. The two resulting lists are the 25 biggest venues and the 35 smaller alternatives. Finally, the index refines and updates our analysis using airport data, annual reports, online statistics, and our own research.

Results in 2026

Top 35 small airports (<47.2 million pax)	Airport	I-distance (adj.)	Change vs. 2025
1	Düsseldorf	26.861	—
2	Zurich	25.511	↑ 1
3	Copenhagen	24.509	↓ 1
4	Helsinki	23.19	↑ 3
5	Malpensa	23.135	↑ 11
6	Oslo Gardermoen Airport	22.083	↑ 6
7	Munich	21.841	Changed rankings
8	Vancouver International Airport	21.402	New
9	Brussels	21.173	↓ 5
10	Berlin Brandenburg Airport	21.132	↓ 1
11	Malaga Airport	20.858	↓ 6
12	Stockholm (Arlanda)	20.767	—
13	Vienna International Airport	19.681	↓ 3
14	Manchester	18.931	↑ 3
15	Humberto Delgado Airport Lisbon	18.808	↓ 7
16	Athens International	18.786	↓ 2
17	Almaty International Airport	18.645	New
18	London (Gatwick)	18.573	Changed rankings
19	Melbourne Airport	18.191	New
20	Warsaw Chopin Airport	17.359	↓ 15
21	Mallorca (Palma de Mallorca)	17.028	↓ 2
22	Ezeiza International Airport (Buenos Aires)	16.996	↓ 4
23	Kansai International Airport	16.811	New
24	Aeropuerto Internacional Benito Juárez (Mexico City)	16.779	Changed rankings
25	São Paulo-Guarulhos International Airport	16.495	Changed rankings
26	Dublin	16.334	↓ 12
27	Baku - Heydar Aliyev International Airport	16.095	New
28	Cairo International Airport	15.914	New

29	Quito - Mariscal Sucre International Airport	15.08	New
30	Cape Town International Airport	14.703	New
31	Antalya Airport	14.345	Changed rankings
32	Paris (Orly Airport)	14.033	↓ 21
33	London (Stansted)	12.838	↓ 13
34	Punta Cana International Airport	12.496	New
35	Seoul Gimpo International Airport	6.859	New

Top 25 largest airports (>47.2 million pax)	Airport	I-distance (adj.)	Change vs. 2025
1	Barcelona (Barcelona–El Prat Josep Tarradellas Airport)	23.835	↑ 3
2	Rome (Leonardo da Vinci–Fiumicino Airport)	22.948	↑ 11
3	Los Angeles International Airport	22.204	↑ 3
4	Bangkok Suvarnabhumi IntL. Airport	22.06	↓ 2
5	Charles de Gaulle Airport	21.814	↑ 3
6	King Abdulaziz International Airport (Jeddah)	21.549	↑ 6
7	London Heathrow	21.447	↑ 1
8	Madrid (Adolfo Suárez Madrid–Barajas)	21.13	↑ 6
9	Tokyo Intl. Airport (Haneda)	20.49	↓ 8
10	Dubai International Airport	20.458	—
11	Denver Intl. Airport	20.366	↑ 11
12	Amsterdam (Schiphol)	20.146	↑ 5
13	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport Mumbai IntL. Airport	19.856	↓ 6
14	Seoul Incheon International Airport	19.418	↑ 3
15	Singapore Changi Airport	19.155	↓ 12
16	Toronto Pearson International Airport	19.002	↑ 4
17	Istanbul	18.786	↑ 11

18	Shanghai Pudong International Airport	18.697	↓ 2
19	Dallas/Fort Worth Intl. Airport	18.232	↑ 7
20	Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Intl. Airport	17.578	↓ 3
21	Chicago O'Hare International Airport	17.242	↑ 6
22	Soekarno-Hatta International Airport (Jakarta)	16.909	↑ 3
23	Frankfurt	15.754	↓ 13
24	Guangzhou Baiyun Internation-al Airport	15.113	↑ 5
25	Seattle–Tacoma Airport	14.488	↓ 1

It is important to remember that the methodology behind the rankings has changed, so any comparisons with the previous year should be taken with a grain of salt, as the results are based on different standards. That said, Tokyo Haneda, last year's number one on the list of largest airports, is now in ninth place. By contrast, Düsseldorf has maintained its top position among smaller airports, as have Zurich (second) and Copenhagen (third). Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi suffers a slight decline, from 2nd to 4th place, while Singapore Changi sees a more significant downgrade, from 3rd to 15th. Barcelona El Prat was fourth on the large list before, and now it is number one. Joint fourth in 2025, Benito Juarez is now twenty-fourth (and has been moved to the smaller-airport category due to the change in the threshold).

One can confirm the general downward trend in passenger traffic just by looking at the raw descriptive numbers of the index. The average compound annual growth rate is 88.6%, considerably lower than the previous year's 128.23%. Expectedly, there is variation across the database, ranging from 134.48% for Seoul Incheon to -15.41% for Seoul Gimpo. Larger hubs continue to drive growth: Charles de Gaulle experienced a 114.90% growth from 26.19 million in 2021 to 72.02 million in 2025. Dubai International saw an even more impressive jump of 131.23%, from 29.1 million in 2021 to 95.2 million in 2025. By contrast, smaller venues are seeing slower progress or downright reversals. Mexico's Benito Juárez Airport increased 53.56% (from 36.06 million to 44.6 million) over the last five years. Seoul Gimpo saw a decline, falling from a peak of 24.52 million in 2022 to 22.96 million in 2025. The decline is due to a shift from regional to international travel following the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to reduced traffic on the Gimpo-Jeju corridor (previously the world's busiest domestic route).

Looking beyond mere description, one can identify which variables correlate with airport scores and determine what airports can do to improve their service.

It is telling that the first- and third-most important variables are the number of airlines available at each venue and the number of destinations, respectively. These two factors are what consumers naturally prioritize in their airport experience: choice through a generous number of options, and convenience through better departure times and fewer connections.

An immediate objection to using either measurement is that it biases the study toward larger venues, which, by default, offer more options. However, actual results show that hub size is irrelevant to the metric itself. Top contender Düsseldorf offers 67 airlines and 171 destinations; by contrast, Antalya, the bottom entry in the larger airport tally, has 53 airlines and 157 destinations.

Besides the number of airlines and destinations, individual circumstances are what set airports apart for consumers. That is obvious from the fact that the second variable to be correlated with the I-distance results is the broad category of "extra points", which encompasses average security wait times and nighttime restrictions. Low index performers saw high average wait times across the board. Passengers at Seoul Gimpo wait an average of 6 minutes at security checkpoints before boarding the plane; at Kansai International, the queue can stretch for 16 minutes; at Almaty, it can last 21 minutes; and the longest duration is at Heydar Aliyev, at 24 minutes. Conversely, Düsseldorf experienced almost instantaneous processing (0 minutes average waits), while Barcelona El Prat passengers waited just 3 minutes for security checks.

When it comes to nighttime restrictions, London Heathrow adheres to a strict government cap of 5,800 nighttime take-offs and landings a year. In practice, it means that, on average, merely 16 flights per day take place at night at Heathrow between 04:30 and 06:00 (with a strict prohibition on any flights before 04:30). That leaves Britain's main aviation hub at a large disadvantage, with fewer overnight and early morning connections relative to its European counterparts. Madrid-Barajas, which has no nighttime restrictions, has 10 times as many flights during the same time period each week as Heathrow. Moreover, it is no exaggeration to say that nighttime restrictions are a drag on overall economic activity. The arrangement makes early business connections across different UK regions impossible, leaving more opportunities for economic prosperity and social discovery unfulfilled.

Other troubles matter. Frankfurt's new Skyline train was designed to carry up to 4,000 Schengen and non-Schengen passengers per hour and was supposed to provide an easy connection between Terminals 1 and 3 in eight minutes. However, just one month into its inauguration, airport authorities have declared that the Skyline train is no longer operational due to "necessary technical inspections and adjustments to the overall system". Consumers

must endure longer shuttle bus routes across terminals instead. Infrastructure failures are compounded by poor signposting at the airport and the delayed launch of Terminal 3. Frankfurt's low ranking is therefore part of a systematic organizational issue. Melbourne Airport's rail is still under development, and it lacks access to the metro and light rail. Vancouver Airport prepared for the surge in World Cup supporters by modifying its layout to accommodate an estimated 5 to 10% increase in traffic, though by the 15th of July 2026, as many as a third of scheduled flights had been delayed due to the heatwave.

IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS FOR CONSUMERS

There are several benefits to choosing one of the top five arrival or departure points in both rankings, 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 selections in each list offer the best experience all around.
- Though we have generally seen improvements in scores, no single hub achieved the maximum I-distance value, meaning there is always room for improvement
- Bigger is not necessarily better, especially when it results in less competition, relatively fewer airlines and destinations, worse infrastructure, fewer flight connections, crowded airports, and long security lines. The highest I-distance score for the largest airports is 23.835, while the equivalent figure for smaller venues is 26.861.
- Even with more entries, European airports continue to dominate the ranking of smaller airports, while the picture of larger airports is far more diverse.

RESEARCH NOTE

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

complications.

Furthermore, what makes an airport "good" for each individual can have a distinct qualitative element. 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.

Methodology

Older editions used an equal-weighting method, though they allowed for hierarchical results across dimensions. For instance, the distance to the city center by car always yields a maximum of 30 points, and every 5 km beyond the 10km limit will cost 5 points. At the same time, other categories, such as ride-hailing, could award fewer points (15). The final score used a simple sum aggregation scheme; therefore, the total score was calculated by adding all 14 categories (excluding descriptive elements such as passenger volumes) to a maximum of 235 points. This resulted in an informative report that was simultaneously easy for consumers and policymakers to understand.

However, adding new entries and extra dimensions made the older model untenable. Editions before 2025 limited themselves to examining airports in Europe, predominantly Western Europe, providing a natural control for other exogenous variables that might have influenced services. Once the index was extended globally, it became more likely that consumers valued services differently, and that particular factors might influence airport performance in one geographical area but not in others. An equal-weighting scheme will not capture these concerns.

Once we add vastly different regulatory frameworks to the mix, it becomes harder to grasp just how much more damaging one disadvantage can be than another. How much more damaging is a small selection of airlines compared to a small number of shops and restaurants per passenger volume? If it is worse, then by how much? Any index aims to address these questions in more detail than merely presenting the authors' judgment of the scenarios.
For these reasons, this index employs an additional layer of statistics via data envelopment analysis using Ivanovic distance metrics. Put simply, the method treats each variable as a separate category but standardizes the results by using the lowest possible value for each variable as a common yardstick. This technique means there is less influence from a single high category on the overall results of an airport (which respects consumers' diverse preferences). It enables us to

directly measure the negative impact of additional rules and restrictions on airports, providing policymakers and consumers with a clearer picture on which to act.

The number that determines the rankings, though, is the Ivanovic distance value. The maximum raw number it can theoretically achieve (assuming a perfect, fictitious airport with no harmful regulations and all sharing-economy services allowed) is 30. The higher an airport's ranking, the better its performance. Adjusted values weight the results by multiplying the raw number by the coefficient of determination (the squared version of the Pearson correlation, denoted r2), which represents the proportion of shared variance between variables, or how much a change in one variable is explained by its linear relationship with another.

The formula for the result is: $\mathrm{I_i} = \frac{|\mathrm{x_i} - \mathrm{min_i}|}{\sigma_i} \prod \left(1 - \mathrm{r_{ij}^2}\right)$

Put simply, to determine the distance I of each variable i, we calculated the standardized gap represented as $|x_i - \min_i|$ / standard deviation σ_i, multiplied by the running discount product of $(1 - r^2)$ against all PRECEDING variables ij.
To ease readers into the findings, we have kept the maximum total base points an entry can receive at 235 points.

A consequence of the method is that airports with lower total scores but more balanced profiles may rank higher, while airports with high total base scores can still rank lower. This change is due to the nature of the I-distance ranking, which emphasizes not only the absolute score but also the balance and coverage across different dimensions of the sharing economy. For example, Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport earned 156 points overall yet ranks tenth in the overall rankings and fourth among the largest hubs. Nevertheless, it features a generally even range of good scores across the board. The only exception is the category of "distance from the city center", where it achieves two points, which is one of the least correlated indicators in the database. Missing or weak performance in more correlated indicators increases the I-distance more than gaps in redundant dimensions (such as distance from the city center).

1. Distance to the city center (by car)
This category gives an airport a maximum of 30 points. A shorter car ride to or from the airport saves substantial time, allowing you to make the most of your arrival and departure days. 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 Düsseldorf 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)
This variable measures the straight-line distance from the airport to the city center. Distance affects more than just commute time, it also influences the types and number of services, on-site infrastructure, and available attractions. An airport earns a maximum of 30 points for this category.
≤ 10km = 30 points
≤ 15km = 22,5 points
≤ 20km = 15 points
≤ 25km = 10 points
≤ 30km = 4 points
≤ 35km = 2 points
> 35km = 0 points

3. Passenger volumes (millions)
In this category, we use available passenger volume data from the past four years (2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024) to identify the largest and smallest airports worldwide. 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 the mean annual growth rate of passenger volumes over the last four 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, or Lyft can pick passengers up from the airport, the venue receives an extra 15 points. We have discounted this in cases where ridesharing services are more expensive than licensed taxis, major apps are unavailable, and where we know de facto carpooling is controlled by taxi companies (Istanbul, Athens, Copenhagen, Seoul Incheon, Kansai, and Seoul Gimpo).

6. Direct access to metro/light rail
This category nets an airport 15 points if present, zero points if not. More complicated cases include those where signage may be confusing (Frankfurt),

the venue may be restricted to a particular terminal (Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson), or the venue is generally harder to access due to distance (Dubai International, Soekkarno-Hatta, King Abdulaziz-Jeddah). These cases receive 10 points.

7. Direct access to national rail services
This category awards an airport 15 points. Edge cases received more marks depending on how comprehensive the connections are. If they are present but modest (such as Helsinki, Munich, Antalya, Toronto Pearson, or Vancouver International), the hub receives only 5 points. If ties had improved, though they still needed to catch up regarding access (like at Gatwick), or signage remained confusing (Frankfurt), the airport receives 10 points.

8. On-site airport hotel
In this category, an airport can earn up to 10 points. 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.

9. Easy connection between gates and terminals
This category 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).

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 airline competition offer 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. Number of airlines
This category can get an airport up to 20 points. More airlines serving the same airport give passengers more choices, better departure times, and more destinations.
≥85 = 20 points
<85 and ≥ 60 = 15 points

<60 and ≥ 40 = 10 points
<40 but ≥20 = 5 points
<20 = 0 points

12. Number of destinations
This category nets an airport up to 20 points. More destinations usually mean more direct flights; thus, fewer connections are needed at other airports.
≥ 90 = 20 points
≥ 75 = 15 points
≥ 55 = 10 points
≥ 25 = 5 points
< 25 = 0 points

13. Passengers per total shops and restaurants
This category can get an airport a maximum of 30 points. More shops and restaurants mean more choices for consumers.
≤250 000 = 30 points
>250 000 and ≤350 000 = 25 points
>350 000 and ≤450 000 = 20 points
>450 000 and ≤500 000 = 10 points
>500 000 and 750 000 = 0 points

14. Average delays
This category can earn an airport up to 10 points. A high percentage of late flights leads to overcrowding, which, in turn, affects airport services. Shops and restaurants can struggle to accommodate the sudden influx of passengers, security wait times may swell, and access to other modes of transportation becomes more difficult. Numbers represent averages derived from websites like Flightera on the same day (01 June 2026). For delays, we considered the proportion of flights that experienced postponements averaging more than 29 minutes.
≤ 15% = 10 points
>15% and ≤ 20% = 5 points
> 20% and ≤ 25% = 2.5 points
> 25% = 0 points

15. Bonus points were awarded for the following:
• For security waiting times ≤ 3 minutes, the score was 5 points.
• Airports that do not feature night-time restrictions in the form of strict night-time curfews or a quota of flights for specific hourly intervals received 5 extra points. Consumer curfews and general noise abatement measures did not count against the venue.

16. Other considerations

This category refers to general conditions that can impact consumers' experience at the airport and that other measures have not captured, such as severe backlogs, unaddressed consumer complaints, infrastructure issues, and other factors that can affect airport performance and are highly prominent in consumer testimonials. Each incident of this nature costs an airport 5 points; hence, two issues cost 10 points, three cost 15 points, and so on.

Citation:

Panzaru, E. & Aun, A. (2026). *World Consumer Airport Index 2026*. Consumer Choice Center, 2026

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