

Small and Pleasant: Southend Airport on the Way to Glory

Located in the district of Rochford, Essex, Southend Airport is one of the six major airports that serve London. During the 60's, the airport ranked as the third busiest airport in the UK in terms of the volume of passengers it handled. Unfortunately it came to lose that position in the late 70's, with the position being taken by Stansted Airport.



However, there has been a consistent development program at Southend Airport since 2008 after being acquired by Stobart Group. The recent infrastructure upgrades at the airport include a new larger passenger terminal, a new control tower, a distinctive railway station and a longer runway. Other ongoing developments include the construction of a four star Holiday Inn adjacent to the airport's entrance.

The developments at Southend Airport are quite amazing, and the airport has become strategically positioned to handle air traffic in and out of the UK. The move has also created frenzy in the air transport sector in London. Before the introduction of frequent flights by easyJet in April last year, Southend Airport's potential was not tapped, but with the new developments there is renewed interest in Southend by several airlines including TUI Travel and OLT Express Germany.



On the Upside

On the upside, Southend Airport has already demonstrated its usefulness in the air transport arena in the UK as observed in the recently concluded Olympics. For instance during the Olympic Games, an American private jet firm, Landmark Aviation, directed their entire operations for the Games to Southend so as to avoid the crowded major airports.

The old terminal was transformed into an executive business lounge to cater for Landmark's passengers. In addition, the longer runway at the airport means that bigger and more modern aircraft can land at the airport.

Secondly, the construction of a new railway station just outside Southend Airport in July last year is a big plus for the airport. The new train station has made it easier for London's travelers to quickly access the airport. The jewel on the crown was the inauguration of the new terminal this April. The new Southend terminal is very attractive, and the shiny glassy structure actually still has that new smell. It is also equipped with cafes on either sides of the security machines, a stunning business lounge that includes a variety of interactive children's games, and even free Wi-Fi access.

The fact that Southend Airport does not currently handle large volumes of passengers as compared to Heathrow and Gatwick makes it pleasant and comfortable to travel through. There are fewer delays due to shorter queues, and the service is also faster because of the fewer number of people being cleared for travel.



And Some Challenges

However, Southend Airport is not without its challenges. One major concern is the volume of passengers. As Southend seeks to reclaim its lost glory, it will seek to increase passenger numbers. This means more flights landing and taking off at the facility. The targeted 2 million passengers the facility expects to handle in a year will lead to a lot of noise pollution in areas or neighborhoods that lie directly below the flight path. Secondly, most high-traffic airports are often unpleasant places for most travelers, and this small, clean, and pleasant airport is bound to run the risk of foregoing its pleasant and tidy nature.

Another challenge for Southend Airport is that it is not adequately served by London's public transport system. The earliest train from London arrives at Southend at 6:30 am, which is very late for someone travelling from London to catch a flight before half past eight. Considering that there may be further delays due to heavy passenger traffic and security checks, most people may prefer not to travel from London to Southend to catch a flight for elsewhere. Additionally, the railway station at Southend Airport is literally outside the terminal thus making it somewhat inconvenient for passengers as they still have to walk.

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