

Japan: Airport on a Sinking Island

Designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, the Kansai International Airport lies on a man-made island in the middle of Osaka Bay in Japan. It opened in September 1994 to relieve overcrowding at Osaka International Airport, and is a perfect early example of what has now happened in East Asia regarding the fact that there is now quite a few airports built on artificial islands. The island has been proven to resist both typhoons and earthquakes which is a huge advantage to the airport.

However the airport was not cheap in the slightest way. After construction began on the island the project shot well over the set budget. In the year of 1987 the builders managed to erect Kansai's seawall. Then they moved on to excavate three mountains located on the mainland in order to fill in the land.



The project became the most expensive civil works project in modern history after twenty years of planning, three years of construction and fifteen billion dollars of investment. The engineers were aware that the land would slowly compress downwards quickly after it had been poured. However the island actually dropped much further and faster than anticipated. Due to this the terminal was fitted with adjustable, modular columns which are extended with some steel plates at their bases in order to keep all the travelers dry while the land continues to sink.



A great advantage to the Kansai International Airport is the fact that there are great expansion possibilities. Like all man-made islands it can be expanded in the long run, however it would be quite costly. This is a huge plus as ordinary airports are usually surrounded by the city and there is no room available to develop the airport. As the island is manufactured it can be expanded over the water if needed.

Along with this there is also a reduced volume of noise pollution. Flight paths over water can greatly reduce the noise disturbance caused by aircraft.



Nevertheless, since the airport is sinking its future is doubtful. Besides the possibility of harmful impact of the artificial island on the environment another crucial drawback of the airport is the cost of the construction. The price paid makes it very difficult for the airport to generate any income whatsoever. More than 60% of the project is financed with debt which is a major drawback of the island.

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