

SPANISH AIRPORTS EXPECT DECREASE IN TRAFFIC



Spanish airports will record 8.4 percent fewer operations and 7 percent fewer offers of seats during the summer season from April to October, as per the number of 'slots' (takeoff and landing permits) requested by airlines operating in Spain.

Although demand data on flight rights is provisional and subject to change throughout the season depending on the decisions taken by the airlines, it is certainly relevant in a country like Spain where air traffic is critical for tourism.

At the start of the year, **the tourism sector lost 1,800 million euros to the 9.7 percent drop recorded by air traffic until February**, according to estimates by EXCELTUR, which resulted in the entry of two million fewer tourists.

According to Turespaña data, this summer the number of available seats will increase by 0.8 percent and aircraft movements will increase by 0.6 percent with an increase of 7.8 percent of bookings through GDS between June and October.

By April, a total of 49.41 million passengers passed through the network, which is down 8 percent with 12.8 percent fewer operations. In April, there were 7.7 percent fewer passengers and a fall of 4.2 percent in the number of flights.

According to the experts the crisis is impacting particularly domestic traffic. The airlines tend to operate larger aircraft, thus fewer operations are accounted for, although the aircrafts "go full and more seats are offered." The supply of airline seats on international routes, Corridor Mediterranean, and Balearic Islands has increased by 10 percent in the summer season compared to the same period of 2012.

The industry blames the decrease of air traffic to the rising airport charges in the past three years that reached 68.16 percent in the entire network and over 100 percent in the two major airports, Barajas and El Prat, which meant companies like easyJet had to close its base in Madrid.

For EasyJet, which operates 'point to point', the rates represent about 30 percent of total operating costs, so any significant increase of these have "an immediate impact on air traffic demand," explained the CEO of the airline to Spain and Portugal, Javier Gandara.

The increased costs for operators and lower demand have led airlines to reduce capacity, especially in the domestic market. For the summer, for example, Vueling bid to increase only one percent capacity in the domestic market compared with 14 percent more capacity in international markets.

Iberia is reducing its overall offer as part of the restructuring plan but will resume the Dubrovnic and Zagreb routes on Croatia and Athens between June and September, taking advantage of the increased traffic to these destinations during the summer. Iberia Express, its subsidiary for short and medium haul, will launch new routes and times to increase their connections between La Palma

and the peninsula, Europe, and the long-haul network.

Air Europa will increase by 19 percent its flights throughout the summer season, especially on routes to the Caribbean.

Ryanair has warned that it will reduce its 5.4 million passengers this year in Spain, mainly in Barajas and El Prat, but has not reported on how much it will reduce its offer in the summer season.

Since May, Air Berlin rose 12 percent the frequency of its flights from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland to Mallorca, but from summer, it will not fly from the island to Barcelona, Madrid, and Santiago de Compostela, which will reduce their destinations to the Peninsula from Palma from 16 to 13.

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