

HAVANA AIRPORT TO BE UPGRADED FOR \$10.2 MILLION



The major international terminal in Cuban Havana Airport, is set for a big boost following a \$10.2 million project aimed at renovating the facility. This development has been confirmed by state-run media. The facility has had to deal with increased traffic over the years and is largely congested.

An overview of the renovation process was carried in the Havana Reporter, an English-language newspaper. The overhaul on Terminal 3 will include among others the extension of a parking zone outside the terminal and the construction of 8 footbridges for boarding purposes.

According to Cubadebate, the government website, the venture also requires a number of additions. Essential are **new walkways, an improvement of lighting and air conditioning systems, more check-in counters and systems to preserve electricity and water.**

The Cubadebate informed that the eastern side of the terminal will be advanced to enable it handle larger aircrafts. Juan Carlos Quintana, the airport director, further added that nearly 17,500 square meters (190,000 square feet) of brand new roofing had already been fixed.

Terminal 3 contains the most recent designs in comparison to all the other terminals in Jose Marti International Airport. It was constructed at a cost of about \$93 million with Canadian aid. After its completion, it was formally commissioned in 1998 in an elaborate ceremony attended by Fidel Castro and Jean Chretien who was then the premier in Canada.

Even with its enhancement, however, it is still straining under the weight of heavy traffic. It is not uncommon to see long queues at the check-in, security, baggage collection and immigration sections. It is evident that further expansions are necessary to deal with this high number of passengers and enhance service provision.

The terminal at times handles between 1,800-2,000 passengers. If you include the people escorting these passengers to the airport, the number can go up to 2,500. According to the website, the terminal is designed to ideally handle 1,400 passengers. Due to the high demand, this number is often exceeded leading to poor service delivery. Long queues and customer delays are common.

Going by the figures provided by Cubadebate, **Terminal 3 handles 2.5 million travelers annually, mainly international passengers.** This number excludes chartered flights going or coming from the USA which are handled by terminal 2.

The number of people visiting the island has been on an upward trend from the 1990s. The negative economic impact of the disintegration of the Soviet Union led the Communist-run government led by Castro to turn to tourism for the desperately needed revenue.

In 2011 alone, the island received 2.7 million tourists. This was a significant increase from the 2.1 million tourists in 2007 as per government statistics. According to stakeholder predictions, the number could reach 3 million by the end of this year. Leading source countries for tourists are Canada, UK, Italy and Spain.

Renovations of the terminal commenced in July and will be going on for 6 months. Cubadebate indicates that during this period, only passengers will be allowed to the terminal to avoid interference with the construction activities.

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