

LISBON AIRPORT MAKES PORTUGAL LOSE ONE MILLION TOURISTS PER YEAR



Lisbon airport planning to open another runway in 4 years, has been overburdened for some time now. The experts warn that the country is losing tourists because of that.

If everything goes as planned, Montijo air base will begin to operate as a complementary runway to Lisbon airport, or Humberto Delgado Airport, in 2022. "That's still four years down the road", says the president of the Confederation of Turismo de Portugal (CTP), Francisco Calheiros, and, in the meantime, the country's top gateway for tourism (accountable for 90% of arrivals in the country) is already "clogged".

Francisco Calheiros estimates that **Portugal will lose around one million tourists per year due to Lisbon airport's lack of capacity**, as flights are seeing their landings denied on a daily basis due to a shortage of "slots" (open spots for plane taxiing). "Knowing what each tourist spends and tourism's intersectionality, you can imagine the impact of [this constraint]," he declares.

CTP's president says that the airport is "like having a thorn in the country's side" and Portugal cannot lose more time in this stalemate. Calheiros even reveals his restlessness when confronted with decisions that have yet to be made: "If tomorrow we find out that certain birds may be harmed by the noise of airplanes, we will conduct another research that will take about a year. That's unfathomable," he says.

The arguments of CTP's president to justify these urgent decisions are all based on the "unexpected" growth that tourism has shown in the past five, six years. "From 2002 to 2009 we had 34 to 36 million overnight stays. From 2009 to 2017 we registered an upsurge that hit 59 million. This is just unreasonable, there are 20 million people more here," he reckons.

Despite acknowledging that the country will not be able to maintain two-digit growth rates for a whole decade, while reminding that things are already dropping slightly, Calheiros still thinks that **Portugal will continue to grow in the upcoming years, as seasonality gets increasingly blurred**. Tourism in Portugal only has one issue - "the British and the Brexit" - but there are other markets compensating those losses.

Calheiros also has another warning: he will only believe that the construction works at the Lisbon airport are taking place when he sees bulldozers in Montijo, but that does not mean he will be happy right away. "The day we have Montijo under construction, you will hear CTP talking about a new airport immediately. Let's not forget: Montijo is not the new airport, but Lisbon airport's expansion".

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