

# AIR TRAVEL: FRENCH AIRPORTS REPORTED SLIGHT TRAFFIC GROWTH



France's air travel is slowly picking up steam again after the COVID slump—it still hasn't hit the 2019 level.

In 2024, French airports served 205.7 million passengers, roughly a 3.6% bump over 2023. Still, that's about 4% less than in 2019. On the commercial side, flights tallied up to 1,765,942, a 10% dip from the past, though there was a small 0.6% uptick from 2023.

Oddly enough, **while the number of passengers now seems to be mirroring those 2018 levels, overall flights dropped by 9%, a swing mainly because average aircraft capacity crept from 107 passengers in 2018 to 117 by 2024**, mainly driven by the boom in budget travel options.

There's more to the story: Domestic air travel fell by 5%, even as international journeys managed a 6.7% rise. Interestingly, low-cost travel now accounts for 44.1% of all traffic in France (up 1% from last year and a solid 9% from 2019), a key fact that keeps cropping up in these discussions.

## Sluggish Comeback in Europe

While many European neighbors are enjoying a robust uptick in air travel—overall EU traffic up about 1.8% compared to 2019—France is still lagging behind. Some places, like Turkey at +23.1% and Greece at +22.1%, are soaring, whereas France, along with Germany (down 16.1%) and Belgium (down 2%), seems to be stuck in a rut. In contrast, Italy (+17%), Spain (+13%), and Portugal (+17%) are showing much healthier recoveries.

Overall, 2024 doesn't exactly paint a rosy picture. It's a unique challenge for the country. Some airports, say Marseille and Beauvais, are clearly on an upswing, but many others haven't yet shaken the long shadow of COVID. The recovery pace in France is noticeably different from that in southern Europe, where things are looking a bit brighter.

## UAF's Outrage Over Rising Taxes

The French Airports Union isn't holding back its frustration, blaming steep air transport taxes as the main culprit behind the slow recovery. Officials from various French airports warn that recent hikes in taxes—like the solidarity ticket tax (TSBA) and the safety and security fee (T2S)—are set to worsen the scene, possibly pushing low-cost operators to cut back their French routes.

Budget airlines play a massive role here, handling 44.1% of French traffic in 2024—a neat 9-point leap from 2019. At regional hubs like Paris-Beauvais, Carcassonne, Béziers, and Nîmes, these carriers account for over 99% of all traffic. With the tax burden climbing, companies such as Ryanair have even hinted they might slash flights if things keep trending this way.

Thomas Juin, the UAF president, didn't mince his words about the issue. **"If we were trying to put air transport in France in jeopardy, we couldn't do it any other way,"** he remarked. He argued that these taxes merely help fill the state's deficit and stall efforts to green the skies, adding, "By

using air transport as a tool to balance budgets, France seems determined to shrink its aviation sector," a decision that could seriously hurt tourism and the overall economy.

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