

# Heathrow breaks passenger records in 2012

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- Press Association
  - [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Monday 14 January 2013 08.29 GMT
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Travellers buy tickets for the Heathrow Airport Express train at Paddington station. The airport saw record traffic in 2012. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

Britain's biggest airport had a record-breaking year in 2012.

Heathrow handled almost 70 million passengers last year – a calendar-year high and 0.9% more than in 2011.

The growth at the west London airport was driven by a 3.2% increase in north Atlantic traffic.

There were also many more flights to Brazil as well as growth on Middle East, central Asian and East Asian routes.

African traffic dipped 5.7% while Indian traffic was down 3.4% last year due to airlines either reducing or ceasing services.

European traffic rose just 0.5%. There were significant variances, reflecting economic conditions, with passenger numbers to Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain collectively falling 4.5% over the course of 2012.

Greece experienced the largest reduction (down 7.3%) followed by Italy (down 6.8%). Offsetting this, Germany's traffic increased by 2.3% and France's traffic rose by 0.6%. Domestic traffic was up slightly, by 0.5%.

Brazil experienced the biggest increase (up 21%), followed by China, which saw passenger numbers rise 5.9%, while Russia had a 4.5% increase in passengers.

Planes in and out of Heathrow flew 75.6% full last year compared with 75.2% in 2011. The 2012 figure was another record.

Cargo traffic for 2012 was down 1.3%.

The 2012 statistics were boosted by record December figures, with 5.6 million passing through the airport – 2.0% up on December 2011.

Colin Matthews, the Heathrow chief executive, said: "The figures for 2012 show Heathrow is delivering higher passenger numbers despite a tough economic climate. At the same time passenger satisfaction reached record levels.

"Over the next 12 months we will continue to improve the passenger experience and focus on our investment programme, as we move towards completion of the new Terminal 2."