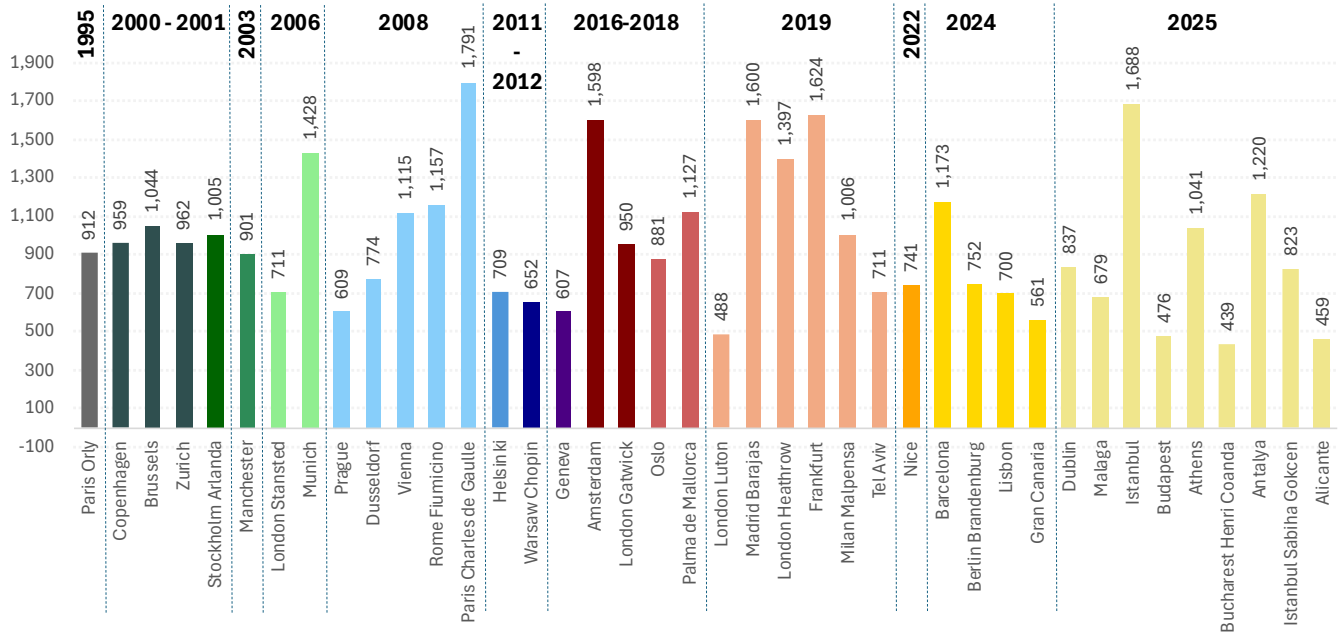


EUROCONTROL Data Snapshot

Top 40 European airports' historic peak days



3 March 2026



Complementing DS#55, which analysed the year of historic traffic peaks by State, this DS evaluates in which year the 40 busiest European airports in 2025 reached their historic peak day.

An airport's peak day is supply and demand driven. Supply depends on infrastructure – ATC, runways, terminals – as well as operational constraints like regulatory caps or night curfews; demand is influenced by a number of factors such as airline strategies, airport coordination, aircraft mix and exceptional events.

When demand is sufficient, an airport's peak traffic day is shaped by capacity and regulatory constraints. At Heathrow, which has operated near capacity for over 20 years, annual peak days are stable. At Paris Orly (1995) and Amsterdam (2017), historic peaks are largely determined by regulatory limits. Orly's yearly traffic is capped at 250K movements, while Amsterdam's is capped at 478K. By contrast, new runways have opened at Dublin (2022) and Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen (2025), enabling later peak traffic days in 2025.

Other airports with strong demand from holiday and leisure traffic – Alicante, Lisbon, Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen, Athens, Antalya and Malaga – all reached their peak in 2025, alongside Barcelona and Gran Canaria a year earlier in 2024. Istanbul's continued expansion since opening in 2019, becoming a major connecting hub between Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Russia, is also reflected in a 2025 peak.

Substantial changes in airline strategies explain the historic peak days at several airports. Some major hubs such as Frankfurt and Madrid, as well as regional hubs like Oslo and Stockholm, have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels. Airports dominated by a few airlines, particularly low-cost carriers, are highly sensitive to their strategic decisions: London Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and Prague all recorded historic peak days before the COVID pandemic. Airline failures can also fix a peak day, as illustrated by the collapses of Swissair and Sabena in 2001, which help explain the historic peaks at Zurich and Brussels in 2000. Conversely, low-cost carrier expansion post-pandemic has seen Bucharest Henri Coandă reach its peak in 2025.

Hosting major sporting events account for historic peaks at quite a few airports – UEFA finals at Berlin Brandenburg (2024), Madrid (2019), Warsaw (2012), Vienna (2008), Munich (2006) and Copenhagen (2000); the Hungarian Grand Prix for Budapest in August 2025, while Nice hit its peak in May 2022 with the Monaco Grand Prix plus the Cannes Film Festival. Milan Malpensa's 2019 peak, conversely, coincided with Fashion Week and Linate's temporary closure - both generating spikes in business jet traffic.

In short, our analysis shows that the year of an airport's peak traffic day typically reflects strategic, operational, regulatory and exceptional local factors - and is not necessarily correlated with the national peak traffic year, which rather reflects aggregated demand across airports, and often includes a substantial share of overflights.