

At least 600K passengers cancel travel plans from Heathrow in December



The Omicron variant upsurge caused December's passenger numbers at Heathrow to drop even below 2020 levels, with at least 600,000 passengers canceling travel plans that month due to both the virus itself and the uncertainty caused by swiftly imposed travel restrictions.

Given continuous changes brought on by the ever-changing global reality of the pandemic, current IATA forecasts suggest passenger numbers will not reach pre-pandemic levels until 2025, and even these figures — revised from original estimates of 2023/2024 — are given that travel restrictions have been removed and that passengers believe they will not be revised.

December 2021

Terminal Passengers (000s)	December 2021		Jan to Dec 2021		Jan 2021 to Dec 2021	
	Dec 2021	% Change	Jan to Dec 2021	% Change	Jan 2021 to Dec 2021	% Change
Market						
UK	226	173.6	1,768	21.1	1,768	21.1
EU	815	134.0	7,258	-9.9	7,258	-9.9
Non-EU Europe	212	161.9	1,537	-13.8	1,537	-13.8
Africa	167	55.2	1,040	-9.4	1,040	-9.4
North America	798	540.4	3,338	-13.6	3,338	-13.6
Latin America	116	172.1	413	-4.3	413	-4.3
Middle East	483	114.6	2,301	-6.6	2,301	-6.6
Asia / Pacific	304	131.3	1,739	-40.3	1,739	-40.3
Total	3,122	173.0	19,393	-12.3	19,393	-12.3

Heathrow has publicly urged the UK government to remove all testing now for fully vaccinated passengers, and to adopt a more predictable playbook for any future Variants of Concern that places limits only on passengers from high-risk destinations, and allows for quarantine at home instead of in a hotel. The airport has stated the belief that “the focus should be on improving passenger service, aligning incentives for airlines and airports to work together to rebuild passenger demand and maintaining affordable private financing in uncertain times.”

Heathrow CEO John Holland-Kaye said: “While we all want to see the back of COVID, 2022 will be another challenging year for the UK’s travel sector. There are travel restrictions on every single route from Heathrow bar one and travel demand will only recover when passengers have confidence they will be removed and not reimposed at short notice – which is likely to be years away. While this creates enormous uncertainty for the CAA in setting a new 5 year regulatory settlement, it means the regulator must focus on an outcome that improves service, incentivises growth and protects affordable private financing.”