

Cardiff Airport on track for best summer in three years with Wizz Air boost

Cardiff Airport is targeting passenger numbers recovering to 50% of pre-Covid levels this year boosted with a new base from Wizz Air going live next month.

Latest figures from the Civil Aviation Authority showed the airport handled 18,674 passengers in February – with a rolling year figure of 150,122.

However, with the removal of Covid travel restrictions, as part of a five year recovery plan the Rhose-based airport is looking to get back to its pre-pandemic passenger level of 1.6 million (2019) by 2026 and around 800,000 this year.

The airport, which is wholly-owned by the Welsh Government but operated by a stand alone commercial venture, has launched its summer season, which runs until the end of October, with 25 routes – in what is forecast to be its busiest period since the pandemic.

Passenger numbers will be significantly boosted when Wizz Air UK – delayed due to the pandemic – launches its base at the airport on April 8th with routes to nine holiday destinations in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Spain.

It will add to the existing leisure route network at the airport from TUI, which will fly to over 20 destinations across traditional Mediterranean hotspots as well as to the Canary Islands, Croatia, Tunisia and Turkey.

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Improved global links will be available from May 24th when KLM increases flights to its Amsterdam hub from Cardiff.

Airlines Ryanair and Vueling are offering flights to six European destinations this summer from Cardiff.

The airport's chief executive Spencer Birns said: "The airport and its partner organisations have been busy hiring staff again in readiness for our busiest summer for three years,

"There is a huge pent-up demand for air travel which has built up over the past two years during the

pandemic and we're very pleased to be able to help people living in Wales take their much needed overseas trips."

A decision has yet to be made as to when Qatar Airways will resume its scheduled Cardiff to Doha route. The airport remains in constant dialogue with the airline which launched its route in 2018 before suspending it due to Covid. However, if it is to restart it is likely to be next year.

While the long-term pre-Covid masterplan, which also included plans for hotels, is on hold the airport is looking to increase the contribution of non-passenger related revenues.

The income the airport generates from passenger-related activities accounts for around 80% of its revenues.

It is now looking to building on the space it has assigned for

operational activities like general aviation development activities and training.

Speaking recently Mr Birns said: “The whole objective is how do we use that asset and the runway to generates activity that provides more revenue for the business and offsets the urgency of needing passenger activity.

“If you compare us to say a much smaller airport like Bournemouth, 75% of their income is non-passenger related. For us it is how do we get to 50% as a first target. The infrastructure is already there so it is about what other things do we need to put in to help stimulate that.

“We are talking to aerospace companies where they may be looking at things like the future of environmental planning etc and how do we work with them so they undertake it here. The important point is that we have got an asset where people can showcase, develop and test and we can work with them accordingly. We have done this over the years with people like Airbus when they have brought their aircraft in for testing. We are not talking about Airbus building a factory here, but saying to them if you need somewhere to test and develop we can support them.”

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