

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT?

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More people are flying than ever before. Airports, once thought of only as a place for aircraft to land and take off, have become part of the total travel experience, especially for international passengers. What does it take to be an airport that serves international passengers?

Airports now actively compete for international passengers who bring significant revenues to the airport and to the communities surrounding the airport as well. Airports are now being marketed as if they were a product or service.

Passengers themselves are more discriminating about which airport they choose to use as a gateway to the United States, Europe, Asia, or wherever else. They ask questions like: Are the landside connections between the airport and the surrounding metropolitan area simple and inexpensive? Can customs and immigration inspections be completed quickly? Is the staff courteous? Are connections to other flights easy to make? Are there activities to keep children and adults entertained and occupied during long waits? Are there a variety of concessions that are interesting and reasonably priced?

Airports are taking steps to differentiate themselves from other gateway airports. Many airports have become a showcase for their locality, region, or country — most visibly through terminal building architecture and concessions.

Public services and amenities are growing in number to meet the needs of a more diverse international flying population. International symbols and multilingual signs are proliferating in gateway airports. More and more visitors who do not speak the local language must be helped to find their way through the airport. Airport managers, municipal officials, and local business owners are asking themselves how they would like to be a passenger at their hometown international airport.

The experts who have written the following articles provide answers to the question of what it takes to be a modern international airport.