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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATE OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE ORGANIZATION OF TOURIST TRAVEL IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to study the historical preconditions for the development of airline transport in the field of tourist travel and to analyse its current state in Europe and the world in the context of post-COVID recovery, as well as to identify new market needs that arise for passengers when travelling by air. **The research methodology** is based on a combination of general scientific and special methods of cognition. In the course of the work, the historical-logical method, a systematic approach, methods of analysis and generalisation, comparative analysis, statistical and logical methods were used. **The scientific novelty** of the study lies in a comprehensive study of the current stage of development of air transport through the prism of post-pandemic recovery of the tourism industry. It is substantiated that the pandemic has become not only a factor of decline, but also a point of change that has affected the process of serving tourists in air transport in terms of sanitary and safety requirements, digitalisation of service, and reorientation of tourist flows. **Research results.** The article examines the state of air transport in the first months of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period of industry recovery; it examines the dynamics of global passenger traffic with forecasts until 2030; examines the share of passenger air travel by region of the world (Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and Latin America, the Middle East, Africa); the market of each region is examined, taking into account revenues from air transport, airlines that have become more competitive in it, and tourist destinations that have become popular in the post-COVID period; The European aviation market has been analysed in detail in terms of passenger traffic and major airports in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands and Ireland. It has been established that air transport is an integral part of the international tourism infrastructure, as it provides fast, comfortable and efficient passenger travel over long distances. It contributes to the development of remote tourist destinations, creates new tourist routes and stimulates the economies of regions that are actively integrating into international tourist flows.

Keywords: airline transport, tourist travel, international tourism, post-COVID recovery, Europe, sustainable development, tourist mobility.

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ІСТОРИЧНІ ПЕРЕДУМОВИ ТА СУЧАСНИЙ СТАН АВІАЦІЙНОГО ТРАНСПОРТУ ПРИ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ ТУРИСТИЧНИХ ПОДОРОЖЕЙ В ЄВРОПІ ТА СВІТУ

Анотація

Метою статті є дослідження історичних передумов розвитку авіаційного транспорту у сфері туристичних подорожей та аналіз його сучасного стану в Європі та світі в умовах постковідного

відновлення, а також визначення нових потреб ринку, які з'являються у пасажирів під час подорожі з використанням авіаційного транспорту. **Методологія дослідження** базується на поєднанні загальнонаукових і спеціальних методів пізнання. У процесі роботи застосовано історико-логічний метод, системний підхід, методи аналізу й узагальнення порівняльний аналіз, статистичні та логічний методи. **Наукова новизна дослідження** полягає у комплексному дослідженні сучасного етапу розвитку авіаційного транспорту крізь призму постпандемічного відновлення туристичної галузі. Обґрунтовано, що пандемія стала не лише фактором спаду, а й точкою змін, які вплинули на процес обслуговування туристів на авіаційному транспорті, що стосується санітарно-безпекових вимог, цифровізації сервісного обслуговування, переорієнтацію туристичних потоків. **Результати дослідження.** В статті досліджено стан авіаційного транспорту у перші місяці пандемії та післяковідний період відновлення галузі; досліджено динаміку світових пасажирських перевезень з прогнозами до 2030 р.; розглянуто частку пасажирських авіаційних переміщень за регіонами світу (Азіатсько-Тихоокеанський регіон, Європа, Північні та Латинська Америка, Близький Схід, Африка); досліджено ринок кожного регіону з врахуванням доходів від авіаційних перевезень, авіакомпанії, які стали більш конкурентоспроможними в ньому та туристичні напрями, які стали популярними в післяковідний період; детально проаналізований авіаційний ринок Європи щодо пасажиропотоку та основних аеропортів таких країн як Велика Британія, Німеччина, Франція, Іспанія, Італія, Польща, Угорщина, Нідерланди, Ірландія. Встановлено, що авіаційний транспорт є невід'ємною складовою інфраструктури міжнародного туризму, оскільки забезпечує швидке, комфортне й ефективне переміщення пасажирів на великі відстані. Він сприяє розвитку віддалених туристичних напрямків, формує нові туристичні маршрути та стимулює економіку регіонів, які активно інтегруються в міжнародні туристичні потоки.

Ключові слова: авіаційний транспорт, туристичні подорожі, міжнародний туризм, постковідне відновлення, Європа, сталий розвиток, туристична мобільність.

Introduction. Modern international tourism is impossible to imagine without air transport, which provides fast and comfortable travel for tourists over long distances. Airline transport plays an important role in the development of the tourism industry, contributing to the expansion of tourist flows and increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

At the same time, the events of 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge to the global aviation industry, causing a sharp decline in air travel, the closure of borders and the virtual halt of international tourism. In the post-COVID period, air transport has entered a phase of gradual recovery. The modern tourism market is characterised by growing demand for air transport, driven by increased population mobility, the development of international tourist flows and improvements in air transport infrastructure.

Air transport provides fast, comfortable and safe travel for tourists, which contributes to the development of long-distance tourist destinations and opens up new opportunities for travel companies. At the same time, the air transport market faces a number of challenges, including fluctuations in airfare prices, economic crises, technical innovations, environmental requirements and geopolitical risks.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. Much of the current research focuses on analysing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the airlines industry, assessing the pace of its recovery and changes in the structure of demand for tourist air travel. Scientists pay special attention to the issues of airlines adapting to new market needs. At the same time, the issues of combining historical aspects of aviation transport development with an analysis of its current state in the context of organising tourist travel in the post-COVID period remain insufficiently covered, which necessitates further scientific research in this area.

The article uses analytical and statistical materials from international tourism and transport organisations that form the general state of tourist flows using air transport.

Publications by the World Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism) reveal the relationship between the development of air transport and the growth of international tourist flows, and define the role of air transport in the accessibility of tourist destinations.

Materials from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) highlight the historical stages of aviation development, flight safety standards, and current trends in the aviation industry. ICAO data allows us to substantiate the impact of aviation on the international mobility of the population during tourist travel.

In analysing the current state of air transport, we have made extensive use of reports from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which contain information on passenger flows, air transport structures, and low-cost airlines after the 2019 pandemic. These sources have allowed us to track the dynamics of tourist travel using air transport.

Particular emphasis is placed on official analytical reports on the development of aviation infrastructure for air transport in Europe and its impact on the mobility of the population for tourism purposes. This has made it possible to reveal the regional characteristics of the functioning of air transport in Europe in comparison with global trends.

The purpose of the article is to study the historical preconditions for the development of airline transport in the field of tourist travel and to analyse its current state in Europe and the world in the context of post-COVID recovery, as well as to identify new market needs that arise for passengers when travelling by airline transport.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks were set: to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of air transport in the tourism sector, to conduct a market analysis of the recovery of air transport in Europe and worldwide, and to study the European aviation market.

Research methods and methodology. The methodological basis of the article consists of general scientific and special methods of cognition. The analysis uses the historical method to study the post-COVID stage of aviation transport development, a systematic approach to consider aviation as a component of tourism infrastructure, as well as methods of analysis and generalisation to process scientific sources and statistical materials. Comparative analysis made it possible to trace the peculiarities of the development of air transport in Europe and other regions of the world, and the logical method contributed to the formation of well-founded conclusions about the current state of the industry.

Presentation of the main research material.

The global air transport market is one of the important components of the global tourism industry, providing mobility for millions of tourists every day. Air transport allows you to cover long distances in a short time, making it a particularly popular means of travel among tourists, both for business and leisure.

The introduction of quarantine restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of state borders and a sharp reduction in international mobility of the population in 2020 effectively led to an almost complete halt in international air traffic. For the tourism industry, this meant the loss of the main channel for tourist travel.

In the post-pandemic period, the industry experienced a significant recovery, accompanied by stricter health and safety requirements and the growing role of digital technologies, including contactless airline ticket booking.

In 2021 and 2022, the situation began to stabilise. Thanks to the resumption of domestic air travel in many countries, especially in Asia and North America, passenger numbers rose to 4.3 billion in 2021 and 6.7 billion in 2022. These years marked a transition from a deep crisis to a phase of active recovery.

The year 2023 saw an almost complete return to pre-crisis traffic volumes. According to the Airports Council International ,8.7 billion passengers used air transport in 2023, which is approximately 95% of the 2019 level (Global passenger traffic expected to recover by 2024 and reach 9.4 billion passengers, 2023). This was facilitated by the resumption of international tourism, the gradual lifting of quarantine restrictions, and growing confidence among tourists.

In 2024, passenger numbers exceeded pre-crisis levels and reached 9.5 billion. This figure is expected to reach 9.9 billion in 2025. According to their estimates, by 2030, global passenger air traffic will amount to approximately 12 billion passengers per year, as shown in Figure 1.

This growth is attributable to increased population mobility, growing demand for travel in emerging economies, the expansion of low-cost airline networks, and the modernisation of airport infrastructure. After a sharp decline at the beginning of the decade, global aviation has demonstrated its ability to adapt and recover steadily, ushering in a new phase of development in the post-pandemic world.

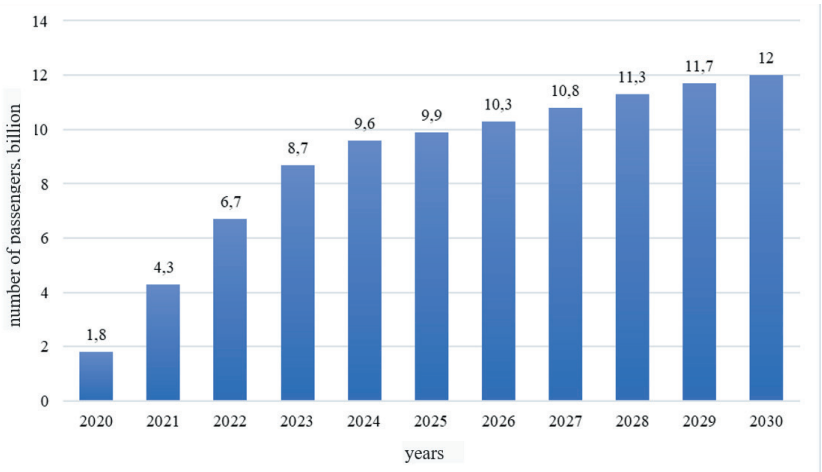

Figure 1. Dynamics of global passenger traffic since 2020 with forecasts until 2030 (Joint Passenger Traffic Report, Trends, and Outlook, 2025)

The global passenger air transport market is characterised by a clear regional structure that reflects the specifics of economic development, tourism activity, urbanisation levels and transport infrastructure density.

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for the largest share of air passenger traffic worldwide, accounting for 33.5% of total traffic. This is due to rapid urbanisation, active business mobility of the population, and a developed network of international hubs in cities such as Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul and Beijing. In addition, the region is actively investing in infrastructure development, airport modernisation and the introduction of digital technologies to improve passenger service quality.

Europe accounts for 26.7% of global air traffic. The region is characterised by a dense network of air connections, high availability of low-cost flights, significant cross-border tourism and active use of aviation for short and medium distances for both business and leisure purposes.

America as a whole accounts for 28.2% of global air passenger traffic. Within the region, North America accounts for 22.9%, driven by the strong domestic air transport

market in the United States and Canada, high population mobility and the presence of large carriers. Latin America accounts for 5.3% of global traffic, showing positive dynamics due to gradual economic growth and the development of regional tourism. At the same time, competition between national and private carriers is intensifying in the region, which contributes to improving service quality.

The Middle East accounts for 9.4% of global traffic thanks to its strategic geographical location between three continents and the strong position of hubs in Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi. Many passengers use the services of airlines in this region as transit carriers.

Africa has the smallest share, only 2.2%, which is explained by poorly developed infrastructure, low purchasing power of the population and a limited number of air routes. At the same time, Africa is considered a promising destination for future growth in air traffic.

The share of passenger air travel by region of the world in 2024 is shown in Fig. 2.

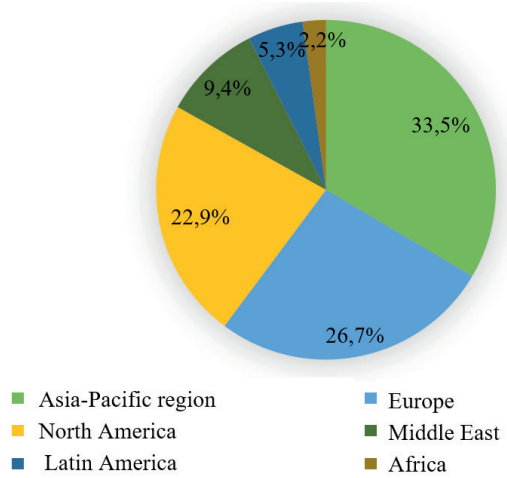

Figure 2 . Share of passenger air travel by region of the world in 2024 Global (Air Passenger Demand Reaches Record High in 2024, 2025)

Passenger air transport in the Americas region has shown complex but predictable dynamics over the past five years. The region includes North, Central and South America, but the bulk of traffic is concentrated in North America, particularly the United States. The aviation industry here is one of the oldest and most developed in the world, with a high level of domestic mobility and a strong infrastructure.

In America, air traffic fell sharply in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with only about 0.4 billion passengers using air transport, which was a historic low. The complete closure of international connections, quarantine measures and falling demand forced dozens of airlines to reduce or suspend operations. A gradual recovery began in 2021, especially in the United States, where domestic flights were actively restored, with passenger traffic increasing to 0.8 billion. In 2022, air traffic grew to 1.2 billion passengers thanks to the lifting of restrictions and the return of international tourism. In 2023, traffic reached 1.6 billion, almost matching pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, there were about 1.7 billion passengers, indicating a return to stable growth. The growth dynamics are shown in Fig. 3.

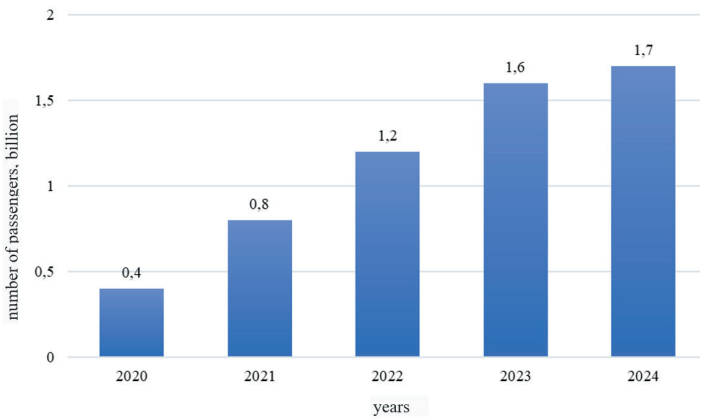

Figure 3. Dynamics of air transport in the Americas region, 2020–2024
(Airports Council Releases 2020 Traffic Data, 2021)

Important trends include the digitisation of aviation services, process automation, the introduction of sustainable technologies and growing demand for domestic flights. Regional hubs such as Dallas, Atlanta, Toronto and Panama play an important role, becoming key transfer points between North and South America.

In 2021, the situation began to gradually improve, with passenger traffic rising to 0.2 billion. In 2022, traffic reached 0.3 billion passengers, and in 2023, 0.4 billion, indicating a steady, albeit slow, recovery in the aviation industry. In 2024, passenger traffic grew to 0.45 billion, as can be seen in Figure 4.

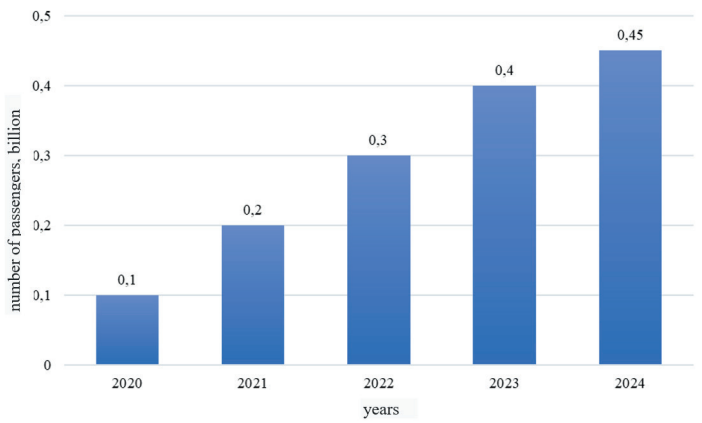

Figure 4. Dynamics of air transport in the African region in 2020–2024
(African air traffic heads for recovery , 2023)

The air transport market in Africa remains fragmented, with significant challenges related to regulatory barriers, high fuel prices and a shortage of skilled personnel. Despite this, some airlines play a prominent role in the development of connectivity in the region. In particular, Ethiopian Airlines is the continent's largest and most successful carrier, with an extensive network of international and regional routes. Also noteworthy are Royal Air Maroc and Kenya Airways, which are actively developing transcontinental flights and cooperation with global airline alliances.

The region's aviation industry has shown flexibility: the recovery has been uneven, depending on government policies on opening borders. The prolonged maintenance of quarantine restrictions in China slowed the overall return to pre-crisis volumes, but in 2023, the lifting of domestic and external restrictions gave a significant boost to growth. At the same time, the low-cost carrier segment, which is particularly popular in Southeast Asia, developed actively, and airport infrastructure in major cities expanded.

In 2024, passenger traffic reached 2.05 billion, a record for the region. Compared to 2020, this is more than a fourfold increase, demonstrating extraordinary resilience and high demand for air travel. The dynamics of change are shown in Fig. 5. China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam became the main generators of traffic, while major air hubs – Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo – regained their positions as transit centres between Asia, Europe and America.

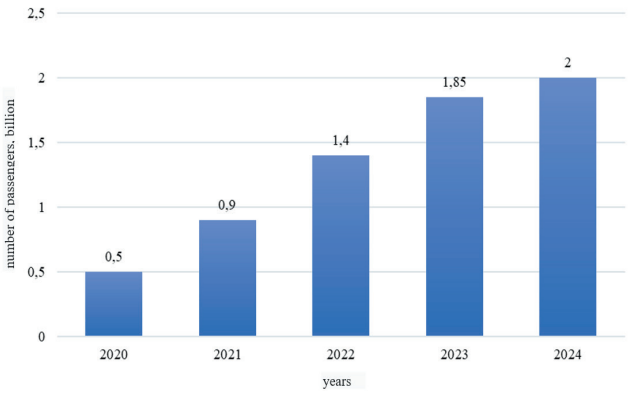

Figure 5. Dynamics of air transport in the Asia-Pacific region in 2020–2024 (Asia-Pacific & Middle East. View from the Top – Asia-Pacific served an estimated 3.5 billion passengers in 2024, 2025)

By 2024, passenger traffic in the region reached 450 million people, almost five times more than in the crisis year of 2020. The growth dynamics are shown in Fig. 6. The main aviation hubs remain Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi, as well as Riyadh and Jeddah, which are actively competing for the status of a leading transit hub. Dubai Airport continues to rank among the world's busiest airports in terms of international traffic, playing a key role in connecting continents.

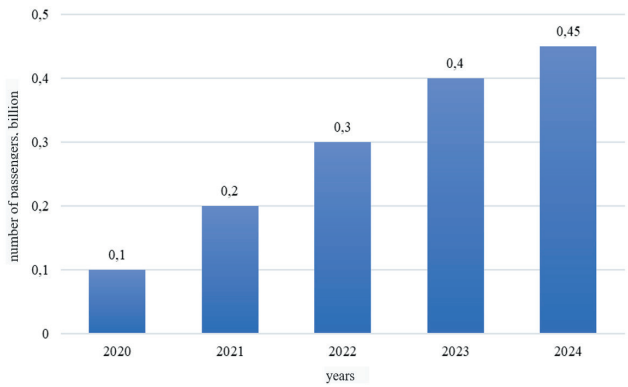

Figure 6. Dynamics of air transport in the Middle East region in 2020–2024 (449 Million Air Passengers, Industry Set for Record-Breaking Growth, 2024)

The region's aviation sector is dominated by powerful state-owned carriers, renowned for their high level of service and extensive route networks. Emirates from the UAE remains a symbol of luxury and efficiency, serving tens of millions of passengers annually. Qatar Airways, which has won numerous international awards, is actively expanding its flight geography and strengthening its position in the premium transport segment. Etihad Airways, based in Abu Dhabi, is undergoing a major transformation of its business model, focusing on sustainable development and profitability. Saudi aviation is rapidly gaining momentum: Saudia is modernising its fleet and expanding its presence on international routes, while the newly established Riyadh Air has ambitious plans to become a global player. All these trends testify to the region's ambitions to occupy an even more significant place in the global aviation system.

As for Europe, this region has shown a gradual recovery after a significant decline in traffic caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The initial decline in demand and numerous restrictions on international travel led to a sharp drop in passenger traffic to 0.6 billion people. However, since 2021, the market has begun to recover, thanks in particular to high activity on domestic routes and the easing of quarantine measures within the European Union.

One of the defining features of the European market has been the rapid growth of low-cost carriers such as Ryanair, Wizz Air and easyJet, which have made air travel accessible to a wider section of the population. At the same time, major national carriers, including Lufthansa, Air France and British Airways, resumed their international routes and invested in fleet upgrades.

A significant boost to growth was observed in 2023, when most European countries fully opened their borders to international travel, contributing to the active return of tourist and business traffic. In 2024, passenger traffic in the region reached 2.3 billion people, exceeding pre-crisis levels and demonstrating the resilience of the European aviation industry. The dynamics of change are shown in Fig. 7.

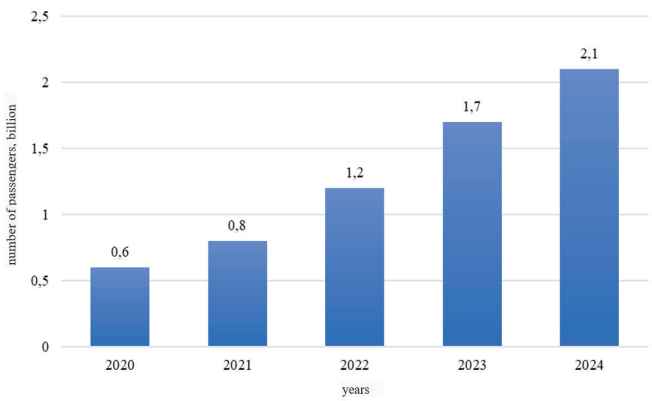

Figure 7. Dynamics of air transport in Europe in 2020–2024
(Passenger traffic reaches nearly 95 % of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, 2024)

The European aviation market has a significant share of transport due to the high mobility of the population, the development of international tourism and an integrated transport infrastructure. Europe has a dense network of airports and airlines connecting both large metropolitan areas and remote regions. In 2024, European Union airports served more

than 2.3 billion passengers, indicating a steady recovery in demand after the pandemic downturn.

The United Kingdom is one of the leaders in terms of air traffic in Europe. The country's main airports are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Main airports in the United Kingdom and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Peters L.,2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Heathrow (LHR)	79	British Airways	United States, Canada, EU
Gatwick (LGW)	41	easyJet, British Airways	Spain, France, Italy
Manchester (MAN)	28	Ryanair, Jet2, TUI Airways	Canary Islands, Greece, Turkey
Stansted (STN)	27	Ryanair, easyJet	Poland, Spain, Ireland
Luton (LTN)	18	easyJet, Wizz Air	Hungary, Romania, Italy

This multi-level aviation system provides the UK with stable passenger growth and competitiveness in the European market. Given the active recovery of tourism after the pandemic, further investment in infrastructure and route network development is expected.

Germany has a strong airport infrastructure, including Frankfurt Airport (FRA) – the largest in the country with over 67 million passengers in 2024 – as well as Munich (MUC) and Berlin (BER). Lufthansa, the national carrier and one of Europe's largest airlines, is the main force in the market. The country's main airports are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Germany's main airports and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Wikipedia, 2024)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Frankfurt (FRA)	67	Lufthansa, Condor	United States, China, United Kingdom, UAE
Munich (MUC)	49	Lufthansa, Eurowings	Italy, Spain, France, Greece
Berlin (BER)	24	easyJet, Ryanair, Lufthansa	Turkey, Poland, Scandinavian countries
Düsseldorf (DUS)	18	Eurowings, Turkish Airlines	Spain, Turkey, Balkans
Hamburg (HAM)	16	Lufthansa, Eurowings, Ryanair	Netherlands, Sweden, domestic flights

The Lufthansa Group also includes the subsidiary brands Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines and SWISS, which form an extensive network of connections throughout Europe and beyond.

Frankfurt Airport serves as the country's main international hub, with particularly active transatlantic and Asian routes.

Munich Airport is known for its high quality of service and extensive network of European flights, and also plays an important role in domestic transport. Berlin Airport, which reopened in 2020, is rapidly gaining popularity as a commercial and tourist hub, especially among low-cost airlines such as easyJet and Ryanair.

In addition to Lufthansa, Eurowings, a subsidiary of Lufthansa that mainly serves medium-haul routes, is also active in the market. Ryanair and Wizz Air are also active in Germany, especially on routes to Eastern Europe. Germany's aviation infrastructure is one of the most technologically advanced in the world, with high safety standards, convenient transfers and efficient logistics.

France concentrates significant traffic at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), which welcomed over 68 million passengers in 2024. It is the country's main international hub and the base of the national airline Air France, which together with KLM (Netherlands) forms the powerful Air France-KLM aviation group, a member of the global SkyTeam alliance. Air France operates flights to Europe, Africa, America and Asia, with an extensive route network.

The second most important airport is Orly (ORY), which served over 33 million passengers in 2024. It specialises in domestic and Mediterranean destinations, mainly serving low-cost flights (Transavia, easyJet, Vueling).

France is also actively developing regional hubs: Lyon-Saint-Exupéry (LYS), Nice-Côte d'Azur (NCE) and Toulouse-Blagnac (TLS). In particular, Nice is an important tourist hub, and Toulouse is a centre for the aviation industry (Airbus). Data on the main airports in France are presented in Table 3. All major airports are integrated into the national TGV high-speed train network, which facilitates convenient transfers.

Table 3

Major airports in France and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Aeroports de Paris SA. December 2024 and Full-Year 2024 Traffic Figures, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG)	68	Air France, easyJet	Europe, North America, Asia
Paris-Orly (ORY)	33	Air France, Transavia	France, North Africa, Spain
Nice (NCE)	14	easyJet, Air France	Italy, United Kingdom, domestic

Spain is one of Europe's leading tourist hubs, with a developed aviation infrastructure and high passenger traffic, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Major airports in Spain and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Reuters. Aena's Spanish airport passenger numbers hit record 309 million in 2024, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Madrid-Barajas (MAD)	56	Iberia, Air Europa, Ryanair	Latin America, EU, USA
Barcelona-El Prat (BCN)	46	Vueling, Ryanair, Iberia	Europe, North Africa, domestic
Palma de Mallorca (PMI)	30	Ryanair, Eurowings, Vueling	Germany, France, Great Britain

The largest airports are Madrid-Barajas Adolfo Suárez (MAD) and Barcelona-El Prat (BCN), which together serve over 100 million passengers annually. MAD serves as the country's main transit hub and base for the national carrier Iberia, which is the leader on routes to Latin America and is also actively developing routes to North America and Europe.

Barcelona-El Prat is Spain's second most important airport after Madrid-Barajas. It plays a strategic role in tourist and business air traffic with European and North African countries, serving millions of passengers annually. The low-cost airline Vueling, a subsidiary of the international aviation holding company IAG, which also includes such well-known airlines as Iberia and British Airways, operates actively here.

Italy has one of the most extensive aviation systems in Europe. The main airport hubs that play a key role in passenger transport are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Main airports in Italy and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Assaeroporti. Italian airports set record in 2024: over 219 million passengers, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Rome-Fiumicino (FCO)	45	ITA Airways, Ryanair	Latin America, EU, USA
Milan-Malpensa (MXP)	26	easyJet, Ryanair, Wizz Air	Europe, North Africa, domestic
Venice (VCE)	11	Volotea, Ryanair, ITA Airways	Germany, France, Great Britain

The main airports are Rome Fiumicino (FCO) and Milan Malpensa (MXP), which together account for a significant portion of the country's international traffic. In 2024, total passenger traffic at Italian airports exceeded 160 million people. FCO is the main hub for ITA Airways, the national carrier created after the restructuring of Alitalia. The

company operates as a full-service airline and is a member of the SkyTeam alliance, actively developing routes to Europe, North America, Asia and North Africa.

Milan Malpensa, in turn, serves as a business and cargo hub for Northern Italy. In addition, the airports of Venice (VCE), Bologna (BLQ), Naples (NAP) and Bergamo (BGY) play a significant role in regional traffic, with the latter being one of the main hubs for low-cost carrier Ryanair. Overall, low-cost carriers Ryanair and Wizz Air have a large share of the domestic and short-haul international market, offering affordable flights to popular European destinations.

Poland is playing an increasingly important role in Central Europe thanks to growing air traffic and its favourable geographical location. The country's main airport is Warsaw Chopin (WAW), which served over 18 million passengers in 2024, as shown in Table 6. It is the main base of the national carrier LOT Polish Airlines, one of the oldest airlines in Europe, which is actively developing long-haul flights to North America, Asia and the Middle East. LOT is a member of the Star Alliance and plays an important role in transit traffic between Eastern and Western Europe.

Table 6

Major airports in Poland and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Gabriel Higgins, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Warsaw Chopin (WAW)	18	LOT, Wizz Air, Ryanair	United States, Western Europe, Asia
Krakow (KRK)	9	Ryanair, LOT, Wizz Air	United Kingdom, Italy, Germany
Gdansk (GDN)	6	Wizz Air, Ryanair, LOT	Scandinavia, Germany, domestic

In addition, Poland is a key market for low-cost airlines Ryanair and Wizz Air, which have numerous bases throughout the country. The airports in Krakow (KRK), Gdansk (GDN), Wroclaw (WRO), Poznan (POZ) and Katowice (KTW) play an important role in domestic and regional connections. For example, Krakow is Poland's second busiest airport in terms of passenger traffic, serving both tourist and business routes.

The Hungarian aviation market is centred around one key hub – Budapest Ferenc Liszt International Airport (BUD), which served over 12 million passengers in 2024. BUD is the country's main air gateway and is actively developing as a transit hub for Central Europe, increasing the number of direct flights not only within Europe, but also to the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and recently opened destinations in Southeast Asia (e.g. Bangkok and Seoul). The government and airport operator are investing in terminal modernisation and infrastructure development to accommodate long-haul flights.

The country's main airline is Wizz Air, a successful budget airline founded in Hungary. The company's main markets are Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, and the United Arab Emirates (through Wizz Air Abu Dhabi). The company also actively competes with Ryanair in many market segments. In addition to Wizz Air, there are major foreign carriers in Hungary, including Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways, and Emirates.

Although Hungary has only one major airport, regional airports in Debrecen and Szarmelék (near Lake Balaton) also operate a limited number of seasonal and charter flights, mainly for tourism purposes. Hungary's main airports and their passenger traffic in 2024 are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Hungary's main airports and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Passenger Numbers Fly Over 17.5 Million at Budapest Airport in 2024, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Budapest-Ferenc Liszt (BUD)	12	Wizz Air, Ryanair, Lufthansa, Emirates	Europe, Middle East, North Africa, Asia
Debrecen (DEB)	4	Wizz Air	London, Eindhoven, Basel
Sármelyek/ Balaton (SOB)	15	charter carriers, Ryanair	Germany, United Kingdom, Austria (summer routes)

The Dutch aviation sector plays a key role in air transport in North-Western Europe. The central hub is Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (AMS), one of the largest and most important hubs in Europe. In 2024, it handled more than 62 million passengers, making it the leading transport centre not only for the country but also for the region.

Schiphol is the main base for KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, the oldest operating airline in the world and co-founder of the global SkyTeam alliance. KLM actively cooperates with Air France within the Air France-KLM Group. Thanks to Amsterdam's convenient geographical location, KLM provides efficient transit connections between Europe, North America, Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

In addition to KLM, low-cost airlines are also active in the Dutch market, including Transavia (a subsidiary of KLM), as well as easyJet and Ryanair, which operate flights from regional airports. Among them, Eindhoven Airport (EIN) stands out as the second largest in the country, specialising mainly in budget transportation.

The Netherlands has a consistently high level of airport infrastructure, as shown in Table 8, high-quality passenger service and effective integration with rail transport, in particular thanks to direct connections to the centre of Amsterdam and other cities in the country.

Table 8

Major airports in the Netherlands and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Schiphol records increase in passenger numbers in August 2024, 2024)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Amsterdam-Schiphol (AMS)	62	KLM, Transavia, Delta, easyJet, Emirates	Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, Middle East
Eindhoven (EIN)	6,5	Ryanair, Wizz Air, Transavia	Europe (Spain, Poland, Italy, United Kingdom)
Rotterdam-The Hague (RTM)	2	Transavia, British Airways, Pegasus Airlines	European tourist and business destinations (France, Turkey, Spain)

Ireland is strategically important in European aviation due to its transatlantic position and active aviation sector. The main hub airport is Dublin (DUB), which served over 32 million passengers in 2024, making it one of the busiest in Western Europe.

The country's largest airline is Ryanair, based in Dublin. It is Europe's largest low-cost carrier in terms of passenger numbers. The company serves over 230 destinations in more than 35 countries, with over 90 bases across Europe. Its strategy is to provide low-cost flights from smaller regional airports, allowing it to cover almost the entire continent and maintain competitive prices.

In addition to Ryanair, Aer Lingus is also active in the country – a full-service carrier specialising in transatlantic routes. It operates regular flights to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, and is a member of the IAG international alliance alongside British Airways and Iberia.

Other important airports in Ireland include Cork (ORK) and Shannon (SNN), which serve regional and seasonal flights, particularly to the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal. Shannon is historically significant as one of the first transatlantic hubs in Europe. Ireland's main airports and their passenger traffic are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Ireland's main airports and their passenger traffic in 2024 (Dublin and Cork airports welcomed 37.7 million passengers in 2024, 2025)

Airport	Passenger traffic (million passengers)	Major airlines	Major destinations
Dublin (DUB)	32	Ryanair, Aer Lingus	Europe, USA, Canada, Great Britain
Cork (ORK)	2,5	Ryanair, Aer Lingus	Domestic flights, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain
Shannon (SNN)	1,8	Ryanair, Aer Lingus, United	Seasonal transatlantic flights, Europe
Knock (NOC)	0,8	Ryanair	Seasonal flights to Great Britain, Spain, Germany

Thus, the European aviation market is characterised by a large number of players, high competition and rapid recovery from the pandemic. The diversity of airlines, from flag carriers to low-cost carriers, provides flexibility and a wide choice for tourists. Significant development of airport infrastructure, fleet modernisation, and the introduction of environmental standards also play an important role in the further growth of the sector.

Conclusions. The study shows that air transport plays an important role in the development of international tourism and the organisation of tourist trips. Its historical development has been a prerequisite for the formation of the global tourism space and a significant increase in population mobility. In modern conditions, aviation remains an important component of tourism infrastructure. It has been established that air transport is an integral part of the international tourism infrastructure, as it provides fast, comfortable and efficient passenger travel over long distances. It contributes to the development of remote tourist destinations, forms new tourist routes and stimulates the economies of regions that are actively integrating into international tourist flows. Air transport also has a significant impact on tourists' choice of destinations and types of travel.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

No artificial intelligence tools or materials were used in the manuscript.

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