

More passengers and cargo checking into Catalonia airports

Barcelona, Girona and Reus have all registered higher numbers than past years

ALEX LEFF

The number of people checking in and out of airports in Catalonia is higher than in previous summer tourist seasons. Most of these tourists are from France and the UK, which had a considerable rise in recent months of 23.6 per cent. Over two million passengers passed through Barcelona's Prat airport last month, 7.7 per cent more than the same month in 2003. The amount of merchandise being handled on airport cargo belts has gone up as well, weighing in at a total of over 38 million kilos in the first two quarters of the financial year, which is an 11.8 per cent increase from 2003.

Passenger traffic abounded even moreso in Girona, whose airport saw over one million fliers check in during the first six months of the year, a whopping 156.9 per cent increase from the year before, owing to the cheap-flight invasion. Bucking the trend, cargo usage actually went down by 3.8 per cent with a total of 53,490 kilos.

The airport in Reus has seen an increase in the number of passengers of 55.2 per cent in the first half of the financial year, reaching over 440,000 people. Over 175,000 people checked into Reus in June, which is 23.4 per cent more than the year before. Reus saw an increase in cargo transport in the past six months by 138 per cent. Last month cargo grossed at some 6,186 kilos, up by 138 per cent.

Prat has introduced two new routes for direct transcontinental flights this summer, Natal (Brazil) and Havana (Cuba), airport officials reported yesterday. The airline company Varig will make trips to Natal from 25 July to 2 August. Cubana will be flying to and from Havana between 2 August to 25 October.



Reus airport has seen an increase in passengers and cargo in past months / ABRAHAM SEBASTIÀ

Ryanair trying to do away with luggage checking

Passengers of the low-cost air carrier Ryanair who show up at Spanish airports with lots of baggage to be checked may soon be in for an unpleasant surprise. The airline yesterday announced measures to encourage passengers to travel with only carry-on baggage in a bid to lower cost and eliminate queues of passengers in the baggage claim areas of airports. And according to international reports, they may end up banning checked baggage altogether.

One new measure is an increase in the allowance for carry-on baggage from seven to ten kilos, while at the same time decreasing the allowance for checked baggage from 20 to 15 kilos. Another measure is raising the fee for excess checked luggage from 2.65 euros per kilo to 2.98 euros.

At a press conference called to announce the changes,

Alfons Claver, sales manager for the company in Spain, stressed that Ryanair has led "a revolution in the price of air travel in our country," citing the average price of a ticket with the company from May 2003 to May 2004 was 40 euros, and adding that "ticket prices may go even lower".

Measures similar to those taken in Spain are becoming widespread in other countries as well. Last week a company spokesman in London told the *Financial Times* that the company is mulling over the idea of doing away with the practice of loading baggage in the holds of its planes, meaning that passengers would be able to fly only with whatever items they are able to bring onboard the plane. According to CEO Michael O'Leary, such cost-cutting ideas are the result of recent disappointing results on the stock market.

RELIGION

Mandala to be dismantled

The world's largest mandala, located in a marquee at the end of the Rambles in Barcelona, will be ceremoniously dismantled today in accordance with Buddhist tradition. Sponsored by the Barcelona Tibet House as an offering to promote world peace, the mandala depicted the "wheel of time" with an intricate floor design created with coloured sand and measuring four metres in diameter. Thubten Wangchen, director of the Tibet House, expressed sadness at the mandala's passing, but reiterated that Buddhist philosophy "teaches one to accept that everything that is born must also die". A reflection on the "temporary nature of the things in this world" will form part of today's ritual dismantling of the mandala. After a session of meditation and prayer, a procession of Tibetan monks, together with any other interested individuals, will carry what is left of it to the port, where it will be thrown into the sea.

RENFE

Female staff can choose trousers

The Spanish rail company Renfe has decided to let female staff working on its AVE (high-speed) and long distance trains decide whether to wear uniforms with skirts or trousers. Female staff, whose uniforms have always included skirts, have been petitioning Renfe for the right to wear trousers should they wish to. Minister of Development Magdalena Álvarez had promised upon taking office that giving women this option would be one of her priorities. The change comes at a time when uniforms for these two services are being replaced for some 1,700 staff members, both male and female.

EDUCATION

Flamenco offered at university

Students wishing to study flamenco as a university subject will soon be able to do so at the University of Cordoba. Augustín Gómez, a professor at that university, said that his objective was to make flamenco both a subject for university-level classes as well as a field to be researched. He said that establishing flamenco in universities was the best way to ensure its survival as a serious discipline, and that his plan was to eventually make flamenco into a "thematic nucleus" for other disciplines. He pointed out that courses about flamenco had already been offered at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

HEALTH

New cancer test centre planned

The Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO) has signed an agreement with the multinational Lilly Research Laboratories (LRL) to create an oncology test analysis centre with the aim of making more efficient use of the resources available for cancer research, according to ICO director Ramon López. Under the terms of the agreement, LRL will provide 340,000 euros for the operation of the new centre and participate in the research and testing carried out within it.

Joan Gaspart calls for tourist sector to be regulated to protect heritage sites

CT

The president of Barcelona's tourism consortium, Joan Gaspart, has called for the tourist sector to be regulated. During a speech at the Forum 2004 he urged local, regional and national government to "regulate" the sector and asked business people working in the industry not to fear any new laws. "Neither business people nor the government have to worry about the phrase 'regulating the sector,'" he said. "I encourage the government to keep a

firm hand in what they say and what they do in order to conserve our heritage," he added. He was addressing a debate launched at the Forum yesterday called "Tourism, cultural diversity and sustainable development."

Gaspart, the former president of Barcelona FC, defended the role of businessmen in preserving local culture. "It is clear that business people have to earn money and this is something that we should not be ashamed about," he added. He said



Gaspart spoke at the Forum yesterday

during his speech called "The responsibility of the tourist company with the heritage of the communities" that business people having obtained the necessary profits, should reinvest part of their income in helping to maintain heritage sites. He also defended the Forum and said it was about a "creative" initiative but not "speculative" a criticism leveled at the event by some of its critics. "It has been built here so that in the future Barcelona can enjoy this area which in past we have been proud."