Copenhagen’s Kastrup Airport is the primary aerial gateway not just for Denmark, but the entire Scandinavian region. As Luigi Vallero discovered, this is a status it doesn’t plan to surrender.

Scandinavia, in many people’s eyes, is made up of Norway, Sweden and Finland. But they overlook Denmark, an intrinsic part of the region which also provides its main gateway for commercial air traffic.

A complex transport infrastructure has developed in and around the capital Copenhagen and the city’s major international access point is Copenhagen Airport (CPH). It sits on the island of Amager 5 miles (8km) south of the city centre and ranks first among the Scandinavian hubs for international traffic, handling 24,067,030 passengers in 2013.

The airport is commonly known – and marketed as – CPH, its three letter IATA designation, and is the main hub for SAS Scandinavian Airlines and a major centre for Thomas Cook Airlines Scandinavia and Norwegian Air Shuttle. It is linked to 140 worldwide destinations and served by 60-plus scheduled carriers. On average, more than 63,000 passengers use it every day. Thanks to the Øresund Bridge, which opened in 2000 connecting Denmark to Sweden, four million people are now within two hours’ drive of the airport, vastly increasing its catchment area.

**Airport Statistics**

- **ICAO Code:** EKCH
- **IATA Code:** CPH
- **Location:** 55° 37’05” N, 012° 39’.22” E
- **Elevation:** 179’ (5m)
- **Runway:**
  - 04L/22R 11,811 x 148’ (3,600 x 45m)
  - 04R/22L 10,827 x 148’ (3,300 x 45m)
  - 12/30 10,072 x 148’ (3,070 x 45m)
- **Frequencies:**
  - ATIS: 122.75, 122.85
  - Tower: 118.575, 118.7, 119.35, 121.825
  - Ground: 121.625, 121.725, 121.9
  - Approach: 118.45, 119.8, 120.2
- **Website:** [www.cph.dk](http://www.cph.dk)

**History**

Opened on April 20, 1925, Copenhagen Airport was one of the first civil airports in the world. It was a simple facility with grass runways, a wooden passenger terminal, a couple of hangars, a balloon mast, and a seaplane landing stage.

Local airline Det Danske Luftfartsselskab (DDL), which evolved in today’s SAS, helped the airport to become an ideal gateway to access the whole of Scandinavia by quickly increasing the number of connecting flights it offered all across Europe during the 1920s. Between 1932 and 1933, the number of movements grew from 6,000 to 50,000 annually, with passenger numbers growing more than six-fold to 72,000.

In April 1939 a new terminal, designed by architect Vilhelm Lauritzen, went into service while new Focke-Wulf Condors were used to launch additional routes. The terminal survives to this day, after being preserved in September 1999 and moved to its present location for restoration to its original condition. This freed up space to enlarge other facilities.

Most civil air traffic ceased on the outbreak of World War Two, with just a few flights providing connections to Sweden, Berlin and Vienna. In the summer of 1946 the first concrete runway, measuring 4,593ft (1,400m), was laid, followed by three more and a taxiway system by the end of the war.

The airport escaped the conflict virtually unscathed, which helped it to quickly develop as one of Europe’s most modern. Intercontinental services arrived in 1946 when American Overseas Airlines and SAS (DDL), which evolved in today’s SAS, helped the airport to become an ideal gateway to access the whole of Scandinavia by quickly increasing the number of connecting flights it offered all across Europe during the 1920s. Between 1932 and 1933, the number of movements grew from 6,000 to 50,000 annually, with passenger numbers growing more than six-fold to 72,000.

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launched flights to the US east coast using Douglas DC-4s (and later DC-6s). By 1948, CPH was handling an average of 190 daily movements and around 300,000 passengers a year, ranking it the third busiest airport in Europe.

To cope with the growth, the terminal needed almost continuous enlargement; passenger numbers having reached 700,000 - and height and mail 34 tonnes - by 1954. The same year SAS launched its Trans Polar DC-7 flights to Los Angeles.

To prepare for the impending jet age, CPH's runway was lengthened and upgraded with new ILS equipment, and a new multi-pier terminal was introduced in 1956 - a year when the annual passenger total passed the one million mark. The honour of being the first jet airliner to visit CPH went to an Aeroflot Tupolev Tu-104 in 1957. SAS later introduced a fleet of Sud Aviation Caravelles and DC-8s - eventually complemented by Convair CV-990 - to the Danish capital with Berlin/Tegel, Düsseldorf and, seasonally, Palma de Mallorca.

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In 1991 CPH was partly privatised, and in the ensuing decade improvement work continued constantly. Passengers totalled 17 million in 1998 while upgrades included the opening of T3, a new arrivals hall, improved baggage handling facilities and an underground railway station directly connected to the check-in area. A five-star Hilton Hotel, directly facing the terminal complex, opened in 2001 and five years later travel numbers passed 20 million.

Rail and motorway connections to Sweden were also improved, providing direct access to the T1 lounges. A new central security checkpoint opened in February 2005 when a dedicated glass-enclosed transfer centre opened - somewhere connecting passengers can find information and pick up boarding passes in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Today CPH has three terminals. T1 handles all domestic flights. T2 and T3 deal with Schengen and non-Schengen international flights, and share a common airside passenger concourse as well as an arrivals section, which includes customs and baggage reclaim. The 'CPH Go' pier (F) handles LCCs. A 9,840m² (105,000sq ft) terminal was built and the international facility further expanded. On the other side of the airport the cargo area was refurbished and more apron space added, increasing the number of aircraft stands to 12.

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that geographically speaking Denmark is more compact than Norway or Sweden. Adding to the busiest domestic destination, accounting for 899,882 travelers last year.

In the last three years the airport has successfully attracted Emirates, Airline and Qatar Airways, opening up virtually the whole of the Middle and Far East as well as Africa. The airport’s airline marketing team is constantly looking for new traffic opportunities and won the World Routes marketing award this year in the 20+50 million passenger category.

Airlines
The airport’s tenant, SAS, uses its varied types on domestic, European and long-haul services. Other local carriers flying out of CPH are Air Greenland, with its distinctive tomato-red Airbus A330, on services to Kangertussuaq, Air Asia, using ATR-72s to Sønderborg; Atlantic Airways, connecting to Vagar in the Faroe Islands with A39s and Avro RJs; and Danish Air Transport offering ATR-42/72 links to Bornholm, Norrköping, Sønderborg and Oslo/Rygge. Locally based Thomas Cook Airlines Scandinavia provides seasonal charters to holiday destinations in the Canary Islands, the Mediterranean, Spain and Phuket in Thailand.

Norwegian has developed a strong presence at CPH and across its red and white Boeing 737s and 787s offer comprehensive connections around Europe and to Los Angeles and New York/JFK (both using 787s). Unbranded LCC easyJet and its Swiss arm provide budget services to key European capitals including Berlin (Schönefeld), Edinburgh, Geneva, Lisbon, London (Gatwick and Stansted), Paris/Charles de Gaulle and Rome/Fiumicino. Meanwhile air Baltic connects with its Riga hub. Finnair provides multiple daily flights to Helsinki and connects with frequent T3T services to Reykjavik, competing with LCC WOW air on this route. The T3T line starts at Kastrup, Linköping, and Örebro; and Widere provides commuter links to Varberg, Hämeenpää, Kristiansand, Middlesbrough and Sandefjord.

European airlines connect right across the continent while intercontinental links include Air Canada to Toronto/Pearson; Delta Air Lines to New York/LGA, EgyptAir to Cairo; Emirates Air to Dubai, Iran Air to Tehran; Middle East Airlines to Beirut; (summer); Pakistan International Air Lines to Islamabad and Lahore; Qatar Airways to Doha; Royal Air Maroc to Casablanca; Singapore Airlines to Singapore; and Thai Airways International to Bangkok/Suvarnabhumi and a seasonal service to Phuket.

Latest developments
The airport’s management presented its detailed vision for the expansion of Copenhagen Airport on January 29 to enable it to handle up to 40mppa, almost twice the current number. However, unlike many of its European competitors, CPH does not intend to build a new terminal. On the contrary, the plan is to increase the capacity of the existing terminal complex in a phased process. The airport’s CEO Thomas Woldbye said: “In my opinion, building new terminals is not an optimal solution. A phased expansion offers several advantages. Eighteen months of analysis work has shown us that, with this approach, we can avoid building excess capacity. Secondly it allows us to keep the airport’s compact layout, which is important. Thirdly a phased expansion allows us to adjust our process to match the increase in traffic, and lets us make use of the latest technology. We will begin expanding Pier C later in 2024. This pair is used for non-Schengen and intercontinental traffic.”

The phased expansion plans are:
- Pier B to be extended, adding more gates and stands for medium-size aircraft used on regional and European flights.
- Pier C to be extended to provide more space for large long-haul aircraft.
- The terminal layout will be modified and expanded to provide better segregation of arriving and departing passengers.
- Providing additional business opportunities around the airport, including a new hotel.
- Facilities to handle very large aircraft, including a new pier (E) and runway upgrades, will be added when airlines decide to introduce such aircraft on routes to CPH.
- Construction of a dedicated station for high-speed trains connecting to Oslo and Hamburg.
- The arrivals area will be altered to make room for more large baggage carousels and to let in more natural light.
- The shopping centre will be enlarged to accommodate more retailers and provide a better passenger experience.

The ‘friendly fight’ to be the leading Scandinavian airport goes on, with Oslo and Stockholm both eager to claim this position. But with plans established for the next 25 years, the Danish hub is well placed to maintain its status as the premier international gateway to the Nordic countries, thanks to its geographical position and to continued efforts to improve its facilities and route network.