

Las Americas Airport

PREPARING FOR A TAKE OFF IN
TOURIST NUMBERS





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RESEARCH BY *Eurides Lopes*



The Dominican Republic is the Caribbean’s second largest country in terms of landmass, giving it considerably more unspoiled tropical coastline than most of its neighbours - totalling something over 1,000 kilometres. This has understandably made it a tourist hotspot over the past few decades, with growing numbers of tourists making their way to the island paradise.

Naturally, this country has had to develop its transport infrastructure to accommodate the influx and this is exemplified by Las Americas Airport (SDQ), managed by Aerodom, a subsidiary of Vinci Airports. 2019 has started well for the airport, with it tying up some significant new deals after only a couple of months into the New Year. In light of this, we dropped by to see why so many airlines are now queuing up to add Las Americas to their roster.

Background and Overview

Located approximately 20 miles to the east of Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, Las Americas celebrates 60 years of existence in 2019, having welcomed its first flights back in 1959. Over the past decade, passenger numbers have grown an average of 5% per year. In 2018, it welcomed a record 3.9 million passengers - and may even breach that in 2019 if its management continues to tie up deals with international airlines.

The airport plays a central role in the ambitions of the Dominican Republic

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government to attract more tourist numbers. It came to understand at the end of the 1990s that throughput in its airport was key if this was to be achieved. The upgrading of the airport began with the addition of the airport’s northern terminal in 2007, adding four new gates and world-class maintenance facilities for airlines. Most of the airport’s visitors come from New York, Miami and Madrid with smaller cities such as Panama City, Atlanta, Boston and Orlando also being popular.

Las Americas is also home to one of the longest runways in the Caribbean. At 3,355 meters in length, its main runway is capable of

supporting Boeing 747s - the most common aircraft among the large international airlines. This is exhibited by the fact that Las Americas currently hosts over 30 airlines, with well-known carriers such as Air France, JetBlue, Delta Airlines, United and Iberia being seen making their way down its runways. They bring passengers to and from 33 international destinations - a number which grows year-on-year.

In 2018, the latest phase of the airport’s expansion began with a US\$25 million investment to implement major improvements in the airport’s infrastructure as part of its

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ongoing modernization and optimization program. This will include a recreational area for passengers, an extended viewing platform, improved security and immigration services, state-of-the-art information systems, new cargo terminal and more.

New Deals

As mentioned at the outset, the management team at Las Americas has been busy in the past few months tying up new deals. In January 2019, Canada Jetlines announced that it would provide future service to Las Americas and its sister airports around the Dominican Republic, subject to regulatory approval.

This was followed by a deal between the airport and Flycana, which announced in February 2019 that it had selected Las Americas as its base in the Caribbean, from where it would operate short- and medium-haul routes. Its investment in the new base is expected to reach into the tens of millions. Significantly, Flycana will be the first ULCC (Ultra Low-Cost Carrier) in the Caribbean, potentially revolutionizing travel in the region.

Partners and Suppliers

The growth of Las Americas airport has been aided by a group of dedicated partners and suppliers, both local and international. Local partners include the Helidosa Aviation Group, a charter airline founded in 1992, General Air Services, a provider of diversified services to



airports, and Dama Cargo, a local cargo logistics firm with its headquarters in the airport.

In terms of international partners and suppliers, Swissport Dominicana, the local branch of the international logistics giant, handles much of the airport’s cargo and ground-handling, Clear Channel Airports provides revenue to the airport through advertising, Spanish Architecture Team Luis Vidal + Architects have been instrumental in modernizing the airport’s building and interiors, while Las Americas counts on Scheidt & Bachmann/ Intelipark for its information and ticketing systems.

What the Future Holds for Las Americas

The investment by Aerodom in Las Americas Airport is not only a vote of confidence in the Dominican Republic, but suggests that they’re preparing to take the airport to the next level. The fact that they’ve added a new cargo terminal illustrates that it’s not just passenger

numbers which are going to increase in the years ahead, but imports and exports too - Las Americas role in the local economy is only likely to growth.

Recent research by Oxford Economics, a global consulting firm, suggested that tourism contributed a little over 600 million Dominican pesos, through indirect and direct means, and that by 2028, this figure would grow to 900 million pesos - or approximately 50% in just ten years. It’s good to see that Las Americas is well prepared for this transition, and that tourists will be well catered for when landing on this island paradise. **BE**

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