

# Tocumen Panama International Airport

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IS NOW IN THE AIR





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as well as Panama in Central America.*

RESEARCH BY *Fernando Ruiz*



Raffoul Arab Pinzón  
CEO

Perhaps no country in the world has taken advantage of its geographical location, as well as Panama in Central America. No one else can provide such rapid and relatively unhindered access between two major oceans and Panama has taken advantage of this to a remarkable extent to effectively become for the world in the 21st century what the Silk Road was several centuries earlier.

Thanks to the work of Tocumen International Airport, the world's most famous sea route is now in the air. We recently spoke with the company's CEO, Raffoul Arab Pinzón, about the company's success story and its role in Panama leveraging its global reputation as a country at the center of global commerce. He told

Construction began in 1971, so the Tocumen River was diverted from its original course for the construction of the new terminal."

It continues: "The new terminal, also called Tocumen International Airport, was inaugurated on August 15, 1978 and the inaugural flight was on September 5 of the same year. Tocumen International Airport is one of the few in the region with two runways, as the runway of the previous terminal is permanently used by cargo planes and private flights or can be used as an alternative runway to the main runway at times demand."

Changes were also being made to management, allowing people in contact with airport operations to make decisions more efficiently. Previously, the airport administration was under the control of

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us about his history, his current operations, including the airport's second terminal, which will be delivered in 2020, a truly historic milestone for Tocumen.

### Background

The history of Tucumen Airport begins with its inauguration in June 1947 by President Enrique Adolfo Jiménez Brin. This was followed in 1954 by the opening of the airport administration and the first terminal buildings. This first airport occupied an area of 7.2 kilometers strategically located just 20 kilometers outside Panama City. Today, the same airport is used as a cargo terminal.

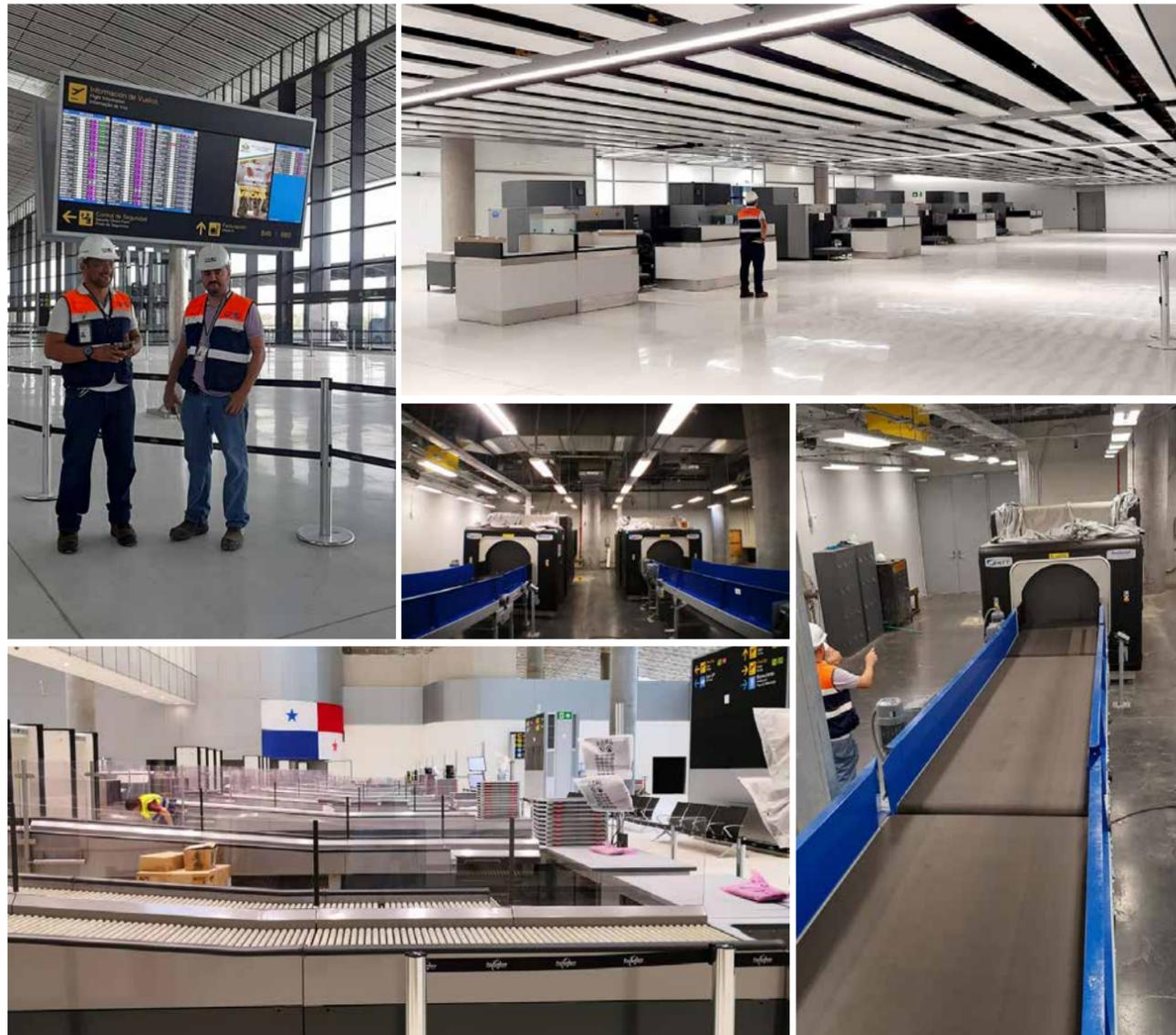
Inevitably, in a short time, this was too small to meet demand. As Mr. Arab says: "Given Panama's history as a transit country favored by its geographical location, that terminal was too small for demand for air operations.

the Civil Aeronautics Directorate (now the Civil Aviation Authority). Starting on June 1, 2003, a new administrative organization was created, which allows the creation of a company called Tocumen S.A. International Airport that currently manages the airport.

Today, Tocumen Airport is one of the most important terminal areas in Latin America as evidenced by its growing number of passengers and the fact that it operates flights to and from more than 94 international destinations to cities in the Americas and Europe, covering much of Latin America. It is also Copa Airlines' main hub and Star Alliance hub for Latin America and the Caribbean.

This translates to an average of 45,432 passengers per day, including landings and transfers, amounting to 16.5 million in 2019. As the number of passengers continues to grow, so does the airport and the most visible signal

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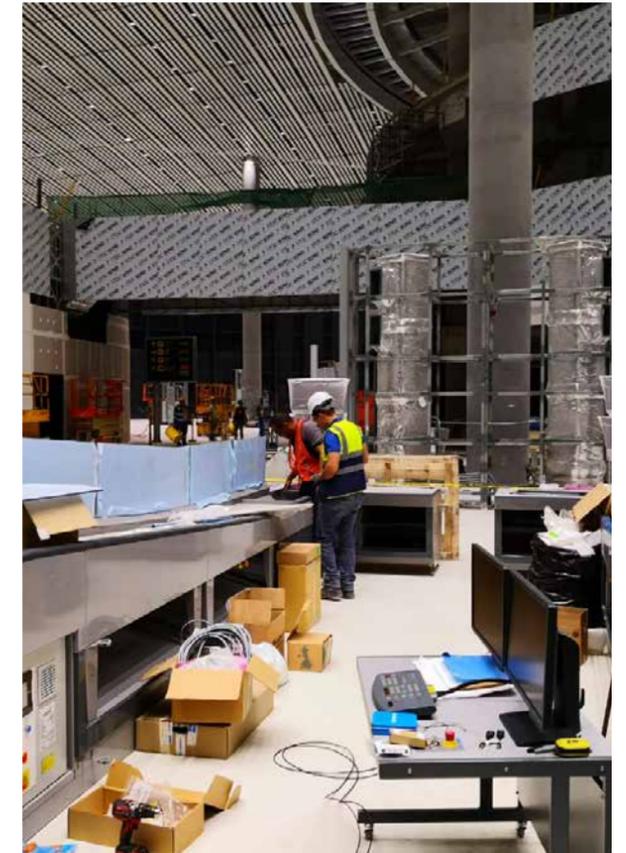
Cuando nosotros GRUPO ESROD, S.A. participamos junto a Rapiscan Systems, en la licitación de equipamiento de seguridad de Rayos X de la nueva terminal (T2) del aeropuerto Internacional de Tocumen, nunca imaginamos el reto que representaría. Lo hicimos pensando en el crecimiento y futuro de nuestros cliente Tocumen.

Y por ello, en consorcio con Rapiscan Systems nos decidimos a implementar la mejor y más eficiente solución para la inspección en su sistema de BHS que una terminal como Tocumen necesita. Nuestra oferta fue el sistema de Tomógrafos Computarizados (CT) más eficiente y de más alta velocidad que existe en el mundo. El CT modelo RTT110 fabricado en UK de Rapiscan Systems, puede manejar 1,800 maletas hora; su sistema de Gantry fijo permite el más bajo índice de rechazos. Por ello, la escogencia de las autoridades de Tocumen fue acertada. Hoy el sistema de manejo de maletas de la nueva terminal de Tocumen es el más eficiente de América Latina con capacidades de manejo de maletas/hora muy superiores a terminales que operan en la región.

Además del sistema de inspección por tomógrafos computarizados, instalamos las primeras 10 líneas de sistemas TRS (Tray Return Systems – Sistema Automático de Recuperación de Bandejas de Inspección)) de América Latina, para puntos de control de pasajeros y equipaje de mano. Con ello, Tocumen estará a la vanguardia de las más exigentes soluciones de inspección no intrusiva reguladas en aeropuertos del mundo.

Desde los detectores de trazas de explosivos, pasando por los sistemas convencionales de Rayos X y los tomógrafos computarizados de la marca Rapiscan Systems, el GRUPO ESROD acompaña la terminal de Tocumen como el proveedor confiable que se convierte en un socio estratégico para el cumplimiento de los objetivos de crecimiento a futuro de ésta terminal.

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*“Tocumen International Airport has one of the highest growth rates in passenger demand in the region and Latin America”*

of this growth will reach mid-2020 with the arrival of Terminal T2.

**Terminal T2**

Success has driven more success at the airport. As Mr Arab argues: “Tocumen International Airport has one of the highest growth rates in passenger demand in the region and Latin

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**Environmental Management Group (EMG)** reúne un grupo de Empresas dedicadas principalmente a la gestión de desechos sólidos urbanos, comerciales e industriales con más de 17 años en Panamá, manejo de plagas y mantenimiento de áreas verdes. Nuestra misión trabajar con pasión el ambiente, bajo valores que nos representan como empresa:

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*“With Terminal 1 and 2 we will have 66 gates and 12 remote positions and will cover an area of approximately 116,000m<sup>2</sup> distributed in four levels”*

America; Therefore, it has been developing a Master Plan, which has a validity period from 2015 to 2035, which is updated and reviewed annually with major industry representatives.”

The pinnacle of this master plan is Terminal T2, which will handle a total of 20 gates that must be 100% operational in the first half of 2020. As Mr Arab says, it will not only be a milestone for aviation in Panama, but also for airport architecture. It says: “T2 is a work of relevant architectural value bearing the seal of quality of the renowned British firm Foster

and Partners. In addition to being a state of the art in terms of technology, it is also totally earthquake-proof.”

He adds: “With Terminal 1 and 2 we will have 66 gates and 12 remote positions (4 in Terminal 1 and 8 in Terminal 2) and will cover an area of approximately 116 thousand m<sup>2</sup> distributed in four levels. It measures 662 meters in length, with a building of 112 meters in length and reaches a height of 30 meters in some points.” Most important for Tocumen, it will also increase its capacity to about 25



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CSA Group is a proud team member of the consortium that carried out the Program Management and Construction Management for the Tocumen International Airport Expansion Program, and provided design oversight, inspection services, construction oversight, and cost control services.

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*“The extension required some 6,500 professionals from different disciplines efficiently coordinated, resulting in one of the most modern terminals in the world.”*

million passengers by 2025, which means the future growth of the airport with a world-class piece of architecture.

**A project for Panama**

Of course, all of this is not just growth for the sake of the growth of the aviation industry. Tocumen’s main role is not only to be a conduit for the growth of other countries, but rather for Panama itself. To begin with, its extension provided an important job to the region. Mr. Pinzón says: “The extension required some

6,500 professionals from different disciplines efficiently coordinated, resulting in one of the most modern terminals in the world.”

Outside of this direct employment, there are other significant benefits, he notes: “According to the most recent study ‘Economic Benefits of Air Transport in Panama’ conducted by IATA, the aviation industry in Panama generates \$7.3 billion every year, of which \$2.2 billion corresponds to air transport revenue, with the remaining amount being the expenditure of foreign visitors to the country.” In 2019,



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**Partners and suppliers**

Successfully managing the flow of more than 16 million passengers each year, while delivering a new terminal, is no easy task. Tocumen has a select range of partners and suppliers that allow it to fulfill its promises, almost all of them are of Panamanian origin. These include Grupo Aluman, and SVF Panama, which participated in elements of the construction and engineering part of T2, joined by Brazilian firm Odebrecht and Spanish firm Sampol.

The considerable task of meeting the airport’s telecommunications requirements is admirably managed by Telecom Group Inc., a US firm, while Inversiones Grupo Esrod S.A. provides ongoing assistance in the various aspects airport management technicians from security to airport signalling systems.

**Panama in the skies**

When talking about the future of Tocumen, one may also be talking about the future of Panama, so the fates of the two. With the arrival of T2 in 2020, Tocumen will firmly



take its place among the best airports in the Americas - a milestone for the airport and the country to celebrate. As Mr. Pinzón says, “the growth of the airline industry in Panama has a hugely positive impact on the overall development of the country; With the launch of the airport complex, the trade, logistics, tourism and financial and business services centre will be enhanced. **BE**

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