

# Loughborough University Institutional Repository

---

## *Still leading the way. Almaty International Airport*

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

**Citation:** BUDD, L.C.S., 2011. Still leading the way: Almaty International Airport. *Airports of the World*, 36, pp.56-62.

**Additional Information:**

- This article was accepted for publication in the journal, *Airports of the World*: <http://www.airportsworld.com/> Please note that this work is unavailable for publication in any commercial form without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Metadata Record:** <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/9941>

**Version:** Accepted for publication

**Publisher:** © Key Publishing Limited

Please cite the published version.

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.



**CC creative commons**  
COMMONS DEED

**Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5**

**You are free:**

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

**Under the following conditions:**

**BY:** **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.

**Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

**No Derivative Works.** You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

**Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.**

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code \(the full license\)](#).

[Disclaimer](#) 

For the full text of this licence, please go to:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

## **Almaty International Airport**

Lucy Budd

Kazakhstan, the second largest of the former Soviet republics, covers an area of approximately 2,717,300 km<sup>2</sup> (1,049,155 square miles) in central Asia and stretches over 2000km from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Altai Mountains and the border with northwest China in the east. Owing to the vast distances involved and the often inhospitable terrain that is encountered, air transport has historically played an important role in Kazakhstan's development and the aviation industry looks set to play a key part in shaping the nation's future. The Seventh Asian Winter Games, which were held in and around Kazakhstan's two main cities of Astana and Almaty between January 30 and February 6 2011 demonstrated not only the country's ability to stage a major event but also the importance of modern air communications. According to the country's Prime Minister, over 10,000 people, including 3900 competitors, coaching staff, and referees, from 28 different countries were expected to travel to Kazakhstan for the event, most of them by air. Following a recent examination of Astana International Airport (Airports of the World 32), this article reports on recent developments at Almaty International Airport, Kazakhstan's busiest air facility which handles over 3 million passengers a year.

### **Almaty**

Situated in the foothills of the Zailiysky Alatau mountain range in south eastern Kazakhstan near to the border with Kyrgyzstan, the city of Almaty has undergone repeated changes in name and status. Originally a small Kazakh settlement, Almaty (which means 'Apple' or 'apple tree') quickly developed into an important trade and military centre. Between 1854 and 1921, following the construction of a Russian fortress, the city was known as Verny, but in 1921 it was renamed Alma-Ata after the famous Airport apples that grew there (Alma-Ata means 'father of apples'). The city has long been reliant on long-distance transportation for its economic prosperity and, following the construction of the Turkestan-Siberia railway in the late 1920s, the city grew rapidly and was designated the Kazakh capital in 1929. Following Kazakhstan's independence in December 1991, the city reverted back to its original name of Almaty. However, the city's status as the country's capital was to be short-lived as Astana, in the north of the country, was designated the new capital city in 1997.

Despite losing its status as the country's capital, Almaty is rapidly developing into a modern commercial city and a centre of intellectual, sporting, and cultural life. Often described as the most 'European' city in central Asia on account of the many international corporations and growing ex-pat community who are based there, Almaty is keen to establish itself as one of the economic powerhouses of central Asia. In recognition of the importance of international air services and global connectivity in attracting foreign trade and investment, the airport at Almaty has undergone significant development in recent years and it now supports a growing range of passenger and freight services.

## **Recent developments**

Almaty International Airport (ALA/UAAA) was founded in 1935 and is located approximately 11 miles (18km) northeast of the city centre at an elevation of 2234ft (681m) adjacent to the A351 highway. Despite seeing little by way of regular scheduled international or intercontinental air services during the Soviet era (apart from Aeroflot flights to/from Moscow), the airport has expanded rapidly post-independence to the point where it now handles 50% of all international air passenger traffic and 68% of all airfreight to/from the country. This rapid growth was facilitated by a substantial programme of capital investment and development that was instigated soon after Kazakhstan became independent in December 1991.

One of the most pressing issues facing the new airport operator was the state of the single existing runway, 05/23, which had been constructed in 1968 and was in urgent need of upgrading. In 1998, the runway was reconstructed to make it CAT II compliant. New navigation equipment and runway lighting was installed and new ground power systems were fitted on the apron. However, despite these developments, a number of significant operating restrictions remained and a decision was taken that a second runway was required.

Although the idea of building a second runway had been discussed in the early 1990s, it was not until 2006 that construction work actually started. Owing to the location of existing urban settlements to the west and to the south of the airport, the second runway was constructed to the north of the existing runway but along the same alignment. Designated 05L/023R, the new close parallel runway is 4,500m (14,763ft) long and 60m (197ft) wide and cost in excess of \$80 million US dollars. Opened on September 30 2008, it is currently the longest runway in central Asia and in the top 20 worldwide. 05L/23R is equipped with modern instrument landing and high-intensity lighting systems and is CAT IIIa compliant. This ensures that the airport can remain operational in all but the worst weather conditions. According to the airport, this capability has already halved the number of aircraft that have to divert to alternative airports.

## **New passenger terminal**

In addition to constructing a second runway, Almaty has also invested in a new passenger terminal to increase the airport's capacity and improve the passenger experience. Opened at the beginning of 2004 on the western side of the airfield, the building is designed to invoke an abstract image of flight. Two curved 'wings' radiate out from the central area and seemingly embrace the new four-storey 320-space car park and road interchange immediately outside. While relatively modest in size, the terminal features a bureau de change, a duty free shop, a newsagents/tobacconists, a chemist, a range of cafes and bars, and has four airbridge-equipped gates that can serve modern wide-bodied aircraft. The remote stands (which number approximately 60) are served by a fleet of dedicated buses. Between 2009 and 2010, passenger numbers grew by 19.5% and the airport recently celebrated handling a record of over 3 million passengers in a single year. By 2014, it is hoped that as many as 4 million people will be using the facility. Naturally, attracting

additional passenger services and new airlines forms a key component of the airport's current development strategy.

### **Passenger operators**

At present, 32 scheduled passenger airlines serve over 35 direct destinations from ALA. Flights to domestic and central Asian destinations, including the cities of Astana, Pavlodar, and Semey, are performed by regional operators Irtys Air, Zhezkazgan Air, Scat, and Semey Avia using a mixed fleet of elderly Soviet and more modern western airframes. Longer-haul international services to destinations including Abu Dhabi, Amsterdam, London, Frankfurt, Tehran, and Urumqi are performed by Ethiad, KLM, bmi, Lufthansa, Mahan Air, and China Southern respectively. The most extensive network of routes to/from Almaty is operated by Kazakhstan's national airline, Air Astana, which offers services from ALA to 25 destinations around the world.

While a number of elderly Tupolevs, Yakolevs, and Antonovs continue to ply their trade at Almaty, they are increasing sharing the apron with growing numbers of more modern Boeing and Airbus aircraft. The German flag carrier Lufthansa currently offers a daily scheduled service to Frankfurt using A340-300s, the South Korean operator, Asiana, employs B767s on its flights to Seoul, while other airlines, including Hainan of China, employ members of the B737NG and A320 families.

### **VIP terminal**

In addition to scheduled passenger operations, the airport is also developing the VIP and business aviation side of its business. Owing, in part, to Kazakhstan's wealth of natural resources, which includes large deposits of oil, gas, lead, zinc, and chromium, increasing numbers of business aviation users are flying to/from the airport. In order to accommodate the needs of these clients, the original Soviet-era passenger terminal (which was vacated in 2004 when the new passenger terminal was opened) was renovated and reopened as a dedicated VIP terminal in June 2007. The careful and considered restoration process enabled modern technology to blend harmoniously with the building's architectural glamour and the airport now prides itself on offering a range of bespoke VIP services to private clients.

### **Cargo facilities**

In addition to these new passenger facilities, ALA has also expanded its freight handling capabilities. In March 2005, a dedicated cargo area was constructed on the northern side of the airfield for US logistics specialist FedEx. This was joined, in 2006, by a new 21,000m<sup>2</sup> cargo complex, which comprises secure storage areas, refrigeration units, ambient store rooms, a centre for handling dangerous goods, a dedicated rail link, and a major road-air distribution centre. Collectively, these developments have enabled the airport to record double digit growth in freight operations between 2009 and 2010.

### **Cargo operators**

At the time of writing, 29 cargo operators, including some of the world's biggest cargo airlines, regularly use Almaty. Historically, some of these services used the airport simply because of its strategic geographic location in

central Asia, but the recent development of the cargo complex and the provision of modern cargo handling and distribution systems has attracted other cargo operators to the airport. In 2000, Israeli carrier El Al began operating twice-weekly B747 cargo flights to/from Tel Aviv. Regular services by KLM Cargo and FedEx followed in 2003. These operators were joined, in 2004, by Lufthansa Cargo, Volga-Dnepr, and Antonov Airlines, the latter of which used giant An-124s and the six-engined An-225 'Mira' to transport heavy and/or outsize loads.

In January 2005, a joint venture between two US cargo airlines, Polar Air Cargo and Atlas Air, resulted in the inauguration of a Shanghai-Almaty-Amsterdam rotation which was flown up to seven times per week depending on demand. Later that year, Italian operator Ocean Airlines began making routine technical and re-fuelling stops at Almaty as part of their Brescia-Hong Kong-Brescia and Brescia-Shanghai-Brescia services and Cargolux introduced an additional stop at ALA on their thrice-weekly Hong Kong-Baku-Luxembourg flights. Cargolux have subsequently expanded their business at ALA and now operate as many as 80-90 flights a month. In November 2005, China Eastern Airlines inaugurated a Shenzhen-Almaty-Luxembourg route using B747F classics up to four times a week. Malaysian cargo operator, Transmile, also served the airport with their fleet of MD11Fs.

Additional growth occurred in 2006. In July, Malaysian Airlines commenced a Kuala Lumpur-Shanghai-Almaty-Amsterdam rotation four times a week and, later that year, the Kazakhstan Government signed an air service agreement with FedEx which granted the carrier seventh freedom flying rights to/from the country. This commercial freedom enabled FedEx to expand its operation at Almaty to the point where it operates as many as 50 flights a month. Other regular cargo operators include Lufthansa Cargo and Aerologic, who operate up to 45-50 services a month and Evergreen Air Cargo, who fly 6-7 flights a week. Other operators, including UPS, Emirates, Aeroflot Cargo, and TNT have also used the airport.

### **The future**

Despite Air Astana recently relocating a number of its services to the Kazakh capital, the future for ALA looks bright. Thanks to an extensive programme of capital investment, the airport now has the airside infrastructure and the capacity to accommodate future growth as well as the physical space to expand further, should it become necessary. Unlike many other airports in the region, the airport's long CATIlla compliant runway and generally favourable weather conditions should enable ALA to remain operational when fog or winter weather necessitate the closure of neighbouring facilities. In an age in which reliability and efficiency of air transport operations are highly prized commodities, ALA appears well placed to serve the air transport needs of both Kazakhstan and that of the wider global economy for many years to come.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author would like to thank Anel Aliaskarova of ALA's press and public relations department for her invaluable help in the preparation of this article.

<b>Passenger airlines operating to/from ALA (winter 2010/11)</b>
AeroSvit (Ukraine)
Air Arabia (UAE)
Air Astana (Kazakhstan)
Air Baltic (Latvia)
Asia Wings (Kazakhstan)
Asiana Airlines (South Korea)
Atlas Jet (Turkey)
Avia Traffic Company (Kyrgystan)
Bmi (UK)
China Southern
CSA
Donbass Aero (Ukraine)
Egypt Air
Ethiad
Hainan Airlines
Irtysh Air (Kazakhstan)
KAM Air (Afghanistan)
KLM
Lufthansa
Mahan Air (Iran)
S7 Airlines
Scat (Kazakhstan)
Semey Avia (Kazakhstan)
Somon Air (Tajikistan)
STS Russia
Tadjik Air (Tajikistan)
Transaero (Russia)
Turkish Airlines
Turkmenistan Airlines
Ukraine International
Uzbekistan Airlines
Zhezkazgan Air (Kazakhstan)

<b>Cargo airlines operating to/from ALA (winter 2010/11)</b>
Aerologic (Germany)
Air Atlanta Iceland
Airbridge Cargo Airlines (Russia)
Air Cargo Germany
Antonov Design Bureau (Ukraine)

Atlas Air (USA)
Berkut Air (Kazakhstan)
Cargolux
Cargolux Italia
DETA Air (Kazakhstan)
Evergreen International Airlines (USA)
FedEx
Kuzu Airlines
Lufthansa Cargo
Martin Air (Netherlands)
Masisavia (Armenia)
MEGA Air (Kazakhstan)
MNG Airlines (Turkey)
Scat (Kazakhstan)
Silk Way (Azerbaijan)
TNT
TransAvia Export (Belarus)
Turkish Airlines Cargo
Ukraine Mediterranean Airlines
UPS
Uzbekistan Hava Yollary
Vertir Airlines (Armenia)
Volga-Dnepr (Russia)

<b>Direct passenger destinations (winter 2010/11)</b>
Abu Dhabi
Aktau
Aktobe
Amsterdam
Ashkhabad
Astana
Baku
Bangkok
Beijing
Bishkek
Delhi
Dushanbe
Ekaterinburg
Frankfurt
Istanbul
Karaganda
Kiev

Kostanay
Kuala Lumpur
Kyzylorda
London
Moscow
Novosibirsk
Pavlodar
Petropavlousk
Semey
Sharjah
Shymkent
St Petersburg
Taraz
Tashkent
Tehran
U-Kamenogorsk
Uralsk
Urumqi
Yerevan
Zhezkazgan