

Big, bigger, biggest

Every so often a particular type of aircraft comes along which excites the industry, whether because of its graceful design (Boeing 707), its speed (Concorde) or because it has challenged the traditional idea of air travel (Boeing 747). And so it is with the Airbus A380. The first landing at Heathrow, two years ago, was carried as live television across the world (and, by the way, Batphone was there) and the first commercial landing at Heathrow last month (Batphone was also there) was widely reported in the national press. This aircraft however has caused more changes to the industry than any of its predecessors. BAA Heathrow has invested millions of pounds in constructing Pier 6, its special dual-level facility specifically for handling the double-deck aircraft. But think of all the ancillary services, such as catering, baggage handling and so on. Those companies on the airport which provide such services have all had to invest considerably to serve the new aircraft.

It is easy to knock aviation, to criticise when things go wrong. Of course we have sympathy with those passengers, staff and organisations caught up in the initial problems which have beset the opening of Terminal 5 but Heathrow Airport handles just under 70 million passengers a year in an ever changing environment. T5 is open, Heathrow East is next, other facilities around the airport are for ever being updated. Around 70,000 people work at Heathrow (incidentally only 4,500 work for the airport operator itself). This is a huge organisation, ever-changing and always in the media spotlight. This isn't an excuse for events at the new terminal last week; just a perspective.

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