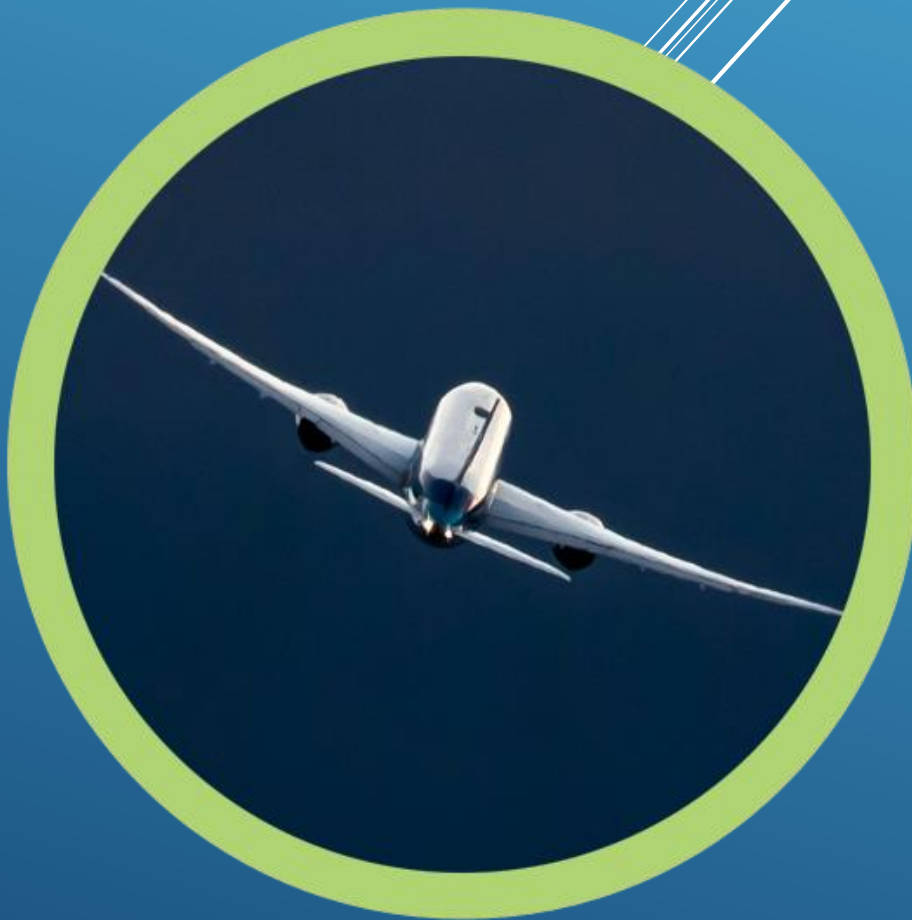




ASSOCIATION OF VISITOR
EXPERIENCES & ATTRACTIONS



AVIATION OUTLOOK 2026

AVEA Insights | February 2026

Ireland Airport Summary – 2025 Performance and 2026 Outlook

As an island tourism destination, the key to opening the tourism economy is connectivity. In the recently published [Statement of Strategy for Tourism](#), Minister Peter Burke set down ambitious targets for growth, with an increase of €3bn in overseas tourism targeted by 2031.

94% of visitors to the island arrive by air, so when considering the prospects for the coming years, it is important to understand what the 2025 year's performance looked like, and to consider investment needs and critical enablers that will impact on the successful achievement of the tourism growth strategy.

It must be noted, of course, that passenger numbers include Irish travellers on outbound trips including [sun destinations](#), as well as transit passengers and day trippers.

Tourism Ireland will continue to work collaboratively with airlines to win new routes to the island. 2026 will see a record 30 gateway cities in North America into DUB and SNN, while Tourism Ireland's strategy in Continental Europe will focus on marketing Ireland as a quality destination, easily accessible with reasonable air fares, and worth spending extra time in. [Register here to watch the Tourism Ireland webinar on 17.02.2026.](#)

Dublin Airport

[Dublin Airport recorded its busiest year ever in 2025](#), with 36.43 million passengers (+5.1% on 2024). Despite record volumes, passenger satisfaction reached all-time highs, underpinned by 97% of travellers clearing security in under 20 minutes and the full rollout of C3 scanners. Dublin handled 255,000 flights (+5%), saw strong transatlantic growth, and processed more than two million US pre-clearance passengers for the first time. December alone delivered 2.7 million passengers (+13%). Dublin stresses that future demand requires new gates, stands, and the permanent removal of the passenger cap. The airport's 'Zone 18' transport hub now has coach connectivity serving every county on the island. Construction of Metrolink is planned to commence later in 2026, but this major infrastructural project is not expected to open until the early 2030s.

Cork Airport

[Cork Airport also achieved its busiest year on record](#), welcoming 3.46 million passengers in 2025 (+13%), marking a third consecutive year of double-digit growth. Strong demand from UK provincial cities and mainland Europe contributed significantly, with standout increases to Germany (+61%) and Spain (+32%). New routes in 2025 and further additions for 2026, including Nice and Antalya, diversify Cork's connectivity. The airport strengthened its hub links to major European gateways, with 60% more seats to Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfurt, and Zurich planned for summer 2026. Cork has major capital works underway, including a new security screening area and Ireland's largest solar carport.

Shannon Airport

[Shannon Airport reached a 16 year high of more than 2.3 million passengers in 2025](#) (+9%), driven by new routes, increased frequencies, and Ryanair's stationing of a fourth aircraft. For 2026, Shannon will offer 40 routes – the most in 17 years – spanning the US, UK, and Europe, including new connections to Rome, Warsaw, Poznan, Madrid, and Frankfurt. The airport advanced major sustainability initiatives, including Ireland's first airfield solar PV farm, which will provide up to 20% of its electricity needs. Substantial investment continued across infrastructure, immigration and baggage facilities, taxiways, and business park expansion. Shannon Airport Group emphasised its role not only as a transport hub but as a driver of regional economic development.

Belfast Airports (City & International)

The combined Belfast airports handled 658,039 passengers in November 2025, reflecting modest year-on-year growth (+1.2%) and significantly higher volumes than pre-pandemic levels (+14.9%). Belfast City Airport saw stronger growth (200,573 passengers, +3.7% on 2024), while Belfast International remained relatively stable

(457,466 passengers, +0.2%). Rolling annual totals softened slightly for both airports, though Derry Airport showed a substantial annual increase (+31%). Overall, the Belfast airport system performed steadily, with year-on-year gains indicating resilient demand across Northern Ireland's aviation market.

Outlook for Irish Tourism – 2026 and Beyond

Ireland's aviation sector enters 2026 from an exceptionally strong base, with record highs in Dublin and Cork, resurgence in Shannon, and stable growth across the Belfast airports. Together, the island's airports are expanding routes, adding capacity, improving customer experience, and investing heavily in sustainable infrastructure.

Sources: CSO Inbound Tourism Statistics; Dublin Airport Authority; Shannon Airport Group; Belfast City Airport



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