

There's a world beyond Heathrow, where the floors are teak, the baggage trolleys are plentiful and there are no queues. Come fly with me, says **Tyler Brûlé**

Terminal cases

Iwonder whether London's airport operators ever check out the competition. During my journeys through revolving doors that spin too slowly, up escalators that never work and in queues staffed by dopey personnel, I doubt London's airport owners do much benchmarking.

Just as building practices are superior in Germany or Switzerland, the same goes for commercial air hubs. In the last decade European players have been spending and building. There's been investment in the UK, but not on the same level. Where Munich lays acres of granite floor, Heathrow slaps down cheap lino. Where City builds an extra apron, Frankfurt responds with a whole runway dedicated to landing traffic.

London needs to decide if it wants to continue to be a serious player as a leading global city or watch its position erode as other cities build better infrastructure and woo more businesses, tourists and investment. Here are five airports London could learn from.

FINN CITY Finnair is fast becoming one of Europe's leading carriers to Asia and is expanding its hub at Helsinki Vantaa to achieve this. With some of the fastest flying times to business centres in the East, Vantaa is attracting passengers with quick connection times and well-designed facilities. Better features include high-gloss parquet floors, functional Finnish design and branches of the Stockmann department store.

DEUTSCH TECHNIQUE The two-terminal Munich airport will soon get a third runway. Lufthansa's hub is an exercise in Teutonic efficiency: baggage trolleys are plentiful and don't squeak, loos are well engineered and clean, and the signage ensures that even the dimmest traveller is in no doubt where to find their gate.

BIG IN JAPAN

You don't hear much about Tokyo Haneda (right) because it's mostly a domestic airport. That doesn't mean it's not busy. Ranked as the world's sixth busiest airport, Haneda is no beauty but it does work. The two-terminal facility (there's also an international satellite terminal for services to Seoul and Shanghai) boasts multiple security checkpoints instead of one main area that everyone has to funnel through, a dizzying array of food and drink outlets, a multi-storey shopping area with an outstanding grocery store and soon a fourth runway. The airport is connected to Tokyo by a monorail service and it goes without saying that the facility is exquisitely maintained.

CANADA DRY

London City might be convenient, but imagine if London had the equivalent of a runway and terminal facility at Waterloo Bridge. Toronto's island airport (below) sits at the base of the city's main financial towers and wins hands down for being the most conveniently located airport in the world. Locals can cycle to the ferry terminal, make the 90-second crossing and then breeze to the gate. The main carrier at the Toronto City Centre Airport is called Porter, and the bijou carrier could soon be whisking passengers from the heart of Toronto to New York seven times a day. If only City Airport was at Vauxhall.



DANISH WHIRL

How can you not love an airport with kilometres of teak flooring? Copenhagen airport (above) has invested heavily in quality materials, inspired design and seamless connections. Just before the start of the year, the airport opened a station that links it to the city's Metro system. Copenhagen is also adding more long-haul connections with new carriers, and home carrier Scandinavian is adding more routes to the East – Dubai being the latest. Two other plus points are the Thomas Eriksson-designed business-class lounge for Scandinavian and the branches of Illums Bolighus, selling Danish design classics.