What Travelers Need to Know About the Attack on Istanbul's Airport

Suicide bombers killed more than three dozen people and injured more than 200 others — many critically — at Istanbul's Atatürk airport on Tuesday.
The horrific attack is, sadly, only the latest tragedy to highlight the very rare but real threat of terrorism in the modern world. In response, world leaders condemned the attack, while victims' loved ones only just began to grieve. The attack, which the Turkish prime minister has attributed to the Islamic State, has further galvanized world leaders in their efforts to stop terrorism and restore peace to Turkey.

As anyone who has visited Turkey knows, the region's rich history and vibrant culture are an asset to the world. Terrorism, in its random atrocities, should not hold the country hostage.

"Atatürk International Airport, like Brussels Airport which was attacked earlier this year, is a symbol of international connections and the ties that bind us together," said White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest in a statement. "Our deepest condolences go out to the families and loved ones of those killed, and we wish a speedy recovery to those injured."

Istanbul's airport has seen major growth in recent years, climbing from 30th busiest airport in 2011 with more than 37 million passengers, to 11th busiest in the world in 2015 with 61.8 million passengers, according to Airports Council International. From 2014 to 2015, the number of passengers traveling through the airport increased 9.2 percent — growth the city is unlikely to see this year after a spate of tragic attacks.
Earlier this week, the U.S. State Department updated its travel warning for Turkey, cautioning U.S. citizens that extremists have targeted areas where groups of people congregate.

"This murderous attack is only the latest in a series of attacks aimed at killing and maiming innocent civilians," the State Department said in a statement condemning the attacks. "Such attacks will only reinforce our determination to work with the Government of Turkey to counter the scourge of terrorism and support all those across the region who are working to promote peace and reconciliation."

If you were planning travel
The Istanbul airport stopped flights Tuesday as the FAA issued a ground stop for the airport. Hours later, however, the airport had been cleared to reopen.
Travelers rethinking their trips have options, however. Turkish Airlines, the largest carrier serving Atatürk, is offering travelers with flights through July 5 the ability to rebook or request a refund for no additional fees. Contact the airline for additional information.
If you are booked on another airline, contact your carrier for rebooking and refund options.
Jim Hutton, chief security officer at On Call International, told *Travel + Leisure* that travelers should take the State Department's alerts and warnings very seriously.
"Warnings don't necessarily mean imminent danger but what they do mean is that the potential for risk is very real," he said.
Travelers in Turkey are warned to avoid southeastern Turkey, particularly near the Syrian border; to stay away from large crowds; to exercise "heightened vigilance" when visiting public areas; to stay at hotels

with identifiable security measures; and to monitor local media and listen to local authorities in the event of an emeregency.

What to know about airport security
In Istanbul, three suicide bombers detonated devices at the airport's entrance. The attack is uncomfortably similar to the Brussels attack in March, when two suicide bombers detonated devices in that airport's departures hall. Both are considered "soft" targets by security professionals. Airports' design varies, but inevitably there are areas where it is difficult to secure the safety of passengers. "What travelers should do is try to make it past these security checkpoints as soon as they can," said Hutton. "The farther they get into the airport the safer they typically are."

At major airports around the world, travelers should expect to see a more visible security presence.

"After every attack you see major airports step up their visible security," said Hutton, adding that New York airports have already announced increased presence of patrols. Outside the airport, that means more frequent screenings, further limitations at drop-off areas and a push for travelers to use public transportation.
Long term, Hutton says the industry needs to think creatively about ensuring the safety of all passengers.
"The biggest challenge for airport security is that no two airports are alike," he said. "It will be difficult to establish a one-size fits all approach to increasing security."

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