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Open Skies Agreement & Belgrade Airport

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Since 1910 the **Belgrade 'Nikola Tesla' International Airport** has been growing and developing to become the largest airport in the Yugoslav area. With an ideal location at the crossroads of major air routes, the airport has become the busiest in Serbia, despite a ten per cent drop in airline passengers following the economic crisis.

The growth of the airport saw 40,664 flights take off from Belgrade International Airport, with a total of 2,384, 007 passengers on board, last year. Growth has been spurred by the increasing amount of new airlines opening new routes to Belgrade. TAROM, the flag carrying airline of Romania, started a route from Bucharest to Belgrade last December as well as Malev, the Hungarian National Airline, which opened a route from Budapest to Belgrade. This growth has been spurred by the Open Skies international agreement, which came into effect in Serbia on January 1, 2010 and lifted restrictions on international airline landing rights, moving Serbia away the policies of protecting the national airline, Jat.

The Open Skies agreement marks a new era for the airport and Serbia as a tourism destination. The changes will see more flights from more countries at affordable rates, as airlines fill the market. Wizz Air, the largest low fare – low cost airline in Central and Eastern Europe announced that in summer 2010 they would be introducing a new route from Dortmund, Germany and London, UK. Open Skies has received the full support of Belgrade International Airport, Ministry of Economy and Regional Development and the Tourist Organization of Serbia in order to make travel to Serbia easier for tourists. The agreement has already had an effect, with an average of one new airline per month announcing Serbia to be the next destination that they intend to begin operating routes to, and by April 2010 there will have already been a 25% increase in the number of flights to Belgrade Airport.

Another important change in policy which has spurred airline growth in Serbia is visa liberalization for Serbian citizens travelling to the Schengen area. Speaking at the 32nd International Fair of Tourism in Belgrade, Dr.Velimir Radosavljevic, Director General, Belgrade 'Nikola Tesla' International Airport said: "I think the main issue is visa liberalization. During January and February we had an increase of 15-20% to European Countries which signed the Schengen Agreement." The Schengen Area comprises of twenty five European countries which have no internal border controls designed to make international travel easier and spur economic growth. As a result of the visa liberalization, the number of Serbian passengers to European Destinations has increased by 20% comparing with the same period last year.

With good reason, Dr. Velimir Radosavljevic went on to say: "I think Belgrade Airport is one of the most prospective airports in the Balkan Region." Currently, the airport is running at almost 50% passenger capacity but has a maximum capacity of 5 million passengers per year. In 2009, Belgrade Airport made 18 million Euros net profit. There is talk of a bi-lateral agreement with Etihad Airways and Emirates Airlines to open new routes to Belgrade. Air capacity is a vital part of infrastructure for development of a tourism destination and with the right policies to attract new airlines and working with the Tourist Organization of Serbia will certainly put Serbia down the right track.

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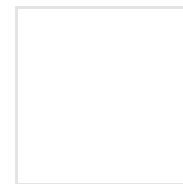
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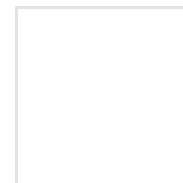
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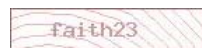
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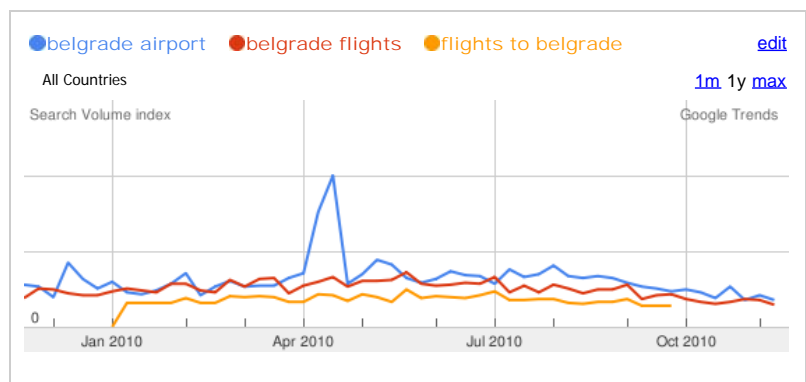


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