

GETTING AROUND THE AIRPORT *Heathrow, London*

LONDON'S HEATHROW AIRPORT has the distinction of being the busiest international airport in the world. The airport is so massive that the only way to get around the place is by subway...and we're not talking about a cutesy monorail system found in some U.S. airports... we're talking about actual city subway stations that connect the five terminals to London.

To keep things organized, flights arriving from the various corners of the world are assigned a terminal. For U.S. travelers the arriving terminal at Heathrow has historically been Terminal #4. A new terminal #5 has recently been completed and will become the home for British Airways. All International arrivals are handled the same, regardless of which terminal you arrive into. After deplaning you will follow the signs (and the crowds) to immigration control where you will present your passport. From there you go to baggage claim and then exit into the "Arrivals Hall." If your final destination is London your best transportation option is by subway into the city. An express train (no stops) and a regional train (multiple stops) are your choices. Both types make the same stops in London but the express train is quicker and more expensive.

If you are changing flights at Heathrow you will follow the signs to "Connecting Flights." It's a maze that they lead you through but eventually you will pass British passport control and then need to determine what terminal your connecting flight departs from. Once you know what terminal you need to go to, the easiest way to get to another terminal is via the subway which is free between terminals. Another free option is by bus that connects to each terminal.

Heathrow is unique in how they handle gate assignments for departing flights. Unlike other airports, where at check-in you are given a gate number, Heathrow only gives you the terminal number. Once in the departures main hall you will find very large message boards that post the gate of your flight approximately 60 minutes before departure. These message boards are located at both ends of the terminal and several in-between. You basically have to find a place to hang out or spend your time shopping while you wait for your gate to be posted. If you decide to hang out and want some peace and quiet, there are quite rooms located at either end of each terminal open to the general public. Most travelers are unaware of these spaces. You can read, nap, or otherwise chill out in relative peace and quiet while you wait for your gate to be posted. These quiet rooms are wonderful when you have a connecting flight at Heathrow with a several hour layover between flights. After flying all night to London the opportunity to take a short nap before your next flight is a godsend.

Like any other major airport, the more you know ahead of time, the less intimidating it is when you actually have to navigate it. To learn more about Heathrow airport visit their official web site at: www.heathrowairport.com ❖

