

easyJet's 'airport of the future' vision becomes reality with opening of world's largest self-service bag drop area at Gatwick

By Ryan Ghee - www.futuretravelexperience.com



easyJet UK Director Sophie Dekkers and Gatwick Airport Chief Commercial Officer Guy Stephenson cut the ribbon to officially open the new self-service bag drop area in North Terminal.

Future Travel Experience was at Gatwick Airport this week, where easyJet and Gatwick officially opened the world's largest self-service bag drop area. A total of 48 fully automated self-service bag drop machines have been installed in the 5,000sqm bag drop area, and the low-cost carrier, which is the largest airline customer serving the airport, says they will help to ensure more than 90% of its passengers flying from Gatwick wait less than five minutes at bag drop. The opening marks a major milestone in the ongoing project to consolidate easyJet's two-terminal operation at the airport into a single-terminal operation by January 2017.

Speaking to FTE immediately after cutting the ribbon to mark the official opening of the new check-in area, easyJet's UK Director, Sophie Dekkers, revealed that the carrier internally refers to the new self-service bag drop area as the "airport of the future".

"The whole concept is about getting rid of queues and having big, open spaces," she said. "This is now our blueprint, our flagship," which can be showcased to other airports served by easyJet, she added. Building on this, Chris Hope, easyJet's Head of Gatwick, stated: "These new self-service kiosks provide a glimpse into the future of airport design and enable our customers flying from London Gatwick to have unique use of the most innovative state of the art facilities."

Flexible bag drop solution

Instead of joining a queue to drop their hold luggage at a bag drop counter upon arrival at the airport, easyJet's passengers arriving at North Terminal are now directed to the bag drop area by easyJet Welcome Hosts. Their passport is then verified against their boarding pass before they can proceed to the self-service machine to place their bags onto a weighing scale. After scanning their boarding pass, a luggage tag is then automatically generated by the kiosk and attached to the bag by the customer. This tag is then verified by laser scanners to check the information is correct and the label is attached securely, before the bag is dispatched through the airport's baggage handling system.



Guy Stephenson, Chief Commercial Officer, Gatwick Airport; Sophie Dekkers, UK Director, easyJet; Chris Hope, Head of Gatwick, easyJet; and Neil Slaven, Commercial Manager for London, easyJet in front of some of the 48 Materna self-service bag drop units that have been installed in North Terminal.

Gavin Jackson, Project Leader Check-in Transformation for Gatwick Airport, explained to FTE that the opening of the new check-in area is the culmination of four years' work. "We trialed a number of different solutions from vendors and with different airlines to make sure we got this right," he said. "What you see today is the result of that. We chose the Materna solution in the end because it met most of our requirements and it is flexible enough to offer either one-stage or two-stage bag drop. We are using one-stage with easyJet, but it does allow us to use a two-stage process with other airlines across the airport if needed."

Gatwick Airport's £2.5 billion investment

As Guy Stephenson, Gatwick Airport's Chief Commercial Officer, explained, the opening of the new self-service bag drop area is an important element of the airport's ongoing £2.5 billion investment programme. "Creating new spaces which allow new technology to speed passengers through the processing part of their journey will help us eliminate queues, handle greater numbers of passengers and put people in charge of how they spend their time at the airport," he said. "It has long been an ambition of ours to have easyJet operating out of one terminal."

Having spent £36 million on creating the new check-in floor in North Terminal, £30 million has been invested in creating a new security area in the terminal, £21 million has been spent on departure hall upgrades, a further £10 million on upgrading the North Terminal border zone, and £250 million on maintaining and replacing existing facilities such as lifts, escalators and the technology infrastructure. A further £265 million has also been invested in reconfiguring Pier 5 and constructing the new Pier 1.

Of all the investments, the new self-service bag drop area could well have the most telling impact on the passenger experience thanks to the removal of queues at the first touch point that passengers encounter upon arrival at the airport.