ABANDONED ATHENS AIRPORT TO BECOME GREECE'S LARGEST COASTAL RESORT

News / Airports / Routes

An abandoned airport complex in Athens currently housing a makeshift migrant camp is destined to be transformed into one of Europe's biggest coastal resorts if a Greek development company get its way.

Hellenikon was once the only airport in Athens and, in its heyday, served 13.5million passengers. But it closed to make way for a more modern hub ahead of the 2004 Olympics in the city, and has been left to decay ever since – with a number of projects to redevelop the land failing to get off the ground.

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But leisure operation Lamda Development is confident its €7billion (£5.9billion) plan to turn the crumbling wasteland and rusting airplanes into a glitzy seaside town of hotels, residences and shops will bear fruit.

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“This project is a game-changer,” Odisseas Athanassiou, Lamda’s chief executive, told Reuters. “It is going to change the psychology of foreign capital toward investment in Greece.”

The country’s tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience despite an on-going migrant crisis, a beleaguered economy and political instability. A record 23.5million holidaymakers visited Greece in 2015.

The success of the Hellenikon proposal on a site some three times the size of Monaco at 1,530 acres could be integral to Greek tourism’s continuing strength.

The airport shut to make way for a new hub ahead of the Olympics

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Backed by Chinese conglomerate Fosun, an Abu Dhabi-based company and other prospective investors, Lamda intends to spend about €1.5billion on roads and other infrastructure, with a further €5.5billion earmarked for 8,000 homes, hotels, shops and 494-acre park.

The Greek government is planning to move the 3,000 migrants and refugees who have fled war and poverty in the Middle East and Asia to other sites in the country.

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Hellenikon is on the Athenian coast

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The once-busy arrivals terminal is currently tightly packed with dozens of tents, while prayer mats are laid in the direction of Mecca beneath signs pointing to shuttered Duty Free shops, according to Reuters.

Athanassiou hopes that construction will start at the site in the first half of next year, with many of the buildings ready for 2020.

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