BEN GURION: WHAT EUROPE'S HUBS COULD LEARN FROM THE MOST SECURE AIRPORT ON EARTH

News / Airports / Routes

Ben Gurion Airport is one of the world's most secure air travel hubs. No one has been killed or even injured as a result of terrorism at the Tel Aviv airport for the past 44 years. Nor has any departing plane been attacked during that time.

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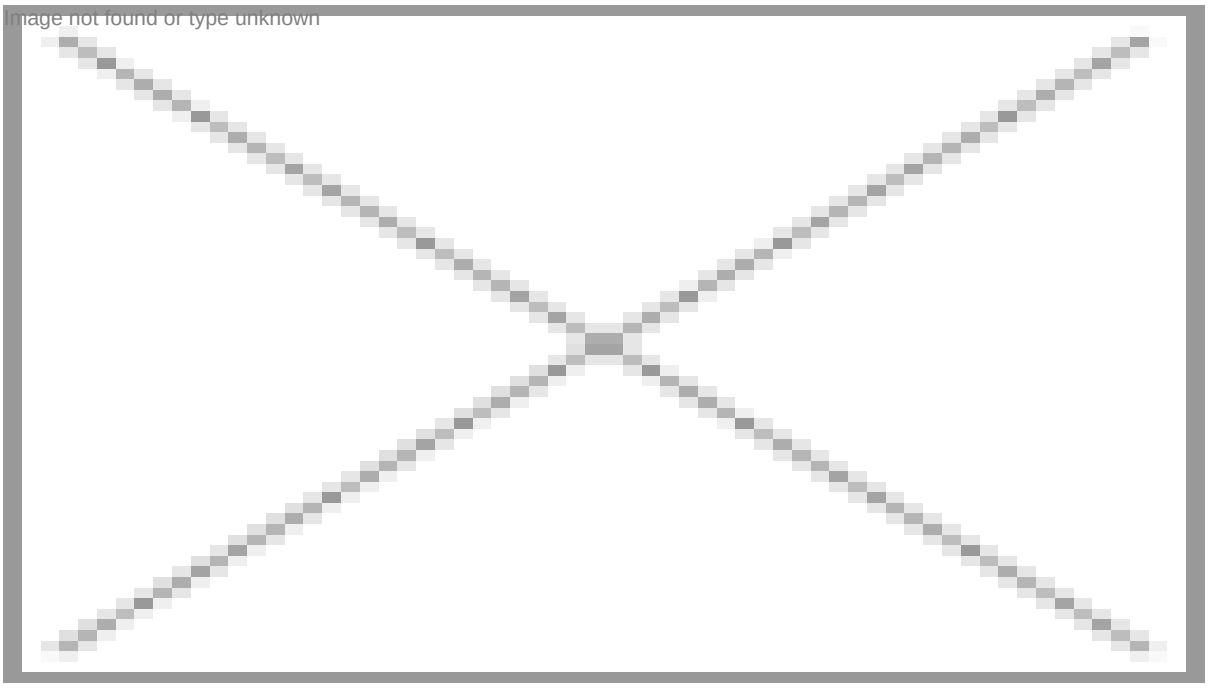

With the latest spate of terror attacks in Europe and Africa, other airports, including London Heathrow, are considering copying some of the practices that have led to the Israeli terminal's stellar security record.

Using Tel Aviv's practices in Europe

Ben Gurion will reportedly share some of its security expertise with other airports this summer, and Heathrow is interested in applying some of the practices used in Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv has multiple layers or “rings” of security. Cars entering the airport have to pass through checkpoints manned by armed guards who ask questions and perform searches if deemed necessary. At check-in, each passenger is questioned by a security official who is trained to look for certain behaviors that arouse suspicion. Some travelers are subject to additional questioning and searches based on what these behavior detection specialists find.

Gurion also has plain-clothes agents who circulate the terminals looking for suspicious behavior.

Ben Gurion’s director, Shmuel Zakay, says that it is no luck that his airport has escaped terror attacks for the past four decades plus. The high level of security is a matter of necessity, not just for passenger safety, but for the country’s connection with the outside world. “This airport is under constant threat. All terrorist organisations know the consequences of hitting Ben Gurion airport. The consequence would be to place the entire state of Israel under an air blockade.”

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Adding layers of security

Heathrow is reportedly considering using plain-clothes agents to circulate in the terminals to watch out for suspicious behavior. Other airports in Europe, meanwhile, are simply trying to keep a Brussels style-attack from happening again by checking passengers' travel documents before they enter the terminal. Many airports in Africa, Asia and the Middle East already do this.

Unfortunately, some of the other security measure used at Ben Gurion would be more difficult to employ in Europe.

Not every measure will work in Europe

First of all, despite being the only major international hub in Israel, the Tel Aviv airport is relatively small. It sees about 16 million passengers per year. Heathrow, meanwhile, sees more than 70 million. Creating a less-open setup with multiple document checks and questioning could lead to gridlock.

Also, some people contend that assigning a level of risk to passengers the way Israel's security agents do could lead to racial profiling because of the diverse ethnicities of passengers at major European airports.

Looking at the big picture

The "big picture" ideas used at Ben Gurion could prove helpful at European and American airports, however. Adding extra layers of security in the form of plain clothes patrols and document checks to enter the departure hall could go a long way towards making these hubs safer. Also, European airports could adopt the idea of trying to single out passengers who are more likely to pose a threat.

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It is probably impossible to have the same level of security that Ben Gurion has, but major hubs like Heathrow can do a lot to improve the current state of their security.

25 MAY 2016

SOURCE: TRAVELPULSE
ARTICLE LINK:
https://50skyshades.com/news/airports-routes/ben-gurion-what-europes-hubs-could-learn-from-the-most-secure-airport-on-earth

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