

4 ► HEATHROW AIRPORT

Amanda: Everyday over one thousand aircraft take-off or land here at Heathrow, the world's busiest international airport. These aircraft carry over a hundred thousand people to and from eighty-five countries. But it wasn't always like this.

The first people to fly across the Atlantic were Alcock and Brown in 1919.

Planes were small and slow then. They were also cold, uncomfortable,

noisy, and sometimes dangerous. And they couldn't fly at night.

By the Second World War planes could fly to any country in the world, but there weren't many passenger airports, only military airports. At that time, Heathrow was a small village in the country, with fields all around, but only fifteen miles from the centre of London. The fields were flat and open – just right for planes to take off and land. Heathrow Airport opened on 1 January 1946.

At first it was small and there weren't any buildings, just tents for the customs. Plane tickets were very expensive, so only rich people could travel by air.

By 1950, Heathrow was the busiest airport in Europe. There were new jets which were fast, safe and comfortable, and more people could buy plane tickets.

In 1955, two point six million passengers used Heathrow. In 1965, there were ten point six million passengers. By 1980, there were twenty-seven million.

Now over forty-two million passengers use Heathrow every year. They can fly to over two hundred destinations, and they take fifty-seven million pieces of luggage with them.

So, Heathrow Airport is a very busy place. Fifty-four thousand people work here. There are four terminals, open twenty-four hours a day. Planes can't take off or land between 11.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m., but the airport stays open. It's a city that never sleeps.

This is one of the airport's duty-free shops. Here you can buy spirits, perfumes and cigarettes, tax free. So, how much do people buy? Well, every year these shops sell one point three million bottles of perfume; four million bottles of alcohol; twelve million cigars, and guess how many cigarettes? Five hundred and thirty-nine million!

Ah, fresh air! But, of course, the air isn't very fresh around here! These planes burn kerosene, lots of kerosene. Every year planes at

Heathrow use about three billion litres of fuel. At least kerosene is lead free!

I'm now on one of the passenger aircraft that use Heathrow every day. This is the flight-deck of a Boeing 747, a jumbo jet. The plane is nearly seventy metres long and carries four hundred and fifty passengers. It can fly at a thousand kilometres an hour at a height of thirteen thousand metres. These planes can fly non-stop from London to Tokyo. So, let's go!

Well, that was easy! But of course this is only a flight-simulator where pilots learn to fly. Enjoy your next flight!