

Hub of activity

Booking indirect flights via some of the world's best-connected hub airports can be a sales opportunity for agents, writes **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Ask any client their favourite part of a trip and rarely will they respond: "The airport." But if they are travelling mid to long-haul or departing from a regional base, clients might find themselves flying via a well-connected hub airport to reach their end destination.

From the traveller's perspective, indirect flights can seem inconvenient. However, hub airports offer them a host of benefits, ranging from a chance to break up a long journey to exciting new experiences along the way, all of which provide agents with some secret sales opportunities. ➤

iGA Istanbul Airport

DESTINATIONS

AVIATION | HUB AIRPORTS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Children's play area at iGA Istanbul, Turkey; Dubai International Airport; Sleepover pods at Dubai; swimming pool at Hamad International Airport, Doha PICTURES: Chandan Sojitra; Shutterstock/Danny Jacob

MAP IT OUT

There are two ways to plot airline routes. Point-to-point networks, transporting passengers between two cities, are common in Europe – if you've ever looked at the route maps of easyJet, Ryanair and other short-haul airlines, the cat's cradle of lines shows how you can easily fly from one regional airport to another.

When travelling farther, the picture changes. While it might be possible to fly direct, especially for those within easy reach of London airports, it can work out more cost-effective for clients to take a one-stop journey via an airline hub. Clients can depart from a regional airport to the likes of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Singapore or Istanbul, where they can spend anything from a couple of hours to a stopover of several days before flying on.

Hub airports can also be useful when taking an onward domestic

“How much time a client will spend at a hub depends on whether they want a speedy connection or want to explore

leg, such as flying into Atlanta then catching a flight to a smaller US city.

Flying via a hub can mean cheaper fares, because an airline's operational costs are reduced. Firat Ocak, aviation development director at iGA Istanbul Airport, says: “Unlike the point-to-point system, the hub-and-spoke [model] centralises operations, allowing us to serve more than 330 destinations efficiently using fewer resources. This means more route options, often at competitive fares, and seamless one-stop connectivity.”

CONNECT THE DOTS

How much time your client will spend at a hub depends on whether they want a speedy connection – usually with bags checked through to their final destination – or want to get out and explore with a stopover. That might mean exiting the airport to see the city or simply getting a good night's sleep in a hotel. ➤

ASK THE experts



Vishal Patel,
director, Travelpack

“Agents can boost commission by selling flights that utilise major hub airports. Hub routing allows for easy twin-centre holidays and cost-effective stopover packages, and departing from a regional airport usually means smoother passenger flows. Leverage premium airlines' free stopover programmes when packaging bespoke holidays.”



Deborah Wadhams, head of long-haul product, Gold Medal

“As well as providing value for money, stopovers offer a chance to integrate contrasting and complementary experiences. Dubai and Abu Dhabi have always performed very well for Gold Medal, but stopovers in Asia are also seeing growth. Those travelling to Langkawi, Penang or Borneo, for example, often include a few nights in Kuala Lumpur.”



Loraine Mehta, call centre manager, Jetset

“Flying direct on long-haul flights has its advantages, but so does flying via global hubs. Clients can break their journey to experience fantastic cuisines and attractions that perhaps they wouldn't otherwise get to. Advantages for agents are clear, as a stopover stay will probably require accommodation, transfers and potentially attraction passes.”

DESTINATIONS

AVIATION | HUB AIRPORTS



ABOVE: Waterfall in the Jewel complex at Singapore's Changi Airport; Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam **PICTURE:** Shutterstock/NataliaCatalina.com

Hub airports are designed to offer favourable flight connections, with landing and take-off slots for key route pairings synchronised to allow passengers time to move through the airport before boarding their next flight. Plus, if the two flights are booked on the same PNR, clients are protected in the case of delays or missed connections.

REST UP

Even if clients have only a couple of hours, agents can position it as a way to break up the journey and stretch the legs – particularly valuable for those travelling with children. Families can use quiet zones to chill out, while play areas encourage kids to burn off excess energy: Boston's Logan International Airport even features Kidports, a fun-sized version of the airport environment, complete with foam play areas and slides.

To add extra value to your pitch, brush up on entertainment and comfort facilities in the airports

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you book most frequently. Abu Dhabi, Doha and Dubai entice with shopping and in-airport spas, while Singapore's Changi excels with a rooftop pool, cinema and nature-themed Jewel complex. Mohamed Rafi Mar, UK and Ireland general manager of Singapore Airlines, says: “In Changi, indoor gardens, a butterfly sanctuary and the Rain Vortex – the world's largest indoor waterfall – await.”

Adding lounge access can also be a great upselling opportunity and a chance for clients to freshen up between long-haul legs. Matt Rushbrooke, commercial and product director at Inspiring Travel, says: “Lounges offer a peaceful escape from airport crowds, and can range from basic comfort to premium lounges that offer showers, nap rooms and daybeds. Find out guest requirements, such as how long a client wants to spend in the lounge, what type of drinks and food they are looking for and if they need access to a business room.”

Airside hotels and sleep pods are also an option for longer connections. Frequently available by the hour, they provide a peaceful place to nap between flights without having to go through airport security or passport control. Booking.com's 2025 Travel Predictions research revealed that Gen Z and millennial travellers were particularly keen to spend on airport luxuries such as sleep pods, with more than a third expressing interest in the concept.

TWO FOR ONE

Connecting flights can help you add a bonus destination to your client's trip, with airline stopover tours and accommodation programmes enabling those with more time to get out and explore the city. Here, agents are at an advantage, as booking stopovers independently can be confusing: customers need to search for eligible flights and, in some cases, apply for their hotel bookings via the airline. For agents, visiting an airline's trade portal or signing ➤

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OF THE
BEST

STOPOVERS

Hong Kong

If clients have a Hong Kong stop of seven hours or more, they can avail themselves of a new free layover programme.

One tour includes a trip to Wong Tai Sin Temple and markets, the other takes in West Kowloon Cultural District and Victoria Harbour.

hongkongairport.com

Portugal

National airline TAP Air Portugal offers stopovers in Lisbon and Porto. Partner hotels, attractions and restaurants in either city are discounted by up to 50%.

flytap.com

Amsterdam

KLM's hub, Schiphol, is a 20-minute drive from the city centre. Tui Musement sells a private guided tour for five-hour stopovers from £48, based on eight sharing.

tuimusement.com

Iceland

The Land of Fire and Ice is handily positioned for transatlantic journeys, with Icelandair offering the chance to add a stopover with no extra flight fare.

For little layovers, the Blue Lagoon is a 20-minute drive from the airport: transfers are available via Do Something Different from £51.

dosomethingdifferent.com

Singapore

For those with between five-and-a-half and 24 hours to spare, a complimentary Singapore tour is on offer. Clients can explore Arab Street, Marina Bay Sands and Sentosa island.

changiairport.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour; XpresSpa at Dubai International Airport; Iceland's Blue Lagoon is 15 miles from Keflavik International Airport PICTURES: Hong Kong Tourism Board; Roger Cremers; Shutterstock/Palmi Gudmundsson

up for free training programmes – such as the array of aviation courses via Online Travel Training (OTT) – offer a way to learn how to get the most out of a stopover programme. For example, Qatar Airways, Oman Air and Etihad Airways include free or heavily discounted luxury hotels to encourage passengers to linger in Doha, Oman and Abu Dhabi, with the chance to enjoy a four or five-star hotel for a bargain price.

Dubai is another popular stopover location. Jabr Al-Azeeby, Emirates' UK vice-president, says: "With Emirates' stopover programme, agents can add value to itineraries by turning a Dubai connection into an experience. Clients can choose from hundreds of attractions – from helicopter rides, desert safaris and boat tours to shopping, beaches and culture."

OPERATOR PACKAGES

Taking advantage of tour operator packages is another effective way to earn commission on flight

bookings that go via a hub airport – Wendy Wu Tours sells stopover add-ons of three to four days. Gary King, head of trade sales, says: "Even when direct flights are available, many travellers are happy to pay a little extra to turn a long-haul journey into two distinct experiences. Our most popular

combinations include Singapore before or after Vietnam and Cambodia tours; Hong Kong paired with China or Japan; and Dubai alongside India and southeast Asia itineraries. These short stays are a fantastic way to boost sales and commission, while giving customers one holiday that feels like two." **TW**

BOOK IT

Travelpack sells an 11-night Doha and the Maldives itinerary from £2,469 per person, based on two sharing. Includes flights from Heathrow with Qatar Airways, luggage, transfers, four nights with breakfast at Hilton Doha The Pearl, three excursions in Qatar and seven nights' half-board in a Sunset Villa at Canareef Resort Maldives. Based on a June 15 departure. travelpack.com

Gold Medal sells a 10-night Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi itinerary from £1,479 per person, based on two sharing. Includes Malaysia Airlines flights from Heathrow, luggage, private transfers, three nights at the AC Hotel Kuala Lumpur and seven nights in a Rainforest Chalet at Berjaya Langkawi Resort, both with breakfast. Valid for departures between January 28-31. goldmedal.co.uk

Inspiring Travel sells a 20-night holiday to Australia from £7,745 per person, based on two sharing. Includes an 18-night self-drive tour of Australia, two nights in the Shangri-La Hotel Singapore, all flights and lounge access in Heathrow, Singapore and Cairns. Valid for departures in October 2026. inspiringtravel.co.uk