



Chart of the Week

16 January 2026

A Record Festive Season for Global Air Travel

Holiday traffic, % change vs. average weekly traffic in 2025, by major country pairs*



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, DDS * top 20 Country Pairs by Average Weekly Passenger Volume

- Christmas and New Year are the peak periods for air travel. Millions return home to reunite with families or take advantage of the year-end holidays. This period accounts for a disproportionate share of annual traffic within just a few weeks. In recent years, the festive peak has also served as a barometer of underlying demand strength, offering an early signal of what might follow amid shifting economic and cost conditions.
- Preliminary estimates indicate around 270 million passenger trips globally during the Christmas and New Year period in 2025 (15 December to 4 January), involving 325 million flight segments, 7% more compared with the same period in 2024. Notably, growth during the festive season outpaced the full-year increase of 4-5% YoY.
- On a global level, Christmas attracted on average 11% more passengers than a typical week of 2025. The largest increases were observed on routes between the United States and Mexico or the Caribbean, and between India and the UAE. These holiday travels reflect deep-rooted migration patterns, with many foreign nationals returning to their home countries for family reunions. At the city and airport level, Cancún and Punta Cana featured in five of the 20 routes with the largest traffic increases, driven mainly by US outbound holiday travel. European leisure travelers preferred visiting Southeast Asia, with Bangkok and Phuket emerging as the leading destinations.
- This surge in traffic underscores the resilience of discretionary spending, as well as suggests that family reunions and holiday leisure remain key drivers even amid economic uncertainty. The preliminary growth of 7% estimated for Christmas bodes well for next year, despite challenging economic conditions.

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