TRAVELLING FOR BUSINESS

THE UK AIRPORT GUIDES

Manchester

The North's global gateway, mastered

A deep dive for the frequent business flyer: the transformed two-terminal airport, the fast way in and out, the lounges worth the walk, where to sleep, and how to make the UK's largest airport outside London work for you, not against you.



MANCHESTER (MAN) Edition 2026 / No. 06 in the series

THE LIE OF THE LAND

Manchester at a glance

Two terminals, two runways and the better part of thirty-two million passengers a year. Manchester is the UK's largest airport outside London, and it has just been rebuilt to match the ambition.

Manchester is the great exception to the London-centric story of British aviation. The third-busiest airport in the country and comfortably the largest outside the capital, it carries around thirty-two million passengers a year and offers something no other regional airport can match: a genuine long-haul network, with the Emirates A380, Singapore Airlines, Etihad, Qatar Airways, Cathay Pacific and Virgin Atlantic flying intercontinental routes alongside the low-cost giants easyJet, Jet2 and Ryanair. For the business traveller based anywhere in the North, the Midlands or beyond, it removes the tiresome necessity of trekking down to Heathrow, putting the world a direct flight away from the doorstep. It is owned by the Manchester Airports Group, the same operator behind Stansted.

The airport has just emerged from the most significant change in its history. A decade-long transformation programme, first costed at £1.3 billion and now put by the airport at £1.5 billion, has vastly expanded Terminal 2 into the airport's centrepiece, and in March 2026 the original Terminal 1, open for more than sixty years, closed for good. For the first time in over thirty years Manchester now runs as a two-terminal airport, with a gleaming, enlarged Terminal 2 handling around three-quarters of all passengers and a reconfigured Terminal 3 taking the rest. That single fact reshapes how you use the place, and getting your terminal right is the first decision of any trip. This guide shows you how.

MANCHESTER BY NUMBERS

Passengers: around 32 million a year - the UK's largest airport outside London.
Terminals: two, T2 (expanded) and T3, after Terminal 1 closed in March 2026.
Runways: two, with full long-haul including the Emirates A380.
Fastest link into the city: about 18 to 20 minutes by train to Manchester Piccadilly.
Owner: Manchester Airports Group (MAG), its £1.5bn Terminal 2 programme all but complete.

GET THIS RIGHT FIRST

Terminal 2 or Terminal 3?

After the great rebuild, the map is simpler than it has been in decades: most carriers now sit in the expanded Terminal 2, with Ryanair in Terminal 3.

The transformation has, if anything, made Manchester easier to navigate. With Terminal 1 gone, the airport works through just two buildings, and the allocation is straightforward. The vastly expanded Terminal 2, the heart of the £1.3 billion programme, now handles the great majority of airlines and around three-quarters of all passengers, from the long-haul carriers and their A380s to easyJet, Jet2 and the full-service Europeans, beneath a bright new glass atrium with two security halls, an extensive shopping street and a street-food market hall. Terminal 3, which has absorbed parts of the former Terminal 1, is now the home of Ryanair alone; since March 2026 the old Terminal 1 Departures A entrance has been signed as Terminal 3 Departures, and that is where Ryanair passengers check in. For most travellers, in other words, the answer is Terminal 2; for Ryanair, it is Terminal 3.

The usual caution applies with extra force here, because the moves are recent and memories lag behind them. Anyone who knew the old three-terminal Manchester should check afresh, since airlines that sat in Terminal 1 for decades have only just relocated, and a handful of carriers have shifted more than once during the programme. Confirm your terminal when you book and again on the day, and allow for the fact that the two terminals, while linked, are not adjacent. Get the building right and the new Manchester is a pleasure to use; arrive at the wrong one and you will lose time you may not have.

The terminal map

Terminal	Mainly used by	Notes
Terminal 2	Long-haul carriers, easyJet, Jet2, full-service Europeans	The expanded centrepiece; around 75% of all passengers
Terminal 3	Ryanair (consolidated here)	Incorporates parts of the former Terminal 1

RULE OF THUMB

Flying Ryanair? Terminal 3. Flying almost anyone else, including long-haul? Terminal 2.

Check afresh on the day - the terminals were reshuffled through 2025 and 2026, so old habits may mislead.

THE FAST WAY IN

Into the city, and the North

Manchester's railway station is part of the airport, and it reaches far beyond the city: this is one of the best-connected airports in Britain by rail.

Few airports outside London are as well wired into the rail network. The airport's own station sits within the complex, linked to the terminals by the covered Skylink walkway, and trains run into Manchester Piccadilly every ten minutes or so, taking under twenty minutes to reach the heart of the city. From there, or in many cases directly from the airport, the reach is remarkable: a handful of Avanti West Coast trains run direct to London Euston each day, with many more via Piccadilly, while TransPennine Express and Northern services fan out across the region to Liverpool, Leeds, York, Newcastle, the North Wales coast and on into Scotland. For a business traveller based anywhere across the North, the airport is often reachable by a single direct train, which is precisely why so many choose it over the long haul south to Heathrow.

For the city itself there is also the Metrolink tram, whose Airport line runs from the station through the southern suburbs to the centre in around an hour, a slower but scenic and inexpensive alternative that is useful for destinations along its route. The choice, as ever, comes down to where you are headed: the fast train to Piccadilly for the city centre and onward main-line connections, a direct regional service if your destination is elsewhere in the North, and the tram for somewhere on its own line. Whichever you take, the train comfortably beats the road into central Manchester at the peaks, and the station is only a short covered walk from the check-in desks.

Rail at a glance

Service	To	Journey time	Note
Train to Piccadilly	Manchester city centre	approx. 18 to 20 min	Every 10 minutes or so
Avanti West Coast	London Euston	approx. 2 hr 25 to 2 hr 40 min	A few direct daily; most via Piccadilly
TransPennine / Northern	Liverpool, Leeds, York, Scotland	varies by destination	Many routes direct from the airport
Metrolink tram	Manchester city centre	approx. 1 hr	Scenic, inexpensive, more stops

THE OTHER WAYS IN

By coach, road and car

Manchester is built for the car as well as the train, with motorway access on the doorstep, though stopping at the terminal now carries a charge, and a free alternative sits nearby.

As a regional airport serving a wide catchment, Manchester does a great deal of its business by road, and it is well set up for it. National Express and Megabus run coaches from cities across the North and Midlands, a cheap and direct option for many towns the trains serve less well, while the airport sits just off the M56, which links quickly to the M6 and the wider motorway network. For travellers driving themselves, the full range of official parking is on offer, from the budget JetParks sites with their shuttle buses through to the premium Meet and Greet that takes the car at the terminal, and booking ahead online is markedly cheaper than turning up on the day.

Stopping at the terminal, however, now costs money. The drop-off zones at Terminals 2 and 3 charge £5.50 for five minutes and £6.50 for ten, rising to £25 up to the 30-minute maximum, paid online by the day after via the airport's camera system. The neat way to avoid it entirely is the airport's free drop-off area at the JetParks 1 car park, served around the clock by a shuttle bus, which turns the charge into nothing for anyone happy with a short transfer. For a single traveller heading into central Manchester, the train will usually win on time and cost, but for the wider region, and for the early start with luggage, the car and the coach both earn their place here more than at the London airports.

The road traveller's checklist

- Use the free drop-off at JetParks 1, with its 24/7 shuttle, instead of paying at the terminal forecourt.
- If you do use the forecourt, it is £5.50 for 5 minutes and £6.50 for 10; pay online by midnight the next day.
- Book parking online in advance - JetParks for value, Meet and Greet for the terminal-side premium.
- The airport is just off the M56; National Express and Megabus serve cities across the North and Midlands.

> **THE HONEST VERDICT**
>
> Into central Manchester the train wins. But for the wider region this is genuinely a car-and-coach airport - just use the free JetParks drop-off rather than paying at the kerb.

Security and fast-track

The rebuilt Terminal 2 has brought Manchester some of the most modern security in the country, with scanners that let the liquids and laptops stay in the bag.

Security has been one of the biggest winners of the transformation. The expanded Terminal 2 now has two security halls fitted with next-generation CT scanners, which let passengers leave liquids and larger electronics in their hand luggage, though the 100ml limit on liquid containers still applies here at the time of writing. The result is faster and far less fussy than the airport of a few years ago, with the extra capacity designed to keep queues moving as numbers climb. As always at a high-volume airport, the picture varies by terminal and time of day, with the early-morning and school-holiday peaks the busiest, so the prudent traveller still plans to be ahead of them.

For those who want certainty, Fast Track security is sold at both terminals, bundled into some premium fares and lounge packages, and well worth the modest cost for an early departure or a holiday-week flight. At the very top end, Manchester also runs aether, a private terminal (formerly PremiAir) away from the main terminals, with its own security and lounge and a car-to-aircraft service for those for whom time and discretion are worth a premium. For most business travellers, though, the combination of the new scanners and a cheap Fast Track ticket is all the speed the morning requires.

Clearing the airport quickly

- Keep liquids to containers of 100ml or less, and follow the lane signage on whether liquids and laptops stay in the bag.
- Buy Fast Track in advance for the relevant terminal, or check whether your fare or lounge already includes it.
- Travel hand-luggage only where you can to skip the bag drop entirely.
- Allow extra time at the early-morning and school-holiday peaks, when volumes are highest.

> **TIMING THE ARRIVAL**
> Short-haul European departures: arrive around two hours ahead, more in peak holiday weeks.
> Long-haul: three hours is the comfortable standard for a relaxed passage and lounge time.

WHERE TO WAIT WELL

The lounges worth the walk

The transformation brought Manchester smart new lounges with runway views. Know which one your ticket opens, and whether it sits in your terminal.

Manchester's lounge offer has been rebuilt along with the terminals, and 2026 is the year it finally caught up with the traffic. In Terminal 2 the Escape Lounge is the dependable all-rounder, with complimentary food and drink, wi-fi and proper workspace, and it has been joined by the Executive by Escape, a larger, more polished room opened in summer 2026 and now the most premium lounge in the terminal open to anyone who books. Aspire adds further choice, including a new 300-seat lounge opened in Terminal 2 in the summer, and all are bookable ahead or accessible on memberships such as Priority Pass. Terminal 3 has its own Escape Lounge, used by Ryanair passengers. The adults-only 1903 Lounge, long the airport's flagship, closed at the end of June 2026, so check what is open rather than relying on past visits.

At the very top, the aether private terminal offers a wholly separate experience, with its own lounge, security and a chauffeured transfer to the aircraft, while Emirates' premium passengers now have the airline's own £10 million Terminal 2 lounge, opened in September 2026 with boarding direct from the lounge. For most business travellers, though, a pre-booked Escape, Executive by Escape or Aspire lounge is exactly the right call: a calm base with decent coffee and reliable wi-fi to turn the wait into working time. As everywhere, the golden rule is to confirm which lounge your fare or card opens, and crucially that it sits in the terminal you are flying from, before you build your timings around reaching it.

A lounge shortlist

Lounge	Terminal	Best for
Escape Lounge	T2 and T3	The dependable all-rounder; book ahead or use a membership
Executive by Escape	T2	The premium pay-to-enter room, opened 2026
aether	Private terminal	A discreet, premium bypass of the main buildings

Page 7 - Airport lounges

Dining and shopping

The rebuilt Terminal 2 has turned Manchester into a genuinely good place to eat, with a street-food market hall at its heart and a proper shopping street alongside.

Dining is one of the most visible gains of the transformation. The expanded Terminal 2 is built around a street-food market hall, a bright, sociable space gathering a range of kitchens and cuisines under one roof, which gives the business traveller far more than the tired chains of the old terminal, from a quick quality bite to a proper sit-down meal before a long-haul flight. Alongside it runs an extensive shopping street, and the wider terminal carries the familiar spread of coffee houses, bars and grab-and-go counters. Terminal 3, the smaller Ryanair base, is more functional but still covers the essentials for a short-haul departure. The overall standard, post-rebuild, is a marked step up.

The retail follows the same upgraded logic, with a broad sweep of fashion, technology, beauty and the practical, plus the duty-free that the leisure crowd expects, all concentrated along the new street rather than scattered down distant piers. For the working traveller the value is the usual safety net, the charger or adaptor or book you forgot, replaceable airside before you board. The sensible habit in a large, busy airport is to do your eating and buying in the main departure area, where the choice is widest, and to keep half an eye on the boarding screens, because even a smart new terminal can involve a fair walk to a far gate.

Eating and buying, the essentials

- Head for the Terminal 2 street-food market hall for the widest and best choice before a flight.
- Terminal 3 is more functional but covers the essentials for a short-haul Ryanair departure.
- Use the shops as a safety net for chargers, adaptors, toiletries and reading rather than to fill time.
- Do your eating and buying in the main departure area, and watch the screens for the walk to a far gate.

SLEEPING CLOSE TO THE GATE

Where to stay

Manchester's airport hotels cluster around the station and the Skylink walkways, which means several you can reach on foot, under cover, in minutes.

Manchester is well supplied with hotels, and the best of them gather around the railway station and the covered Skylink walkways that link it to the terminals, so you can reach check-in on foot and in the dry. The standout is the Radisson Blu, connected into the complex and the most polished of the airport hotels, with soundproofed rooms, a swimming pool and a restaurant looking out over the airfield, the natural choice for an early long-haul departure. Close by, the Crowne Plaza and the Clayton offer comfortable four-star stays with restaurants, bars and meeting space for those combining a flight with a working session, and a Hilton and the budget chains fill out the range.

Because the hotels sit together around the station rather than being split between distant terminals, the choice here is simpler than at Gatwick or Heathrow: pick by price and by how short a walk you want, then ride the Skylink or a quick shuttle to your terminal in the morning. For a genuinely early start, particularly a long-haul flight needing a three-hour check-in, the Radisson Blu's covered connection and airfield views earn their premium; for value, the Crowne Plaza, Clayton and the budget options nearby are comfortable and well placed. As always, book with the morning's timing and your terminal in mind.

A hotel shortlist

Hotel	Location	Why it earns its place
Radisson Blu	Connected via Skylink	The polished flagship, pool and airfield-view restaurant
Crowne Plaza	By the station, short walk	Comfortable four-star with restaurants and meeting space
Clayton / Hilton	Around the station	Reliable four-star and full-service options, well placed

STAY BY THE STATION

The airport hotels cluster around the station and the covered Skylink walkways, so a room here means a short, dry walk or shuttle to either terminal in the morning.

THE TRICKIEST HOUR

Connecting and transferring

Unlike the low-cost bases, Manchester is a genuine connecting airport, the North's hub for changing onto a long-haul flight or feeding into one.

Manchester is the one airport in this series outside Heathrow that works as a real long-haul hub, and its connections behave accordingly. The Gulf and Asian carriers, Virgin Atlantic and the full-service Europeans all interline here, so a journey booked on a single ticket has bags checked through and the connection protected in the usual way, whether you are joining a long-haul flight from a regional or European feeder or changing between two services. The great majority of these connections now happen within the expanded Terminal 2, which makes them straightforward, a walk through the building rather than a trek between distant satellites, with transfer security where required. It is, by regional standards, an unusually capable airport for changing planes.

The complications are the familiar ones. A connection that involves changing between Terminal 2 and Terminal 3, most often where a Ryanair flight meets something else on a separate ticket, is a self-transfer, requiring you to reclaim and re-check your bag and pass landside between the buildings, so allow generous time and treat it as two journeys. On a single interlined ticket within Terminal 2, by contrast, the minimum connection times are realistic and the process smooth. As ever, travelling hand-luggage only simplifies everything, and the rule of thumb holds: know before you fly whether your connection is protected or a self-transfer, and build your buffer to match.

Connecting well

- On a single interlined ticket, bags are checked through and most connections stay within Terminal 2.
- A Terminal 2 to Terminal 3 change on separate tickets is a self-transfer: reclaim, re-check, allow time.
- Manchester is a genuine long-haul hub; regional and European feeders connect onto intercontinental flights.
- Travel hand-luggage only where possible to simplify any transfer.
- Know before you fly whether your connection is protected or a self-transfer, and build the buffer to match.

THE REGULAR'S PLAYBOOK

Manchester, mastered

Everything above distilled into the habits that separate the traveller who glides through the new Manchester from the one still navigating the old one.

Manchester rewards a traveller who has kept up with its rebuild. The terminals have changed, the security is new, the dining is transformed, and the old three-terminal muscle memory will mislead you. Get the current terminal right, lean on one of the best rail connections of any UK airport, and use the free drop-off rather than paying at the kerb, and the country's largest regional airport becomes brisk and genuinely pleasant. The frequent flyer's advantage here is simply being up to date, then exploiting the long-haul reach that no other airport outside Heathrow can offer.

Twelve habits of the seasoned Manchester flyer

- Confirm your terminal afresh - Ryanair is Terminal 3, almost everyone else is the expanded Terminal 2.
- Take the train to Piccadilly, under 20 minutes, for the city and onward main-line connections.
- From across the North, check for a direct TransPennine or Northern train to the airport itself.
- Use the Metrolink tram for destinations on its line; it is cheap if slower.
- Never pay the forecourt drop-off; use the free JetParks 1 drop-off and its 24/7 shuttle.
- Book parking online in advance for the best rates, JetParks for value or Meet and Greet for convenience.
- Pack liquids in 100ml containers; the two-litre allowance has not yet reached Manchester.
- Buy Fast Track ahead for an early or holiday-week flight, or check your fare or lounge includes it.
- Book an Escape, Executive by Escape or Aspire lounge ahead, and check it sits in your terminal; the 1903 has closed.
- Eat at the Terminal 2 street-food market hall, a real step up from the old terminal.
- For an early long-haul, sleep at the Skylink-connected Radisson Blu and walk to check-in under cover.
- Treat a Terminal 2 to Terminal 3 change on separate tickets as a self-transfer with a generous buffer.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The bigger picture

Manchester has just spent a decade and £1.3 billion rebuilding itself. The result is an airport positioning itself as the true gateway to the North of England.

The defining story at Manchester is the transformation now drawing to a close. The decade-long programme, now costed by the airport at around £1.5 billion, has delivered a vastly enlarged Terminal 2, retired the sixty-year-old Terminal 1, and reshaped the airport around two modern buildings with new security, lounges, shopping and dining and gates able to handle the largest aircraft flying. It is among the most significant pieces of airport investment in the UK in a generation, and its purpose is plain: to cement Manchester as the long-haul gateway for the North and to relieve the pressure that sends so many northern travellers down to a congested Heathrow. Owned by the Manchester Airports Group, which is also behind Stansted's growth, the airport is backing the rebuild with a steadily expanding route network.

For the traveller, the next few years should bring the dividend of all that disruption: a smoother, smarter, better-connected airport with more destinations and a passenger experience finally matched to its scale. There will be further phases of work to bed in, and the recent terminal moves to remember, but the direction is unambiguous. Manchester intends to be more than a regional airport, a genuine alternative to the London hubs for long-haul travel, and for the frequent flyer based anywhere in the North it is already the most sensible way to reach the world. Edition by edition, expect it only to grow more capable.

Quick reference

The essentials	At a glance
Terminals	T2 (all airlines but Ryanair) and T3 (Ryanair); T1 closed in 2026
Fastest into the city	Train to Manchester Piccadilly, approx. 18 to 20 min
Rail reach	Direct trains to London, Liverpool, Leeds, York, Scotland and more
Drop-off charge (2026)	£5.50 for 5 min, £6.50 for 10; free at JetParks 1 with shuttle
Lounges	Escape, Executive by Escape and Aspire (T2); Escape (T3); Emirates lounge (T2)
Standout dining	The Terminal 2 street-food market hall
Closest hotel	Radisson Blu, connected by the covered Skylink
On the horizon	£1.5bn T2 programme all but done; T3 revamp under way

EDITOR'S NOTE - NOVEMBER 2026 UPDATE (not for layout)

Updated 27 November 2026 against current sources. Changes: Terminal 1 closure dated to March 2026 and the T3 Departures renaming added; transformation cost updated to the airport's current £1.5bn figure; drop-off tariff corrected to £5.50/£6.50; 100ml liquids rule confirmed as still in force; lounge page rewritten for the 1903 closure, the Executive by Escape, the new Aspire lounge and the Emirates lounge; PremiAir renamed aether; Avanti direct trains to Euston corrected to a handful a day.

Not independently verified: current hotel line-up and facilities (page 9), Fast Track prices, Metrolink journey time, and whether the Executive by Escape and the new Aspire lounge are on every membership scheme. Check before press.