

Athens' Ghost Airport: Ambitious Redevelopment Plans Announced for Abandoned Hellenikon



By David Sim

International Business Times - Updated July 9, 2014 15:20 BST

Hellenikon was once Athens' only airport but it closed down in 2001 to make way for a newer, more modern airport before the city hosted the 2004 Olympic Games.



The Olympic Airways logo is seen on a building at the former Athens International airport, Hellenikon (Reuters)

Built in 1938, it was used as a Luftwaffe base during the Nazi occupation of Greece. It was then used by the United States Air Force after the end of World War Two.

The airport had two terminals: the West Terminal for Olympic Airways, and the East Terminal, designed by star Finnish architect Eero Saarinen, for all other carriers.

In its heyday, shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis ran Olympic Airways in lavish style, and his partner Maria Callas added a touch of glamour. Before its closure on March 30, 2001, the airport was serving 12 million passengers per year.

Thirteen years later, the airport seems frozen in time, its burnt-out terminals littered with old boarding passes and debris from a collapsed roof. Destination boards still announce flights long forgotten. An old Boeing 747-200 sits rusting among overgrown weeds. Stray dogs roam the runways.



A control tower stands in front of the old east terminal (Reuters)



An abandoned Olympic Airways plane stands on the premises of the former Athens International airport, Hellenikon (Reuters)



The burnt-out arrivals hall is seen at the old west terminal of the former Athens International airport (Reuters)



Stray dogs roam around the grounds of the former Hellenikon airport (Reuters)



A corridor leading to a passenger gate is seen in the east terminal (Reuters)



Boarding passes are seen inside a hall at the west terminal (Reuters)

But the sprawling airport complex may be set for resurrection as a glitzy coastal resort. Lamda Development, controlled by Greece's powerful Latsis family and leading a consortium of Chinese and Abu-Dhabi based companies, has big dreams for the area since signing a deal for a 99-year lease in March.

The group hopes to invest seven billion euros to turn Hellenikon into a glamorous seaside resort with hotels, a kilometre-long beach, a marina and a park bigger than London's Hyde Park. It is hoped construction can begin in 2016 on the ambitious project that should take 15 to 20 years to complete.

Greece's left-wing opposition and many locals fear the area will become a concrete enclave only for the rich. Others are sceptical, as many previous redevelopment plans have fallen through, including a 2011 dream to build a financial district like Canary Wharf, with Qatari backing. The Gulf state pulled out of the project last year.



A destination board is seen inside a deserted hall in the west terminal (Reuters)



Documents are seen strewn on the floor of an office at the abandoned airport (Reuters)



Disused planes are seen on the tarmac at the abandoned airport (Reuters)



Lamda Development plans to turn the airport into a seaside resort with hotels, a kilometre-long beach, a marina and a park bigger than London's Hyde Park (Lamda Development)