

East Midlands Airport: An Easier Passenger Experience

Executive Summary

Independent passenger research and UK Civil Aviation Authority operational data both indicate that East Midlands Airport delivers a simpler and less stressful passenger experience than Birmingham Airport.

Sources:

www.which.co.uk/reviews/airports/article/uk-airports

www.caa.co.uk/data-and-analysis/uk-aviation-market/flight-punctuality

The evidence shows that:

- Passengers rate EMA significantly higher overall than Birmingham.
 - Passengers report easier check-in, bag-drop and baggage reclaim experiences.
 - EMA handles substantially fewer passengers and flights, reducing complexity and congestion.
 - EMA delivers better operational performance, with more flights departing on time and lower average delays.
 - Birmingham experiences longer delays despite its larger scale.
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1. Higher Passenger Satisfaction

According to the Which? Airport Survey 2026: [Best airports 2026 - Which?](#)

Airport	Customer Score
East Midlands	66%
Birmingham	57%

East Midlands scores **9 percentage points higher** than Birmingham, indicating passengers are considerably more satisfied with their overall airport experience. [\[Easy East Midlands | Word\]](#)

2. Easier Journey Through the Airport

Passengers rated East Midlands more highly for key parts of the airport journey: [Best airports 2026 - Which?](#)

Passenger Experience Measure	East Midlands	Birmingham
Staff Service	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Check-in Queues	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Bag Drop Queues	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Security Queues	★★★★☆	★★★★☆

East Midlands outperforms Birmingham in three of the four measures that passengers encounter before boarding, suggesting a smoother and less stressful experience from arrival at the terminal through to security.

3. Far Better Arrivals Experience

Baggage reclaim is one of the strongest differentiators between the two airports:

Measure	East Midlands	Birmingham
Baggage Reclaim	★★★★☆	★☆☆☆☆

Passengers rated East Midlands four stars for baggage reclaim compared with only one star for Birmingham.

This suggests passengers are much less likely to experience frustration and delays when arriving back through EMA.

4. Better Operational Performance

CAA 2026 on-time performance statistics support the passenger feedback.

Airport	Flights On Time (<165 mins)	Average Delay
East Midlands	73.9%	13 mins
Birmingham	66.0%	17 mins

Key findings:

- EMA recorded **74% of flights on time**, compared with **66% at Birmingham**.
 - EMA passengers experienced average delays that were **4 minutes shorter**.
 - EMA performed significantly above the UK average for punctuality (73.9%).
- Operational performance has a direct impact on perceived ease of travel because passengers spend less time waiting at gates, on aircraft and during disruption.
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5. Smaller Scale Creates a Simpler Experience

The Which? research notes that passengers generally prefer smaller airports because they are easier to navigate and less congested. The report observed that many of the highest-rated UK airports handled fewer than six million passengers annually. [\[Easy East Midlands | Word\]](#)

CAA airport activity figures further demonstrate the scale difference:

Airport	Total Flights 2025
Birmingham	91,368
East Midlands	24,711

Birmingham handled almost **four times as many flights** as East Midlands during 2025.

A lower volume operation typically means:

- Less crowding
- Shorter walking distances
- Easier wayfinding
- Simpler terminal navigation
- Reduced queue pressure

These characteristics align closely with the higher passenger ratings achieved by EMA.

6. Lower Cancellations

CAA data also shows a lower cancellation rate at East Midlands.

Airport	Cancellation Rate
East Midlands	0.3%
Birmingham	3.0%

Birmingham's cancellation rate was roughly **ten times higher** than East Midlands during 2026. Fewer cancellations contribute to a smoother and more predictable passenger journey.

Conclusion

The combined passenger research and operational data present a clear picture: **East Midlands Airport is easier to use than Birmingham Airport.**

Evidence Summary

- ✓ Higher overall customer satisfaction (66% vs 57%) [Best airports 2026 - Which?](#)
- ✓ Better ratings for staff, check-in and bag-drop processes
- ✓ Significantly better baggage reclaim experience
- ✓ Higher on-time performance (73.9% vs 66.0%)
- ✓ Shorter average delays (13 mins vs 17 mins)
- ✓ Lower cancellation rate (0.3% vs 3.0%)
- ✓ Handles around one quarter of Birmingham's flight volume, creating a less congested and more manageable environment

Final Assessment: East Midlands combines stronger customer satisfaction with better operational performance. Passengers experience a more efficient, less congested and more predictable journey, making EMA demonstrably easier to use than Birmingham Airport.