



# Fogbound

BY LESLIE JOSEPHS

**A CAT III landing system provides hope for keeping Peru's key airport open during the busy tourist season.**

A dense fog blanketed most of Peru's coastal capital in early May. Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport was shut down for at least six days — four of them consecutively — grounding hundreds of flights, rerouting others and stranding thousands of passengers, many of them tourists who had traveled long distances to see the country's treasures.

Although usually not as severe, fog is always expected as Peru's autumn begins. While

nighttime temperatures begin to dip significantly in May, the days are still warm and sunny. It is this gap in daytime and nighttime temperatures that generates the fog, which generally burns off by midday.

The density of the fog is sufficient to bring operations at the airport to a halt. With only a Category (CAT) II instrument landing system (ILS) in place, requiring a runway visual range of no less than 350 m (1,200 ft) and allowing

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aircraft to descend no lower than 100 ft without the appropriate references in sight, flight cancellations and delays sometimes persist for days on end.

Lima's airport has long needed a CAT IIIC landing system, which would allow suitably equipped aircraft and specially trained flight crews to land in zero visibility, at least partially alleviating the seasonal logjam. The sluggish pace of the Peruvian government's investment in the country's principal airport has proved to be a major headache for travelers and airlines alike.

No other airline has suffered more than Chile's LAN Airlines, whose local subsidiary LAN Peru controls 80 percent of the domestic market and whose domestic and international flights comprise more than half of Jorge Chávez's air traffic. "There's a lot of things that Peru should have but doesn't," said Jorge Vilches, general manager of LAN Peru. "It's something they're working on."

Indeed, the Peruvian government has now committed to purchasing

the zero-zero landing equipment.

The Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications says that the CAT IIIC landing system should be up and running by May 2010.

The Peruvian Airport and Commercial Aviation Corp., or CORPAC, the government company that equips Peru's airports and oversees air traffic, estimates that the system will cost about \$3.5 million, including training for airport staff — a modest investment for the region's so-called rising star.

Peru had the highest economic growth rate in Latin America in 2008 — 9.8 percent. The country has one of the few economies in the region that is expected to grow this year.

Nevertheless, lagging investment in infrastructure is a common complaint in Peru, where the government is scrambling to draw investment in the construction and improvement of roads and ports.

"The government has not acted opportunely in implementing technology that is more efficient to allow planes to land in difficult conditions," said José Maslucán, a congressman who heads the Transportation Committee.

Peru is eager to position itself as a prime destination for foreign capital and foreign visitors. Despite the slow pace in approving the installation of a landing system that will enable year-round operations, the government has big plans for Lima's airport. It wants to have a second runway operating there within the next five years.

"Now more than ever, Peru needs to try to show the world that we're able to propel more air transit," Maslucán said.

Travel to Peru has indeed increased in recent years. The country's tourist destinations, particularly the no. 1 tourist site, the pre-Columbian Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, continue to draw hordes of visitors. Foreign visitors to Peru nearly doubled from 1.1 million in 2002 to 2.1 million last year, according to Peru's Foreign Trade and Tourism Ministry.

The economic impact of the seasonal fog that had virtually closed Jorge Chávez International Airport for hours and days on end has not been quantified. Around 230 flights typically go in and out of Jorge Chávez every day. This year, the fog could not have rolled in at a worse time. Between April 30 and May 4, 56 flights were canceled because of the fog. Friday, May 1, was a bank holiday and nearly all domestic flights were sold out. The airport was again closed for several hours each day on May 5–7. Because flights were unable to come in from Peru's interior provinces, operational delays snowballed into half-day lags in departures.

The modest investment required for the CAT IIIC equipment at Jorge Chávez International Airport promises to save the country from near-chaos and embarrassment when the tourist season begins next year. 🌀

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