

Abandoned Ellinikon International Airport May Become Greece's Largest Coastal Resort

by Katherine LaGrave

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An aerial view of the Ellinikon Airport complex.

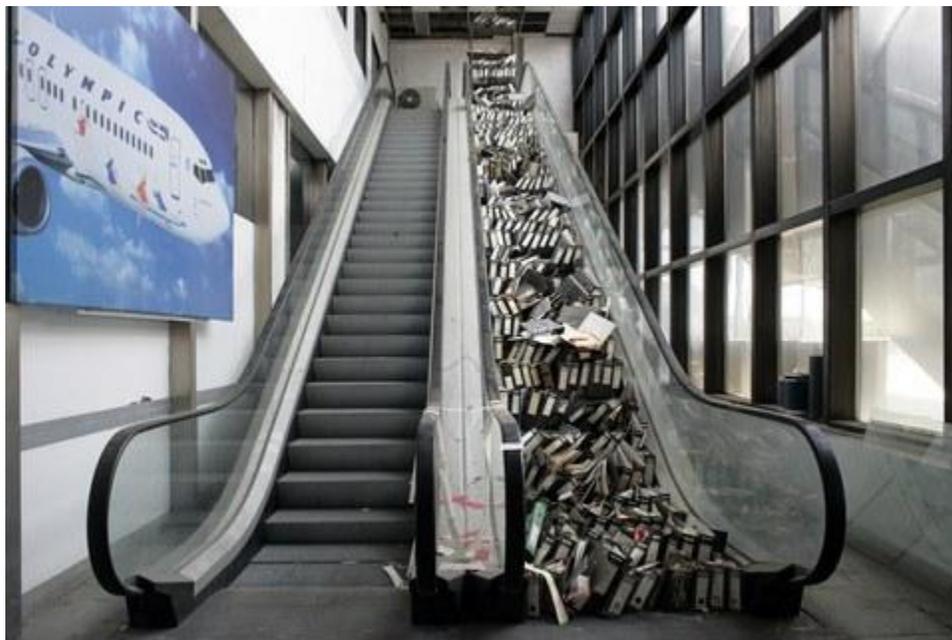
The Athens airport closed in 2001 and currently serves as a refugee camp.

Abandoned airports around the world have been turned into everything from massive parks to cruise ship terminals. Now, if a Greek development company's plans come to fruition, what was once Athens' Ellinikon

International Airport will soon be something else entirely—one of Europe's biggest coastal resorts.

Originally built in 1938, Ellinikon was once the Greek capital's only airport, but it closed in 2001 after six decades to make way for the new Athens International Airport (also known as Eleftherios Venizelos) before the city's turn as host for the 2004 Olympics. Today, the sprawling, 1,530-acre plot three times the size of Monaco serves as a makeshift camp for more than 3,000 migrants and refugees who have fled Asia and the Middle East. A \$7 billion euro plan from Lamda Development, owned by Greece's powerful Latsis family, looks to move the refugees to other locations across the country and transform the site into a seaside town comprising some 8,000 homes, hotels, shops, a 494-acre park, and a .62-mile beach, with free access to the public. "This project is a game-changer," Lamda CEO Odisseas Athanassiou told Reuters in an interview. "It is going to change the psychology of foreign capital toward investment in Greece."

It is not the first time there has been interest in transforming the former airport. (One of the most popular plans, in 2011, was to build a financial center akin to London's Canary Wharf.) And while the project's parliamentary and court approval are still pending, Athanassiou, for his part, said he hopes that construction will start at the site in the first six months of 2017, with many of the buildings ready by 2020.



An internal view of the abandoned Hellinikon Airport.

