

The Lajes Lowdown: Atlantic Stopover and ETOPS Alternate

Chris Shieff

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In 2001, Air Transat Flight 236, a heavily laden Airbus A330, developed a massive fuel leak midway across the Atlantic and lost power to both engines. It was hundreds of miles from land. The pilots managed to glide the stricken jet to an emergency landing at a lesser known air force base, Lajes, in the middle of the ocean. Its runway saved the lives of 306 people.

LPLA/Lajes is a large military airfield located in the Azores Islands – a Portuguese territory found midway across the Atlantic Ocean. It's nestled amongst the NAT Tracks, 1900nm east of New York City, and 800nm west of Lisbon.



LPLA/Lajes, 38°45'43"N 027°05'27"W.

LPLA/Lajes was approved for civilian use by ANAC (the Portuguese Aviation Authority) in 2018.

Since then, it has grown considerably in popularity as a **convenient stopover, refuelling point** and **ETOPs alternate airport** for aircraft crossing the Atlantic. Lajes is regularly used by a variety of operations including scheduled airline services, ferry flights, air ambulance, VIP and private traffic.

The Lajes Lowdown

It's long enough, and strong enough. The fully lit asphalt runway is 10,870 feet (3,330m) long and 164 feet (50m) wide and has no weight restriction.

It's fully IFR equipped. ILS approaches are available for landing in either direction and the runway is equipped with PAPI slope guidance and a Category 1 approach lighting system.



The ILS equipped Runway 33/15.

There's always someone home. The airport is open and ATC is on watch 24 hours a day. There is no curfew at night and landing fees remain competitive. RFF category 8 and emergency medical services are available around the clock, along with accurate weather forecasting. Santa Maria FIR will direct aircraft experiencing an emergency in their airspace to LPLA/Lajes.

Fuel is available. Jet A1 is available through Petrogal/Galp (a reputable Portuguese company) in partnership with WFS World Fuel Services, Total Aviation, AEG Fuels, US Government Air Card and AML Global. They will also happily accept cash and credit card payments.

It was good enough for the Space Shuttle. Lajes was used by NASA as an emergency landing site in the event of aborted shuttle launches. Emirates have also used Lajes as a primary alternate for their A380 aircraft crossing the Atlantic since they received approval in 2013. The USAF and NATO forces regularly use Lajes for large scale air exercises.

There's ample parking. It has a spacious ramp capable of accommodating the largest transport category aircraft in the world including the A380 and Antonov AN225.

It is an EU entry point. Customs and immigration are on hand to process entry to Europe, and the terminal has both Schengen and non-Schengen circulation areas.

It has all the usual amenities. A well-equipped terminal includes check in counters, dining, security, customs and immigration, lounges, ground handling and rental cars. The airport is located an easy twenty-minute drive from downtown where ample accommodation options exist for crew and passengers.



The civilian terminal building at LPLA/Lajes.

How do I land there?

To land at LPLA/Lajes **you need prior approval.**

The good news is that it is **really easy to get.** Your request will generally be processed within four hours by the Civilian Terminal Operations.

If it is just a **simple fuel stop** you need, refuelling at the airport is also now authorised with passengers onboard.

If you prefer to handle things yourself, you can apply directly here or call airport operations on +351 295 545 461.

However, there are several local handling agents who can take care of clearances, approval, fuel, lavatory servicing and catering for you:

GROUNDLINK

Phone: +351 217 923 750

Email: portugal@groundlink.pt

SATA AZORES AIRLINES

Phone: +351 295 540 033

Email: terklsp@sata.pt

By VHF radio: 131.700 MHZ

WEXJET SUPPORT

Phone: +351 218 701 025

Cell: +351 938 650 864

Email: lpia@wexjet.com

For fuel enquiries contact:

PETROGAL/GALP

Lisbon Office

Mr Joao Meneses

Phone: +351 217 240 739

Email: joao.c.meneses@galp.com

Terceira (local) Office

Mr Gilberto Pereira

Phone: +351 295 512 396

Email: galpair.lgs@mail.telepac.pt

Thanks to Miguel Santos for this post. Visit www.atlantis-lajes.com for more information.