# The Lajes Lowdown: Atlantic Stopover and ETOPS Alternate

OPSGROUP Team
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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. Hundreds of miles from land, the crew managed to glide the stricken aircraft to an emergency landing at Lajes, a little-known air force base in the middle of the ocean. Its runway saved the lives of all 306 people on board.*

LPLA/Lajes is a large military airfield on Terceira, in Portugal's Azores Islands, midway across the Atlantic. It sits among the NAT Tracks, about 1,900 NM east of New York and 800 NM west of Lisbon.




LPLA/Lajes, 38°45′43″N 027°05′27″W.

The airport was approved for civilian use by Portugal's aviation authority, ANAC, in 2018. Since then, **LPLA has become a popular stopover, refuelling point and ETOPS alternate for aircraft crossing the Atlantic.** It now sees a steady flow of bizjets, scheduled airline services, ferry flights and air ambulance.

#### The Lajes Lowdown

**It's long enough, and strong enough.** The fully lit asphalt runway is 10,860 ft (3,310 m) long and 197 ft (60 m) wide, with no weight restriction.

**It's fully IFR equipped.**ILS approaches are available in either direction. The runway also has PAPI slope guidance and a Category I approach lighting system.



The ILS equipped Runway 33/15.

**There’s always someone home.** Lajes is the Azores’ only airport fully open all night for emergency diversions. It normally operates 0700-2100, but is available H24 for emergencies, with RFF 8 at all times. ATC, medical support and weather services are available around the clock. In an emergency within Santa Maria FIR, expect to be directed to LPLA.

**There’s no carbon tax.** As the airport is operated by the Portuguese State through the military, it falls outside the charge applied at **LPPD/Ponta Delgada**, **LPAZ/Santa Maria** and **LPHR/Horta**, as well as at airports across mainland Portugal and Madeira. Depending on the aircraft and operation, choosing Lajes could save USD 2,000 or more. Check the charges with your handler before you go.

**Fuel is available.** Jet A1 is available through Petrogal/Galp (a reputable Portuguese company) in partnership with WFS, Total Aviation, AEG Fuels, US Government Air Card and AML Global. Cash and credit card payments are also accepted.

**It was good enough for the Space Shuttle.**NASA used Lajes as an emergency landing site for aborted shuttle launches. Emirates has also used it as a primary alternate for its A380 aircraft crossing the Atlantic, and the USAF and NATO regularly use the airfield for large-scale exercises.

**There’s ample parking.** The spacious ramp can accommodate the world’s largest transport-category aircraft, including the A380.

**It’s an EU entry point.** Customs and immigration can process entry to Europe. The terminal has both Schengen and non-Schengen circulation areas.

**It has all the usual amenities.** The terminal has check-in counters, dining, security, customs and immigration, lounges, ground handling and rental cars. Downtown is about a 20-minute drive away, with accommodation options for crews and passengers.




The civilian terminal building at LPLA/Lajes.

#### How do I land there?

**You need PPR to land at LPLA/Lajes.** Requests are generally processed by Civilian Terminal Ops within a few hours.

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 ops 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:

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Email: handling@sata.pt; terkksp@sata.pt; terkosp@sata.pt; terowsp@sata.pt
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*Thanks to Miguel Santos for this post. Visit www.atlantis-lajes.com for more info.*