



The new perishables facility (left) at Huntsville, Alabama with direct tarmac access was built right next to the existing Panalpina premises.

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From Mexico with love: frozen guacamole through Huntsville

Airlifting 42,000 kg of frozen guacamole from Mexico to the UK in ten shipments over a six-week period might seem odd. Why ship frozen food by

air? If the customer was happy with having the product sent over six weeks, wouldn't a single shipment by ocean be more reasonable?

Because of product nature or market requirements, perishables can be very particular. High-quality guacamole is made in small amounts and then quick-frozen to maintain its freshness. In this case, the customer required it in small increments to fulfill orders and avoid storage issues in the UK.

The guacamole was flown from Guadalajara, Mexico via Huntsville, Alabama in the US, to London Stansted Airport in the UK on scheduled charters of the [Panalpina Charter Network](#). The product was transported on the lower deck of Panalpina's 747-8 freighter "Spirit of Panalpina" with the temperature set at 2 °C.

The goods were loaded on pallets with thermal covers (passive cooling) to maintain an optimal temperature during transport and transit, and a vehicle was on stand-by at Stansted Airport with the temperature set at -18 °C for immediate onward distribution to the customer in Braintree, 29 km away.

The ambient temperature of the cargo was controlled at every stage of the journey to maintain the cool chain and each shipment was delivered to the full satisfaction of the customer between two and maximum five hours after landing in Stansted.



The "Spirit of Panalpina" passes in front of the new perishables facility during construction in 2017.

Why Huntsville

Perishables traffic from Mexico has been increasing steadily for the last four years, and fresh produce has become a regular staple commodity on each flight. Panalpina's gateway in Huntsville, Alabama was recently expanded to accommodate these and new volumes.

Of the new 1,626 m² (17,500 sq ft) 1,022 m² (11,000 sq ft) is cold storage dedicated to perishables with variable temperature ranges. The coolers are located directly adjacent to Panalpina's main building, less than 100 meters from the apron where aircraft park and can fit enough perishables to fill up an entire Boeing 747-8F (double-stacked).

Operational since August 2017, the new perishables facility makes it easier for Panalpina's experts to manage and oversee the transit of berries, blueberries, blackberries, avocados, lemons, limes, oriental vegetables, papaya, and jackfruit among many other products on their way from Mexico to the US and Europe, as well as from the US to Europe.

At the moment, 100% of the cargo in transit stays in the plane, but the facility is ready to accommodate perishables at the right temperature in case of aircraft on ground (AOG) and future connecting flights.

"It can get hot and humid here in Alabama in mid-summer, so the new cold storage capability is definitely good to have to keep products fresh while in transit when needed," says James Beck, Panalpina's gateway manager for Huntsville and Miami, with a smile. "On the other hand, we do not suffer winter closures or diversions due to weather."

The new facility in Huntsville is an important addition to Panalpina's Perishables Network and will complement the Miami gateway, which handles most of the perishables flown in from the Americas, in particular flowers from Colombia and Ecuador.

Huntsville is ready to handle additional products, including American fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, hatched eggs, chocolate and confectionary, and open new routes from the Americas as well as to and from Asia. As part of the Panalpina Charter Network, Huntsville is directly linked to Mexico City, Guadalajara, Hong Kong, Sao Paulo, Stansted, and Luxembourg.

"Huntsville is geared towards a product-conscious cool chain for fresh produce," explains Markus Fellmann, regional head of Perishables Americas. "The many direct flights that we control connect important markets with high frequency and ample air freight capacity. This way we can meet the rising international demand for perishables while ensuring product integrity with optimal temperature control."

An airport without congestion, strategically located Huntsville has the additional advantage of a road feeder service – a truck network that covers 26 US states over a 970 km radius where major cities can be reached in 1-1.5 days. "We have minimal waiting times, and the permanent presence of

the [US customs](#) and the United States Department of Agriculture ([USDA](#)) allows for optimized overland transport with reefers and quick transfer times to other cities and airports,” adds James.

75 people work at the Huntsville gateway which has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration ([FDA](#)) and is expected to receive the Global Food Safety Initiative ([GFSI](#)) certification by the end of March.



The completed Huntsville facility (left) is an important addition to the Panalpina Perishables Network.



Connected to an extensive road feeder service: The new temperature-controlled facility in Huntsville has four truck docks.



Two airside doors give direct access to the tarmac and Panalpina's freighters that are parked only 100 meters away.

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