

JET AVIATION'S SINGAPORE HUB PROVES A STRONG FOUNDATION IN ASIAN MARKET

News / Business aviation



When Jet Aviation first established its Asia-Pacific headquarters at Singapore Seletar Airport back in 1996, it was far from clear how market prospects would unfold. Twenty years on, Jet Aviation president Robert Smith feels the company's far-sighted investment has been more than vindicated with plenty more growth in private and corporate aviation anticipated in this part of the world.

In 2014, Jet Aviation completed a major expansion that almost tripled the size of its presence at Seletar, with the addition of a 54,000-sq-ft maintenance hangar that has freed up space in the adjoining hangar for covered aircraft parking. Last year the company completed an extensive refurbishment of its FBO, which provided ground handling for around 1,500 movements last year. It is one of six FBOs at Seletar, which is building a new executive terminal, and Jet Aviation also offers handling at Singapore's larger Changi International Airport.

"The first few years were a struggle but we made the move to the Asia-Pacific region as a long-term strategy, and it paid off," Smith told AIN. "We were there as the market started to improve in the early 2000s."

More Asia-Pacific expansion is on the horizon in the shape of a new 43,000-sq-ft maintenance facility and hangar in Macau that is slated to open in the second quarter of this year. This will provide much needed extra capacity given that nearby Hong Kong International Airport, where Jet Aviation already has a significant maintenance and aircraft management operation, is heavily congested.

Jet Aviation has expanded its fleet of managed aircraft across the Asia-Pacific region to 31 jets, including four G650s, nine G550s, seven G450s and two G200s, as well as a Global Express, three Global 6000s, two Global 5000s, a Challenger 605, a Falcon 900LX and a Falcon 7X. The Asian Business Aviation Association recently honored the company as the best aircraft management operation in the region.

The new Jet Aviation Macau operation will provide aircraft maintenance, cleaning and parking. It is now covered by the Hong Kong facility's Dassault Falcon authorized line service center approval, which has just been renewed. The Macau site will also serve as a Gulfstream authorized service center and, in addition to Part 145 approval from the Macau authorities, will be covered by equivalent FAA and EASA clearance.

But Singapore remains the hub of Jet Aviation's maintenance capability in Asia, holding approvals from the local civil aviation authority, as well as from the U.S., Europe, China, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and Australia. The facility mainly specializes in working on Gulfstreams, as well as Boeing Business Jets and most Challengers and Global Expresses. This year, it plans to add the G200 and G280 to its support roster.

According to Jet Aviation Singapore vice president and general manager John Riggir, getting Chinese maintenance approval has been a major breakthrough in attracting customers from the country's growing fleet. To achieve this it first had to go to special lengths to get equivalent Singaporean approval, which was by no means straightforward since there are no business jets on the country's register.

The facility provides everything from line maintenance to heavy 8C checks. The latter work is often done in conjunction with cabin refurbishments, for which it provides cabinetry, upholstery and painting with in-house skills. The operation provides continuous airworthiness maintenance organization cover for 15 aircraft types.

"The number of business jets in this region has grown a lot in recent years, and we have also seen a migration to larger aircraft," Riggir said. "Owners who previously had small turboprops are now in Gulfstreams and Globals."

Despite the global economy's troublesome start to 2016, Jet Aviation remains optimistic about prospects for further business aviation growth in this part of the world. "Overall, we are not concerned about long-term prospects," said Smith. "Yes, there is some uncertainty, but flight activity is still growing in the region, but not at the same pace as three years ago. After all, the Chinese economy is still growing, there has just been a reduction in the level of growth."

In February, during the Singapore Airshow, Jet Aviation celebrated the anniversary with a lavish party for clients, employees, OEM representatives, vendors, media and members of the financial community. In a welcome speech, Smith thanked Jet Aviation Singapore's "founding father," Ruedi Kraft, who is now the company's vice president for business development completions, as well as Stefan Benz, the company's senior vice president for regional MRO and FBO operations, and John Riggir.

"Jet Aviation Singapore not only survived the financial crisis throughout Asia in the early 1990s; it bounced back and grew stronger," said the company in a statement. "Since 2010 alone, it has tripled its capacity and more than doubled its workforce. And we're exceptionally proud to note that 75 percent of our employees have been hired locally."

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