

CARIBAVIA 2025 - TOGETHER WE WE CAN MAKE THINGS GREATER - INTERVIEW WITH SHERKANE DE HAENEN

News / Events / Festivals



It's like the moment of truth when you finally meet someone you originally connected with via latest technologies. Verification of your first impression, disillusionment, or something else. The entire CARIBAVIA "family" had the opportunity to live warm welcome, high efficiency, and kindness of CARIBAVIA 2025 soul - Sherkane De Haenen. CEO of BIRDY AERO, event organizer par excellence, a woman in aviation—these are just a few of the many roles Sherkane has. I absolutely needed to talk to her, to hear her thoughts on the event, her feedback, and her ideas for future editions. Here is the essential of our

conversation.

T.O. My very first and obvious question - how you survived CARIBAVIA 2025 ? You were responsible to deal with everything, everyone. I guess almost 24/7.. As it was your first CARIBAVIA, how did you live that? What are your impressions?

S.D.H. Well I mean having to handle everything by myself doesn't really scare me 'cause I'm kind of used to it. I have been doing that forever. So, it was great. It was great because I love being busy all the time, so that was totally fitting my expectations. I had the chance to be supported by St Barth Tourism Committee. I didn't do everything by myself. I just handled the everyday operations. And of course some preparation before the event. I mean mainly what was challenging was to handle all of these people coming from different territories speaking different languages, having different visions. And what was great about it, is that we could get insights from everywhere in the world. And that's what I preferred about the event, is that synergy between different minds and different perspectives and different ways of doing things and different ways of working. So I mean, it was a great event and I really have common vision with the founder, with Bud. But I also have my own vision of course because we're from a different generation. I'm trying to bring my young vision, if I can say to that existing CARIBAVIA state of mind, but status quo. that's what I meant. Yes.

T.O. Huge thanks to St. Barths for the welcome, to everyone. I mean, everyone. Tourism Committee, Président de la collectivité... We were accepted to the family I would say. We were really feeling like we could live there forever. Previously, I got the message that the island is very « dangerous », because once you spend some time there, you will always willing to be back. So that's the secret of St. Barths. But as he told we were from so many different countries and I've lived several CARIBAVIA before. Did you feel maybe same thing what I got this time? I think Commander Bud created a family, a family of thinkers. Of industry's experts who are not only talking, but taking decisions and moving towards real document's signing. As an example, during CARIBAVIA St. Barths Executive was appointed Tecnam's service center, for the first time we had static display. Do you think that Caribbeans needs cocktails of different industry experts to come, to see, to discuss and to act?

S.D.H. Of course. I mean, we're kind of secluded, you know, geographically. By default we're in in our own world. And we definitely need some influence from the outside. Bringing people from the outside with locals can only make things better. Because we can take examples, we can make collaborations to begin. As we did with Tecnam, as we did also with the Minister of Tourism in Nevis and and the presidency here. It's really, it's challenging 'cause we have different visions and different ways of doing things. But at the same time I think without CARIBAVIA, we wouldn't have an opportunity to merge our ideas and to make things happen. We would just remain stuck kind of in our old way, old-fashioned you know, airlift functioning. So I mean yes, I think it's necessary. I think it's absolutely mandatory for the region to have this type of events. Without CARIBAVIA, I don't know of any other event where we could meet each other. I mean we're used to work all together. Of course we send email to each others all the time. we call each other. We work, we collaborate every day like all the stakeholders in the region. But we never actually have a drink together, you know? And we don't have more than an email or a phone call. We don't have more time to discuss and to get to know each other better, to start to think about solutions together. So to me, CARIBAVIA is the key to the region. I really hope that we can take it to the next level in the upcoming years.

T.O. I don't have a doubt about that. One more easy question. How CARIBAVIA will impact your business, your company, Birdy Aero ? As you told, you are not afraid of doing things and you are used to organise whatever comes and whatever your clients are asking. How

the experience of CARIBAVIA will change or maybe contribute to your company's development?

S.D.H. It's just key to everybody working in aviation in the region. So, of course, it's key for Birdy Aero too. Right now we have to face so many challenges. Unfortunately, I'm very sorry to say that, but we're not able to say « yes » to our clients, and that happens many times. I would say out of ten requests we have, we have to say no at least five times. Because there is not enough aircraft, airports are too busy to handle more aircraft sometimes. The regulation, the air traffic, the taxes the immigration. All that is blocking us from saying yes to the client sometimes. Whatever impact CARIBAVIA has on airlift in the region will be a great added value to our business and to travelers. At the end, our business is aimed to facilitate and give options to the clients, so they can have the experience the way they want. I cannot yet say much about what was born during this year's CARIBAVIA, but it will definitely impact the business, impact traveling to the Caribbean. So I'm really looking forward to. There's so much to be done ! We made a couple steps forward this year but there's still a lot to do and I'm really waiting for the next CARIBAVIA to move forward and get things done, liberalize the sky as much as we can. It is true that the Caribbean is very complex. There's more than 30 territories, more than 20 nationalities. It's very, very complex and that's why, to me, it's even more important for the region to have this kind of gathering.

T.O You mentionned next CARIBAVIA .Thanks to Commander Bud all event's "family" already knows about new « home » for 2027, so this is done. Thanks to the invitation of Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment of Antigua and Barbuda Charles Fernandez CARIBAVIA 2027 will be held at Antigua and Barbuda. We are still looking for CARIBAVIA location 2026 as much as I know. You are on a team. What you will bring and what you would love to add to the next edition of CARIBAVIA?

S.D.H. Bud and I are really close. We talk to each other every day. I know pretty much everything that's in his mind and so does he. We're not the same generation. I have my vision that goes with my generation. He's got his habits and his vision and his experience, which I don't have, of course. And we fight a lot. Because I want to do things this way, he wants to do them that way, and we have to find compromises all the time, and it works. It actually does work. So that's what's magical about it. And what I really would like him to understand and to bring to life... ... is making the event a little more modern. He wants something very exclusive and I totally understand that. I just want to bring it to another level. I want it to be really exclusive meaning that even for very big International organisations and biggest decision makers that would become « impossible to miss event ». We already got ministers, we already got CEOs. But I want to make that people who missed this yers' edition for some reasons, would not miss the next one. Everybody needs to be aware that CARIBAVIA is non-missable. If we want things to move forward, we need everybody to be here. And to make that possible, I wanna make CARIBAVIA a little a little bit more attractive. Bud is very, you know, discreet. He doesn't want, you know, glitters and all that. Like, it's not his style. I'm a little younger and I'm a little more, you know used to, like, social media and all that. And I just want to communicate a little bit more and a little bit better about CARIBAVIA. So that people understand that it's not just an option. No, they, they have to be here.

T.O. I totally agree. I have the pleasure knowing Commander Bud for a long time. We still have some differences between generations. During all these years, I always did whatever I could to spread the message and to make the industry understand that CARIBAVIA is not an option. This must have already be marked in your next year agenda. When I returned from CARIBAVIA 2025, some colleagues were asking, "What's so special? And why... Can you explain?" Actually, no. We've stated numerous times « it's a, a no sit and listen event »... But people have to live that to get what exactly is happening.

S.D.H. Exactly, 'cause I think is that people picture CARIBAVIA as a discussion platform, but that's not it. As you mentioned earlier, it's about creating a business and professional, local and international family, you know. And with Birdy Aero I already know that. I'm part of a network of more than 900 other brokers and operators, we talk to each other every day. We share tips and advices and blacklisted people. We share everything pretty much. We're all competitors, but we discuss every day and we're not actually competing. Whoever wins, wins. At the same time, we share insights every day and that's so important ! I really love that and that's what CARIBAVIA is about. When someone sees CARIBAVIA on the internet or somewhere and thinks : « I don't want to go to another panel discussion or a conference or whatever" It's because he doesn't know that it's actually about creating a network, a startup.

T.O. You're right. That's exactly the spirit you are creating. The spirit of start-up, of making things possible to realize. Until you are sitting in a nice room and seeing and meeting every participant of CARIBAVIA, you have no idea what exactly is this event.

S.D.H. Exactly. it's not a traditional conference or panel session like you can see in other events in Europe, in Dubai, in the US. It has nothing to do with that. And if we want things to move... I mean, there's so much potential in the Caribbean. Whether it's for investors, whether it's for local professionals, whatever, there is so much potential. We have to think as a startup and, and be all together, merge our ideas and make things happen ! And with a traditional standard conference, that cannot happen. With half of the people from the Caribbean not attending... I mean, the, the key people that can make decisions, this won't happen either. That's why I'm really trying to take it to another level. So that family makes things happen every day and that we can meet each other and, and know each other for real, 'cause there's no other opportunity in the Caribbean for that.

T.O. 50skyshades and I will do whatever possible to help : articles, interviews, announcements, social media. It is quite clear to me that we need to come together... Whatever the place will be, whatever island or country. Once you've been to CARIBAVIA, I guess there will be a very few people who will be ready to leave that family. From my perspective, everyone willing to change the industry, to contribute to the development of aviation industry has to participate at least once at CARIBAVIA. To see why and how this specific aviation event is completely different from anything I've seen in more than 15 years within the industry.

S.D.H. Great. Thank you so much for your support ! I'll be very happy to see you again at CARIBAVIA next year. We already have a couple options, but of course nothing official. I will let Bud announce when it will be official. And yeah, just one thing I wanted to add, I mean for now CARIBAVIA, is a family and a conference and some events. But when you want to do something, when you want to create something, you really need that family. Within the Caribbean it's an easy thing to do, you know. In Europe, in the US there are so many stakeholders. It would be a really, really big family. But in the Caribbean it's so easy to do it, you know, and it it would be so helpful for everybody and it's easy to reach. Yeah. My goal with CARIBAVIA for next years is really discuss region's important matters, to develop the region economically and make things better. I

know I've already said it, but that's so important. CARIBAVIA can be the basis of CARIBAVIA Airlift Council, as Commander Bud wrote in his vision. It is important for the region, for airlift, for the people traveling, for the people working locally, for my business of course. And without Bud, none of this would be possible. I really want to deserve that trust he put in me and I hope he will agree that I help him in the next years to make it, you know to take it to a higher level. I have no doubt that together we we can make things greater.

P.S. Thank you Umberto Vallino for the brillina header photo!



06 AUGUST 2025

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