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BASKING IN THE WHITE LOTUS SUN

Full-service Bangkok Airways has had good years, but it never expected a television series to boost its growth CEO tells Orient Aviation

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Groundswell in SAF
production across region

Not guilty say airports as
region's fares escalate

China's airlines build
bridges with global peers



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Smash hit TV series The White Lotus has made stars of Thailand's famed beach resorts injecting unexpected verve into the bottom line of boutique carrier, Bangkok Airways.



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Groundswell for SAF across region

Several aviation key stakeholders have been divided, often pessimistically; about the ability of the industry to meet its 20250 net zero carbon emissions target. Sceptics suggest the slow pace of investment in the production of one key element necessary for achieving the 2050 target, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), is holding back a nascent industry that cannot meet demand from airlines for SAF.

Developing nations have not helped. They have been very vocal in expressing fears their countries will be left behind when only minimal SAF is available at costs that their economies cannot afford.

Therefore it is encouraging that evidence is emerging that achieving net zero within the time frame to 2050 may not be impossible emissions after all.

Significantly, the first of these encouraging developments was the unanimous decision by a record-breaking 192 Member States of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to adopt a resolution supporting reducing carbon emissions to net-zero and ensure no country is left behind as air services grow in emerging economies.

The resolution accelerated aviation's transition to a more sustainable and decarbonized future by achieving broader global cooperation, strengthening the international framework and laying the groundwork for increased investment.

Achieving unanimous agreement among so many nations at the U.N. is almost unheard of. ICAO general secretary, Juan Carlos Salazar, told delegates at the early October gathering "Aviation's transition to a safe, secure and sustainable aviation system is achievable. The decisions you have taken here will guide aviation for decades with a positive impact that will benefit all nations and people".

The second significant development is a new International Air Transport Association (IATA) study that said there are sufficient sustainable feedstocks and SAF production technologies to decarbonize aviation and enable the airline industry to meet its net zero carbon emissions goal.

Also it appears interest in the global SAF project pipeline is extremely strong. One report estimates that in the last 10 years nearly 190 companies have announced they will produce sustainable aviation fuel across 330 locations worldwide. In another sign of progress, major oil and gas companies, long accused of failing to come to the party where SAF production is concerned, are increasing investment in the biofuels sector with 43 projects planned to be running by 2030.

But there is still a long way to go. Only eight billion litres of SAF will be produced in full-year 2025. By 2035, SAF volume output needs to be 90 billion litres and reach 449 billion litres a decade later. ■

TOM BALLANTYNE

Associate editor and chief correspondent

Orient Aviation Media Group

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ORIENT AVIATION





CHINA BUILDING POST-PANDEMIC AVIATION TIES WITH GLOBAL PEERS

By Tomasz Sniedziewski in Xiamen

This year, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) World Safety and Operations Conference (WSOC) was held in Xiamen and hosted by Xiamen Airlines. It was the first major IATA event held in the country since the pandemic and an important opportunity for China's carriers, representatives of all three levels of the administration said.

This representation underlines the significance of the summit being held in China, IATA vice president North Asia, Dr Xie Xingquan, told Orient Aviation on the sidelines of WSOC.

"Last year in Morocco, Xiamen Airlines bid at the tender to host the WSOC. Its presentation was very impressive, demonstrating commitment to sustainability, safety, openness and hospitality. So we wanted to come here and host WSOC," he said. "Unfortunately for Shanghai, China Eastern Airlines missed the opportunity to host the AGM in 2022.

"In 2023, we relaxed COVID regulations in China, but there were still restrictive measures on passengers. This is the first time after COVID a Chinese airline has hosted an IATA global gathering," Dr Xie said.

"We have welcomed more than 800 delegates and nearly 600 attendees came from overseas. That is indeed a platform for Chinese airlines, especially Xiamen Airlines, to display achievements, share knowledge and learn from the rest of the world.

"All of these factors are significant. Nobody regrets this choice. Some people are saying after Xiamen Airlines they will be under pressure to match this level of organization."

Many Chinese attendees, including the IATA Team, say it is a symbolic signal that shows strong support for China's

recovery from the COVID crisis.

"This is not easy. Somehow it is a long journey. The top three airlines in China are still losing money. The good news is they have reduced the loss," he said, "but they still suffer from intensive price competition.

"During COVID, at least for three years, Chinese airlines were separated from IATA global events.

"After COVID, IATA stopped providing the video channel to them to encourage people to come together in person.

"Xiamen Airlines is the first airline from China to join the Airline Retailing Program. They are an industry pioneer and very eager to adapt to new markets and embrace new technology," he said.

On the first day of the WSOC, IATA highlighted three critical priorities for global aviation safety and operations.

They are defending and advancing global standards, using data to enhance performance and fostering a strong safety culture through leadership.

"But North Asia and the Asia-Pacific have their own pressing challenges," Dr Xie said. "The two regions are slightly different.

"For North Asia, I highlight using data. It is what I am doing right now. I encourage Chinese airlines to contribute more to data, to share data and navigate the data with the global industry data pool.

"Chinese airlines move fast in smart aviation - digital transformation, leveraging data and gaining benefits from using the data for many things.

"That is good, but in terms of sharing data globally, when it refers to data cross-border transfer and data governance, they have concerns about regulatory compliance and global alignment.



“One example is IATA Turbulence Aware. When we look at the live map, there is dense coverage in regions like Europe, the U.S., but the Mainland airspace is blank.

“So we lack coverage density. If you lack data coverage and the airlines don’t want to share data then this is an egg and chicken issue. The more data you contribute and share, the more valuable the data.

“For the Asia-Pacific, the biggest challenges are fragmented or inconsistent regulations or policies.

“Different countries, different regulations, rules and fragmented, patchwork regulations. So we increase the complexity of the compliance, increase the cost for airlines and manage to confuse passengers and air carriers in that region.

“For safety, it is the same. “Just as director general, Willie Walsh said, there is no competition on safety issues. We have to share, we have to harmonize, we have to unify the safety regulations and identify the minimum requirements to keep all the regulations consistent and easy to implement harmoniously.”

“There are several reasons why airlines might be hesitant about sharing data. They have a few concerns. Firstly, consent to data coverage density.

“In this aspect, the carriers might feel by sharing data, they give too much information about their own commercial operations.

“Secondly, it is cost and technical issues. For example, Turbulence Aware. It requires transmitting the data and transmitting the data is a cost burden.

“Fortunately, Boeing has committed to provide support free of charge, but only for 747s, 777s and 787s. Technically, it is possible and free of charge.

“But for Airbus, it is a problem. It is being worked on and very soon we will provide a solution for the aircraft fleet. So that is a technical issue.

“There are cost concerns. The first one is data governance. People care about data confidentiality, transparency and how much decision-making power they have.

“One way to mitigate the data governance issue is introducing a supervising governing body, composed of airlines, that will be looking for clearance from government structures to move forward,” Dr Xie said.

Just as hosting the WSOC in China was an opportunity

for its industry to connect with the rest of the world their global peers had the opportunity to learn from China. “This lesson might be very valuable as the country is the global safety leader.

“Chinese airlines move very fast. The aviation market expanded at a very rapid pace. At the same time, its safety record was maintained very well.

“I am very proud of North Asia’s safety record. In 2024, the medium flight accident rate was 0.13, the lowest of all IATA regions. For the last three consecutive years, no fatality occurred. That is amazing.

“Willie Walsh himself said it is a cause for the rest of the world to learn from Chinese airlines and the CAAC as regulator in how to keep safe and remain safe while the market is growing exponentially, in fact neck in neck. Right now in the region, demand is jumping and the market is moving very fast.

“For the regulators, safety challenges are quite huge: how to smartly, efficiently and effectively manage the safety challenges.

The lessons from China’s regulations, or Chinese airline operations in terms of safety management, are strong leadership.

“We have our unique political system and culture. So aviation safety and security are top of other priorities and there is a duty to implement every word of the law and policies.

“If a safety audit leads to findings for actions, regulators and airlines take it seriously and follow up to correct them. We have very strong political will and we treat safety as non-negotiable.

“Another lesson is the proactive investment in infrastructure for passengers. In this part of the world, the scale of investment is huge. For almost three decades, China invested huge resources in its air traffic management system and modernized its airports and facilities at airports.

“To be honest, somehow we outpaced air traffic itself. I don’t know if we can keep up this investment pace, but it is definitely seen as the cornerstone of economic development and growth.

“So I think these are lessons the rest of the world can learn about Chinese aviation: strong leadership and safety culture and the aviation industry’s contribution to the economy for society and for the people themselves.” ■





“We do not compete on safety”

The one sentence repeated most often at the International Air Transport Association (IATA) World Safety and Operations Conference (WSOC) in Xiamen in mid-October was: “We do not compete on safety, we cooperate on safety”.

IATA's director general, Willie Walsh, said as much during the WSOC Opening Plenary and it was repeated countless times at workshops during the three days of the summit.

And cooperating on safety, the delegates did. More than 45 hours of expert sessions on four tracks: Safety, Cabin, Flight Ops and Crisis Management provided an opportunity to learn, exchange knowledge and work on the solutions together.

The event was attended by 853 delegates from 70 countries, IATA said. As soon as the workshop sessions started, it became clear most attendees had arrived in Xiamen with a strong agenda to discuss the challenges and learn.

The level of preparation and discussion was very high. It was no surprise, given the scope of changes the aviation industry is faced with addressing.

“The environment in which airlines operate has grown even more complex as conflicts and regulatory fragmentation have proliferated. As a result, we have seen airspace closures, drone incursions and rising global navigation satellite system (GNSS) interference disrupt connectivity, undermine confidence, and threaten safety,” IATA global director safety, Mark Searle, said in his opening address.

IATA identified three critical priorities for aviation safety and operations: defending and evolving global standards, fostering a strong safety culture through leadership and using data to enhance performance amid growing operational challenges.

While the challenges to the safety environment might be worrying to the informed members of the general public, the WSOC should offer some reassurance - hundreds of safety experts working for airlines, OEMs and regulators are a step ahead in discussing the best working solutions to address these issues.

“A good example of this might be addressing the opportunities and challenges of harnessing the growing amount of available data.

“The fact that a single airplane can produce the same amount of data as an entire airline did in the 1990s,” as Atos chief growth officer, Clay van Doren, pointed out can be both an opportunity and a challenge.

Some panelists in the Safety track believed more data can help, as it provides more information to make a decision.



Others pointed out the risk of the “data lake” problem, in which a critical piece of information can be buried under an excessive amount of other figures.

The invited experts said both arguments are right and it is imperative airlines use the up-to-date tools are available, helping to navigate through the data.

Airbus Head Safety Enhancement, Ian Goodwin, highlighted the need to update how we view safety. “We need to be pragmatic not dogmatic,” he said, explaining there is no need to go 120% on safety, which can make the process much longer, when 100% will do.

It was generally agreed an important way to enhance safety is to exchange data with other stakeholders - airlines, OEMs, regulators and airport operators.

Several data-sharing programs are operated by IATA and the conference provided an opportunity to introduce them as well as to share the experience of the participating airlines.

One of the pressing issues discussed by the cabin operations experts was addressing the incidents with lithium-ion battery-powered products carried on board by passengers.

IATA unveiled ‘Travel Smart with Lithium Batteries’, a global safety campaign of seven simple rules for passengers carrying mobile phones, laptops, power banks and other lithium-powered devices safely onboard.

A Pixar Animation Studio-style video attempts to draw the attention of travelers and explain how to handle the lithium-ion batteries.

“The challenge is great. In the Asia-Pacific, more than 70% air travelers do not know they are carrying potentially high-risk products when they fly, a UL Standards & Engagement study, conducted in February to late March this year revealed after the Air Busan accident.



The same study said thermal runaway incidents are trending upwards and have increased 15% from 2019, when the data collection started and 2024. Globally, Li-Ion battery incidents during flights happen on average twice a week. Nearly one in five incidents result in significant passenger disruption, including diverted landings, evacuation, or return to the gate.

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning was one of the important themes mentioned during the conference. Xiamen Airlines is one of the carriers using the technology.

The airline is building the AI talent pool, introducing AI to train pilots and using predictive maintenance as well for the optimization of flight operations.

"The AI is not just a tool, but a partner," Xie Bing, CEO and President of Xiamen Airlines said, adding his company adopted a "3T" (talent, technology and transformation) policy for using the technology.

Widely discussed in the flight operations track was a presentation by Wang Ronghui, Deputy General Manager, Maintenance and Engineering at Xiamen Airlines, sharing firsthand experiences on the implementation of machine learning and AI algorithms in day-to-day aircraft operations. The presentations came at a time predictive maintenance is gaining importance as one of the channels that allows for easing the negative aspects of the current supply chain issues.

The attendees participating in the Crisis Management track saw IATA launching a revised Emergency Response Best Practices Handbook. For the first time, it includes detailed guidance on family assistance.

"Accidents are rare. But when they happen, people are affected—not only those onboard but those waiting on the ground. Those who are impacted must feel supported, informed and respected. This new chapter will help the aviation industry meet those expectations in a timely and effective manner as documented in ICAO and IOSA standards," said IATA's Senior Vice President, Operations, Safety and Security, Nick Careen explaining the update.

Many delegates told Orient Aviation the event gave them the chance to learn about China's industry achievements in digitalization and use of the new technologies, being named in the country as "smart aviation". There was a strong representation of China's industry experts in the workshops and discussion panels. Alongside the delegation of the host airline Xiamen Airlines, there were representatives of other Chinese state and commercial carriers, as well as a strong team from the state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC). A highlight of the joint closing plenary ceremony was a presentation by Wu Guanghui, the chief scientist and chief designer of the COMAC Large Passenger Jet C919.

He detailed the decision process and challenges involved in developing the aircraft.

"We had a very good discussion, but let's not just stop at it," Searle said. "The risks in aviation will not magically disappear. If the previous years might provide any guidance, it is the industry needs to be ready for new challenges. Luckily for us all the rule "we do not compete on safety, we cooperate on safety", means these challenges will not be faced alone. When the delegates meet at next year's WSOC in Istanbul they will be more experienced and as always, ready to share their knowledge." ■



Asia-Pacific industry leaders to gather in Bangkok for annual regional assembly

The CEOs of the region's airlines, along with other senior industry stakeholders, will gather in Bangkok on November 14-15 for the 69th Assembly of Presidents of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines.

Hosted by Bangkok Airways as AAPA chairman for 2025, the regional industry's leaders will gather at the major annual gathering to spend two days networking, brainstorming on industry issues and holding high-level discussions. Among the key topics to be discussed will be ongoing supply chain

issues, air safety, geopolitical impacts on the region's airline operations and their efforts to achieve sustainability and net zero emissions by 2050.

While 2025 has been a challenging year, AAPA director, Subhas Menon, has said Asia-Pacific carriers remain cautiously optimistic with travel demand expected to stay resilient underpinned by continued expansion in global economic activity, particularly in Asia.

On the cargo front, the near-term outlook is likely to be shaped by developments in global trade policy and inventory cycles.

Capacity shortfalls have led to record passenger load factors this year, but airlines were not immune to cost pressures, with a marked increase in operating expenses, particularly non-fuel costs, underscoring the impact of supply chain constraints.

Heads of airlines and their senior management will be able to exchange views about the issues they face. It is likely there also will be discussions on when supply chain issues will ease.

However, as they prepare to meet, Menon has said these persistent supply chain constraints and associated pressures on

operating costs will continue to pose challenges, underscoring the need for airlines to remain agile in responding to market demand and for continued vigilance in cost management.

"Overall, Asia-Pacific airlines are well-positioned to navigate the wider economic and operational challenges that present will themselves in the coming months," he said.

All in all, while AAPA member airlines compete strongly at the commercial level, the Assembly allows them to exchange views and discuss solutions about their common problems. ■

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ICAO member states unite to meet 2050 net zero emissions

It has been the subject of controversy for years: can aviation achieve its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050? Finally, there are signs the goal is achievable following a landmark International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) session in Montreal. Associate editor and chief correspondent, Tom Ballantyne, reports.

Persuading dozens of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) member states to universally agree on anything has been near impossible for decades. But the most recent Assembly of the global body seems to have done just that; paving the way for aviation to reduce carbon emissions to net-zero in the next 25 years.

"Let this Assembly be remembered as one that set us firmly on track to transforming global aviation for generations to come. Let it be remembered as one where global ambition becomes global action," declared ICAO Council President, Salvatore Siacchitano.

"Aviation's transition to a safe, secure and sustainable system is achievable. The decisions you have taken here will guide aviation for decades with a positive impact that will benefit all nations and people," Secretary General, Juan Carlos Salazar, told delegates.

Their remarks were delivered to representatives of a record-breaking 192 Member States, with nearly 3,000 delegates attending two weeks of deliberations and decision-making.

They adopted a resolution supporting the reduction of carbon emissions to net-zero



ensuring no country is left behind as air services grow in emerging economies.

The resolution accelerated aviation's transition to a more sustainable and decarbonized future by achieving broader global cooperation, strengthening the international framework and laying the groundwork for increased investment, ICAO said.

Decisions made by the Assembly directly support the implementation of ICAO's Strategic Plan for 2050. It aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions from international air transport, building on a Resolution adopted by States at the 2022 Assembly.

Universal agreement on

resolutions such as this have been difficult to achieve at past Assemblies because of developing nations concerns their smaller airlines will be left behind because the cost of achieving sustainability is impossible to attain with their struggling economies.

Significantly, the ICAO breakthrough came just days after the release of a new study by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), in partnership with Worley Consulting, that established there are sufficient sustainable feedstocks and SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) – a key component of reaching the target – production technologies to

decarbonize aviation and enable the airline industry to meet the net zero carbon emissions goal.

"We now have unequivocal evidence that if SAF production is prioritized then feedstock availability is not a barrier in the industry's path to decarbonization. There is enough potential feedstock from sustainable sources to reach net zero carbon emissions in 2050. However, this will only be accomplished with a major acceleration of the SAF industry's growth.

There is optimism interest in the global SAF project pipeline is extremely strong. One report said in more than the last 10

China Airlines achieves milestone of 40% SAF flight

In mid-October, China Airlines fuelled a CI831 flight with 40% Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). At the same time, partnering with CPC Corporation and Taiwan (CPC), the flag carrier introduced low-carbon vegetarian meals and air-to-ground de-carbonization measures.

The flight, CI831's Taoyuan-Bangkok, was a record for TAC demonstration flights. CPC fully supported the 7.7 metric tons of SAF uplifted for the inward Bangkok flight. For the return journey, CI832 Bangkok-Taipei, CAL sourced SAF from Thailand's PTTOR.

CAL will continue to normalize SAF use aboard its fleet and boost the impact of collaborations across industry, government, and academia.



years near 190 companies have announced their intentions to produce sustainable fuels across 330 locations worldwide.

However, out of these companies only 18 are producing SAF and only a few of them are producing at it at scale. This situation means 70 aspiring producers are at various stages of investment and development.

In another sign of SAF progress, major oil and gas companies, long accused of failing to come to the party where SAF production is concerned, have ramped up investments in biofuels, betting on SAF with 43 projects expected to be up and running by 2030, consultancy Rystad said in a report. The energy research firm indicates investments by industry giants such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, Shell, TotalEnergies and Eni could add 286,000 barrels per day (bpd) – more than 12 million actual gallons – of production capacity.

It does, however, remain a confronting target. This year, eight billion litres of SAF are being produced. By 2035, this needs to be 90 billion litres and by 2050, 449 billion litres.

IATA has set the figure at 500 million tonnes (Mt) of SAF to achieve net zero carbon emissions by the target year as it has outlined in its Net Zero Roadmap.

It can be achieved from two

main sources:

Biomass which has the potential to produce more than 300 Mt of bio-SAF annually by 2050 although some of this potential could be limited from or competing sources.

This potential could be expanded by unlocking additional feedstocks or through efficiency gains and technology improvements over intervening decades.

Power-to-liquid (PtL): This will be required to reach 500 Mt of SAF production annually by 2050. Maximizing the volumes of cost-effective bio-SAF will reduce pressure on e-SAF to bridge the gap.

IATA said in all cases, to maximize SAF output, it

will be essential to improve conversion efficiencies, accelerate technology rollout, enhance feedstock logistics and invest in better infrastructure to scale up commercial facilities across all regions.

Nevertheless, the ICAO Assembly has given a clear mandate to pursue its long-term strategy, including a commitment to cleaner energy, with States endorsing the ICAO Global Framework for SAF, Lower Carbon Aviation Fuels and other cleaner energy sources.

It includes endorsement of the Framework's collective target of 5% CO₂ reduction by 2030 and the policy, regulation, support and financing pathway it provides for achieving it.

It also clears the way for accelerated investment with the Assembly calling for the full operationalization of the ICAO Finvest Hub.

This Hub will connect decarbonization projects with public and private investors. It aims to address financing challenges, particularly in developing countries, by facilitating greater access to climate finance.

It also backs a strengthened commitment to the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), the world's only global market-based measure for international aviation.

The Assembly reaffirmed the scheme's environmental integrity and committed to increasing support to States through the ACT-CORSIA programme.

CORSIA is on track and continues to progress with enhanced participation and expanded coverage, IATA said.

ICAO said the decisions taken by the Assembly will provide crucial momentum to real and measurable progress led by the organization on environmental sustainability.

"This progress is demonstrated by increasing numbers of States submitting Action Plans on CO₂ Emissions Reduction Activities (154 compared with 33 in

Michelin Green-Starred Vegetarian Cuisine and Thai Favorites Onboard

To align with the SAF flights, CAL and Michelin Green-Star restaurant, Little Tree Food, devised a menu of plant-based cuisine dished made from local Taiwanese ingredients on the outbound Taoyuan-Bangkok flight.

On the return flight, passengers enjoyed a creative twist on a Thai classic: Thai Basil Plant-Based Mince with Jasmine Rice and Fried Egg. The dish was 100% plant-based protein with Sweet Pandan Coconut Jelly, a Thai national dish, served as the dessert.

CAL offers e-Menus in all classes, bio degradable paper products, stainless steel cutlery in Economy Class and PET materials for tray lids, cups, pillow and headrest covers and lavatory containers.

CAL has introduced electric tractors, electronic cargo-handling and recycled-material tarpaulins among other on ground de-carbonising initiatives.

2022), increasing voluntary participation in CORSIA, now at 130 States, and a growing number of sustainable aviation fuel plants worldwide. The broader participation and stronger commitments of these Resolutions also sent a resounding signal to governments, industry and investors alike that the global aviation community is united and determined to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050."

IATA has called on governments worldwide to urgently address the extremely limited supply of carbon credits available for airlines to fulfill their obligations under CORSIA.

Specifically, it calls on governments to issue Letters of Authorization (LoAs) which enable the release of CORSIA Eligible Emissions Units (EEUs) for purchase by airlines.

The timely issuance of LoAs is key to creating a robust and transparent market for CORSIA EEUs and facilitating the successful implementation of CORSIA.

"CORSIA is a vital part of aviation's global climate strategy. Through it, airlines mitigate their climate impact by funding verified emissions reductions in other sectors. In generating this climate finance CORSIA also plays a key role in both environmental and socio-economic progress, especially in developing countries. To unlock CORSIA's climate finance potential and ensure its contribution to aviation's decarbonization, states must authorize the release of EEUs. That is one of our top messages to the member states at the ICAO Assembly," said ICAO Assistant Director Climate Policy, Yue Huang.

IATA forecasts airlines will require between 146 and 236 million EEUs in CORSIA's first phase from last year to 2026. However, the current supply of

CORSIA eligible units is limited to the 15.8 million credits made available by Guyana. To assist states in issuing LoAs, IATA has published guidance documents and offers practical tools and workshops.

The airline body says that in all cases, to maximize SAF output, it will be essential to improve

China, and ASEAN identified as key drivers of global SAF output.

"The report highlights the local and regional opportunities for SAF production to create jobs, stimulate economies and support energy security goals. Governments, energy producers, investors, and the aviation sector must work

aviation's decarbonization. The potential to turn SAF feedstock into real SAF production is in the hands of policymakers and business leaders, particularly in the energy sector. The conclusion of this study is an urgent call to action. We have just 25 years to turn this proven potential into reality."

IATA also points out that airlines are increasingly adopting sustainable practices to reduce their environmental impact, focusing on initiatives like SAF, waste reduction, and fleet modernization.

Key Sustainability Initiatives include:

Many airlines are investing in SAF, which can reduce carbon emissions by up to 70% compared to fossil fuels.

Airlines are updating their fleets with newer, more fuel-efficient aircraft. For instance, modern aircraft can be up to 20% more efficient than older models, helping to reduce overall fuel consumption and emissions.

They are also implementing measures to reduce single-use plastics and cabin waste. For example, Air New Zealand has committed to removing millions of plastic items from its flights, which is expected to significantly cut down on waste and emissions.

Some airlines offer carbon offset programs, allowing passengers to compensate for their flight emissions by investing in environmental projects. However, this practice has faced criticism for potentially leading to "greenwashing" if not transparently managed.

Airlines are partnering with organizations and other stakeholders to develop and implement sustainability initiatives.

For example, Etihad Airways collaborates with Boeing to test sustainable fuel blends and improve fuel efficiency. ■



Cathay Group and Airbus investing in scaling SAF production

The Cathay Group and Airbus have announced they will jointly invest up to US\$70 million to accelerate SAF production in the Asia-Pacific and worldwide.

The two companies will identify, evaluate and invest in projects that support the scaling of SAF production to 2030.

In a joint statement, the OEM and the Hong Kong airline said: "SAF adoption requires deep collaboration across the value chain, from policy makers and investors to SAF producers, airlines and customers.

"With the region's strong potential in feedstock supply, production capacity and vibrant aviation market the partnership aims to leverage their global experience to help shape policies that make SAF more accessible and affordable in the Asia-Pacific."

conversion efficiencies, accelerate technology rollout, enhance feedstock logistics, and invest in better infrastructure required to scale up commercial facilities across all regions.

Achieving coordinated government policies to support innovation, and investment to create a fully functioning SAF market, unlocking new economic opportunities is vital, as is rallying regional leadership, with North America, Brazil, Europe, India,

together, de-risk investment, and accelerate rollout. Policy certainty and cross-sector collaboration are essential to unlock the scale we need. The time to act is now—delays will only make the challenge harder," said Marie Owens Thomsen, IATA's Senior Vice President Sustainability and Chief Economist.

"With this study it becomes clear that we can make SAF the solution it needs to be for

VietJet honored as an aviation leader in sustainability

Vietjet has been named one of the global winners of the Sustainability Awards 2025

recognised as an airline reducing their environmental impact. Out of seven global winners, Vietjet is proud to be among three low-cost carriers recognized for industry-leading initiatives in sustainability and reducing environmental impact, the award said.

Vietjet was recognized for operating one of the youngest and most modern fleets in the

Asia-Pacific, predominantly A321neo, which deliver significant fuel savings as well as reductions in CO₂ emissions and noise compared with previous aircraft generations. The airline also is an early adopter of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) in Vietnam and has implemented innovative practices for fuel efficiency across its operations.

In its latest order, the LCC confirmed 100 A321neo during visit by Vietnam's General Secretary, To Lam, to the UK at the turn of the month.

"This not merely a



commercial contract, but a symbol of trust, aspiration and a shared vision for sustainable development and global connectivity," Vietjet chair, Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao, said.

Vietjet is the first airline in Vietnam to publish an ESG sustainability report. The carrier has recently formed a partnership with Petrolimex Aviation to use Vietnam-blended SAF for the first time under ISCC EU standards, meeting strict sustainability

requirements. By 2025, Vietjet has invested billions of US\$ in fleet modernization, including orders for 40 new-generation A330neo which reduce fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions by 25% compared with previous generation aircraft. Its fleet also includes 100 additional A321neo aircraft. These investments underscore Vietjet's commitment to advancing sustainable aviation and supporting the global goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. ■

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BASKING IN THE GLOW OF THE WHITE LOTUS PHENOMENON

It is known as Asia's boutique airline; its business built on air traffic to Thailand's famed beach resorts. With solid financial performances and "The White Lotus" affect boosting traffic, Bangkok Airways is preparing for fleet renewal and network expansion. Associate editor and chief correspondent, Tom Ballintyne, reports.



It's not often an airline's growth prospects are boosted by a television series. But in the case of Bangkok Airways (BKK) that is exactly what is happening. The White Lotus is an American TV drama and a global smash hit. Along with other international destinations featured in some episodes of the series two have been set in two of Thailand's most popular resorts: Koh Samui and Phuket.

Thailand, a leading tourist destination in Southeast Asia, forecasts a record 40 million visitors this year driven in part by the global success of the White Lotus. Already its fans have fuelled a surge in luxury bookings in top destinations in Phuket, Bangkok and Samui. The trend is expected to boost visitor spending in Thailand by 10%-15%, up from 7% last year, and driving accommodation prices higher by 40%.

All of this is great news for Bangkok Airways (BKK), which this year is hosting the Assembly of Presidents of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) in mid-November in Bangkok, as BKK owns Samui airport – and two others in Thailand – so flying passengers to and from the country's famous beach resorts is the mainstay of its business.

It has code-share agreements with some 30 international airlines that fly into Bangkok and pass on their passengers to BKK for transit to resorts across the country.

With prospects bright, the airline is looking to renew its aging fleet. BKK president and CEO, Puttipong Prasarttong-Osoth, has said the carrier is looking at acquiring 20 single-aisles with options for another 10 jets. It has been in discussions with Airbus, Boeing and Embraer, but is yet to announce any firm orders.

BKK operates 25 aircraft with an average age of 15.1 years: 12 A319-100s, three A320-100s and 10 ATR 72-600s.

"Regarding fleet, we are modernizing and right-sizing it. We have publicly stated plans for fleet renewal and potential additions of more aircraft over a multi-year horizon, while taking a measured approach to near-term acquisitions given market uncertainty," he told Orient Aviation.

"We expect to operate in the mid-20s aircraft range through 2025-2026 as we balance renewal with operational stability."

He added the airline's core network will remain focused on Asia and its resort hubs where BKK has a strong market position, including Samui and key domestic routes.

"We continue to evaluate selective network additions that fit our boutique full-service model and where we can deliver a profitable, differentiated product, he said."

Puttipong said overall demand for air travel across the region has recovered steadily in all segments since the pandemic ended: either it be domestic travel, international travel, corporate or leisure travel and especially leisure destinations as people are looking for not just vacations but "work-cation" in remote areas rich in cultures and with a relaxing atmosphere, locations Thailand has in abundance.

"For Bangkok Airways, our uniqueness is a boutique, full-service product focusing on passenger experiences beyond



regular services," he said.

"Our airline focuses on regional destinations within and around Thailand. We continue to prioritize steady, profitable growth rather than rapid expansion, matching capacity to demand on our key routes to keep load factors high and yields stable.

"Our core network will remain focused on Asia and our airport hubs of Samui, Sukhothai and Trat as well as key main destinations popular with both domestic and international travellers particularly like Phuket, Chiang Mai, Siem Reap and Laung Prabang where we have a strong market position.

"We continue to evaluate selective network additions that serve the outlook of our customers and fit our boutique full-service model. It is where we can deliver a differentiated product."

Post the gloom of the pandemic, BKK's financial performance has been strong. In 2023, as the industry continued to recover from the impact of COVID, BKK reported an operating profit of US\$93.2 million with revenue rising 70.06% to \$665.11 million. It has reported a net profit of \$52 million for the first quarter of this year despite a marginal 1.4% decline in revenue.

The result reflected the carrier's strategic cost management in a competitive Southeast Asia market. In the three months, BKK flew 1.28 million passengers.

In the second quarter of the year, profits did drop, by 43.59% to \$12.37 million, with a 1.1% decrease in revenue to \$177 million.

It was a result of average fares softening by 2.6%, an increase in expenses of 3.5% and the addition of higher personnel costs and foreign exchange losses.

Like all airlines, BKK is conscious of ongoing supply chain pressures across the aerospace sector. "Manufacturers and suppliers have experienced delivery and parts constraints, which has extended lead times industry wide," he said.

"We are managing this conservatively with a mix of owned, leased, and temporary wet-lease solutions where needed and by planning fleet decisions with realistic delivery timetables.

"In short, the global supply environment is a constraint,



but we have taken steps to mitigate operational risk and maintain service for passengers.”

BKK also has been able to meet the challenge of talent supply, an industry-wide issue as airlines rebuild capacity.

“At Bangkok Airways, we actively recruit and retain cockpit and technical crew through competitive training programs, retention packages and partnerships with global training providers,” Puttipong said.

“Moreover, we had a comprehensive strategy in place during COVID to retain experienced staff in critical areas of the company, allowing us to resume operations smoothly and avoid shortfalls. We have been seeing the benefits of this strategy up to now. Importantly, we operate our own Bangkok Airways Training Center (BATC). It plays a key role in developing and upskilling our pilots, engineers and cabin crew to meet current and future operational needs.”

BATC reinforces a long-term strategy of building self-reliance in training, ensuring BKK can grow sustainably without being overly dependent on external pipelines, he explained. “In addition, we make tactical use of wet-leases or short-term leasing to cover peak periods when required,” he said.

“At present, our staffing levels allow us to operate our network reliably, but we remain vigilant, especially as the wider region is experiencing increasing pilot demand as airlines expand fleets.”

One key focus has been on sustainability and Puttipong has implemented sustainable practices including reducing carbon emissions, investing in eco-friendly initiatives and promoting responsible tourism in the regions it serves.

The Bangkok Airways Blue Volunteers are part of the airline's corporate sustainability initiatives. They participate in various environmental conservation efforts, such as planting coconut seedlings and releasing juvenile blue swimming crabs to promote marine conservation. Recently, they also contributed to the "Love Earth, Save Earth" campaign, which aims to plant coconut trees and raise awareness about carbon dioxide absorption.

One of the key impacts of his leadership is his emphasis on sustainable practices. BKK, under his direction, is a pioneer in implementing eco-friendly initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint and promote environmental responsibility within the aviation sector.

“The aviation industry continues to navigate multiple challenges, from economic volatility and fluctuating fuel prices to shifting travel patterns and geopolitical uncertainties,” he said.

“For Bangkok Airways, maintaining operational resilience while adapting to these evolving dynamics remains a key focus.

“Another major challenge is global warming and climate change. As an industry, we must address our environmental impact responsibly. At Bangkok Airways, ESG development is a core strategic priority in the years ahead.

“We are fully aligned with IATA’s commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

“To move toward this goal, we have initiated several sustainability programs, including the initial implementation of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) usage on our commercial flights, our One Engine Taxi campaign to reduce CO₂ emissions and continuous energy-efficiency improvements across operations.

“Beyond environmental measures, our ESG focus extends to social and community development. We actively support local communities near our airports with a variety of projects that promote education, cultural preservation and economic self-sufficiency.

“In short, the path ahead will require innovation, collaboration, and commitment, but we see these challenges as opportunities to strengthen our long-term sustainability and to continue being a responsible, forward-looking airline.”

In July this year BKK announced it was continuing to drive its “Low Carbon Skies by Bangkok Airways” campaign, aiming to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The airline officially announced the adoption of SAF on its commercial flights, reinforcing Thailand’s green aviation industry and laying a crucial foundation for environmentally balanced aviation development in the future.

In 2024, the airline began using SAF on a pilot flight





operating between Samui and Bangkok. This time, SAF will be used on commercial flights departing from Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi Airport) to international destinations including Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Luang Prabang and the Maldives.

BKK started life in 1968 as Sahakol Air, operating air taxi services under contract to a number of organizations engaged in oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Thailand.

It began scheduled services in 1986, becoming Thailand's first privately owned domestic airline. It rebranded as Bangkok Airways in 1989.

Its first foray into jet aircraft operations was in 2000 with a B717. It now operates scheduled services to destinations in Thailand, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Maldives and Singapore with its main base at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

The airline is majority-owned by Puttipong's father, Prasert Prasarttong-Osoth, a former surgeon and Thai billionaire who also co-founded Bangkok Dusit Medical Services in 1972, Thailand's largest private hospital operator. He took BKK public in 2014.

In the early 2000s, BKK considered an ambitious plan to expand its fleet by entering long-haul markets, looking at adding wide-body A330s, A340s or 787 to its fleet.

In December 2005 it announced it had decided to negotiate an order for six A350-800s to be delivered to the airline from 2013, but the order was cancelled in 2011 due to delivery delays.

Puttipong's approach emphasizes collaboration, transparency and a relentless pursuit of excellence. His academic achievements include a Bachelor's Degree from the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy and a Diploma from the Senior Executive Program, Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration from Thailand's most prestigious university.

One key aspect of his leadership style is his focus on customer-centricity, believing putting customers at the centre of every decision is crucial for long-term success.

As for the future, Puttipong is confident the airline will continue to thrive. "Bangkok Airways remains committed to delivering the warm, dependable full-service experience that defines our brand as 'Asia's Boutique Airline!'" "While we are realistic about industry headwinds, we see strong opportunities in regional leisure travel and we will continue to invest prudently in fleet renewal, crew development, sustainability and product improvements that matter to our guests." ■



Not guilty say airports as region's airfares escalate

Airfares continue to hit ever more highs with the biggest increases being recorded in Oceania and ASEAN regions, the most recent report by Airports Council International Asia-Pacific & Middle East (ACI APAC & MID) details.

Earlier this month, the airport association said airfares had increased across all markets except China, with Southeast Asia and Oceania recording the biggest increases of 20% and 30% higher than pre-pandemic levels, respectively.

The 2025 edition of the Airfare Trends for the Asia-Pacific and Middle East Report regions reveals a significant rise in the cost of air travel.

International fares have increased 17% compared with pre-COVID levels, particularly in Southeast Asia and developed East Asia.

Domestic fares are 30% higher compared with 2019, especially on short-haul low-cost carrier routes that have reduced competition.

Economy travellers are bearing the largest proportion of the fare increases except in India and China, the report said. These two markets are still performing below average regional air fare pricing levels.

Developed with Flare Aviation Consulting, the analysis is a data-driven assessment of airfare movements across two of the world's fastest growing regions and their fare prices.

Despite a strong post-

pandemic passenger traffic recovery, airfares have climbed steadily since the first half of 2019.

The air ticket trajectory contrasts sharply with the declining fare patterns pre-COVID. It is primarily attributed to inflation and reduced airline competition in several markets.

Asia-Pacific airfares increased by an average of 8% from first-half 2019 to 2025 compared with an average 18% decrease between interim 2014 and 2019.

Confirmation air travel is becoming more expensive coincides with passenger traffic continuing to expand across the region.

The most recent statistics from the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) reports the average international passenger load factor for carriers in the region remains elevated at 82.9%.

But many flights are operating with full passenger loads, particularly in premium cabins, evidence travellers are



prepared to pay a premium to find a seat on a flight.

In August, Asia-Pacific airlines carried 34.3 million international passengers, an 8.8% increase compared with the same month in 2024.

Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPK) increased 9.1% year-on-year underpinned by strength in longer haul markets.

AAPA director general, Subhas Menon, said passenger markets continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of global challenges, including protectionist trade measures and supply chain constraints.

In the first eight months of 2025, Asia-Pacific airlines flew 258 million international passengers, up 10.8% against 12 months ago.

Menon said the region's carriers remain cautiously optimistic with travel demand forecast to stay resilient supported by expansion in global economic activity, particularly in Asia.

"Persistent supply chain constraints and associated pressures on operating costs will pose challenges and underscore the need for airlines to remain agile in responding to market demand and for continued vigilance in cost management," he said.

"Overall, Asia-Pacific airlines are well-positioned to navigate the wider economic and operational challenges in the months ahead."

The ACI report reaffirmed its cornerstone defence that airport charges play a marginal



role in airfare price changes. Airport charges and turnaround costs, including government taxes, have generally risen below inflation levels, it said.

Notably, in markets where airport charges have decreased, airfares continue to increase, ACI APAC and MID director general, Stefano Baronci, said.

"The objectives of this analysis are an assessment of market dynamics, its impact on aviation and transparency about the rising cost of air travel," he said.

"This study proves lowering airport charges does not translate into reductions in ticket prices. It limits the ability of airports to invest in capacity and technology to enhance service quality.

"To make air travel more affordable from a consumer perspective, policy makers should focus on liberalising markets and efficient slot policy. This can strengthen airline competition while ensuring airports can build capacity to support growth." ■

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