

Home (<https://themalaysianreserve.com>) » News (<https://themalaysianreserve.com/category/news/>)  
» Subang needs work to be regional BizAv hub

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*Subang Skypark could still lose out to the other airports due to regulatory constraints*

**By RAHIMI YUNUS / Pic By MUHD AMIN NAHARUL**

**Much** could be improved at the Subang Skypark area, particularly in terms of its regulatory framework, before it could be transformed into a thriving business aviation (BizAv) hub in the future.

According to the Asian Business Aviation Association (AsBAA), Subang offers better facilities with a cheaper cost structure compared to other centres including the Seletar Airport in Singapore, the Halim Perdanakusuma International Airport in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand.

However, Subang Skypark could still lose out to the other airports due to regulatory constraints, particularly paperworks regarding flight permits.

“For a normal flight, it will take about 24 hours or faster to get a permit, whereas Singapore does not require one. People just fly in and that is a plus for Singapore,” AsBAA board of governor Emil Pope, who is also the co-leader for AsBAA’s Malaysia executive committee, alongside Tan Sri Ravindran Menon, told *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)*.

For chartered private jets, Pope said Subang could take up to 28 days to approve a flight permit, against Singapore and Hong Kong which could process them in three days.

He said the situation has also forced some charter jets to “break the law” and end up not “declaring” the aircraft in certain circumstances.

Pope added that Singapore allows yearly approval to certain charter operators, which is convenient for subsequent individual flight permit applications.

“For us to be too structured and bureaucratic when we have a better facility does not make sense,” he added.

However, Sapura Resources Bhd’s unit Sapura Aero Sdn Bhd CEO Ilyas Alex Chan viewed the long duration of permit approval as a minor issue, specifically in the context of foreign aircraft wanting to pick up passengers in Malaysia.

“If a foreign aircraft wants to enter Malaysia and pick up passengers here, there are some level of foreign restrictions that need to be sorted out in line with the cabotage law.

“It is not isolated to Malaysia alone as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia also apply such law,” Ilyas told *TMR*. Sapura Aero currently manages more than 20 jets in Subang as the biggest private aviation services company based in the area.

Apart from the permit matter, Pope also highlighted that private jets might choose other airports over Subang due to refuelling issue.

Currently, the sole fuel provider is Petroliam Nasional Bhd (Petronas).

“Charter flights from Europe to Australia are making a fuel stop in Singapore or Bangkok, instead of Subang because it is quicker there, despite higher handling charges,” Pope said.

Apart from being a BizAv hub, Subang Airport — also referred as the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport or Subang Skypark — is currently the country’s turboprop aircraft hub.

Currently, it mainly serves FireFly Sdn Bhd, Malindo Airways Sdn Bhd and Berjaya Air Sdn Bhd.

Ilyas said time is not a factor for jets that park more than one day at the airport as the longer turnaround time will allow for refuelling and other smaller suppliers or vendors from master supplier Petronas are available.

Overall, Ilyas said regulatory bodies including the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia and Malaysian Aviation Commission could have assessed BizAv in a precise manner, not necessarily driven by the commercial aviation framework.

“Passengers buy tickets and wait for their flight in a commercial airline. But, a private jet is the reverse of that.

“The aircraft waits for the owner or customer, hence, the regulation needs to be flexible enough for unscheduled flights,” he said.

Moving forward, Ilyas said safety and compliance should be the top priorities for regulators and operators alike in a business that handles expensive assets worth millions such as BizAv.

The BizAv segment has been growing between 3% and 5% yearly in South-East Asia, according to Dassault Aviation SA’s senior VP of civil aircraft Carlos Brana.

“Considering a 3% growth, we are more than happy if we sell one or two new airplanes every year (in the South-East Asian countries),” Brana told *TMR* at the introduction of new Falcon 6X programme at Paris Le Bourget Airport recently.

Despite still being a young market compared to the US and Europe, Malaysia is Dassault's biggest market in South-East Asia with 12 Falcons.

Malaysia is also the second-biggest market for private jet charter company VistaJet International Ltd in Asia, after China.

*TMR* recently reported that Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd is expected to build the country's first dedicated private jet hub and terminal within the Subang Skypark area in the next three years.

The proposed terminal is part of the Subang Regeneration Exercise that is aimed at increasing the number of business jets in Malaysia from about 50 to more than 150 jets within the next five years.

Data from the Asian Sky Group Fleet Report 2016 showed that Bombardier and Gulfstream were the top two business jet fleet by original equipment manufacturer in Malaysia, with 17 each from the total of 48 aircraft, ahead of Dassault, Cessna Aircraft Co and Embraer SA, among others.

Large jets dominated this market with 31%, or 15 aircraft, based in Malaysia.