

HITTING THE ASIAN TRAIL



Asia may be the world's smallest market in terms of business jet penetration, but it accounts for some of the largest headaches when it comes to getting there. Fortunately, there is a growing raft of expertise available to smooth the skies. **Liz Moscrop** reports.

It is all very well enjoying full leather seats, an aerial living room and the luxury of dictating your own travel time. However, to get from Europe to where you want to go in Asia – not to mention when you want to get there – it is vital to hire an expert trip planner. Firms such as Universal Weather and Aviation (UWA) and Air Routing International (ARI) have decades of expertise in supplying such services.

Bris Gannett, director of Air Routing International flight operations, has seen how political unrest impacts the sector.



“Security is really important in a volatile country,” he says. “Our staff in Houston is in touch with local agents who are constantly feeding information to our headquarters to keep a realistic approach to travel. We keep people away from the volatility.”

Gannett further points out that such events as national holidays, elections or transportation strikes can be just as detrimental to the success of a trip and stresses the importance of direct local contact.

Walter Perry trip, support specialist for Universal Weather and Aviation, is also well versed in helping to plan trips into Asia. “Japan, China, Singapore and Korea are our mainstream business destinations in the region,” he says.

Perry cites the example of getting a Gulfstream G550 out of Paris to Shanghai and the logistics such a trip entails.

“First, we would try to get a firm date and schedule the best time for our client to plan the trip. As much time as possible is best,” he says. “For example, China requires over a week’s notice for a permit. If we choose Russia for a tech stop, we also have to allow a minimum of one week for the overfly permissions.”

An Expensive Process

Flying to Asia from Europe is expensive and involves navigation charges, fuel and landing, overfly and entry permits.

“For a Paris to Shanghai trip, the client needs a business sponsor in China,” says Perry. “The principals also have to file the usual information – such as name, address, home and

cell number. The sponsor will also ask for entry permission in a letter to the Chinese government to vouch for you. Our handler in China takes care of all this.”

Gannett also vouches for using local handlers and stresses just how important relationships are to doing business in the region. “We use a team of handlers in Asia that take on some of the trickier or smaller airports in places like Cambodia, Bangkok, and Myanmar.”

EXPENSIVE.

Flying from Europe to Asia is expensive due in part to navigation charges, fuel and entry permits.

"We offer a sophisticated service to Fortune 100 type customers who have their own aircraft," he adds. "They expect VIP treatment, so we use local people who know the environment and local customs – and who also understand VIPs."

A Helping Hand

A good flight planning company will help charter companies by establishing lines of credit en route so crews do not have to carry large amounts of cash in multiple currencies.

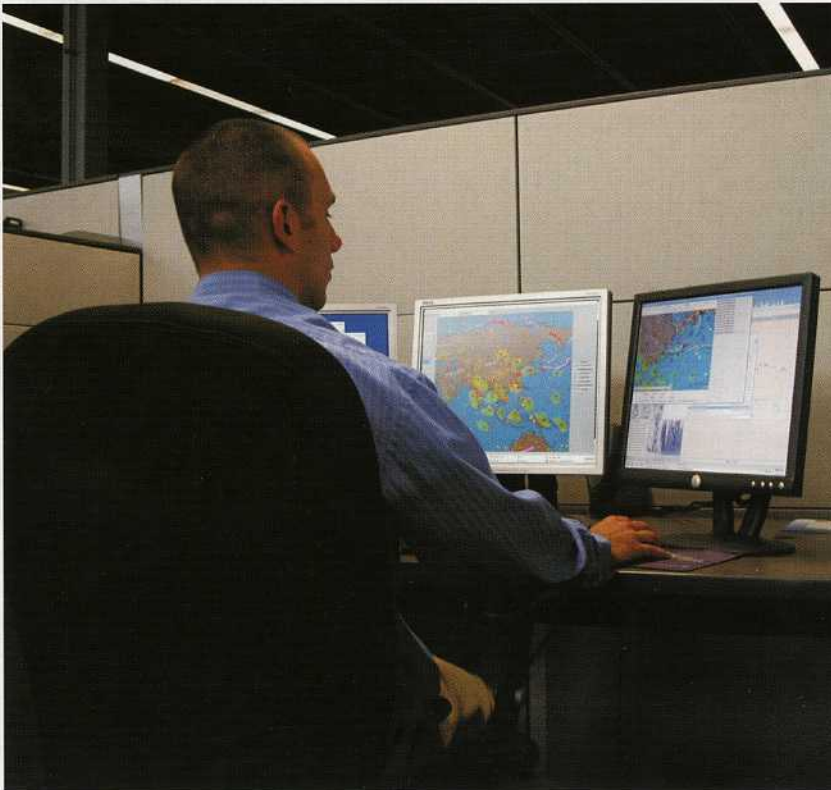
"Our handlers step in and act on our behalf of our client, paying the airport and other fees," says Gannett.

The choice of flight path is important, too. Gannett says the ARI will generally look at the Great Circle route, depending on the time of day. Dubai and London can get very crowded, so ARI may well head for Abu Dhabi on a Middle Eastern routing. East of Germany and the CIS states require overfly permits, so it is important to file a request at least 72 hours prior to the estimated take off time.

"Going to Cambodia from London, for example, we try to take the path of least resistance and choose to fly London via Western Europe, then Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, UAE, touch Pakistan or India and route

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over Thailand and get to Phnom Phen with 24 hours notice," Gannett says. "We then contact our handlers and they contact the destination airport as well as the CAA of that country."



Most business jets will become thirsty on such a long journey. A common tech stop en route to Asia is Mongolia, where aircraft refuel and the crew receives the latest updates on weather or notams. The stop lasts for around an hour and since passengers do not get off, they do not require visas.

"We offer a detailed package for clients with winds aloft charts notams at destination and so on," says Perry. "And we will contact our local handlers if there is a problem."

"The first thing on arrival at a destination is to get passengers and their luggage off the aircraft and cleared through customs and immigrations," continues Perry. UWA will also arrange post flight transport to the crew hotel, as well as accommodation and catering.

Anything But Easy

Because it is so fragmented, flying around Asia presents many difficulties. Japan and Hong Kong can be problem-

EXPANDING.

Jet Aviation recently expanded into the Chinese and Asian markets, signing a joint-venture with Deer Air in Beijing (top). Weather forecast is the specialty of Universal Weather (bottom).

