

# Punching above its weight

A large private jet aircraft is parked on a tarmac in front of a hangar. The aircraft is white with a red and blue stripe along the fuselage. The hangar in the background has a sign that says "DC Aviation". The sky is blue with some clouds.

Business aviation has had a huge effect on the Maltese economy. The Malta Business Aviation Association is confident that the industry will continue to grow with the support of stakeholders

In a study conducted on behalf of the European Business Aviation Association focusing on the impact of business aviation on the economy of the Republic of Malta, the numbers are nothing short of extraordinary. Malta has only one airport and the number of business aviation departures in 2017 recorded increased by an extraordinary 23.2%.

Sure, Malta held the European Presidency in the first half of 2017, which certainly had an impact on the traffic figures, but if the first quarter of 2018 is anything to go by, Eurocontrol figures still are showing a steady increase. With almost two thousand five hundred departures, business aviation traffic makes up almost 9% of the whole traffic to the Maltese islands with Nice, Rome and Geneva, being amongst the top city pairs and most traffic coming from Italy, France and the United Kingdom.

An island of less than half a million inhabitants and approximately three hundred square kilometres these numbers demonstrate a healthy economic activity and stable European country. From basically an unknown entity Malta is certainly punching above its weight in the industry. In less than ten years the number of business aviation companies calling Malta home, has increased exponentially with now almost 150 aircraft carrying the 9H mark on their tail.

This is of significant importance to the Maltese economy as when one gets an air operator certificate from any EASA member state that must have their principal place of business in that member state. This means that between direct and indirect jobs over the past eight years 3,250 new jobs have been created in the aviation sector, tipping the percentage of employees in business aviation to over 50% of the total of employees in the aviation sector.

The European Business Aviation Study totals the net output of business aviation towards the Maltese economy to more than €500 million.

When you ask the various operators on the Maltese Islands, such as TAG Aviation, Jet Aviation, Vista Jet, DC Aviation and others, they all agree that the major attraction to business companies of the Maltese jurisdiction is that is a business aviation friendly jurisdiction. The authorities understand that time is money and therefore are competent and efficient.

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Furthermore, the Malta is native English-speaking community making easier to do business transactions, has a reputable banking industry and having good scheduled airline connections which help the increasing number of expats finding jobs on the islands commuting to their homes on mainland Europe. Of course the nice Mediterranean weather and cuisine do also play a role in the favourable reviews of the jurisdiction.

This successful story brings with it also challenges, such as shortage of human resources, but that is true in many other European jurisdictions. However, Malta have embarked on a number of apprenticeship programmes aimed at attracting youth to the aviation industry and these are not only pilot and engineering programs but also in the fields of operations and compliance.

Airport access is also becoming a challenge, and although the airport is not a Eurocontrol slots airport, parking restrictions are becoming more frequent, but again the government has commissioned a study consisting a structural plan for Malta International airport encompassing all stakeholders. There also an ongoing consultation with all the stakeholders for the country's aviation policy which is taking in account the major role that business aviation is playing within the Maltese economy.

The Malta Business Aviation Association is confident that this industry will continue to grow with the support of the local government, but the local government also acknowledges the value of business aviation to the continued growth of the Maltese economy. ■

## **Malta Business Aviation Association**