JOINING THE AVIATION CONFERENCE IN ST.MAARTEN FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

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Andrew Crawford, the CEO of Sounds Air, an airline in New Zealand and almost on the opposite side of the globe, will make a presentation at the Caribbean Aviation Meetup in St.Maarten, June 13-15.

It takes record-breaking numbers for him to come to the event in the Caribbean. Flying from Blenheim, where his company is headquartered to Auckland, New Zealand, then across the Pacific to Los Angeles and on to Miami for the final leg to St.Maarten. All in all, it is a trip of 33 hours of which 24 hours in the air and crossing 10 time zones.

“The Caribbean conference seems to be the ideal platform to connect with a lot of like-minded people. I have spoken at several conferences in Australia, and always had a good reception. We are passionate about aviation, especially in the General Aviation and small airline sector and feel the experience we have gained in 30 years of operation is something that would be good to share,” says Andy who is looking forward to come to St.Maarten.

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“What excites me about joining at this particular conference in the Caribbean is, that it’s catering for a niche market in our area of expertise. Hopefully we can impart some knowledge and learn a lot ourselves.”



Under his leadership, Sounds Air provided its airline services to more than 100,000 passengers last year with its fleet of ten small aircraft. The operation has come a long way. The original founders of the airline had a vision of providing low cost inter-island transport to provide locals and tourists with easy access to the Marlborough Sounds, an extensive network of sea-drowned valleys at the north end of the South Island of New Zealand. In 2003, the operation had only one single 12-seater Cessna Caravan flying one route, moving 14,000 people who were opting out of the three-and-a-half hour drudgery of the sea ferry between the North and South Island of the country, for the much faster scenic flight across Cook Strait.

“I am always excited to see a new part of the aviation world. The Caribbean has a great history and tradition and I am excited to see what it offers. I was recently in Hawaii and took a great interest in the smaller airlines there. They are operating large Cessna Caravan fleets in high frequency operations like ours; it’s great to see them being so successful. I am passionate about

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single engine turbine operations. We have been operating the Cessna Caravan for 30 years. They are a fantastic aircraft for our operation. Extremely high on time dispatch rate for reasonable costs makes them the perfect aircraft for most of our sectors. We have 5 of them in our fleet along with 5 Pilatus PC12's."

These single engine, turbine powered aircraft, are perfect for Sounds Air routes and providing high levels of passenger safety and comfort, as well as being very sturdy and extremely reliable aircraft to operate. The Caravans that Sounds Air is using, are also perfect planes for shifting freight. The airline is being approached by an increasing number of companies that want to shift perishables, lobsters and fresh blood for hospitals around the country.

"Some of the experiences I want to share are, of course the 30 years of operation in the single engine, single pilot environment. What may be of special interest are the benefits of the airline enterprise software system we use and how it clearly shows how it has transformed our business. From reservations to online booking to flight management to maintenance scheduling and tracking to flight and duty to revenue management to GDS interface, it has transformed our business. These are the types of experience I want to share."



In the past, Sounds Air couldn't find an appropriate contractor who was suitable to maintain its aircraft when it wanted it maintained. Being annoyed of the delays that contractors were taking with their growing fleet, Sounds Air decided to do it themselves and they created an additional company, Sounds Aero Maintenance.

Similar to the smaller air transportation operations in the Caribbean, Sounds Air pilots are highly trained and more flexible in their landings than other providers, tailoring their approaches to suit the conditions. If it's a really windy northerly in Wellington, they come in slow and high and then get down to the ground quicker, instead of barrelling in at a certain speed, or a certain time they put the flaps down.

"There are similarities between our operation and activities in New Zealand and operations in the

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Caribbean. We operate between two islands, single engine, over water. Sounds just like a Caribbean, just 30 degs cooler!!”

Andy Crawford is proud of what his company has achieved, but likes deflects attention by saying people are only interested in aviation because of its sex appeal. From an airline that started as a tourism venture getting people in and out of the Marlborough Sounds, the company has successfully carved itself a niche in New Zealand aviation.

The 2nd Annual Caribbean Aviation Meetup differs from most other conferences, because it puts the emphasis on experience exchange, interaction and participation, rather than on listening to speakers' or company's achievements. It is the perfect opportunity for face-to-face business discussions and comprehensive group opinion exchanges on sector-specific topics. The result is a proactive platform upon which successful networking can be built. It will provide impulses for new business developments and industry investments and will accommodate a new attitude towards positive development and impact of airlift. Thirty speakers are contributing to the program. Participants from twenty-eight countries and territories will attend. The conference will be held June 13-15 on St.Maarten and is hosted by Princess Juliana International Airport.

(www.caribavia.com).

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