



Air Hamburg Private Jets Broadens its Horizons

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It all started in 2005 with a solitary, second-hand Britten-Norman BN2A-8 Islander twin-prop flying air taxi services from Hamburg to the islands of Heligoland. “Would you be able to manage the chartering of my Citation Bravo?” enquired one of the regular passengers. Today, Air Hamburg Private Jets has a fleet of 29 aircraft for hire and is continuing its steady expansion to horizons farther beyond Europe.

How has this been possible? Flight crew operations director Jan Strobel and flight crew COO, Mike Ulka explained.

Were Air Hamburg French, and not German, the simple answer would be *esprit de corps*. Flight crew work together as a team and are trusted with high levels of responsibility for all aspects of the mission. “Pilots work with the rest of the crew. Flying is only 50%; the rest is administrative – leading to job enrichment,” Ulka says. Crews may find themselves at any one of 1,000 destinations in Europe alone, taking charge of everything from fueling to hotel accommodation.

Though there is no restriction on crew nationality at Air Hamburg, fluent German is a “must.” English for air traffic; the customer’s native language if possible; German for on- and off-duty crew harmony. Russian would be an asset, too, because customers from that country show an unexpected preference for flying in German-crewed business jets,

Crews are rostered for seven-day continuous duty periods to ensure full availability of aircraft, 24 hours per day. At any time, 27 crews might be active. “The basis is an airline operation, but for private jets,” says Strobel. And that extends to in-house simulator training and Air Hamburg’s own Part 145 maintenance facility.

Aircraft owners are also kept happy. For efficiency, business-to-business bookings are made via Avinode 95% of the time, producing typical hours totals for the [Embraer](#) Legacy of between 1,100 and 1,400 per year.

Business strategy at Air Hamburg is of measured expansion of the fleet at the optimum rate of four new aircraft per year. “A smooth cruise climb,” explains Ulka. That said, the last 12 months have seen seven additions to the inventory, “because it just happened that the opportunities were there.”

Currently, Air Hamburg has Europe’s largest fleet of Embraer Legacies, numbering 16 of the 600, 650 and 650E versions. Eight [Cessna](#) Citation XLS+ are also available, backed by three Phenom 300s and a Citation CJ2.

The Legacy’s spacious baggage compartment is popular with some customers. Others are less vocal in their appreciation of the feature, because it is large enough to accommodate the coffins of those who have expired while abroad and who must be quickly repatriated for religious reasons.

Number 29 in the fleet is a [Dassault](#) Falcon 7X which, with 14 seats and a 5,170 n mi (9,575 km) range bestows true intercontinental capability – the next stage in growing the business. For the moment, the 7X is officially “in a 12-month evaluation phase” but if it proves successful in attracting customers, we may see more of the same or similar being added to Air Hamburg’s portfolio.

And the Islander? It’s still earning its keep, being one of the 15 additional piston-powered, mostly two- and four-seat Cessna and Piper, aircraft at the wholly-owned training and pleasure flight subsidiary, Flugschule Hamburg.