

Ian Fleming Airport marks first anniversary with fly-in of 8 jets

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BOSCOBEL, St Mary — The Airports Authority of Jamaica (AAJ) on Thursday marked the first anniversary of the opening of the Ian Fleming International Airport here in St Mary, with its first fly-in of eight private aircraft.

The convoy of private aircraft jetted into the airport just after 12:30 in the afternoon transporting a group from Air Journey, who were warmly greeted by representatives from the AAJ as well as Minister without portfolio in the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing Dr Morais Guy.

In his welcoming remarks, AAJ president, Earl Richards described the fly-in as significant, and expressed the hope that it would help to market the facility which had been established to attract high-end tourists and investors to the country.

“We really want to say a big thank you today to the Air Journey team for selecting Jamaica and the Ian Fleming International Airport for their special celebration,” Richards said as he welcomed the group, which is also celebrating the 100th anniversary of the TBM aircraft.

The group of 27, who will be guests at Sandals Royal Plantation Resort in neighbouring Ocho Rios, St Ann, for three days, said Jamaica was specially chosen as one of the destinations to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the TBM aircraft.

Richards later told the Observer that the fly-in by Air Journey was a direct result of the AAJ’s marketing of the airport at the Sun and Fun air show in Florida, United States, last year.

“We have been going to various air shows in Miami and in Wisconsin — where the two main shows are held — to introduce the airports to pilots and to different groups like Air Journey...,” Richards said, as he spoke of the marketing efforts being undertaken by the AAJ for the high-end facility.

“We expect that over time more and more fly-ins of the kind will take place [and] that they will go back and tell their friends and associates in the aviation sector about the wonderful time they had in Jamaica,” said the AAJ boss.

He said the AAJ was looking to tap into the general aviation sector with small aircraft and non-commercial operations as well as private aircraft owners and operators and business aircraft owners. These, he said, represent the largest aviation sector in the world.

“That is the market we want to get into. Of course it will take some time for us to get to that market because when you build an airport you design it for a particular type of aircraft at the top level,” Richards told the Observer.

He added: “What we have found is that we have more interest from larger aircraft than it was designed for, and so we are making gradual improvements and extensions to make it more attractive or make it capable of accommodating larger and larger aircraft.”

Richards said there has been interest from two groups which have already inspected the facility. However, he said the type of aircraft that the groups want to fly would require the AAJ to extend the runway by 500 feet.

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“That would mean that it would have to be extended across the north coast highway, which of course is a big decision — very costly — but it would be what we say is a game changer for the airport, because you would now be able to accommodate scheduled traffic.”

Richards said over time, and with additional resources, it is expected that more improvements would be made so the facility could become a significant asset to the tourism industry.

Richards said while the first year of operations was not very active, he expected more international flights to come in this year. He said the AAJ was also in discussions with Jamaica Air Shuttle and that the facility could become one of its scheduled stops each day.

Thierry Pouille, chief executive officer of Air Journey, said more groups from his organisation were expected to make at least five other visits to the facility between February and April this year.

“What we usually do is fly in groups so we’ll bring up to 10 aircraft all together and we explain to them that it is a very welcoming place, very easy airport, very open airport, and that’s why we choose it and this is Ian Fleming, we [are] not going to the others,” Pouille told the Observer.

For his part, Minister Guy said the visit by the Air Journey team should showcase the facility as an important point of entry and Jamaica as an important tourist destination for aircraft owners and flying enthusiasts.

“It is the hope of the Government of Jamaica that through the Airports Authority of Jamaica the Ian Fleming International Airport will become a catalyst for further development for this section of Jamaica and contribute further to the overall tourism product,” said the minister.

Custos of St Mary Robert Pottinger, representatives from the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association’s St Ann/St Mary Chapter, director general in the Ministry of Tourism Carole Guntley-Brady, and Member of Parliament for Western St Mary Joylan Silvera were among the guests who welcomed the group.



Chairman of the Airports Authority of Jamaica Mark Hart (2nd right) is assisted by Sophie Pouille (right), wife of Air Journey CEO Thierry Pouille, as he cuts the Ian Fleming International Airport first anniversary cake, while Director General in the Ministry of Tourism Carole Guntley- Brady (third right), and minister without portfolio in the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing Dr Morais look on.



Some of the private jets which landed at the Ian Fleming International Airport at Boscobel in St Mary on Thursday. (Photos: Alesia Edwards)