



The entrance to AviaVIP's refurbished Palma di Mallorca FBO

Flexible Focus

Combining and building upon the former Argos VIP and Aviapartner FBO networks, AviaVIP is looking forward to an exciting, sustainable future, as Jerome Ferasin, Chief Commercial Officer, explains

Already well established in the complex Italian FBO market, Argos VIP partnered with Aviapartner in 2021, sowing the seeds for a burgeoning European network. Rebranded as AviaVIP in 2023, the group now operates 51 FBOs in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Jerome Ferasin, Chief Commercial Officer at AviaVIP, describes the partnership's progress: "The decision to partner with Argos was driven by their

great network, which complemented Aviapartner's existing organisation, their fine reputation, excellent level of service and entrepreneurial spirit. We completed the integration process early in 2024 and the Italian network is now fully merged. It provides a single point of contact for all VIP flights into 17 Italian airports, whether AOC, private, or government, using aircraft up to ACJ350 size."

The entire AviaVIP network benefits from synergies with Aviapartner, which provides commercial ground handling at 53 European airports, although the business aviation division is fully

independent. "Our FBOs run in parallel with Aviapartner, with their own staff, ground support equipment [GSE] and corporate identity," Ferasin emphasises. "AviaVIP inherited the robust processes and on-time performance culture of commercial aviation and added the flexibility and out-of-the-box thinking required by business aviation."

That said, the relationship allows some sharing of GSE for larger aircraft types and Ferasin notes that AviaVIP's Italian and Spanish FBOs are the only such local facilities capable of handling Airbus and Boeing jets with in-house equipment.

Enhanced network

AviaVIP settled on a new lounge design during 2023. Ferasin says the design creates a peaceful and relaxed space for guests, with a discrete touch of luxury. He continues: “Our Amsterdam, Ibiza, Marseille, Nice and Palma di Mallorca FBOs will be ready for the summer season and Rome by the end of 2024. We also hope to open our newest FBOs, in Barcelona and Madrid, in summer 2024.”

The new and refurbished facilities feature what Ferasin calls ‘AviaVIP experience markers’, including a signature world map and individual items, perhaps a painting or sculpture, with local connections.

Effecting these changes across the entire network is challenge enough, but AviaVIP is also well into the parallel process of harmonising operations. Ferasin says the entirety of the task is endless because the team constantly thinks of new ideas for improving the customer experience.

Nonetheless, he reveals: “Over the past 15 months we’ve worked to create greater harmonisation across the network, focusing on commercial, invoicing and operational aspects. Now we have a single agreement covering six countries, simplifying life for our customers. We also nominated a key account manager for every major client, making them the single point of contact for all 51 FBOs.

“From the point of view of operations, we now use the same software – MyHandling – across the network. We will also soon offer a 24/7 operations control centre, with bases in Italy, France and Spain. It will allow local staff to focus more on taking care of VIP passengers, crew and aircraft.”

The experienced operations control centre (OCC) staff are experts in satisfying concierge requests, interacting with airport authorities, customer service and more. The OCC in Italy is already fully

operational, the Spanish facility will come online during summer 2024 and France by year end.

Asked about the importance of sustainability to the AviaVIP operation, Ferasin is robust in response. “I spent the last 10 years working for a major airport authority that was very much concerned by sustainability, which must encompass all the actors in the airport ecosystem, including FBOs. Among our flagship facilities, our Nice FBO fully supports the airport’s target to become net zero by 2030, which means it has a fully electric vehicle fleet and, where possible, electric GSE.”

Sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) will make the major saving in aviation industry carbon emissions but AviaVIP, in common with most FBOs, must rely on local fuel providers and airport stocks, meaning SAF is scarce. The company is working to provide a book-and-claim option, however.

The refurbished passenger lounge in Palma di Mallorca





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Jerome Ferasin, Chief Commercial Officer, AviaVIP

The wider picture of sustainability includes staffing. Ferasin says AviaVIP is fortunate to have little staff turnover, meaning most of its recruitment is for expansion and to fill new roles. He acknowledges that media ‘aviation bashing’ can be unhelpful when reaching out to young people and says AviaVIP is serious about countering this ill-informed messaging.

“We are part of the global business aviation ecosystem; that’s why we are partnering with airport authorities and our customers to offer innovative sustainability solutions. We’ve also decided to invest more of our time into the EBAA and national business aviation associations, which do a good job representing our industry and leading sustainability standards.”

Olympic year

Through FBO refurbishment, new OCCs and harmonisation efforts, Ferasin’s focus is very much on industry changes and the future. “Since Covid, we’ve seen a huge increase in flights and welcomed new guests who previously never or seldom

flew privately. And although it’s slowing, we still expect steady growth in Europe through 2024 and beyond.

“We’ve also noticed some destinations are more popular post-Covid, including Malaga and Mallorca, plus a change in seasonality, with summer destinations now becoming popular from April rather than May, and the season ending in October rather than September.

“The Olympic Games will be important for France of course, and they will have a positive effect regionally since slots and parking options in Paris will be difficult to get. AviaVIP will provide convenient alternatives at regional French airports, at Girona, Spain; Turin, Italy; Brussels, Belgium; and Amsterdam in the Netherlands.”

In the longer term, Ferasin notes that FBOs may need flexibility to face new challenges, including potential airport restrictions on business aviation, while working towards sustainability targets and introducing new technologies. “Lots of customers of our Amsterdam FBO

were worried by news stories suggesting business aviation movements would be capped at 12,000 per year in 2024, but I can confirm that we are operating as usual. I believe the risk of capping is mitigated by the fact that the airport is really chasing the most polluting and noisier aircraft, representing a very small fraction of business jets, while there is also no alternative airport for business aviation.

“That brings me to the next challenge: sustainability. FBOs must lead by example, matching airport strategies and new aircraft technologies. AviaVIP is engaged with electric/hybrid fixed-wing aircraft and eVTOL manufacturers to anticipate their technological needs and the impact they might have on operations. I am convinced that some airports in our network will soon be operating eVTOLs, including Nice, where connections to Monaco and Saint Tropez make a lot of sense.

“Overall, I believe business aviation has a very promising and exciting future, but we must all be flexible and ensure our development is sustainable.” ■