

Kunming takes flight

City emerging as frequent destination for international travelers

By ZHANG ZHAO and LI YINGQING

When Yunnan Airport Group attended its first Routes Asia meeting in 2008, representatives introduced the capital city Kunming and its airport, but the question they heard most from foreign delegates was, "Where is Kunming?"

Seven years later, they have their answer.

The city now has an emerging international airport in Southwest China, serves as a regional hub linking China with South Asia and Southeast Asia and is the host city of Routes Asia 2015, a gathering for aviation-related companies that want to conduct business to, from and within the region.

Over the intervening years, the Yunnan Airport Group has integrated the resources of airports across the province, improved the Kunming airport capabilities and planned new international air routes.

The company won a marketing prize last March for airports in the Asia-Pacific region

that handle more than 20 million passengers a year.

This year's Routes Asia will provide opportunities for the company to "weave a denser network of international flights", said Zhou Kai, chairman of the group.

"The forum will also boost airport economy," Zhou said. "The airport is no longer seen as just infrastructure. It can integrate with many industries and resources."

The event "will also showcase the distinct culture and natural beauty of Yunnan, a paradise for tourists", said company president Tang Xuefan.

"The world's aviation companies will understand Yunnan's demands and find their own. And we in turn will learn from the world."

The aviation business in Yunnan dates back to 1922 when Wujiaba Airport in Kunming became the second in the nation. It was closed in 2012 and replaced by Changshui Airport.

Thanks to the new airport's independent dual-runway design and large terminal, its

handling capacity increased from 34 flights an hour to 46. The growth of passenger numbers ranked No 2 among the world's top 100 airports in 2013, and growth in cargo ranked first.

The province now has more than 360 air routes to 137 cities in China and overseas managed by 47 airline companies. Last year, airports in Yunnan handled more than 44 million passengers and 340,000 metric tons of cargo on 390,000 flights.

Geographic position

Tang also noted Yunnan's "advanced geographic position".

Kunming Changshui Airport is along the air path from Southeast Asia to Russia and from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan to Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Domestic air routes from Kunming now cover all provincial capital cities in China. The entire region of South Asia, Southeast Asia and West Asia is within a five-hour range from Kunming, while it takes only two hours to Bang-

kok, Vientiane, Chiang Mai, Hanoi and Phnom Penh.

In addition, the province has "one national-level airport, three mid-sized and five small airports", Tang said.

"And another three airports are under construction, including one expected to start operation this year."

Last December, China Eastern Airlines inaugurated its flight from Kunming to Paris, the first intercontinental route from the city.

Kunming has long-standing close relations with France. In 1903, French engineers built the first cross-border railroad in the country linking Kunming and Haiphong in Vietnam. Today Paris is the most popular destination for international departures from Kunming.

The city plans to also develop routes to Australia, North America and Africa.

Kunming Changshui Airport ranked as the seventh-busiest airport nationwide in 2014 in flights, passengers and cargo, and the 50th in the world.

Provincial government

plans call for the world ranking to rise to 30th by 2020 when Yunnan will have at least 410 air routes handling 100 million passengers and 600,000 tons of cargo a year.

Flights from Kunming will reach the capital cities of all 10 Southeast Asian nations and seven South Asian nations by 2017, along with a number of popular tourist destinations, said Zhang Weijian, deputy chief of the provincial aviation administration, at a recent press conference.

The authority will establish funds to support some key international flights to aid in the expansion over the next three years.

Kunming began offering a 72-hour visa-free policy last year that allows passengers from 51 countries to spend three days in the city if they have valid third-country visas and onward flight tickets.

The government will also introduce more preferential policies such as bonded jet fuel and airline subsidies.

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Delegates from home and abroad exchange opinions at the 13th Route Development Forum for Asia. LI JINCHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

China grows civil aviation industry

By ZHANG ZHAO and LI XINYI

Airline companies, airports and associations in Asia and beyond are seeking the opportunities of new flights and partnerships in the 13th Route Development Forum for Asia in Kunming, Yunnan province.

The government of Yunnan is encouraging the civil aviation industry in its belief that the business will lead the way of its transportation development, said Vice-Governor Ding Shaoxiang, at the opening ceremony of the forum.

Ding said the flight network to Asian countries will expand over the next five years, while intercontinental routes will also be explored.

"Yunnan has large markets for both passenger and cargo flights, where airline companies from both China and overseas will find business," he said.

As one of the most dynamic regions in the world, Asia has become one of the most important forces driving the global growth of the industry, said Zhou Laizhen, deputy director of the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

He said the latest national strategies of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road have provided opportunities for the regional aviation industry, because of larger demand for the connectivity of people, cargo and services.

The strategies cover nearly 60 countries and represent 29 percent of the world's GDP and 24 percent of its total goods and service exports.

Zhou said the CAAC will encourage airline companies to develop flights in the central and western China regions, and consider policies to open aviation rights in Yunnan province.

Conrad Clifford, regional president for the Asia-Pacific region of the International Air Transport Association, said there is a shift in market power towards the Asia-Pacific

region, and China will replace the United States to become the world's largest single aviation market by 2030.

"The future is bright," he said. "Asia-Pacific will have the highest annual average growth rate for the next 20 year."

He also said the region "is witnessing huge creativity and innovation in airline approaches to the market".

"The Asia-Pacific model can be best summed up by saying that regional airlines adapt their models to whatever best suits local conditions."

He said that one of the biggest challenges for the industry in the region is the "soft infrastructure", such as pilots, air traffic controllers, safety inspectors, engineers and skilled technical personnel.

Organized by UBM Aviation Routes Ltd, the event has attracted some 1,000 delegates from airline companies, airports and government departments of more than 60 countries and regions around the world.

The top policymakers and leading companies in Asia's civil aviation business use the meeting to discuss the development of new international airlines in the Asia-Pacific region. There are also many delegates from outside Asia representing companies that already have or are planning businesses in Asia.

Kunming is the fourth Chinese city to host the annual event after Haikou, Macao and Chengdu.

The Kunming Changshui International Airport is the seventh-busiest airport in China with the most rapidly growing number of passengers and has undergone a complete reconstruction. Routes Asia 2015 will "provide an opportunity to showcase this to the routes community", said Katie Bland, director of Routes at UBM EMEA.

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The Kunming Changshui International Airport is the seventh-busiest airport in China with the most rapidly growing number of passengers. LI ZHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

What they say

Editor's note: At the ongoing 13th Route Development Forum For Asia in Kunming, Yunnan province, delegates from the region and beyond talked about the industry's developing trends and their impressions of the host city and province.



The service at Kunming airport is great and there are so many flights to Thailand from Kunming. Yunnan needs to attract more people

concerned about its wonderful tourism resources. The connection between Thailand and Yunnan will be closer in the future.

Amphawan Wannako, deputy director general of the Department of Civil Aviation of Thailand

It is fantastic that we are able to bring Routes Asia to China once again. The



Yunnan Airport Group has attended many routes events over the years and we look forward to working more closely with their team

over the next 12 months. With its beautiful landscapes and mild climate, Yunnan province is one of China's major tourist destinations and we are eager for our delegates to experience Kunming — the "city of eternal spring" — and Yunnan province.

Katie Bland, director of Routes at UBM EMEA



This is the first time I have come to Kunming and I feel that Kunming

airport is great. It is important to have good infrastructure for developing air-

ports. Yunnan has so many similarities to Southeast Asia, like Thailand and Laos. Yunnan also has many ethnic groups, which are mysterious. I think Yunnan can attract more tourists and making visas easier can attract even more people.

Conrad Clifford, regional vice-president for Asia-Pacific, International Air Transport Association



Yunnan is a very important market for Air Asia. One of our experiences over the past years is that we must cooperate with local governments and

companies to achieve long-term success. In the future, we will continue our efforts to develop routes in accordance with Chinese government strategies and plans.

Lao Celia, general manager of Air Asia Greater China

We are honored to be the first city in Europe to have nonstop flights to Kunming. We hope that this new service will become a great success because of



the two attractive places — Paris and Kunming — and also because of the long-established relationship between France and China.

We will do our best to promote this new service, and also do all that is possible to strengthen the cooperation between the Paris Airport Group and Yunnan Airport Group.

Hugues Potart, head of the network department of Airport International Charles de Gaulle



Compared with the old airport, the new Kunming airport is much better. But still a lot of foreigners do not know that the Kunming Airport is a gateway to South Asia, so

Yunnan needs to let more overseas people know about it. They need to go out and promote themselves.

Adam Wu, chief operating officer of China Business Network