

# PRIVATE FLIGHT TAKES OFF TO NEW HEIGHTS

ExecuJet Middle East's Business Development Director **Khalid Al Hai** and Regional FBO Director **Dumani Ndebele** discuss the company's latest facility upgrades, planned expansion and the value they bring to its offering, the business aviation market and clients' overall travel experience



# ExecuJet

## MIDDLE EAST



Unlike its commercial counterpart, the business aviation industry prospered over recent years driven by the growing demand for more reliable, safer and convenient travel solutions and accelerated by the pandemic-induced travel restrictions and constant disruptions to commercial aviation operations.

ExecuJet Middle East, the global business aviation company, part of Luxaviation Group, and one of the world's largest business aircraft and helicopter operators has mirrored the sector's unprecedented growth, with a fully renovated Fixed Base Operator (FBO) facility at Dubai International Airport (DXB), and a brand new facility at Dubai World Central (DWC) set to welcome passengers in the upcoming months.

We sat down with ExecuJet's Business Development Director, Khalid Al Hai, and Regional FBO Director, Dumani Ndebele to discuss the company's latest facility upgrades, planned expansion and the value they bring to its offering, the business aviation market and clients' overall travel experience.

#### Enhanced guest experience

As we entered the fully upgraded FBO facility at DXB, we immediately noticed the modern designs fused



▲ ExecuJet's FBO facility at Dubai International Airport (DXB)

with Arabic accents and cosy features. This was intentional, according to Ndebele.

"We want our guests to feel rested and relaxed, almost as if they are at their own home, which is why we have crafted a unique sense of peace and luxury across all our FBOs. We decided to upgrade the facility at DXB to enhance a sense of comfort and familiarity for our guests, by carefully blending sophisticated details with modern designs, whilst maintaining the authentic Arabic features that are unique to the region," he explains.

For an enhanced travel experience, ExecuJet guests can personalise their lounge stay with ease and convenience, Ndebele notes, adding that visitors can share their screen with the lounge TV, play their own music on the lounge sound

system or order from the food and beverage menu, with a simple push of a button. "We developed a larger crew lounge with better entertainment amenities, meaning that our new facility will offer benefits beyond our passengers' [requirements]," he says.

According to Ndebele, the new upgrades at ExecuJet's DXB facility, as well as the planned inauguration of the company's new facility at DWC - set to take place in the upcoming months - aim to consolidate ExecuJet's foothold as the only "truly private" airport experience across both regional hubs. "Private flyers seeking luxury and valuing comfort above all else will feel right at home at the newly renovated FBO," he adds.

Elaborating on the company's upgraded offering, Ndebele points out that ExecuJet



▲ Khalid Al Hai, Business Development Director, ExecuJet Middle East





▲ The facility features sophisticated details with modern designs and authentic Arabic accents.

is an “all-in-one service provider,” with a comprehensive offering covering every aspect of business aviation, from aircraft handling to concierge services, commercial flight transfers and aircraft hangarage, as well as aircraft management and charter services. “At the beginning of 2023, our DXB FBO will have two dedicated aircraft hangars, making ExecuJet the leading provider of aircraft hangarage in the region,” he adds.

#### New facility

Leveraging the company’s decades of experience, ExecuJet’s new 33,000 square metre ultra-luxury FBO and hangar facility at DWC will set a new benchmark in private aviation, Ndebele remarks, adding that the facility is designed to mirror the company’s extended offering, as a one-stop-shop private aviation facility providing aircraft management, charter and MRO services, to meet the unique requirements of aircraft operators, brokers and private flyers.

In addition to the planned fully-equipped aircraft hangars and MRO facility, the three-storey FBO building will feature lavish private lounges and open seating areas for passengers to enjoy, as well as a commercial kitchen serving a range of select gourmet meals and treats. Moreover, the mega-structure will feature

**“Private flyers seeking luxury and value comfort will feel right at home at the newly renovated FBO.”**

a presidential suite and a conference room to accommodate guests travelling on business trips. Meanwhile, those travelling on leisure or looking to relax can enjoy a luxury apartment fitted with a couples’ massage spa, jacuzzi and steam room, as well as a gym, games room and a cocktail lounge.

“Whilst we are able to get our guests cleared through airport formalities in a matter of minutes, our decades of experience have identified that not all private travellers are in rush. Many welcome a truly unique and engaging FBO experience and our new facility will deliver just that,” Ndebele reveals.

#### Market challenges

Despite the industry’s robust recovery over recent months, the aviation sector was hit with strong headwinds threatening to hamper its rebound, from a record surge in fuel prices to pandemic-



▲ Dumani Ndebele, Regional FBO Director, ExecuJet Middle East

triggered labour shortages and a parallel shortage in aircraft parts supply.

Strikingly, the thriving business aviation sector was merely impacted by the perfect set of challenges bearing upon its commercial counterpart.

“After the pandemic, the pieces were already in place for business aviation to accommodate an increase in flying, which is likely why the industry has recovered faster than commercial aviation,” Al Hai explains, revealing that while the upsurge in fuel prices has inevitably impacted aircraft owners to some extent, it did not bring about a significant decline in demand for private flying.

In contrast, charter prices have increased after the pandemic, nevertheless, overall aircraft charter has been higher compared to previous years, likely owing to countries around the world reopening their borders and welcoming an influx in tourism, he says.

#### A changing market

The business aviation market has undergone significant changes over recent years, largely driven by the shift in customer behaviour and purchasing habits, which in turn enabled businesses to expand into untapped market segments and created endless

opportunities for growth and development. The past few years have seen an influx of first-time buyers entering the Middle East's business aviation market, Al Hai points out, revealing that most of the region's fleet consists of heavy long-range jets.

Al Hai also sees another trend shaping today's business aviation market—FBOs vying for clients by offering passengers and crew upgraded facilities and luxurious amenities that rival those of five-star hotels. "At ExecuJet, our aim has always been to go one step further than this, serving ultra-luxury, extensive amenities and an experience like no other," he says.

Although the unprecedented growth in business aviation was largely driven by the need to escape stringent restrictions on commercial operations, the industry's roaring recovery had little to no impact on the rising demand for private air travel, according to Al Hai.

"We witnessed an increase in people starting to move from commercial to business aviation, as opposed to seeing a decline in demand," he says, adding that with personalised services, stringent hygiene protocols and greater flexibility to travel, new passengers have had first-hand experience of the benefits of private flying and eventually decided not to revert to commercial travel.

By the same token, the company expects a further increase in new aircraft owners and new charter users, especially as the world continues to adjust to the post-pandemic age.

### FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

With the world's biggest sporting event taking place in an Arab country for the first time in its history, the aviation industry is bracing for a record surge in demand set to exceed all prior estimates. Nevertheless, ExecuJet has its jet engines revving and ready to meet the anticipated demand, all while maintaining its elevated service standards, according to Ndebele.

"We have been preparing for the FIFA World Cup in Qatar for months and though we predict a surge in demand, our teams are set to accommodate any requirements," he says, noting that aircraft operating charters to and from Doha will be under added pressure to



***“The new ultra-luxury FBO and hangar facility at DWC will set a new standard in private aviation.”***

depart on time, to avoid hefty penalties should they miss their runway slot.

"With ExecuJet, operators are certain to avoid the crowds and will be able to stick to their schedule. Our new facility at DWC will provide the fastest fuel stop in the UAE, with eight dedicated fuel hydrant

points capable of fuelling multiple aircraft simultaneously," he explains.

With its dual runway operation, DXB is proving to be a popular choice for aircraft owners who wish to avoid the single runway operations at DWC and the expected stretch on airport resources.

Furthermore, the airport offers seamless transfers between private aircraft and commercial airlines for passengers travelling to attend the tournament, Ndebele says, highlighting that the company's facilities offer extensive aircraft parking services to accommodate the expected influx of aircraft choosing to base in Dubai over the World Cup period.



### New markets

As our interview runs its course, Al Hai reveals that ExecuJet is actively pursuing opportunities in key growth markets including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, where it established a strong foothold through a strategic partnership with Bilen Air Service. To this end, it plans to build an FBO or increase the volume of managed aircraft as part of its expansion plan in the region. "The key will be to establish an Air Operators Certificate (AOC) or partner up with local entities to support our long-term business goals," he says. **AVB**