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ALPARK : AN ALTERNATIVE AT THE HEART OF EUROPE

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For the past few years it has been difficult to obtain a slot within a reasonable period of time at the major Swiss airports. Moreover, it has become nearly impossible to find any hangarage space. This excessive demand encouraged a group of investors to develop a concept through a new company, Alpark SA, offering a welcome alternative to the major Swiss airports.

By Frédéric Vergnères

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Zurich, Bern and of course Geneva are currently facing with not only a saturation of traffic on their platforms but also the inability to meet the demand for long-term aircraft parking. In spite of its size, Switzerland boasts numerous regional airports, such as in Sion. This airport, located in the heart of the Swiss Alps, around 100 km from Geneva, is better known for its combined civil and military activity. Since 2014, the airport has developed new facilities within which Alpark SA operates a high-end complex entirely dedicated to business aviation and helicopters.

AT THE HEART OF EUROPE :

Ideally located in Sion airport's new activity zone, Alpark SA has been developing this site since 2012 which it considers to be a platform with underutilized potential. The focus is placed on private VIP and business aviation. In addition to its geographic location in the heart of the Alps and near the largest ski areas (like Verbier, Zermatt or Crans-Montana), the Sion airport boasts a number of benefits for operators. With a 2,000 m runway, a very modest

military presence, its public airport status and favorable weather conditions, Sion is also able to receive heavy-weight aircraft such as the ACJ or BBJ.

MULTI-SERVICE FACILITY :

Taking into account the undeniable advantages of this airport and the potential of a new private zone to be developed, Alpark SA, with the support of financial partners, inaugurated a new complex on the site in 2014. “The idea of creating Alpark was to offer jet owners new parking spaces for their aircraft in a region located at the heart of Europe”, stated Michel Seppey, vice-president of Alpark SA. He added: “In addition to the storage of their aircraft, the idea of Alpark from the start was to offer related services and to benefit from periods where the aircraft is in the hangar to perform various upkeep such as maintenance, cleaning and other work”. Alpark SA relies both on offering protected aircraft parking as well as on providing maintenance services. To do so, Alpark SA has five hangars covering more than 10,000 m². Enough room to hold 24 private jets or three Boeing BBJ and other aircraft simultaneously. In addition to the hangars and a private tarmac, the complex includes 2,000 m² of adjacent space for offices, technical premises, accommodation, as well as a lounge and meeting room for passengers and crew all featuring resolutely contemporary design. All rooms are equipped with a high-speed WiFi connection and high definition digital tools. To top it all off, Alpark SA even offers its customers a fitness center and a spa.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT :

Alpark SA alone uses 60% of the airport’s new activity zone. With its exclusive position, the company is also a major player in the local economy. Different partnerships were forged for all of the services offered, not only with local businesses but also with major names in aviation industry. Alpark SA has in particular developed a helicopter maintenance center with Ruag for Airbus Helicopter, Agusta Westland, Bell and Sikorsky. Alpark SA is also constantly expanding its on-demand line maintenance offer both

directly or through third parties in the business aviation sector. Thanks to the success of the services offered, Alpark SA has raised growing interest with a customer segment that is rather accustomed to on-demand service. According to the director, “we deal with customers with individual demands and we have very few year-round members. The principle is that aircraft are, by the very nature of their owners’ activity, always on the go. Space is therefore regularly available.” While this type of concept makes sense for the economic revival of certain airport platforms both in Switzerland and in Europe, Michel Seppey remains cautious on the future strategy indicating that he wants “to strengthen the services and make the complex profitable prior to undertaking any development outside of Sion”. However, the director believes “the Alpark concept could be applied abroad...”, while stating that “it would be difficult to develop it within Europe due to the economic complexity of the region”.

The company, created only two years ago, plans on rapidly bolstering its position and contributing to making the Sion airport one of the most sought after places in business aviation in Switzerland.

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