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Australia's GAM Air Sees Opportunity To Do More Air Tours Using Dornier 228s



(http://smartaviation-apac.com/en_GB/author/leithen/) Leithen Francis (http://smartaviation-apac.com/en_GB/author/leithen/), 3 Aug 2017 (http://smartaviation-apac.com/en_GB/2017/08/australias-gam-air-sees-opportunity-to-do-more-air-tours-using-dornier-228s/)

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Australian operator GAM Air uses Dornier 228s for freight runs, but continues to scout for opportunities in the mining charter market and it also sees opportunity in the tourism charter market.

GAM Air CEO, Carl Jepsen, says: "I think there is more opportunity coming up now in the tourism passenger business now that Australia is really pushing tourism."

"The Dornier 228 is a great aircraft for air charters for tourists," he says, adding that there has been any increase in the number of Chinese tourists to the state of Victoria and many like to see the scenic sites around the state. GAM Air is based at Essendon Airport, which is a business and general aviation airport near Melbourne's city centre.

He says the 19-seat Dornier 228 is well suited for the mission, because every seat has a window and it has a high-wing aircraft, which means passengers looking out the window can see below.

GAM Air used to operate its three Dornier 228s for fly-in fly-out operations transporting people who were working for Queensland Gas Company to build a gas facility in Queensland.

But now that construction of the facility is completed, there is no longer a need to transport so many people to that site. The runway at Chinchilla was also lengthened to accommodate larger 30-seat aircraft.

“From our perspective, one of the main competitive advantages of the Dornier 228, is the aircraft’s ability to get into those smaller, narrower strips that other aircraft are unable to access.”

Jepsen says this was the advantage that the Dornier 228 had at Chinchilla before the runway was lengthened.

“There are other locations like that still around. We just need to wait for the mining and resource sector to revitalize and the opportunities will come. That is why we have stuck with the assets.”

Besides accessing short and narrow runways, the aircraft can access unpaved air strips. Jepsen this is something GAM Air is willing to do with its Dornier 228s. “We will go into unpaved airstrips. We just need to install the gravel kit,” says Jepsen.

Jepsen says GAM Air likes the Dornier 228 because it has proven to be a very reliable and easy aircraft to maintain. “It is a very strong aircraft. We had one that was parked in Brisbane that tipped over in the storm [tropical cyclone] and the guys had it back in the air the following day. The damage it sustained was minimal. It is a very sturdy aircraft. The short field performance is second to none.”

He also says it outperforms its nearest competitor in terms of payload and speed.

GAM Air derives the majority of its revenue from air charters, mostly freight runs in and out of Brisbane,

Sydney Bankstown and Adelaide for Australian logistics company Toll Holdings.

But GAM is also an aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) company. It also derives revenue from third-party MRO work. In fact, GAM stands for General Aircraft Maintenance and when the company was founded in 1983, it started as a MRO company and later expanded into air operations.

Jepsen says GAM Air has its own pool of Dornier 228 spare parts and has supported other Dornier operators with spares. It also does airframe heavy maintenance checks and component overhauls.

“We do all the instruments, interior, skin work, hydraulics, avionics and landing gear ourselves,” says Jepsen, adding that the only work it outsources is engine and propeller overhaul. For engine MRO, it uses Pacific Turbine in Brisbane.

“That is one of our strengths. We try to bring everything in-house, so [as an air operator] we can control maintenance costs, which is important when you are operating so many aircraft.” He says GAM Air is working to grow its maintenance business by doing more work for other air operators.

Besides Dornier 228s, GAM Air also operates 20 Aero Commander aircraft, a smaller twin-engine aircraft that it also uses for freight runs for Toll Holdings.

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