

## PILARSKI SAYS...

# First hand report on the growth of Chinese traffic

Adam Pilarski, senior vice-president at Avitas, shares some thoughts from his travels.

Everybody in aviation is aware of the tremendous opportunities China brings to our industry. I want to provide a personal perspective on this subject.

I took another two-week spring vacation in China. After Beijing we visited three cities in Henan, a province where even my Chinese friends questioned why I would want to go there. It is a part of the country relatively unknown to tourists, who usually do not venture there – kind of like Ohio in the US. Apologies to my friends from that wonderful state.

Henan has 94 million people. It is the birthplace of Chinese civilization, and home to four out of the eight ancient capitals of China, three of which we visited – Zhengzhou, Kaifeng and Luoyang, populations respectively of 8.6 million, 4.7 million and 6.5 million. (Ohio, by the way, has a big role in US history with the most US presidents elected from that state – eight.) The only real tourism attraction is the Shaolin temple, home of kung fu. From there we went to Xian (population 8.5 million), followed by cities many readers probably have not heard of such as Nanchang (five million), Changsha (seven million), Shenzhen (10.4 million) and various smaller cities and villages in Hunan. Our trip was mainly for religious and family reasons.

What is the relevance of all of this to aviation? From China I continued on a business trip to Barcelona. Overall, the trip lasted two-and-a-half weeks and spanned about 20,000 miles, mainly by air but also by train, high-speed train, car and bus. Everything worked perfectly. The flights from Nanchang to Shenzhen and Changsha to Beijing were delayed because of violent weather but we had no other delays, missed connections, lost luggage or other headaches. The hotels were all five star Chinese chains I had never heard of. There was no shower or running hot water in the village but that was our choosing. When I told a hotel manager about our journey he asked seriously whether we were planning on a half-year trip. We take for granted all that aviation can do for us and usually concentrate only on the negatives. This trip reminded me again of how great our industry really is, and how it enables us to do things that even a decade ago would seem inconceivable.

The second important observation is the reality of China. Obviously it is the future of

our industry, with Boeing just celebrating its 1000th delivery. The changes in the past decade are truly astonishing but nothing compared with 30 years ago when I started visiting China. In 1983 there were 800 million passengers flying in the world; now there are more than three billion for a multiple of 3.75. At the same time, India's passengers multiplied well above the world average to 6.5 times above the 1983 level; from 9.1 million to 58.8 million. This is not bad but consider China. Its passenger count went from 3.9 million to 319 million for a phenomenal multiple of 82. In fact, India had 2.3 times as many passengers in 1983 as China but, despite its above-average world growth, the reality now is reversed because China has 5.4 times as many passengers.

How is this expressed in terms of cities I have visited? Thirty years ago Warsaw, a city I lived in some time ago, and Beijing had almost an identical number of passengers at about 1.8 million. Most cities I visited this time had no civilian airports in 1983. Now Xian has more than double the passengers Warsaw has (23.4 million versus nine million), Shenzhen more than triple and Beijing more than nine times the passengers of Warsaw. I distinctly remember sitting in Xian in the early 1980s waiting for one of the two flights that day to take off. Zhengzhou and Changsha also have more passengers each than Warsaw, while Nanchang was the only city that had a smaller airport than Chopin in Warsaw. But Greater Kaifeng does not even have an airport, showing there are still great growth prospects in China.

While I was in China statistics came out showing that in 2012 Chinese tourists spent more than all other nations in the world for the first time. New predictions came out stating that 200 million tourists are expected by 2030. The future still appears fairly bright for Chinese aviation.

How about the experience? Load factors are very high but not above the 100% level I experienced in the early days (collapsible chairs in the aisles). High-speed trains are sold out and totally full going at more than 300km/hour. But China still has its own flavour. I saw a restaurant called Mr. Prawn's Holy Soup, which ranks in terms of name with my favourite restaurant in Zhuhai, called Butterfly Love Flower Coffee Shop. And the kids got a kick from the Green But beverage, which turned out to be a simple mung bean drink. ▲