Fixed Base Operators (FBOs) are renowned for offering a high quality service to VVIPs, business people, sportsmen and women and celebrities. Efficient and unobtrusive handling, fuelling and servicing of a wide range of aircraft takes place behind the scenes while customers are ushered seamlessly through often opulent, well-equipped terminals to go about their business.

On the beautiful Mediterranean island of Sardinia, Eccelsa Aviation provides its own brand of FBO, dedicated to private and business aviation at Olbia Airport, on the island’s northeast coast. Only minutes from world-renowned beaches, resorts, marinas, golf courses, and one of the most spectacular coastlines of the Mediterranean, Eccelsa Aviation is the ideal choice for the upmarket traveller.

Occupying a large area of Olbia’s Costa Smeralda (OLB) International Airport, Eccelsa Aviation was created as part of the Meridiana Group to satisfy the needs of those who enjoy flying at the top end of the market. The company is now running an ultra-modern terminal that is open 24/7 and is exclusively dedicated to the private aviation sector.

Since its inception, Eccelsa Aviation has focused on providing the same level of assistance to every customer, handling any kind of aircraft ranging from small single-piston engine Piperettes or Cessnas to large private Airbus A340s or Boeing 747-400s, and giving passengers and crews all the required services in total comfort, privacy, safety and security.

**Background**

Eccelsa Aviation (from the Latin ‘excelsior’, meaning higher) was established in January 2003 to guarantee top quality service to the private aviation sector, which was growing rapidly using Olbia’s basic GA terminal. At the time, the growth rate of private aviation movements was very high, having risen from 4,226 in 2002 to 9,068 in 2004, mostly concentrated in peak periods between mid-June and mid-September. This created substantial problems for ATC trying to simultaneously co-ordinate commercial and private traffic – also in its busiest season.

One of the first tasks for Eccelsa was to re-vamp the services offered to customers, launching huge improvements in the existing GA terminal. Its interior was redesigned to provide a sleek and contemporary Sardinian design, while amenities and ground infrastructure were also improved.

High numbers of private customers visit Olbia in the summer months and often include VVIPs and heads of government – consequently attracting the occasional large aircraft – even a 747-400 – which require a substantial amount of apron space, sometimes for a prolonged period of time. The large aircraft, coupled with dozens of smaller executive jets including Cessna Citations, Gulfstreams, Bombardier Challengers and Global Expresses, had to compete for apron space with commercial airliners.

The only viable solution was to segregate the two, dedicating a specific apron near the southwestern end of the airport’s runway to executive and GA traffic.

By the beginning of the 2008 summer season a 107,643sq ft (10,000m²) apron for private aviation, which offered extra security and privacy to its users, was open and accommodated all of Eccelsa’s customer jets; however passengers still had to be shuttled to and from the original GA terminal by bus.

**A terminal fit for royalty**

The true revolution for Eccelsa, the airport for the Italian private aviation sector, came on June 27, 2009, when the new Eccelsa General Aviation Terminal was opened in the presence of His Highness the Aga Khan, Sardinian Governor Gigi Cappellacci, and ENAC (the Italian CAA) President Hon Vito Riggio. It was built facing the new apron about two kilometres from the main passenger terminal, to which it is linked by a dedicated road.

The terminal, designed by architects Fuller Lefort and Fabrizio Vindolli, is

![Large executive jets are frequent visitors to the Eccelsa Aviation apron during the summer months, including VVIPs and heads of government](image)

![The impressive Eccelsa Aviation terminal at Olbia](image)

![Boeing 737-600 with OE-ILX stands beneath the covered canopy in front of the Destriero VVIP lounge](image)

![One of the first tasks for Eccelsa was to re-vamp the services offered to customers, launching huge improvements in the existing GA terminal](image)

![High numbers of private customers visit Olbia in the summer months and often include VVIPs and heads of government – consequently attracting the occasional large aircraft – even a 747-400 – which require a substantial amount of apron space, sometimes for a prolonged period of time](image)
Aviation apron.

Sight on the Eccelsa makes an impressive M-CLAB (c/n 20271) Challenger 300 livery, Bombardier a very eye-catching floor near the main goods are available varied and very luxury shops selling a range of luxury delicacies and a range of specialty beverages at the Kara Sardegna shop, along with prestige eye-wear, jewellery and luxury watches from classic brands including Royal Cashmere, de Grisogono, Zegna, Ambrosio and Brunello Cucinelli of high-quality Sardinian and international Audio-visual equipment elsewhere in the terminal. It also has an impressive boarding facility with a canopied gate. Many passengers alighting from most business/aircraft will require a short but comfortable transfer to the terminal in one of Eccelsa’s Audi A8s, but further privacy is offered from the Destriero Lounge. A cantilevered canopy protruding over the apron from the lounge entrance is designed to shelter the entry door of an airliner up to A321 or 757 size to provide discreet passage for the discerning traveller. Wi-Fi is provided throughout the facility and computers are available in the business centre – including the Newspaper Direct service that provides online access to more than 500 international newspapers every day. Eccelsa Aviation’s concierge service provides a personalised approach to coordinating every aspect of the guest’s visit, including aircraft and helicopter charter, hangar space, hotel accommodation, high quality in-flight catering, limousines, luxury car rental, yacht rental, security and a wide range of tourist services. As part of the Meridiana Group, it is a fully certified handling company by the Italian Civil Aviation Authority. It satisfies EASA standards and in addition meets the requirements of the International Standard of Operations Certifications (ISO 9001, ISO 14001, OH&SAS 18001), placing it at the highest level among Italian FBOs.

Statistics
Approximately 12,000 private and GA aircraft movements were handled by the end of 2011, with a peak in the summer months averaging 160 per day at weekends (a maximum of 180 and never below 120 during July and August), making Eccelsa’s FBO the busiest GA facility in Italy. In 2012 aircraft movements dropped to 10,355, although the decrease was compensated by a higher average aircraft weight, which grew steadily from 12.2 tons in 2002 to 15.3 tons a decade later.

The customer base has been gradually shifting and now most traffic is to and from Russia, the Middle East and the USA. Traditional Western European markets, which used to constitute the mainstay of visitors until the 1990s, are still strong. The 747-400 and A340-500 in executive configurations are the largest jets handled by Eccelsa Aviation. The Boeing BBJ, 767s, Airbus A310 and A340-300s of Russian tycoons ‘rubbing shoulders’ with private narrow and widebodies owned by the royalty of Saudi Arabian and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are among the more regular daily summer arrivals at Eccelsa. They share the facility with a plethora of other jet set-style aircraft at the Costa Smeralda during the peak season. Location is undoubtedly an extra bonus for customers who do not wish to waste a single minute to reach their exclusive villas or luxury yachts. The closest harbour, the new modern Marina di Olbia, is just five minutes drive away, while the Porto Rotondo and Porto Cervo marinas are 30 and 26 minutes respectively – a much quicker helicopter transfer is available too.

Awards
Eccelsa Aviation has received a considerable number of international awards for five consecutive years since 2009. It has been named the Best European FBO by Business Destinations Magazine, while the online MICE Report attributed the same award to the company in 2012 and 2013. In 2010, Aviation International News, a US magazine specialised in the GA sector, classified Eccelsa among the top five international private aviation organisations. The following year New Europe magazine classified the company as the number one FBO in Europe, and in 2012 European Business Air News placed the company as number two in its international FBO survey programme.

With its excellent services, outstanding facilities and a beautiful location in the Mediterranean, Eccelsa Aviation is perfectly positioned to satisfy its discerning customers’ needs, and to continue winning coveted awards.

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Want more?
A full feature on Olbia Airport will appear in the next issue.