

# Excelling Eccelsa

Eccelsa Aviation runs an award-winning and very popular Fixed Base Operation at Olbia Airport on Sardinia. **Luigi Vallero** pays a visit to discover the power behind its success.

Fixed Base Operators (FBOs) are renowned for offering a high quality service to VIPs, 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 Pipers 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 already using Olbia airport's basic GA terminal. At the time, the growth rate of private aviation movements was very high, having risen from 8,226 in 2002 to 11,968 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 airliner 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 (10,000m<sup>2</sup>) 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 and 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 Ugo 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 Didier Lefort and Fabrizio Vinditti, is of

▲ Large executive jets are frequent visitors to the Eccelsa Aviation apron during the summer months, including Klaret Aviation Airbus A340-313 M-IABU (c/n 955), used extensively by Russian billionaire Alisher Bourkhanovich Usmanov - hinted at by the registration and the title 'Bourkhan' on the fuselage.

◀ Boeing 737-8DR BBJ2 OE-ILX (c/n 32777) stands beneath the cantilevered canopy in front of the Destriero VIP lounge.

◀ The impressive Eccelsa Aviation terminal at Olbia Airport on Sardinia. (All photos author)





▲ Seating options are varied and very comfortable.

▶▶ Several small shops selling a range of luxury goods are available on the ground floor near the main reception desk.

▼ Resplendent in a very eye-catching dark blue and yellow livery, Bombardier Challenger 300 M-CLAB (c/n 20271) makes an impressive sight on the Eccelsa Aviation apron.

a modern form in steel and glass, but also incorporates local materials, such as San Giacomo granite. The structure covers around 53,800sq ft (5,000m<sup>2</sup>) on two levels connected by a spiral staircase. There is a traditional Sardinian olive garden within a central atrium - providing a central design element - and a large waiting area offers well appointed and comfortable lounges that overlook the busy apron through large floor-to-ceiling windows.

The facilities are complemented by a modern and well equipped crew service and rest area, an impressive VVIP lounge named after the famous Destriero Blue Ribbon-winning speedboat of the early 1990s, a shopping area offering a selection of high-quality Sardinian and international delicacies and a range of speciality 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 Cashmere. There is a sleek Pilot's Bar and Coffee Shop and on the second floor the Runway gourmet restaurant provides great views of the apron.

The Destriero VVIP lounge is an ideal

place to hold private business meetings and conference calls and there are other conference rooms, fitted with the latest audio-visual equipment elsewhere in the terminal. It also has an impressive boarding facility with a canopied gate. Many passengers alighting from most business/GA 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, OHSAS 1800, 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

### Partners

Meridiana fly/Air Italy  
Meridiana Maintenance  
Yacht Club Costa Smeralda  
Rolex  
Bombardier Aerospace  
Audi

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 BBJs, 767s, Airbus CJs 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 20 minutes respectively - a much quicker helicopter transfer is available too.

### Awards

Eccelsa Aviation has received a considerable number of international awards and 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 specialising 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.

### Website

[www.eccelsa.com](http://www.eccelsa.com)

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. ✕

▼ A typical line-up of international business jet tails on the Eccelsa Aviation apron.

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### Want more?

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

