

MEET THE NEW CEO

Martin Craigs discusses his experiences in the travel industry and expectations as he takes the reins of PATA

BY JIM ALGIE



CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR APPOINTMENT AS THE NEW CEO OF PATA. AS YOU PREPARE TO FORMALLY START ON OCTOBER 31ST WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES DO YOU FORESEE?

Thank you, and many thanks to the numerous PATA family members who have written with good wishes and advice. The PATA CEO challenge as defined in the June advertisement in the *IHT* said the new leader would be expected to "build the business for our members" whilst improving its "service delivery to industry partners". So the mission is clear.

The opportunities are also obvious; Asia Pacific represents the world's fastest growing and largest future travel market that ultimately needs an organisation which impartially understands its multifaceted business and can link its vital interests. PATA is uniquely placed to provide continuity and credibility for an industry under constant threat from

external factors, natural and political.

The obstacles are as manifold as individuals may wish to make them or imagine them; my job is to find group consensus and take actions that benefit the overwhelming majority of the PATA community.

YOU HAVE WORKED PRIMARILY IN AEROSPACE/AIRLINE-RELATED BUSINESSES AROUND ASIA PACIFIC FOR OVER 30 YEARS. WHAT EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE WILL YOU BRING TO PATA?

That's largely for others to judge, but my instincts say many of my past experiences are highly relevant to PATA. I have been an employee for 20 years in large multi-nationals like Saab and BAE Systems/Airbus, but also an out sourced advisor for 10 years with organisations as diverse as Arlington Securities, AirAsia, Reed Elstiver, the Economist Group, the Hong Kong SAR government, ELFC and PBEC – a business lobby group inside the APEC process.

The consistent thread since 1986 has been my founding link to and elected leadership of Aerospace Forum Asia (AFA - www.wingsasia.org). AFA started informally in Hong Kong 25 years ago and has evolved into a well-recognised advocacy and facilitator group for the supply chain. Leading "hardware" sponsors include Airbus, Boeing, Rolls Royce, and Embraer.

PATA's membership needs are similar to the AFA but much broader, its history and scale are of course longer and larger, but in essence these complementary organisations provide a platform both physically and online for members to build their businesses.

PATA and AFA are getting their external advocacy aligned behind major trade associations like IATA on external threats. The ill-considered, but soon to be imposed EU Environmental Tax Scheme (ETS), effectively a tax on all airlines flying in and out of Europe is a prominent example. Many believe this

illegal tax will restrain the business of all PATA members and most job growth in Europe.

The experience I can bring to PATA will, however, only be truly value adding when we get current and future members behind the events and campaigns that PATA's determined staff will be delivering. Be sure to welcome PATA-NG (Next Generation). Hearts and minds of all ages are welcome.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS PATA'S KEY STRENGTHS?

Put simply: Heritage, Insight and Access (HIA).

These three central pillars, formed from PATA's rich history, provide perennial themes and a strong foundation to generate future mutually beneficial business from. Heritage, in my mind, is one of PATA's core strengths when combined with its natural geographic and functional diversity. PATA-HERITAGE means activities and ambitions are built on well-tested real world experience and long-standing relationships based on trust and transparency.

PATA has a unique set of benefits to offer its members; Heritage really means continuity in organisational and human relations, but also in the sense that PATA provides continuity as a one-stop shop for research, events, training and advocacy. A multipurpose platform that has stood the test of time whose best and brightest years are ahead not behind it.

SO TELL US ABOUT INSIGHT AND ACCESS?

With pleasure. I'll try to keep it brief as this is supposed to be an introductory interview! In terms of insight, busy executives want fast access to information that has been empathetically distilled for their special interests. PATA needs to reliably deliver those distilled droplets of information. PATA-INSIGHTS can be further refined by testing initial conclusions with business peers at PATA events before using them in industry



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advocacy... I hope you can see the word continuity reappearing.

I have not yet received a detailed briefing on PATA's trials and tribulations in establishing a state-of-the-art delivery vehicle for that data, but like most IT-centric projects it's clearly a moving target, hard to deliver but essential to invest in.

AND HOW ABOUT ACCESS? IS THAT REALLY A PATA STRENGTH THESE DAYS?

Most definitely. Access is the third key strength that PATA has, meaning privileged access to many events and people. Membership also provides a sense of belonging and interaction with like-minded people plus external recognition.

Major events and interaction need to be constantly adapted. In the early decades of PATA's existence, it was virtually the only show in town. The PATA events pre-1990, pre-Internet were one of the few ways to get an inside track understanding of what was going on or about to happen in the travel business around the Asia Pacific region.

Today, anyone with an Internet connection can present themselves as an expert on travel trends and industry information. In Ireland we used to say "paper accepts anything". Now it's screens. The travel industry and public are clearly ever more interested in trusted sources and qualified access. PATA-ACCESS is multi-dimensional and will remain comprehensive and authoritative.

Organisations operating within the travel industry like to meet in person as well as online, however, it is evident there needs to be a constant reassessment of the value which so many different meeting points/events provide. PATA events which fail to contribute to the ultimate goal of fluid information flows and value-adding access will be remoulded. You cannot stay strong by standing still.

Ultimately good access leads to effective

advocacy i.e. influence, a natural byproduct of PATA's HIA.

This is my "outsider" theory on PATA's strengths. I look forward to it being tested and trust it will be at the centre of my continuous dialogue with members.

CAN WE ASK YOU MORE SPECIFICS ON HOW PATA WILL OFFER VALUE TO IT'S MEMBERS AND WHY IT OUTSOURCED ITS FORMER EVENT AND MARKET INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT CHIEFS?

Let me stop you there. You can of course ask, just as members and staff will always be welcome to question my actions and initiatives, but asking me to give a detailed response on specific internal issues is rather premature.

I am, however, pleased to direct you back to Bill Calderwood's long and logical explanations to the questions you raise. Bill and the Chairman, Hiran Cooray, briefed me fully before I was appointed the job on the restructuring plan and new policy initiatives. I am comfortable with those decisions and so are the personnel involved.

The Executive Board has thanked Bill for his dedicated efforts as Interim CEO. I also wish to thank him for his calm but candid advice during a comprehensive internal and external hand over. I have got to know Bill well since we first met for my full-day interview with other board members in August. His good company and passion for PATA are much appreciated.

For all other difficult questions, ask me in two months time, for your first edition of 2012. To get a sense of direction, you first need to start the journey...that should make sense to a magazine called *Compass*, shouldn't it?

YOU SEEM VERY RELAXED GIVEN THE BIG BURDEN YOU WILL BE EXPECTED TO CARRY AT PATA.

Life is short, listen to those of goodwill, follow

your heart, find a path and take positive people with you.

Managing an association like PATA is bound to have some pain. It involves orchestrating the outcries of thousands of people from dozens of countries with multiple functional experiences. However, this type of contention will be more than counteracted by the pleasure of interacting with the many positive people that the travel industry attracts, not least the proactive PATA staff.

On orchestrations, I hope to hear some common tunes amongst all the outcries. I then need to turn that into actions that appeal to the overwhelming majority. That's a fun job not a burden. Let's see how the tunes play out.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW ABOUT AND EXPECT FROM YOU?

What you see is what you get: six foot three, glass half full not half empty type of guy. I am sometimes known as a cultural chameleon. I adapt to my environment. Even my accent seems to move from English to Irish to Asian according to who I am with or where I am.

Ask my wife of 26 years, Sherwin, or sons Kain (22) and Kallam (20). They will come to PATA events from time to time... they know me best. I have worked with many others who could comment, not always favourably about my optimism and high expectations!

In the office I like to understand personal backgrounds and motivations before delegating. I enjoy wholehearted debate but recognise when you're asked to lead you must decide and when you decide you are bound to some degree to divide.

On the subject of expectations, the board has made me very welcome but expect fast track progress. The PATA staff wants to advance the organisation into a new productive era. Current and potential members want a family they are privileged to be a part of and proud to belong to. We are all in this together.