

HOW TO FLY IN STYLE TO THE CARIBBEAN

News / Business aviation



Engaging with new team members during the preparation for the Caribavia 2025 conference can bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the table. Collaborating with individuals who have diverse backgrounds and experiences can only lead to a successful event. Introducing various faces of women in business aviation industry showcases the wide range of talents and perspectives they bring. This diversity enriches the industry, fostering innovation and creativity. Please meet Sherkane De Haenen, the owner and CEO of BIRDY Private Jets, an air charter broker based on St.Barth. BIRDY offers exclusive private flights and lifestyle experiences throughout the Caribbean. Her Grandfather, Remy De Haenen was iconic aviation pioneer in the region and the first to land an aircraft on St.Barth before there even was a runway or airport. The airport on the island no bears his name Aeroport Remy De Haenen. Here is the essential of our discussion:

Q. What is your recommendation for people who want to fly to the Caribbean?

S.D.H. **Get yourself a one-way ticket, you will never leave!** Joke aside, as much as I love the Caribbean, flying over here can be tricky sometimes. Each island has its own specificities in terms of entry conditions, air traffic principles, aircraft landing or parking restrictions. Island hopping or even just reaching some island may involve a good knowledge of the area if you want your plans to run smoothly. If they are chartering – as objective as I can be – I would definitely recommend people to go through a local aviation professional to organize their trip, especially if they are traveling in high season.

Q. What is your recommendation for people who want to fly to St Barth?

S.D.H. St Barth is a good example of the complexity of flying in the Caribbean, although it is not the most tricky one. People would land in San Juan (SJU), Sint Maarten (SXM) or Anguilla (AXA) to take a connecting flight to St Barth. When flying all private, I would personally go through Anguilla as the connection can be wing-to-wing, especially during high season when most airports get very busy. Talking about peak season, I think the most important recommendation here is to book flights well in advance since options and availabilities are limited in the Caribbean, especially from November to April; some operators were fully booked 6 to 8 weeks ahead of flight last year!

Q. Booking a flight to a destination is one thing, securing the appropriate hotel accommodation is another. What do you recommend? Do you assist?

S.D.H. This is so true. Dream getaways start in the air and continue on the ground. When you fly people privately, you naturally have to assist with other travel services. Luckily, we are working with a selection of privileged partners such as real estate, concierge and hospitality companies we entirely trust for our clients to be taken care of. Another thing that needs to be considered is to make your reservations in advance. While it is a common recommendation to our clients in general, it makes the most sense here! Every end of the year, more than 20.000 passengers land in St Barth. There are “only” 800 villas on the island, and around 500 rooms available within the finest hotels.

Q. Is there something people, who are visiting, don't seem to know or didn't expect? How to remedy such?

S.D.H. When people think about St Barth, they usually think yacht day on a clear blue ocean, beach club and private villa parties, shopping without taxes, or fancy restaurants. Attending huge events like end-of-the-year festivities or the Bucket sailing regatta.. But St Barts is a lot more than that; it's an outstanding island full of history, culture and local festivals. It's also a central place to go spend a day in Sint Maarten to enjoy casinos, visit Nevis for a golf tour or horse ride at Anguilla's beaches. And – my favorite – it is to me a perfect spot to just enjoy peacefulness when it's all quiet and calm in low season. St Barth does not just disappear from the map every year in April, and people should consider discovering after the typical touristic surge.

Q. Besides the air charters do you provide any other services?

S.D.H. Our core passion is aviation, but working with high-end clients made us evolve in terms of services. We must meet substantial levels of expectations and provide a lot more than just a “charter service” to make them happy. To do so, we try to anticipate every need and personalize every experience as much as we can. We operate all around the globe, but St Barth is our homebase and one of our preferred value propositions here is to offer visitors a “bucketlist” actual

list where they can tick as many services or activities as they want for their stay; whether it's about deep-sea fishing, caviar tasting or driving a Mini Moke. Once the list is completed, as I like to say, just "sit back and relax, we got your back!"

Q. What is your view on future aviation development like eVTOL?

S.D.H. I might not be politically correct here, but I am not convinced eVTOL is the best available option in terms of sustainable aviation. There is hydrogen and some other sustainable fuels that seem more interesting to me. But the whole aviation industry has been working hard on carbon offsetting and greener alternatives, and I am confident we will succeed in achieving sustainability within the next few years. The VTOL project would definitely help in this matter and make a lot of sense in megacities, where they would first operate. I can easily picture more traffic and tourism in The Caribbean once we start using them, but it might just not emerge overnight here.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your activities?

S.D.H. As an aviation passionate, making people fly is of course what makes me happy at the end of the day. But also, I love how challenging it is. Not only dealing with all air transportation "subjects" – so complex but so fascinating – but on top of everything, it's all about making clients happy. Before I created BIRDY, I was already dedicated to customer satisfaction, very naturally. I used to fight with my managers so my clients would get their way whenever I thought it was justified from a customer point of view – I won the debate most of the time. Doing things my way with BIRDY is very enjoyable and I think our clients can feel this dedication to them – I win the debate every time now!

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