

EPISODE 19

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:05.7] IP: On this episode of AvTalk, we welcome back Seth Miller to discuss his recent adventures on a variety of Japanese low-cost carriers and his flight on the Comac ARJ21. He also fills us in on the status of Operation Puerto Rico Care Lift and the upcoming Operation Gift Lift. We also recap the massive order book of the Dubai Air Show and check in on a few A380s that have been in the news.

Hello and welcome to episode 19 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik as always here with —

[0:00:36.0] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Welcome, and thank you for listening.

[0:00:38.8] IP: We are back with — We're almost to 20 episodes. We're closing in on 20 episodes and we're going to do a little something special for episode 20, but we'll talk about that a little bit later in the show.

You haven't been doing any traveling in the past two weeks, have you?

[0:00:54.2] JR: Why do you remind me of that? Now, I'm depressed.

[0:00:56.1] IP: I'm just making sure that you've gotten a little sleep.

[0:00:59.7] JR: I didn't say I got any sleep, but I haven't been doing any traveling. I'll make up for that soon though.

[0:01:03.2] IP: All right. At least you haven't been up for 48 hours before we record this time. So that's, I guess, better.

[0:01:10.1] JR: I got hot water, so I could take a shower and everything. It's all working out this time.

[0:01:14.0] IP: Everything is coming up [inaudible 0:01:14.6]. Yeah.

We are going to talk to Seth Miller a little bit later in the program who has been doing a lot of traveling to some very interesting places on some very interesting airlines. So I am looking forward to that conversation in a few minutes.

[0:01:28.0] JR: Lucky.

[0:01:30.9] IP: We should start with the big news in the aviation world in the past two weeks, which is the massive order book that has come out of the Dubai Air Show.

[0:01:39.4] JR: Massive is probably the right word. I went to the Dubai Air Show. The last one was held in 2015 and there were 67 orders according to Flight Global, I can confirm, because it was pretty boring. This year, there were 874 orders. More orders than in 2013, 2011, and I don't think the stats go back much further than that, but it was an absolutely huge year for narrow body orders, which is surprising.

One of the orders actually was the second largest aircraft order in history I believe.

[0:02:15.4] JR: It's a pretty massive pretty massive haul for both Boeing and Airbus and in the short haul — Or not short haul, but single aisle aircraft. If we combine them, it's over 400 aircraft by Indigo Partners. Indigo Partners is comprised of Wizz Air, Frontier, JetSmart and Volaris down in Mexico. They ordered 430 aircraft in total, 72 A320neo for Wizz, 74 A321, a hundred A320neo for Frontier, with 34 A321neos. JetSmart — I never even heard of them. 56 A320neo, 14 321. Volaris gets 46 320s and 34 321neos. They're going all over the place, and I should really find out JetSmart.

[0:03:04.6] IP: They're based in Chile.

[0:03:06.0] JR: Oh. Well there you go.

[0:03:07.8] IP: There you go.

[0:03:08.4] JR: Well LATAM is going to have some competition.

[0:03:10.5] IP: Yeah. Then on the Boeing side, Fly Dubai with — What was it? 225 737 MAX.

[0:03:18.9] JR: Yeah. 175 firm 50 options, and there were other smaller orders all over the place. Even 45 787s for Emirates. Picked up — What was it? 45 787 — I'm sorry. Not 78 —

[0:03:36.6] IP: 40 787-10s.

[0:03:38.9] JR: Right. There it is.

[0:03:39.4] IP: For Emirates. That was kind of the big scoop out from the A350 order that they moved over to Boeing.

[0:03:49.3] JR: The other five 787s were Azerbaijan actually, to round out that 45. Even the C-series got some action. We had mentioned this a couple of podcasts ago, but 24 Airbus C Series to Egypt Air.

[0:04:08.4] IP: It's the Bombardier C Series by Airbus.

[0:04:10.2] JR: Right, which is sponsored by Airbus. I think that was — Yeah, 12 — 24 of those.

[0:04:16.2] IP: 12 and 12 I think is the split for that.

[0:04:17.7] JR: Yeah, 12 and 12. I don't know what the split is, because it says about 300s, but maybe some firm, maybe some options. Even SCAT, one of my favorite weirdo airlines from Kazakhstan, I think, ordered 6 firms 737 MAX, 85 on option. Air Senegal ordered 2 A330neos. What else do we have here? Golden Falcon Aviation ordered 25 A320neo. I don't know who they are. Nordic Aviation got the only Bombardier Q400 orders at the show with two. There were a lot of orders, but mostly for narrow body aircraft, which is very unusual for the Middle East.

[0:05:00.7] IP: That's been one of the big kind of big storylines to come out those with Fly Dubai's big MAX order. The feeder push really coming in Emirates. Then the 787 10s order with

the realization, and I think it was John [inaudible 0:05:18.5] that mentioned this, is that A380 and 777 300ERs aren't the only airplanes and you don't need to send them everywhere.

[0:05:29.6] JR: Right. I think he also said Fly Dubai is basically Emirates Express at this point, especially with the new interior Fly Dubai put on their first 73 MAX which has a really nice economy cabin with long hall style seats, and even fully flat beds in business class on a 737 which I don't think has ever been done commercially, really, for regular flight operations. It's looks a lot like JetBlue's Mind cabin, but on a slightly narrow 737s. It's very, very fascinating the transition Fly Dubai is making.

[0:06:06.5] IP: Yeah. It will be interesting to see how all of these end up. We're looking at orders in 2017. We're looking at delivery starting in the 2020s. I think for the Indigo Partners order with the 430 A320neo families, most of those are for delivery in 2025 and 2026. It kind of sets the stage for almost 10 years from now, a big change in how airlines are going. It'd be interesting to see what happens as those deliveries start to come out, but that's a lot of airplanes.

[0:06:42.3] JR: Yeah. Flight Global will have to start at 825 narrow body aircraft order, 47 wide body and two turbo prop. It's super, super strange to see the Middle Eastern airlines gobbling up narrow bodies. It's a huge change.

[0:06:58.6] IP: Yeah. We kind of knew it was coming.

[0:07:03.1] JR: It had to.

[0:07:04.8] IP: Yeah. I guess looking at what's been happening between Emirates and their kind of A380 777 only operation and the other kind of major players there. Something had to give.

[0:07:23.1] JR: Yeah. It turns out you can't operate a 600-seat A380 between Dubai and Qatar every day. It just doesn't make sense.

[0:07:31.5] IP: Or at least not on eight flights a day or something.

[0:07:35.7] JR: Oh, wait. You can't operate between Dubai and Qatar. Period.

[0:07:41.0] IP: Yeah. That's going back a few episodes.

[0:07:42.8] JR: Yeah. Oops!

[0:07:44.9] IP: Speaking of A380s, we've got two little bits of A380 related news to get into. One; the Air France A380 in Goose Bay is slowly on its way to getting fixed.

[0:07:59.1] JR: That thing is still there? That's been forever.

[0:08:01.2] IP: It's still there. There's an Antonov 124 in Dubai right now. It's going head up to Paris and pick up an engine. Carry an engine over to Goose Bay and then pick up the disabled engine or the damaged engine. I supposed it's disabled as well.

[0:08:21.8] JR: Disabled is a little too kind for that.

[0:08:24.2] IP: Yeah.

[0:08:24.8] JR: Exploded engine works.

[0:08:25.5] IP: Yeah, there you go. That's going to go over — Cardiff is going to be the first stop, and then from there I'm not exactly sure where they're taking it for further inspection, but that's going to be underway. It should be delivered this Thursday or Friday and carried out the following day. That's on its way.

[0:08:46.3] JR: They're basically flying out an engine all the way to Goose Bay, Canada to put it on an A380 and then they won't even be turning it on to fly at home.

[0:08:55.5] IP: Correct. They're basically bringing an engine — Air France hasn't said exactly how they're going to do this. I think we talked about this in a previous episode, but it's worth recapping because it's just so crazy. They have to have the fourth engine, because no one's ever flown an A380 without the four engines. Nobody has any idea how it would perform. They have to have the fourth engine on there as weight and balance.

From there, they can either windmill it or basically cover the core and take the fan off so that there's just kind of the engine pod sitting there. They haven't said which one they're going to do yet. It's very interesting. Dave Wallsworth, the British Airways captain published this, and we talked about this when he did. Kind of a long list of what would have to happen for them to get through the list. We'll throw a link back to that episode, because I think it's worth revisiting as they get ready to bring the aircraft back. It will be interesting to see which option they end up going with and whether or not we get to kind of get some insight into how they end up doing it.

[0:10:04.0] JR: I wonder if they'll even divulge how they did it or, really, any of the details. They may just not.

[0:10:11.0] IP: I hope they go the Swiss route and kind of own the fact that they're getting it fixed. I don't know if our listeners might remember, Jason, if you remember, earlier in the year a Swiss 777 had an engine issue that required an engine replacement —

[0:10:27.3] JR: I do. It went in the little igloo.

[0:10:29.3] IP: Yeah. Exactly. Swiss kind of owned the process, because it was such a cool thing and such a remote diversion that they really got everybody together and kind of said, "This is how we fix things," and showed a bit behind the scenes in the process and allowed some people some access. I hope that's the route they go saying that, "Something broke. We're going to the bottom of that, but this is how we fix things and we're proud of our people that are working on this project." I hope that's what they do, but we'll see.

[0:11:02.5] JR: Yeah. We should talk more A380.

[0:11:05.2] IP: We have more A380s to talk. We have one right now, and up to five to discuss.

[0:11:12.1] JR: Up to, and including five.

[0:11:13.9] IP: Yeah. We talked about a few episodes ago about the X-Singapore A380s that Singapore is letting go back on lease, because they were the first production ones. They're a

little heavier than the others. They're less fuel efficient, etc., etc., and so the first one has now been returned to the leasing agent and it's being stored and awaiting its next customer.

The question becomes; who gets to use it? This week, some news came out that Hi Fly — We had previously talked about Hi Fly operating this and questioning how they would do this. Now it comes up that Garuda Indonesia and Royal Air Maroc might be the kind of — I don't even know what you call it, the airlines behind the Hi Fly operation.

[0:12:04.6] JR: Which makes sense in a strictly Hajj Flight scenario, because both of these airlines ramp up their operations pretty significantly during a very specific time of the year, during the Hodge Pilgrimage when they all flight out to the region where they all — All of these airlines in the region really hugely ramp up their operations and lease aircraft from anywhere they possibly can. I could see them needing it for a couple of weeks out of the year, especially for Ram, since their largest aircraft is one single 7474-00 and the rest of their fleet is basically 787-8s at this point. It's not even a -9. That would be a huge, huge capacity boost for them, but do they really need it the rest of the year? What are they going to do with it?

[0:12:54.2] IP: I don't know. Party bus maybe.

[0:12:58.0] JR: Oh! That'd be cool.

[0:12:58.5] IP: Just drive it around. Get a hotel. I don't know.

[0:13:02.4] JR: The problem with these A380 on lease is that no one knows what to do with them. Sure, Garuda and Ram can use them for a couple of weeks, but then what?

[0:13:12.2] IP: If anybody knows —

[0:13:14.0] JR: That silence is your answer. Nobody knows.

[0:13:15.7] IP: Podcast at fr24.com, because my initial — When I heard Garuda and Royal Air Maroc, I have of course thought, "Okay. Hajj Pilgrimage charter flights. That makes perfect sense." I can't see that being a year-round necessity.

[0:13:37.3] JR: No. Everyone is struggling to figure out what to do with these things, from us, to the aviation gigs, to the people who own the planes. What is the guy — Dr. Peters or something?

[0:13:49.7] IP: Dr. Peters.

[0:13:50.6] JR: That actually owned and leased these A380s to Singapore and now has to figure out is it worth it to figure out who to lease it to and keep doing that till the end of the frame's useful life or just say, "Screw it. We're going to scrap it right now and turn them into beer cans." That could be a likely outcome.

[0:14:11.3] IP: Yeah. They even said that that was definitely a possibility that was on the table, pending a final agreement with any other leasing agency.

[0:14:20.8] JR: We'll see. Only time will tell, and there's going to be a bunch of these coming up off lease soon, so I can't imagine they're all going to find a home. If you have a few dollars to spare, send it to Dr. Peters and maybe you'll get your very own A380.

[0:14:35.9] IP: Maybe that's what we should do. Just kind of —

[0:14:37.2] JR: Yeah, crowd fund.

[0:14:39.1] IP: Scrape some change together and have an A380. It'll be fun.

[0:14:42.7] JR: Yeah. Sure. Dangerous, but fun.

[0:14:44.1] IP: Speaking of fun — Yeah, it'd be fun. Let's take a quick break and then bring Seth in for a little of conversation about what he's been up to in Japan, in China and in Florida, which is a really great story that he has to share. Let's take a quick break and we'll be back with Seth Miller.

As promised, we are back with Seth Miller, aviation journalist and friend of the show. A returning guest. Seth has been a very busy man and he's done some interesting things that we've been pretty odd by and we want to say congratulations possibly for being the 30,000th person to fly on the ARJ, we think maybe, and we're bestowing the title, because why not?

[0:15:43.9] SM: It happened while I was there, when I was there. It's the best I can do, was say, "Yeah, it was me.

[0:15:50.6] IP: We brought you on to talk about a few things, the first of which and probably really the most impactful and most important is the work that you've been doing to help out the folks in Puerto Rico. You also did the Delta A350 inaugural. You flew on a bunch of Japanese low-cost carriers, and then last, but certainly not least, because any time you can lay the claim to being the 30,000th to anything, that's a milestone, the Comac ARJ.

[0:16:16.0] SM: Absolutely.

[0:16:17.8] IP: Welcome back, and let's dive into — Tell us about what you've been doing in the aftermath of the hurricane in Puerto Rico to help people out and how that kind of ties into some aviation stuff.

[0:16:28.8] SM: Sure. Hurricane Maria, as everyone knows, devastated Puerto Rico. The island is still struggling to get reliable power and water and other functions back online. The infrastructure is just decimated. Through a group of friends — It's one of those things that starts simple. Someone started a Go Fund Me project then said, "Hey, let's try to raise some money and figure out how we can get some stuff and get it delivered."

Raising the money part was relatively easy. The getting stuff, once you have money is relatively easy. Getting it delivered turns out to be really hard especially to an island. Through a group of friends, Chris Sloan over at Airways/Archive and a bunch of other folks got involved. They called on Spirit Airlines. Spirit Airlines, based in Fort Lauderdale, has a lot of lift down into Puerto Rico and also uses the Lufthansa Technik Facility at Aguadilla for their MRO, for a lot of their sea checks. The folks at Lufthansa Technik are willing to cooperate. The folks at Spirit were spectacular cooperative, and what we ended up with was more than \$250,000 in cash plus

indirect supply donations and a ton of belly capacity of Spirit Airline's planes and some are between 10 and 15 flights. Some were commercial service. Some were the sea check fairy flights where we had 18,000 pounds of cargo loaded in. I spent a week down in the Fort Lauderdale warehouse and in Miami and Hialeah helping sort the goods, helping with the purchases, helping get things repackaged and done. I got to tell you, it was an absolutely incredible experience.

[0:18:07.4] JR: Did you actually make it down there to Puerto Rico with some of the flights?

[0:18:10.4] SM: I did not go. It's funny you mentioned that, because that was Operation Puerto Rico Care Lift is what we called the first half of that and we were producing boxes of food essentially, 40-pound boxes. It's important to know Spirit doesn't do cargo, and what we were shipping was all cargo. We had to repackage pallets full of various non-perishable supplies into what appeared to be 40-pound suitcases. It turns out a 14-inch cube cardboard box filled with black beans and soup and this and that and whatnot, some toiletries and suck comes out right at 40 pounds if you plan it correctly and it fills the box with the stuff we need.

We ended up packing a couple of thousand of those boxes. We had a great group of volunteers who showed up. We had some great logistics help and we crushed it. We really did. It was an incredible experience.

That part of the project wrapped up for the most part and where we're at now is what we're calling Operation Puerto Rico Gift Lift, and I'll make sure that we have a copy of the URL to put in the show notes for that.

We're trying to take into account the fact that while things are starting to get back to normal a little bit in Puerto Rico, and we're still nowhere close, but they're starting to get back to normal. We also have families that basically lost everything. With Christmas, Hanukkah and whatever other holidays coming up in the next few weeks, really trying to help out and get some supplies down to Puerto Rico to help those families celebrate a little bit where we can and give the kids something to celebrate.

This next round, we are once again raising some funds. Cash, we've got on the Go Fund Me page. There's also a link to an Amazon shopping list, if you want to shop that way and donate like that. Trying to gather, there's — Again, Spirit has been a huge contributor here with three more airplanes worth of cargo capacity and we're trying to fill those up with gifts and toys with the ultimate goal of, on December 10th, a Christmas party in Aguadilla. I'm hoping to be on the flight on that one.

That's the answer to your question, Jason, is I haven't been yet, but I'm hoping to go for Christmas.

[0:20:19.8] JR: Good answer. That's pretty amazing work since the situation down there is still pretty dire.

[0:20:25.2] SM: It is. I got to say, this was one of those things, we had to start turning some people away, believe or not where like, "I've got all these stuff too." It was hard, because we want to take everything. We want to get it all down there and it was just stuff that wasn't packaged right or couldn't get to our warehouse in time and things like that. Also, it shows just how much people wanted to help, wanted to good, wanted to make all these stuff happen and how fortunate we were to have partners like Spirit Airlines, like Lufthansa Technik, like some of the other corporate folks that got involved on the donation and collection side of things.

It was just — Nickelodeon donated a whole bunch of stuff. They had done a food drive and they didn't know how to get it where it needed to be, and we were able to help them out and pick up the stuff and help transport it. Just lots of stuff like that. It was amazing how it came together, and spending a week doing that was really probably one of the highlights of my year, which is saying considering I'm an AV-geek, I love planes, and the stuff I did in the three weeks after that, which is what I thought we're going to talk about on today's show.

[0:21:24.0] JR: You're exactly right. I think we mentioned this on a prior podcast, that even people that had donated things to organizations, they had no means to actually get it to the island, because there was just no infrastructure or flights or even operational sea ports to get supplies to Puerto Rico. These air lifts that Spirit was doing were really, really helpful.

[0:21:43.0] SM: Yeah. It's been incredible. Just working with the people, they're spending time in the warehouse. These are people that were doing their regular job too and then for a free pizza every now and then would hang out afterhours and help move 10,000 pounds of bottled water in the flats of 24 bottles at a time. Help load those up into an airplane. It's incredible to see people who recognize the value of what we were doing and how important it really is.

[0:22:11.7] IP: Yeah. It is really great work, and to kind of follow that up with a way to bring a little bit of joy and not just the basics, but kind of a little bit of normalcy back to some kids I think is a really great way to go about things too.

[0:22:24.9] SM: Yeah. It's not merely as critical necessarily as food and water were, but at the same time, giving — Like you said, the sense of normalcy in just some sort of regular life so they don't necessarily have to think about, "Are we going to have dinner tonight?" is really, really exciting.

[0:22:44.9] JR: Yeah, that's great. You had mentioned this was one of your highlights or 2017, and I'm jealous that you get to help so many people, but I'm also jealous of the trip you had in Japan recently, because I've hosted this podcast from Japan. I love the region. But you did something even I haven't done recently. How many airlines did you fly in Japan in how many days?

[0:23:07.1] SM: I did five airlines in 44 hours, I think.

[0:23:12.0] JR: I'm not going to ask you why, because I've traveled with you enough to every corner of the world to know that it doesn't need to be an answer to that.

[0:23:18.8] SM: The answer is because I could.

[0:23:20.6] IP: Exactly.

[0:23:22.5] SM: No. This is one of the — I was on the A350 inaugural for Delta and got to try premium select product out. Big fan of premium economy in general. I think Delta did a very nice job with their product. A couple of little quirks in the seat, like not enough storage space in my

opinion, but overall great product. Because I had that ticket, and I had a one way to ticket to Japan to cover that story, and so I could have turned around the came straight home. A bunch of people on the flight did that. That I had a little flexibility in my schedule and figured I should stay for a couple of days and do something, because I was already in Japan.

I've done Tokyo a few times enough that I could have found something to do, but wasn't really what I was looking for and started thinking, and it turns out that Air Asia Japan had just returned to service. That was right at the beginning of the month, at the end of —

[0:24:06.3] JR: I think they have two planes right now.

[0:24:08.6] SM: Two A320s flying, but when that happened, I decided, "Huh!" I saw that headline come up, I said, "Huh! Maybe I should try to fly them while I'm there." I went and looked and they fly between Nagoya and New Chitose Airport CTS up in the north. I wasn't going to be in either of those airports. So I either have to take a train or fly to get there to one end or the other and then back to Tokyo to get home. Then this sort of gear started turning in my brain, I said, "Well, if I have to fly anyways, why don't I fly a different low-cost carrier to get there and then a different low-cost carrier to get home?" Then started sort of adding them up and then it became a game of how many different unique routes and low-cost carriers could I combine in basically the 48 hours between when I landed at 4 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday at 3 p.m. when the flight took off back to Minneapolis.

[0:25:02.7] JR: You flew Air Asia, a brand new airline.

[0:25:06.0] SM: Yup.

[0:25:06.2] JR: You flew Star Flyer, an airline that apparently was incredibly difficult to book. You flew [inaudible 0:25:13.2] on a 767. You flew — What were the other two?

[0:25:17.7] SM: You did them out of order and now I'm all sort of confused.

[0:25:20.9] JR: Was it Vanilla or Peach or both?

[0:25:22.8] SM: Both.

[0:25:22.9] JR: Both. Okay, perfect.

[0:25:24.0] SM: I did vanilla first. I did a quick connection at Tokyo a couple of hours to switch terminals over the LLC terminal. Had some dinner. Hopped on a plane and flew to Osaka that night, Kansai International. Stayed out by the airport and went to bed that night pretty quickly after I arrived. The next morning, I was up early and flew to Fukuoka on Peach, which it's interesting. That's a very much a downtown airport. The airlines were all fine. The airlines were all fun. There were some good and bad on all of them. Peach didn't have the toys in the galley cart that I wanted to buy. I give them demerit points for that. I don't know.

[0:26:01.1] JR: What a shame. It's Japan. If they don't have the little toys they're advertising, it's a major failure.

[0:26:06.6] SM: But they were super polite about it, so I don't know. Fukuoka, after flying in and out of Kansai, which is way, way out of town relative to Osaka, flying into Fukuoka, which is right in the heart of the city. It's two stops on the metro to like the heart of downtown. That was pretty cool. And you come in right over the water and then right over land and then suddenly you're on the buildings and then you're on the ground. It was really neat.

Then flew from there to Nagoya, which is another sort of out of town airport. That was the Star Flyer segment was to Nagoya. Then Air Asia — Japan was from Nagoya up to New Chitose, and then [inaudible 0:26:45.7] back down to Haneda.

[0:26:48.8] JR: I want to talk about Star Flyer, who's always kind of pegged my interest a little bit, because it doesn't look anything like a low-cost carrier at all. It's got pretty good leg room, black leather seats, USB port, seatback entertainment, which may or may not actually work depending on who you talk to, but it looks like Virgin America basically on the inside. How was it?

[0:27:10.0] SM: I think that you described it pretty accurately. It's not an LLC experience at all. It's part of the ANA world. So most of the flights have ANA co-chairs on them. I could have

booked it that way through ANA. It would have cost three times as much and I just said I didn't want to do that, because paying \$300 when I can pay a hundred seems like a bad idea.

[0:27:37.1] JR: It's just kind of the thing where they only open up the lowest fare buckets if you book directly.

[0:27:41.6] SM: They have essentially a tourist fare, and a bunch of airlines in Japan — ANA and JAL have done this in the past as well, which they have a sort of a visit Japan pass. If you're an international arrival with your passport and you can show your onward or arrival ticket and a visitor visa stamp or passport stamp rather than a permanent resident or long term resident, you can buy these cheap tickets, and it's a way to get tourists to explore more.

The challenge is that was only bookable direct with Star Flyer. The website is 100% Japanese only. Some of the about us stuff, they have an English version, but that wasn't very helpful. Booking was Japanese only. The phone numbers listed were not available to me from outside the country, which I haven't quite figured out how that works, but even dialing the country code, different city codes, all sorts of things, could not get through to them. Trying to use my credit card on their website didn't work.

[0:28:41.8] JR: How did you end up doing it?

[0:28:43.1] SM: As you're aware, in Japan, connections to the international banking system are not always easy. If you want an ATM, you got to basically go to a 7/11. Every other bank ATM does not connect to the rest of the world.

[0:28:54.2] JR: It's okay. Just load up your little tappy card in Tokyo anyway and you could use it anywhere in the country.

[0:28:58.5] SM: Yeah, you use a passcode [inaudible 0:28:59.7] card.

[0:28:59.7] JR: Once you figure out how to load it up.

[0:29:01.5] SM: But you need cash to do that, right? It's a complicated system. I ended up calling in a favor with a friend who happened to be living there at the time. This was not a trivial or easy booking by any stretch. Making the reservation was easy. I could do the reservation with Google Translate on the Japanese website and got through it all and had the PNR and eventually texted my buddy a PNR and asked him to text me back how it much cost and then did a PayPal transfer to him.

Getting the Star Flyer tickets certainly on these discount fares, which the irony is these are four visitors to Japan and you can't buy them unless you have a Japanese credit card it seems.

[0:29:37.3] JR: Yeah, the irony is not lost here.

[0:29:40.8] SM: We want to give you guys cheap fares and you help you explore our country, except we won't sell it to you. We're very sorry.

[0:29:44.9] JR: Well, they just want you to learn Japanese stuff.

[0:29:46.7] SM: The language wasn't the problem. I couldn't use a U.S. based card.

[0:29:49.9] JR: That's bizarre. Did you try a debit card? Maybe it's no credit, debit only. Japan is just really weird like you mentioned.

[0:29:56.2] SM: I did not try a debit card. I should have. Maybe I'll go buy another ticket just in case.

[0:30:01.0] JR: Next time.

[0:30:01.8] SM: Yeah.

[0:30:03.0] IP: That's a great reason to visit Japan again. Just to see if a different card will work.

[0:30:07.5] SM: You guys know I could buy the ticket without having to go to Japan and fly it, right?

[0:30:11.7] JR: But what's the fun?

[0:30:12.3] SM: None at all. Either way, it was a good excuse to go back to Japan.

[0:30:18.1] IP: Then we're back to the, "Because I could." Right.

[0:30:21.8] SM: Exactly.

[0:30:22.5] JR: Speaking of because you could. You were between Japan and we were on the United 747 final flight and sometime between or after or before you are also in China doing other crazy things that I wish I was —

[0:30:38.3] SM: Yeah. I went from Honolulu on to Chengdu, China via San Francisco.

[0:30:41.4] JR: As one does.

[0:30:41.9] SM: As one does. I had a conference in Shanghai, and the timing of it was such that I figured I'd actually go over a couple of days early and get over jetlag because I was presenting at this conference. Also, I was already on the West Coast, so why not just head over a few days early. Chengdu is one of the secondary cities United Airlines flies to. They flight it on a 787. I figured why not? I'll give it a go. Nice flight over. Then I had a week in Chengdu.

Similar to [inaudible 0:31:09.8], I have a friend who lives in China and he flew out from Beijing and we hang out for a couple of days and saw the pandas and things like that. But from an aviation perspective, one of the things that makes Chengdu really interesting is, A; is the fourth largest or busiest airport in China. I had no idea.

[0:31:25.6] JR: Who knew?

[0:31:26.2] SM: B; Chengdu Airlines is hubbed there and Chengdu Airlines is the only commercial operator of the ARJ21-700, which is the only model of the ARJ21 flying.

[0:31:40.3] IP: It is an aviation oddity still basically.

[0:31:44.4] SM: It's a Franken-plane.

[0:31:45.9] JR: If you've ever seen a picture, it looks like a Boeing 717 mated with a CRJ900. The body of a — I guess a McDonald Douglas rear-mounted engine aircraft, engines that I think are the same engines that's part of VRJ.

[0:32:06.2] SM: CF34s?

[0:32:11.4] JR: I can't quite tell what the wings are, but this thing just looks — It doesn't look right.

[0:32:15.9] SM: Yeah. It's a GECF34-10A engine which they have an exclusive contract with General Electric for the engines. The wing is an Antonov product that was designed specifically for the new frame, and the frame is not new at all. This is a slightly controversial thing depending on who you believe. The Chinese claim it was a new design. There are those who say they saw the original blueprints and they were the Douglas Aircraft company blueprints with a new title block pasted over in Chinese where the original is supposed to be.

[0:32:48.7] JR: You are one of probably very few Americans who have ever actually flown on this thing. Tell us about it.

[0:32:54.5] SM: I was certainly the only American on my day. That part was obvious to me. We talked a little bit about how crazy the construction whatever of it is. There's only three of them that have been delivered, and this is a plane that's been undeveloped since 2002. Just a decade or so late in delivery. The third was only delivered a couple of weeks ago and still isn't actually in service. They fly it once a day. They go one place and they come back.

You get on board and it's one instance, I was like — You were talking about, when you see a picture of it. When I saw it in person as well, you look at it and you're like, "This looks a little familiar, but not quite right." Everything about it both inside and out was a little bit of — But not quite right. It's a two, three cabin with the five seats across, because that's what the MD80 and

the 88 family was like. It's pretty comfortable inside, honestly. The overhead bins are of an old, old classic style. There's nothing new there.

You walk to the back of the plane and two rows from the back well behind the wing, all of a sudden there's like a gap and there's exit route and it's like a super exit route, because there's doors back there.

If you remember, like an MD80 has that side door.

[0:34:07.3] IP: Yeah

[0:34:09.0] SM: On the port side. This one has doors on both sides.

[0:34:11.8] JR: Yeah. I'm looking at a picture of it now and there's an exit door, like maybe two rows from the engines.

[0:34:19.0] SM: Oh, no. [inaudible 0:34:19.4] from the back of the plane. It's right at the engines. If you're standing in that exit with the door open, I guarantee you could touch the engine.

[0:34:27.4] IP: That's probably a bad idea?

[0:34:29.1] JR:

[0:34:29.7] SM: I certainly wouldn't pop the doors while the engines were running.

[0:34:34.1] IP: Which happens in emergencies.

[0:34:35.7] SM: Or in China.

[0:34:36.7] JR: Yeah. Just throw some coins in the engine. That will seize it up.

[0:34:40.1] SM: I was going to say. No one throw me coins, because that's a long throw from the boarding stairs.

[0:34:45.5] JR: Ooh! We're going to get some hate mails this week.

[0:34:47.9] JR: Happy to help, fellows. Happy to help.

[0:34:49.8] SM: It was just weird inside. Overall, the flight itself was fine. It's loud on board. Not that surprising. They travel with two mechanics who take the exit row seats.

[0:35:01.6] JR: Still? On regular flights?

[0:35:03.7] SM: No. They were on mine, so I assume yes still. Maybe they saw a white guy coming and decided to make me feel comfortable. I don't know. Yeah, the two engineers still fly with it and they got their cool jumpsuits on. There's a security guard, security officer on board.

[0:35:20.7] JR: Which is fairly typical in China.

[0:35:21.2] SM: Yeah. This was my first domestic Chinese flight. I've been led to believe that that is normal. It's got a first class cabin. It's got — No one was booked in that, but they have the cabin.

[0:35:31.3] IP: How would you even do that?

[0:35:33.0] JR: C trips sold it as a first class — would sell me first class seats.

[0:35:35.8] IP: Wow!

[0:35:36.5] SM: I didn't book them. I don't remember, because I thought it was too expensive or just stupid, but I decided to do the coach thing. My only regret is I didn't get a window seat.

[0:35:47.0] JR: It couldn't have been full though, right? Could you move around?

[0:35:49.9] SM: There was one row that looked pretty good and I thought I was going to get it, I thought I was going — I was too nice and I waited like a half second too long and a couple that had window aisle of the three set split up to take window-window and I was in a row of all three on the aisle and I was moving forward and I lost it. I was pretty annoyed at that, and I ended up taking the aisle in that one instead because at least there was still only two of us instead of three.

There was also a guy across the aisle from me who had the window seat and didn't seat there for landing. By the time I realized he wasn't going to back to his seat, I couldn't get in there. Certainly not without creating an international incident, and I decided not to do that.

[0:36:26.9] JR: Probably a good idea. Just yesterday on Twitter, because Comac is on Twitter, which is still relatively surprising. They tweeted, "Congratulations to," I guess themselves, that the ARJ21 has operated 30,000 passengers. 30,000 passengers have flown on the ARJ21. They said it happened last week. You were on it last week.

[0:36:50.5] SM: I was.

[0:36:51.3] JR: We don't know for sure if you are passenger 30,000.

[0:36:54.8] SM: I'm taking it.

[0:36:56.2] JR: But we're not going to tell you no you weren't and I'm betting Comac is not going to say you weren't. Let's just run with it. Congratulations.

[0:37:04.2] SM: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much. It was a great honor truly to be able to represent the aviation community in this way. A few people I'd like to thank — No. Actually, Jason, you're the one who helped me figured out the routes it was flying on, so I do owe you a thanks on that front.

[0:37:20.4] JR: Well, you're quite welcome. We have actually talked about the ARJ for months now because it is sometimes in the OAJ schedule, sometimes not. It's really difficult to actually track down the damn thing

[0:37:33.4] SM: You say that, that it's sort of sometimes in the schedule and sometimes not. I think that's because legitimately it's only sometimes flying and sometimes not.

[0:37:40.4] JR: Yeah. The flight schedules goes out 330 something days in the future, but sometimes it just disappears entirely.

[0:37:47.3] SM: Yeah. Even when we thought it was supposed to be in the schedule, it wasn't actually available for sale. I couldn't find it looking at JDS sales. I couldn't see it listed as a flight zeroed out. It wasn't there, and then one day it showed back up and I was able to book it.

[0:38:04.0] JR: You got very lucky, because I know other people that have tried — Will Horton from Hong Kong, I believe, booked it and got there and found himself on A319 or something and probably cried a little bit, because that would have sucked.

[0:38:17.4] SM: Yeah, I would have. Just so you know. We landed — I flew to Hefei. I'm sure I'm pronouncing it wrong. But I assume just another random town you've never heard of that has a million people and a gorgeous airport.

[0:38:29.2] JR: Of course. I have never been, but I'll put it on my list.

[0:38:33.5] SM: No. I wouldn't do that, but it's got a gorgeous airport. It's one of the sort of the new era Chinese airports built within the last 10 years. It's 20 or 30 gates. Super futuristic, glass-steel design. It was gorgeous.

[0:38:48.9] JR: That's China. That's what we talk to John Aschauer a couple of episode ago, that China is — Their aviation mark is just exploding and they are future-proofing, so they expect this airport to be futuristic and eventually it will be filled up with little ARJ21s.

[0:39:04.7] SM: I'm not betting on that.

[0:39:08.4] IP: Seth, I want to thank you for joining us and bringing us along on what is, I think, too many adventures in one conversation.

[0:39:15.8] SM: Never enough adventures.

[0:39:17.8] IP: But hopefully we'll have you back on sometimes soon, and I don't know if we can top this, but we'll try our best.

[0:39:23.2] SM: I'll try to do something else ridiculous and stupid so you guys will have me back. Thanks so much.

[0:39:27.1] IP: Excellent.

[0:39:27.9] JR: Well, we are going to Orlando so, so let's see if we can do something stupid down there.

[0:39:34.3] SM: Take care guys.

[0:39:36.0] IP: All right. Thank you so much, Seth.

[0:39:45.0] IP: Seth seems to be having a lot more fun than you or I lately.

[0:39:49.8] JR: Yeah. I've traveled a lot with Seth over the years. We've been — Every corner of the world; South America, Asia, all over the place, and he left me behind on this trip and I've kind of upset because I'm incredibly jealous of him flying the ARJ21.

[0:40:06.0] IP: I mean we'll just have to go back and do it again.

[0:40:09.7] JR: Okay. That's good.

[0:40:10.8] IP: All right. Seth has been working on the Operation Care Lift and now the Operation Gift Lift, kind of the next stages, but some of the other things that are happening in Puerto Rico is the loons have been on station.

[0:40:30.1] JR: They tried to be on station.

[0:40:33.1] IP: They're doing their best. From what I've heard is it's working kind of sometimes.

[0:40:41.9] JR: There's a lot of issues with this. Completely upfront, they have never deployed loon in a real-world scenario and this was really a wing it. Hope it works. If it does, fantastic. These are balloons. They can't control the wind and the wind tells them to go wherever the wind tells them to go, which unfortunately has not been over at Puerto Rico and that doesn't even really mentioned the tech aspects of phones have to be updated to even talk to the balloons, which is really difficult if you don't have any connectivity which defeats purpose of the whole thing.

Really, good on X by Google or who are these guys?

[0:41:21.6] IP: It's just X.

[0:41:23.6] JR: X or whatever. I don't care. It's Google. You know it's Google. We know it's Google. We'll just say it. AT&T of all companies has done something a little bit interesting actually. A lot of interesting. A couple of companies; Sprint, AT&T have been touting this idea of a cellphone tower on a drone, which never really made any sense to me, but they finally got to test it in a real-world scenario and it's not really a drone. It's a single rotor helicopter, I guess, that weighs more than 55 pounds. So AT&T had to get special permission from the FAA to actually fly it, because anything over 55 pounds, you have to get special permission. It's not really a drone. I guess it is, but it also tethered. It's not fully remote. It has this cord that provides power for it so it can stay aloft and data so it can transmit the signal back down. It hovers 200-feet up above the ground and can cover a 40-square mile area with LTE connectivity, which is pretty great, because if you've ever seen a temporary cell tower, they're maybe — I don't know, 40, 50 feet tall and they don't provide a huge coverage area. 200-feet is way higher than any temporary cell tower is going to get. This is pretty cool to see how technically drone technology is being used down in Puerto Rico.

[0:42:46.0] IP: Yeah. I was pretty impressed. I saw the picture, and I'll see if we can toss one in the show notes, because it looks like an RC helicopter with cell technology on it and it tether down back on the ground. I saw the picture and I was like, "What is that?" Then I read the story

and I was like, "That's pretty cool." Hopefully they can get enough of them where it actually helps.

[0:43:10.9] JR: Yeah. It's kind of crazy. I think that was in San Juan City limits. They're moving it out to more remote areas, but they're still going to have the issue of you need to be able to connect it something to connect to the rest of the world. So I guess they connected to a satellite terminal. I don't really know. There's a lot of logistics here, but it's super cool and maybe it has ADSP and we can track it and you can find where your phone will work in Puerto Rico.

[0:43:35.2] IP: Yeah. For me, a lot of these have been — It just goes to show you how much you take for granted with modern technology. You just assume that your phone is going to work.

[0:43:45.6] JR: Yeah. I've been following some of the cellphone companies repairing the network down in Puerto Rico and the cell towers quite literally blew away. They're gone. There is no more tower. You can't obviously rebuild that whole thing just like their power grid overnight, so they've come up with these really creative solutions to provide coverage again.

[0:44:06.1] IP: And here's hoping that we hear more about that and that they continue to work on it and get things back up.

[0:44:12.1] JR: If they could put some of those over in Manhattan and give me cellphone coverage in New York City, that'd be cool too.

[0:44:19.3] IP: That's true. We'll see what we can do I guess.

[0:44:23.2] JR: Yeah, bring in the drones.

[0:44:24.7] IP: There you go. Big news for Airbus today. The A350-1000 has EASA and FAA certification.

[0:44:35.2] JR: Oh it has FAA too?

[0:44:36.5] IP: Yeah. Joint certification. I don't know if it's joint certification, but concurrent certification. It's ready to go.

[0:44:43.5] JR: Almost exactly a year today from the first flight too.

[0:44:46.4] IP: 362 days from first flight, which is pretty impressive. It's not a brand new airplane.

[0:44:54.5] JR: I can click the photos app on my phone, click a year ago today and the pictures of me at the first flight pop right up. Is it quite literally a year ago today. It's pretty amazing.

[0:45:05.1] IP: Well done to them. Qatar is taking delivery of the first one by the end of the year. In just a little over a year, they went from first flight to commercial delivery.

[0:45:16.8] JR: Pretty good. Not bad. Not bad at all.

[0:45:20.3] IP: Episode 20 of AvTalk will come from Stockholm, Sweden. Jason and I will head over there in just a few weeks in the beginning of December and we'll record episode 20 from Stockholm. We are going to sit down with people in the office of Flightradar24 and talk a little bit about how Flightradar24 works. How we track flights and we're also going to talk about some of the things that are coming up in the future, and so I think that's going to be a fun thing to do and I'm glad that, Jason, you're able to join us over in Stockholm for that.

[0:45:55.0] JR: This will be good for me too, because all of this is literally new to me. So I'll be learning right along with you.

[0:46:01.4] IP: It will be great. So what we wanted to do is ask people. If you have any questions, specific questions about how Flightradar24 works or how tracing flights in general works, send us an email, podcast@fr24.com or tweet us @flightradar24 or send us a message on Facebook, Flightradar24 and we will be happy to kind of put everything together and answer as many questions as we possibly can about how the service works, about tracking flights works. If you have any burning questions about anything, we want to get those answers. I'm excited for this, because I think it's going to be good to talk to some people.

We're big avgeeks, but we're not the most technical people in the world shall we say. So I'm excited to talk to some people who are some of the most technical people in the world or at least much more technical than we are. So I'm excited for this one.

[0:46:54.7] JR: As am I.

[0:46:57.0] IP: I can tell in your voice. I think that's a good way to leave episode 19, and I'm looking forward to episode 20. Thank you so much for listening. We will see everyone in Stockholm next episode.

As always, I'm Ian Petchenik, here with —

[0:47:13.7] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thank you for listening.

[0:47:15.9] IP: We'll talk to you next time. Bye-bye.

[0:47:17.9] JR: Bye-bye.

[END]