



Mr Sim enjoys going to work at Changi Airport and seeing passengers taking flights that resulted from the negotiations that he was responsible for. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

The sky's the limit

CAAS Scholarship recipient Victor Sim's work impacts millions of jetsetters annually

MEREDITH WOO

MR VICTOR Sim Zhicong, 32, is literally a high flyer.

During his undergraduate years at the Singapore Management University (SMU), he was a student leader.

There, he pioneered various initiatives that helped to establish the culture of the student community as his batch was among the first few cohorts of the university.

His passion for air travel and aviation saw him applying for and being awarded the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) Scholarship in 2007.

Mr Sim's inclination towards CAAS raised a few eyebrows, especially

among the SMU staff and faculty.

"With SMU being more business-centric, joining the aviation industry was definitely a path less taken (at least at that time). Most of my peers applied to multinational corporations, financial institutions or set up their own businesses," he says.

In 2008, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science (Economics) and joined CAAS in May that year.

He made history by being the first and only SMU graduate in the organisation then.

Currently, he is a senior assistant director (Air) with the Ministry of Transport, on secondment from CAAS.

Passion for aviation

When Mr Sim was young, aviation to him was synonymous with travelling and holidays abroad.

Growing up, he began to appreciate aviation as "an important conduit linking Singapore to myriad communities, cultures and economies around the world".

As a student, he often studied at Changi Airport and took breaks by watching planes take off and land from the viewing gallery.

He would also spot new airlines at the aircraft parking bays and look out for new destinations on the flight display systems.

He recalls: "I knew that there was much more behind the fancy terminals and aircraft cabin interiors; and I wanted to find out more.

"To be precise, I wanted to play a part in this multi-faceted, vibrant and important industry in Singapore."

He started out at CAAS' Air Transport Division, where he was responsible for managing Singapore's air services relations with specific countries under his purview.

As part of his job, he has travelled quite a bit — the longest being a 35-hour journey from Latin America back to Singapore, with stopovers in Miami and London.

One of the highlights in this portfolio was working with foreign counterparts to allow for more flights between Singapore and their countries through negotiating an expansion of the Air Services Agreement or, when possible, the conclusion of an Open Skies Agreement.

The latter would allow carriers to operate any number of flights between and beyond both countries' destinations, opening up more commercial opportunities for air carriers and increasing the travel options of consumers.

To date, Singapore has concluded Air Services Agreements with over 130 states and territories, of which 60 are Open Skies Agreements.

Says Mr Sim: "It is always a joy coming to work at Changi Airport and seeing passengers taking flights that resulted from the negotiations that I was responsible for."

Career trajectory

He was rotated to CAAS' Air Navigation Services Group in 2011, where he was part of the team responsible for airspace-related policies.

His responsibilities included coordinating measures across the airport community to enhance Changi Airport's capacity and to minimise delays even as air traffic volumes continue to increase.

The most challenging yet most interesting aspect of this portfolio, he says, was having to understand the specifics and technicalities of air traffic control.

This is so that flights take off and land safely and expeditiously at both Singapore's civilian airports in Changi and Seletar.

In October 2013, he was seconded to the Ministry of Transport (MOT), one of the career development opportunities outside CAAS.

This allowed him to look at the same aviation issues with a different perspective; and through working with colleagues who handle other transportation sectors, they learnt from each others' experiences and tapped on the synergy among the various modes of transport.

He loves his job and is passionate about aircraft, flying and travelling. But work can also be challenging — there is a steep learning curve as fresh graduates have to manage complex policy issues, work with foreign counterparts from different cultures, and stay up to speed with the dynamic and constantly changing industry.

Despite that, he finds fulfilment in being "plugged into the exciting and fascinating air transport industry", as this sector provides the primary means for people and trade flows between Singapore and the world.