

Centrum

Travel magazine

No7 | Winter 2025-2026

A I R



Pilot of Centrum Air Susan Mamedova
Photo: Gio Kardava



Hilton



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TASHKENT CITY



The Season When the City Shines – Winter at Tashkent City Mall

A truly magical time arrives at Tashkent City Mall – "Muhtasham Mavsum – The Season of Splendor." This winter, the heart of the capital sparkles with festive lights, elegant decorations, and enchanting moments. Discover dazzling shop windows, new fashion collections, and the warmth of gourmet experiences. Every day brings something new – a celebration of beauty, style, and inspiration.

Tashkent City Mall invites you to feel the magic of the season – where winter turns into a masterpiece and joy becomes a lifestyle.

**TASHKENT
CITY MALL**



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Your guide to style, travel and culture in Central Asia



HILL UZBEKISTAN is a magazine about people who are shaping the new aesthetics of the region. Travel, get inspired, and discover the best hotels, restaurants, and events with us.





Air

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Centrum

Travel magazine

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DEAR FRIENDS!

Air is our element. It gives us the power to rise higher, to connect cities and people, to see the world from a new perspective. For a passenger, it's the sense of lightness and endless space outside the window; for us, it's a space of responsibility. Because air can be different – clear and transparent, filled with light and hope, or restless, fragile, in need of care.

Every flight we operate is more than just a journey from point A to point B. It's part of humanity's greater movement toward the future. We know the sky doesn't welcome us by chance. And if we are to leave a trace in it, let it be a trace of conscious choices and care. That's why we strive to make our flights more sustainable, our technologies smarter, and our impact on the environment minimal. Air is not only what we breathe – it's what unites us all.

In this issue, we speak of air as an element, an inspiration, and a challenge – about what pilots feel at altitude, about humanity's longing to touch the sky – from observation decks that take your breath away to extreme adventures that bring the taste of true freedom. And, of course, about why responsibility for the sky begins with each of us.

Respectfully,
General Director of Centrum Holding
Abdulaziz Abdurakhmanov





Centrum Holding is a family of brands uniting companies in aviation, logistics, cargo transportation, and tourism. We are building an ecosystem that makes travel more accessible, logistics more efficient, and businesses more scalable.



Centrum Air offers affordable and convenient flights on modern aircraft. We are constantly expanding our route network and enhancing our services, with plans to grow our fleet to 14 aircraft and add 15 new destinations this year.



Centrum Holidays, officially recognized as a national tour operator since late 2024, specializes in comprehensive inbound and outbound tourism. We have developed 13 tour programs across the most picturesque locations, secured 500 direct contracts with hotels, engaged 350 professional guides, and established partnerships with 2,300 travel agencies. With Centrum Holidays, we are opening Uzbekistan to the world – and the world to you.

MY FREIGHTER

My Freight is the leading cargo airline in Central Asia, specializing in commercial freight transportation and handling over 60% of Uzbekistan's air cargo. Our primary goal is to ensure reliable deliveries, supporting businesses and trade connections worldwide. This year, we plan to expand our fleet to 13 aircraft, making freight transportation even faster and more efficient.



Centrum Logistics Group is a top-tier multimodal operator providing innovative logistics solutions. We transport thousands of tons of cargo in 7,000 containers, using 350 trailers and 500 railway platforms to ensure timely deliveries across the globe.



UzLogistic offers comprehensive logistics services, including warehousing, transportation, and multimodal freight solutions. We guarantee secure storage and fast cargo handling at state-of-the-art logistics hubs strategically located across key points in Uzbekistan.



*Co-Founder of Centrum Holding
Khafizjon Gafurov*

Uzbekistan's largest private airline with the most modern fleet

Our fleet

2025 – 15 aircraft



5 × Airbus A320-200
2 × Airbus A320neo
3 × Airbus A321neo
3 × Airbus A330-300

Upcoming:
1 × Airbus A330-300
1 × Airbus A321neo

2026 – 25 aircraft



7 × Airbus A320-200
3 × Airbus A321-200
1 × Airbus A330-300

1500 000+

passengers transported
in 2025



MY FREIGHTER

The leading cargo airline in the region,
established in Uzbekistan

Our fleet

2025 – 11 aircraft



10 × Boeing B767-300F
1 × Boeing B757F

60%

of Uzbekistan's cargo was
transported via our flights in 2024

2026 – 19 aircraft



3 × Boeing B767-300F
1 × Boeing B757F
4 × Airbus A330-300F

8 000+

flights performed in 2025

12 800+

flight hours logged



CENTRUM

A rapidly growing 3PL operator
delivering cargo worldwide

7000+

40-ft containers
transported annually

350+

trailers and
container trucks

500+

rail platforms

UZLOGISTIC

Part of Centrum Holding,
specializing in transporting vehicles
and auto components

Closed warehouse
in Tashkent

6 600 m²

Container terminal
in Angren

18,4 hectares

Warehouse
in Akhtachi

11 hectares

CENTRUM HOLIDAYS

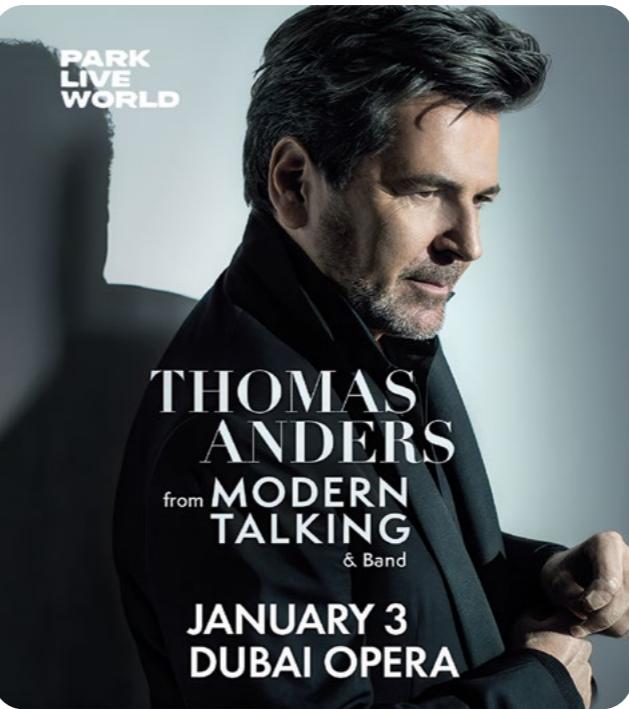
A next-generation tour operator,
providing 360-degree service to every client



WHAT? WHERE? WHEN?

THROUGH YOUR OWN EYES: EVENTS WORTH SEEING

 CENTRUMAIR



THOMAS ANDERS CONCERT

 January 3, 2026

 Dubai, UAE

Thomas Anders, the former lead vocalist of Modern Talking, will take the stage at Dubai Opera with a major solo concert. The evening will transport the audience into the vibrant atmosphere of the '80s: the program includes all of Modern Talking's iconic hits – "You're My Heart, You're My Soul," "Cheri, Cheri Lady," "Brother Louie," and more – along with the best songs from Anders' solo career.

More than 40 years into his musical journey, Thomas Anders continues to captivate audiences with his voice and charisma. This concert at the ultramodern Dubai Opera promises to be an elegant retro celebration, offering Eurodisco fans a rare chance to hear their favorite melodies live, performed by one of the most recognizable stars in European pop music.

REGULAR FLIGHTS

from \$152*

TASHKENT

→ 4 h →

DUBAI

CONCERT OF THE PESNYARY ENSEMBLE

 January 5

 Saint Petersburg, Russia

In the very heart of wintertime St. Petersburg, on the stage of the legendary Officers' House, the songs that defined an entire era will come to life once again. The Belarusian State Ensemble Pesnyary will celebrate its 55th anniversary with a grand festive concert. Their repertoire is a true golden treasury of Soviet and post-Soviet pop music: "Belovezhskaya Pushcha," "Vologda," "Alesya," and of course the iconic "Belorussiya."

These melodies are known by heart across three generations, and hearing them live is a rare gift in today's age of digital noise. Pesnyary is about lyrics that speak directly to the soul and performances that become musical journeys into the past – warm, heartfelt, and deeply nostalgic.



REGULAR FLIGHTS

from \$88*

TASHKENT

→ 5 h 30 min →

SAINT PETERSBURG

“QUEEN MASTERPIECES ON CELLOS”

January 6

Moscow, Russia

Imagine “Bohemian Rhapsody” not coming from speakers, but performed live on cellos – rich, resonant, and charged with symphonic drama. At the Moscow Folklore Center, a true musical spectacle will unfold: the Magic Cellos Band will present Queen's greatest hits in entirely new arrangements. These virtuosos of the classical tradition take rock legends and transform them into a theater of emotion – “We Are the Champions,” “Don't Stop Me Now,” “Somebody to Love” – each piece sounding fresh, powerful, and exquisitely crafted. It will be an evening where the stage becomes an intimate arena of passion, where Queen's music takes on a new, almost cinematic form – and you'll find yourself wanting to rediscover these songs again, with your eyes closed and your heart wide open.



REGULAR FLIGHTS

from \$86*

TASHKENT → 4 h 40 min → MOSCOW

ÇAĞRI SINCI CONCERT

January 10

Istanbul, Turkey

Local hip-hop in Istanbul has its own distinctive pulse, and Çağrı Sinci is one of the artists shaping its sound. His performance at Blind İstanbul will be a manifesto of the underground: raw lyrics, experimental beats, and a sharp social edge. Turkish rap has found its identity – and it's a face with tattoos, a direct gaze, and a microphone capable of setting the streets on fire. This concert is more than music; it's the voice of Istanbul's alleyways, concrete rooftops, and late-night commuter trains. Perfect for those who appreciate hip-hop with grit, attitude, and a backbone forged on the streets.

**SPANISH SUPER CUP**

January 7–11

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia will once again host the Spanish Super Cup. The mini-tournament will take place from January 7 to 11 in Jeddah on the shores of the Red Sea. For the third time in its history, the Spanish Super Cup will be held at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium, with the semifinals scheduled for January 7 and 8 and the final set for January 11 (9:00 p.m. local time).

Four of Spain's top clubs will compete for the trophy – the draw has already paired Barcelona with Athletic Bilbao and Real Madrid with the Copa del Rey holders in the semifinals. Fans can look forward to an intense clash of Spanish football giants under the Saudi sun, making the tournament a vibrant and high-energy start to the 2026 sporting year.

REGULAR FLIGHTS

from \$294*

TASHKENT → 5 h 40 min → JEDDAH

TEMPLE FAIR IN GUANGZHOU

January 15–21

Guangzhou, China

If you're looking for an authentic Eastern celebration where tradition and atmosphere merge into a single vibrant tapestry, the Temple Fair in Guangzhou offers a gateway into both the past and present of China. Here, dragon dances in the streets coexist with Buddhist rituals, Chinese opera echoes from open-air stages, and vendors sell fragrant flatbreads and roasted chestnuts just steps away. During this January festival, the city's ancient quarters transform completely: lanterns glow, silk rustles, incense smoke drifts through the air, and it feels as if time itself has paused. This is more than a fair – it is a collective meditation on spring, renewal, and cultural memory.



REGULAR FLIGHTS

from \$225*

TASHKENT → 6 h 55 min → GUANGZHOU



SELOFAN DUO CONCERT

January 24
Tbilisi, Georgia

For the first time, the Greek dark-wave duo Selofan will perform at Tbilisi's Junkyard Club. The musicians are known for their signature sound that blends cold wave and minimal synth: a dark, cinematic atmosphere built on hypnotic synthesizers, deep vocals, and a melancholic saxophone. The band has won over fans of the gothic scene at festivals such as Wave Gotik Treffen and Grauzone, and now they are bringing their spellbinding show to Tbilisi. This concert will be a true treat for lovers of post-punk and dark-electronic music – an invitation for everyone to dive into Selofan's haunting romanticism.

OKEAN ELZY CONCERT

February 8
Baku, Azerbaijan

The Ukrainian rock band Okean Elzy will perform a major solo concert at the Heydar Aliyev Palace. This marks the band's long-awaited return to Azerbaijan after many years, and the event promises to be one of the brightest musical highlights of the winter season. Sviatoslav Vakarchuk and his band will perform songs beloved by millions – "Obiyimy," "Bez boyu," "Vstavay," and many other heartfelt rock ballads and anthems that have inspired listeners around the world for more than two decades.

Don't miss this evening of sincere, emotionally charged music: Okean Elzy are renowned for the powerful energy of their live performances and are sure to deliver unforgettable moments to the Baku audience.



WWE ROYAL RUMBLE 2026

January 31
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

For the first time in history, WWE Royal Rumble will take place outside North America – Riyadh will host the 39th annual edition of the legendary wrestling event. Scheduled for Saturday, January 31, 2026, the show will be part of the Riyadh Season festival.

A massive spectacle will unfold in the Saudi capital: the traditional Royal Rumble matches – with 30 wrestlers in both the men's and women's bouts – will determine the contenders for championship matches at WrestleMania. For WWE fans in the Middle East, this is a rare opportunity to see global superstars like John Cena, Roman Reigns, Bianca Belair, and others live.

The Royal Rumble 2026 promises to be one of the biggest sports-entertainment events of the year, drawing thousands of wrestling enthusiasts from around the world to Saudi Arabia.

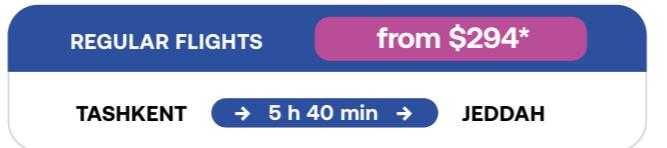


BOLUO TEMPLE FESTIVAL

February 11–13
Guangzhou, China

For three days, Guangzhou will be immersed in a celebration that unites religion, culture, and theater. The festival at the Temple of the God of the South Sea features vibrant processions, flag rituals, nighttime dances, circus performances, and full-scale dramas staged on temporary outdoor platforms. Fireworks light up the sky, sandalwood fragrance fills the air, and smiles appear on every face.

This ancient celebration preserves the spirit of Old China: everything is authentic, spoken in the language of its ancestors, and infused with history. If you want to experience China without tourist facades, this is the place to be.



WAVVES CONCERT**February 12****Istanbul, Turkey**

Blind İstanbul may barely withstand it – the venue is practically destined to crack under the weight of roaring guitar waves and punk choruses. Wavves is heading to Istanbul, and that means surf rock is returning to a place that never expected it. The American band is bringing a show with zero compromises – just noise, adrenaline, and full-body energy.

Expect thundering basslines, raw garage-style vocals, crowd-jumping chaos, and all the hits that shaped their unmistakable sound. No posing, no polish – just pure, unfiltered musical fever. If you've missed the MySpace era and the grit of California garage rock, Wavves is here to bring it all back.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$153*****TASHKENT****→ 5 h 30 min →****ISTANBUL**

SAINT STACY
14.02.2026 BLIND / ISTANBUL

SAINT STACY DUO CONCERT**February 14****Istanbul, Turkey**

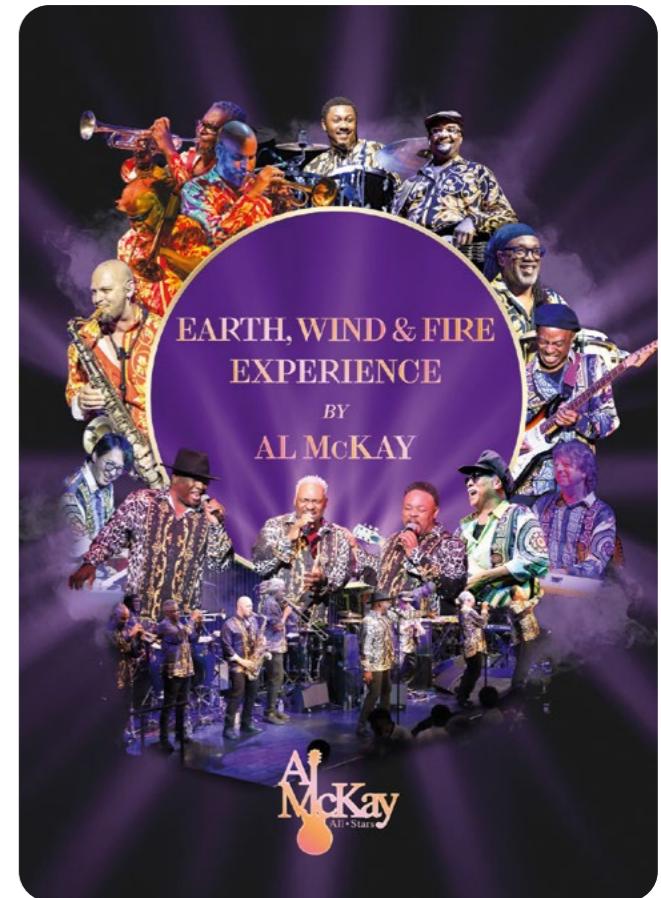
Blind İstanbul will host a performance by Saint Stacy – a young alternative electronic duo rapidly gaining popularity across Europe. Their music blends atmospheric synth-pop with trap beats and a touch of soul, creating a mysterious and captivating sound.

Saint Stacy's Valentine's Day concert promises to immerse the audience in a world of sensual electronica – an ideal choice for anyone looking to spend the evening with high-quality live music outside the mainstream.

**EARTH, WIND & FIRE EXPERIENCE BY AL MCKAY****February 21****Almaty, Kazakhstan**

For the first time in Kazakhstan, the Earth, Wind & Fire Experience project led by guitarist Al McKay – an original member of EWF – will take the stage. At the Baluan Sholak Arena in Almaty, audiences will hear the timeless hits of Earth, Wind & Fire performed live, with the signature electrifying funk groove that defined the band's iconic sound.

Fans will be able to dive into the atmosphere of the golden era of disco and soul: the evening promises to be a true celebration of music and a heartfelt tribute to the legacy of Earth, Wind & Fire.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$67*****TASHKENT****→ 1 h 30 min →****ALMATY****ALESSANDRO SAFINA****March 2****Saint Petersburg, Russia**

The operatic romantic Alessandro Safina returns to the Oktyabrsky Concert Hall with a new program where classical music and pop blend into a single, harmonious breath. His voice – velvety, powerful, and deeply expressive – will fill the hall with emotional richness, while the live accompaniment of a symphony orchestra adds grandeur and charm.

It will be an evening of passion, music, and unmistakable Italian elegance – where every performance feels like a confession, and the audience becomes part of a romantic story unfolding on stage.

**REGULAR FLIGHTS****from \$88*****TASHKENT****→ 5 h 30 min →****SAINT PETERSBURG**

SHAWAN SPRING CARNIVAL**March 3****Guangzhou, China**

The streets of Guangzhou's southern suburb will transform into a pulsating open-air stage: dancers, acrobats, street bands, and vibrant processions will turn the day into an endless celebration. The Shawan Spring Carnival is a burst of color, emotion, laughter, and local tradition. To the rhythm of drums and the jingle of tambourines, spectators are immersed in ancient customs and modern festivities – a place where the heartbeat of folk joy comes alive.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$225*****TASHKENT****→ 6 h 55 min →****GUANGZHOU****BLIND****07/03/26****CUMARTESİ****A.A. WILLIAMS**KAPI AÇILIŞ : 20.30
LIVE**A.A. WILLIAMS CONCERT****March 7****Istanbul, Turkey**

British singer and composer A.A. Williams – whose music is often described as a blend of folk rock, post-rock, and gothic lyricism – will perform at Blind İstanbul. Her voice, deep, misty, and penetrating, guides listeners through the shadows and light of personal emotion. The show promises to be both intimate and powerful – a rare fusion of closeness and musical grandeur. This is an evening for those who seek music that touches the most delicate strings of the soul.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$153*****TASHKENT****→ 5 h 30 min →****ISTANBUL****MIKHAIL SHUFUTINSKY****March 13****Almaty, Kazakhstan**

The king of Russian chanson, Mikhail Shufutinsky, will give a major concert in Almaty at the Palace of the Republic. Originally scheduled for 2025, the performance was postponed – which means that on this evening fans will finally get to hear all of the maestro's beloved hits live, from the heartfelt Third of September to his lively Odessa-style couplets. Shufutinsky's signature voice, accompanied by an es-trade-jazz ensemble, will create a warm, soulful atmosphere. The concert promises to become one of the coziest and most nostalgic events of the spring season.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$67*****TASHKENT****→ 1 h 30 min →****ALMATY****ROCK OPERA "JUNO AND AVOS"****March 14****Tashkent, Uzbekistan**

Tashkent will host the legendary Russian rock opera "Juno and Avos," with a performance set to take place on the stage of the Palace of Friendship of Peoples. Audiences can expect an unforgettable musical production presented in the original version created by composer Alexey Rybnikov and poet Andrey Voznesensky. Moscow artists will appear on stage – among them finalists of The Voice, the Pozdnyakov brothers, and other renowned performers.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$52*****NUKUS****→ 1 h 30 min →****TASHKENT**

MOT**March 28****Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

At the Bishkek Arena, the bright, bold, and romantic MOT will present a new concert program where street rhythms blend with delicate lyricism. His style – a mix of hip-hop, pop, and poetic storytelling – turns every performance into an emotional show. With a live band and dance troupe on stage, the audience will hear both his cult hits and fresh tracks that fans haven't stopped singing yet. Spring in Bishkek will begin with the pulse of beats and the sound of hearts in song.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$66*****TASHKENT** → 1 h 10 min → **BISHKEK****UVULA CONCERT****April 3****Almaty, Kazakhstan**

For the first time, the cult indie band from Saint Petersburg, Uvula, will perform in Almaty. Known as the voice of the new dreampop wave, the group is returning to the stage after a long silence with a Central Asian tour. They will bring their melancholic guitar-driven dream pop – filled with crystalline riffs and sincere lyrics. Uvula has never performed in this region before, and the Almaty concert (the venue will be announced by the organizers separately) is expected to be a rare opportunity for fans across the CIS to hear their favorite songs live.

REGULAR FLIGHTS**from \$67*****TASHKENT** → 1 h 30 min → **ALMATY****GAGARIN NIGHT MULTIMEDIA SHOW****April 11****Saint Petersburg, Russia**

The Saint Petersburg Planetarium invites guests to Gagarin Night, a nighttime multimedia show dedicated to Cosmonautics Day. Under the giant dome of the star hall, a unique performance will unfold: soloists of the Mariinsky Theatre and the band Bis-Quit will present cover versions of global hits – from Billie Eilish and Nirvana to Mozart's classics and the folk song "Kalinka" – all in unexpected new arrangements.

At the same time, the dome of the planetarium will illuminate with a projection of the starry sky – visitors will see the heavens over Baikonur exactly as Yuri Gagarin saw them on April 12, 1961. The fusion of live music and cosmic visual installations will immerse the audience in an unforgettable atmosphere. Organizers promise "the most cosmic night of the year," where art and science come together in a full-dome show format.

**REGULAR FLIGHTS****from \$241*****TASHKENT** → 6 h 55 min → **BANGKOK**

REGULAR FLIGHTS **from \$88***
TASHKENT → 5 h 30 min → **SAINT PETERSBURG**

SONGKRAN – THAI NEW YEAR**April 13–15****Thailand**

Every April, Thailand celebrates its liveliest – and wettest – holiday of the year: Songkran, the Thai New Year. Officially, the water festival lasts for three days, though in some tourist hotspots the festivities can continue for an entire week. During this period, massive nationwide water fights take over the streets – Songkran is widely known as the largest "water battle" in the world. Locals and visitors pour into the streets armed with buckets, water guns, and hoses, joyfully welcoming the new year by symbolically washing away misfortune. Alongside the playful water fights, temples host Buddha cleansing rituals, families gather for traditional ceremonies, and cities come alive with folk celebrations – offering a unique chance to experience Thai culture in its most vibrant and heartfelt form.

IVAN ABRAMOV STAND-UP CONCERT**April 17****Novosibirsk, Russia**

Well-known comedian Ivan Abramov will bring his new program, "New and Best," to Novosibirsk, performing at the V. V. Mayakovskiy Concert Complex. Audiences can expect Abramov's signature style – an intellectual, music-infused stand-up that wins people over with its sincerity and the comedian's unmistakable charisma. Ivan is known for being both sharp-witted and remarkably relatable, so his fresh material promises an evening of unstoppable laughter and humor drawn from everyday life.

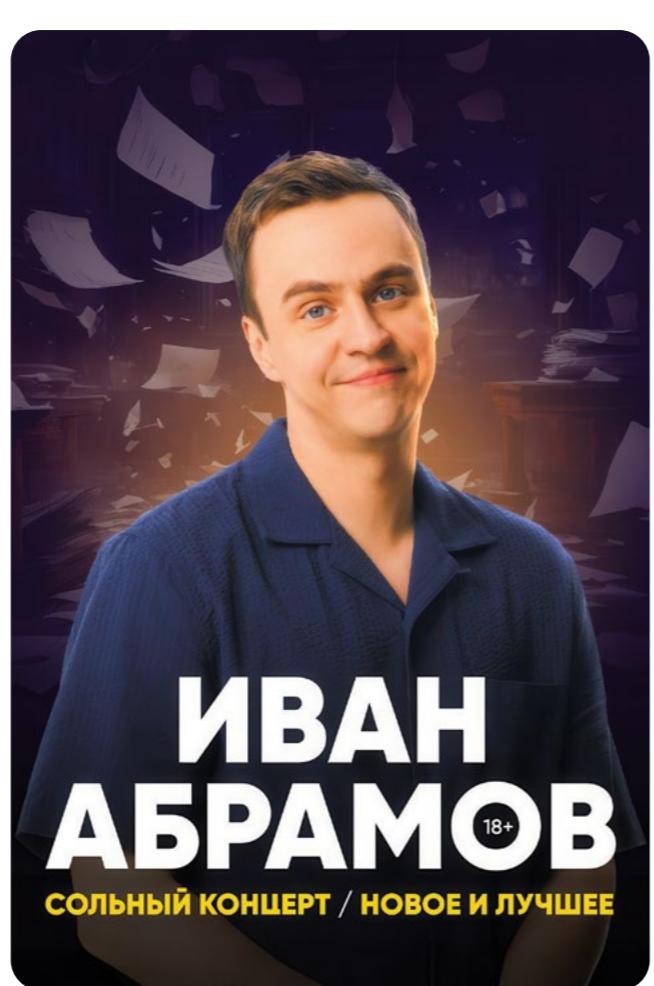
REGULAR FLIGHTS **from \$80***
 TASHKENT → 3 h 15 min → NOVOSIBIRSK



REGULAR FLIGHTS **from \$294***
 TASHKENT → 5 h 40 min → JEDDAH

SAUDI ARABIAN GRAND PRIX – F1 STC 2026**April 17–18****Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**

The Formula 1 Grand Prix in Jeddah is one of the most anticipated events on the motorsport calendar. The 6.174-km circuit, stretching along the scenic Corniche waterfront, is among the fastest street tracks in the world. The race will take place in the evening, allowing spectators to enjoy the action under the city lights. After the racing sessions, guests will be treated to a spectacular entertainment program: USHER, TUL8TE, and Marwan Pablo will perform on stage, and the headliner of the night will be none other than Jennifer Lopez.

from \$294***JEDDAH**

REGULAR FLIGHTS **from \$66***
 TASHKENT → 1 h 10 min → BISHKEK

MY OWN PRIVATE ALASKA CONCERT**April 26, 2026****Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

For the first time, the French post-hardcore band My Own Private Alaska will perform in Bishkek. The concert will take place at Pepper Pub and will be part of the group's Central Asian tour. MOPA are known for their unconventional lineup – piano, drums, and extreme vocals, without guitars – as well as for the emotional force of their music.

Their performance promises to break all stereotypes about post-hardcore: the band's sound blends delicate neoclassicism and art rock with explosive aggression, turning each song into a dramatic story of pain and beauty. A true moment of catharsis for fans of alternative music!

PROMOTORS SHOW SAMARKAND 2026**May 29–31****Samarkand, Uzbekistan**

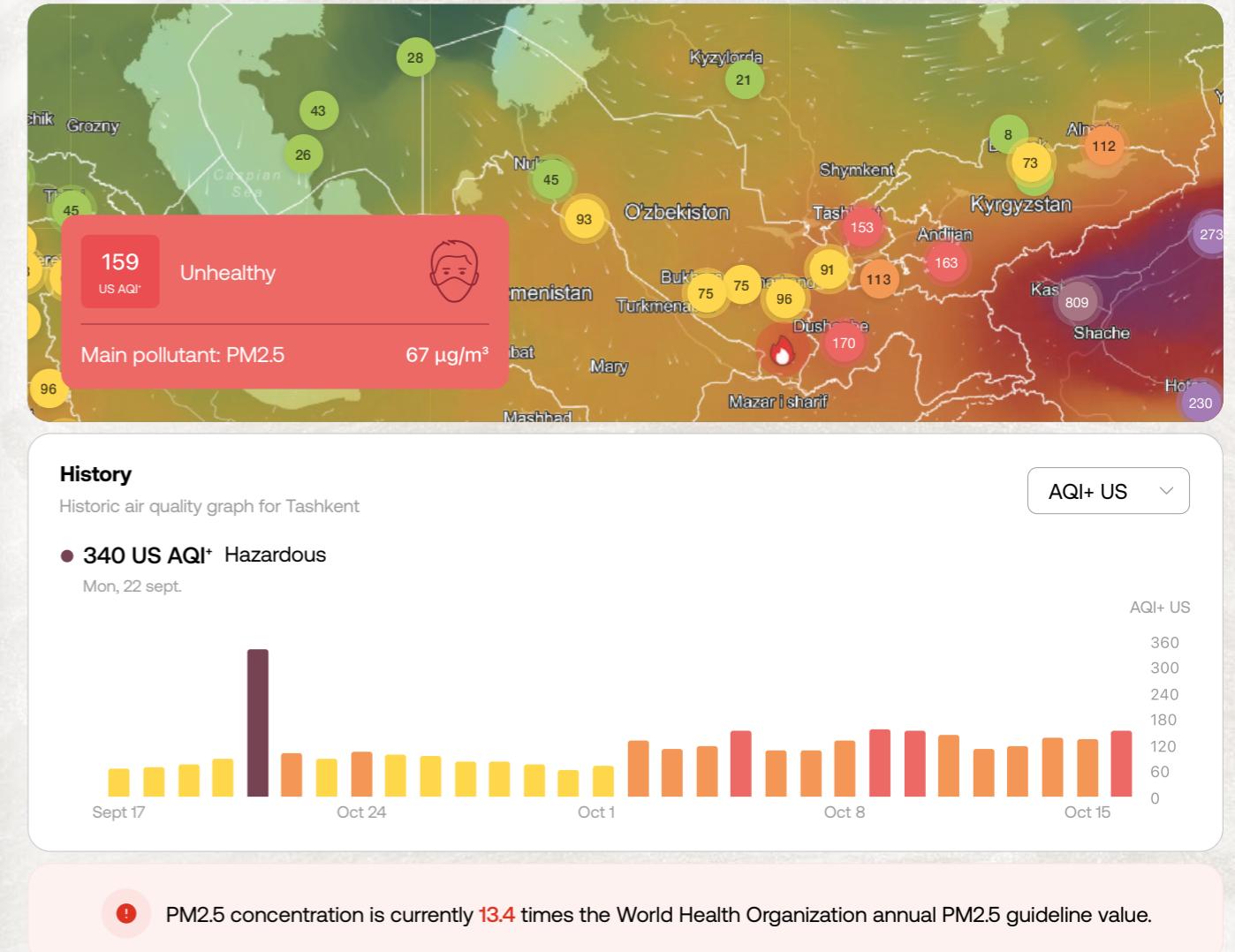
For three days, the SOF EXPO Samarkand complex will turn into a true mecca for car enthusiasts. Promotors Show Samarkand 2026 will showcase the latest innovations in the automotive industry – from electric vehicles to retro models, as well as motorcycles, tuning projects, car audio systems, and much more. The program includes spectacular supercar shows, drift battles, car audio competitions, and even races of handmade, motorless vehicles – a real celebration of speed and technology for all auto fans.

REGULAR FLIGHTS **from \$225***
 SOCHI → 3 h 30 min → SAMARKAND

**Prices may vary depending on availability.
 Limited seats at listed fares. Taxes and fees included.*



THE CITY THAT WANTS TO BREATHE



When Air Becomes a Number

At the time of writing, Tashkent's air quality index stands at 64 — meaning the concentration of harmful PM2.5 particles is three times higher than the limit set by the World Health Organization. Similar readings have been recorded in other cities across the country — Samarkand, Gazalkent, and Salar — where, earlier in the day, the index climbed as high as 150. Such precise data has only become possible thanks to the installation of IQAir meteorological stations across Uzbekistan, equipped with automated air-monitoring systems.

The situation can now be tracked in real time. For example, with the current level of pollution in Tashkent, residents are advised to open windows less frequently, use air purifiers at home, and — for those with heightened sensitivity — wear protective masks outdoors and limit physical activity in the open air.

The capital often appears in global “anti-rankings”: in September of this year, Tashkent ranked first among the world's most polluted cities.

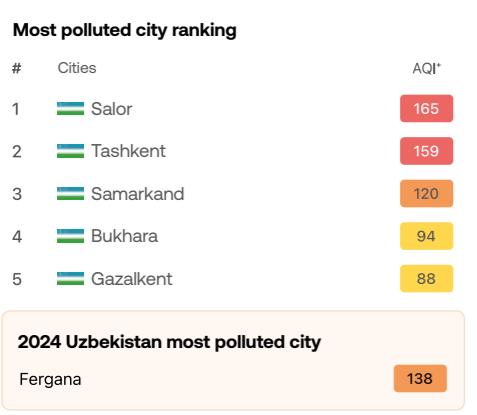
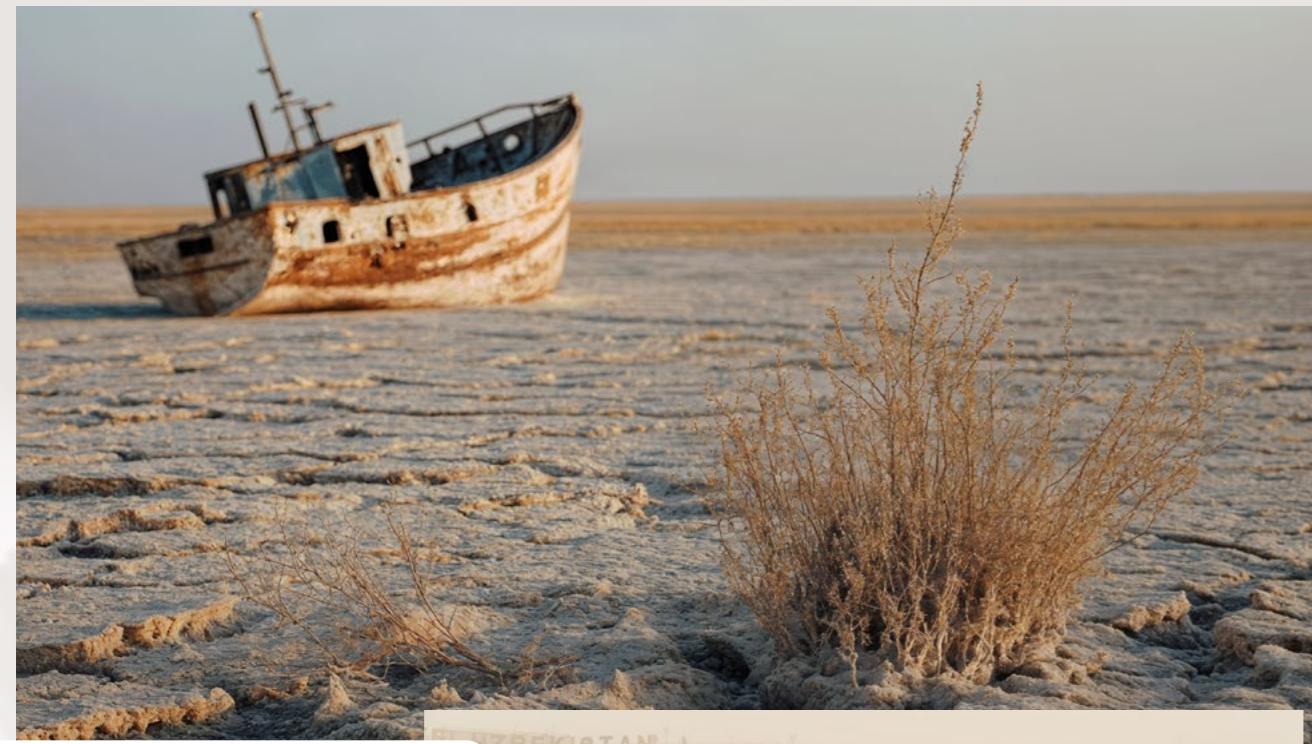
According to the Ministry of Ecology, the main causes of the city's poor air quality include mass tree cutting — despite a moratorium introduced in 2019 — and chaotic construction that ignores the city's master plan. Vehicle emissions and the continued use of coal and fuel oil in the energy sector also make a significant contribution.

Air Across the Regions: Uzbekistan's Contrasts

Recent data shows that the worst air quality is recorded in Termez, Tashkent, and Jizakh. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Urgench, where the air is considered the cleanest. The city and its surroundings lie far from major industrial centers, and it shows in the numbers: PM2.5 concentration here is just 11.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. A similar situation can be observed in Nukus and Khiva, where the air quality indices stand at 37 and 39 respectively – significantly lower than in the capital.

However, even this seeming idyll is sometimes disrupted by a natural phenomenon: dust haze. Winds lift dust and salt particles from the dried bed of the Aral Sea, sharply increasing the concentration of fine particulate matter to hazardous levels.

Activists and international organizations are working to prevent such occurrences. The issue of the Aral Sea is regularly raised at conferences, including UN roundtables. It also resonates in the cultural sphere – for instance, at the Natural Element festival, which brings together environmental and sustainability experts from around the world.



A United Front: People, Business, and the State

Clean air is the result of collective effort – individual, social, and governmental. Change can start small: by using private cars and taxis less often, and instead choosing public transport or simply walking.

At the national level, the “Green Space” program is making a difference. Anyone can take part in greening their surroundings: the Forestry Agency delivers up to 200 saplings free of charge to more than 9,300 mahallas across the country. Planting takes place in autumn – before the first frost – so trees can take root and benefit from the rainy season. But you can also plant independently – in your yard, next to your home – without waiting for official campaigns.

The government is taking more and more steps to protect the environment. The Ecological Party succeeded in enforcing a moratorium on tree cutting – a measure that, according to their data, saved nearly 500,000 trees, about 90,000 of which are valuable species. Deputy Javlon Abdullaev emphasizes that trees not only clean the air of dust but also reduce noise, regulate temperature, and protect soil from erosion.

Technological solutions are also emerging. Following a World Bank report on the economic losses caused by environmental problems, the Eco Expo Central Asia showcased the Stop Dust startup – a formula that suppresses dust and salt particles in the air. Illegal burnings are now tracked from space, and coal-fired power plants are gradually being converted to gas.

Still, the most effective measure remains the sim-

plest: planting and preserving trees. Yet planting alone is not enough. Without proper care, trees die. For instance, during pruning, city services often remove up to 30% of branches, making trees vulnerable to disease and pests.

Trees play a crucial role: they trap dust on their leaves and bark, and absorb chemical compounds such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide.

But ecology cannot be reduced to one or two actions. For Uzbekistan to truly breathe freely, it is essential to preserve biodiversity, restore natural balance, prevent soil degradation, and use resources wisely.



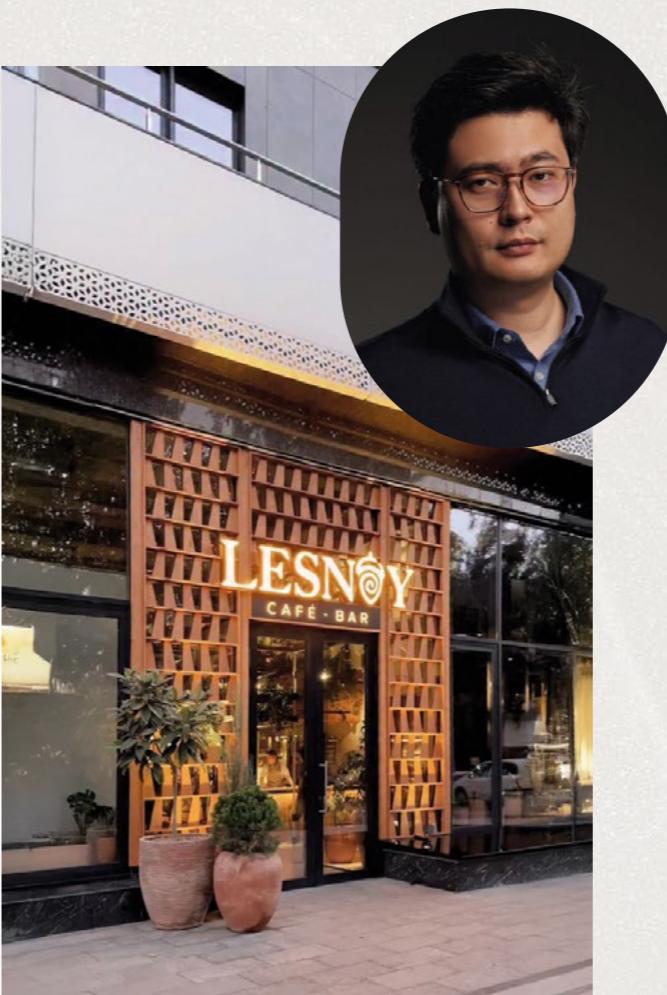


When Words Turn into Action

In January of last year, a flash mob was held in Tashkent calling on the government to develop a long-term plan for improving air quality. The event brought together musicians, bloggers, and eco-activist **Mutabar Khushvaktova**, better known as Urikguli. On her blog, she regularly raises environmental issues – including air pollution.

The flash mob was sparked by a report from the Ministry of Ecology outlining the reasons behind the worsening air conditions. Participants opposed the short-term measures proposed by authorities – such as banning certain types of fuel, introducing “hour-based” vehicle restrictions, creating “bus-free” roads, and temporarily suspending construction.

Mutabar emphasizes that what matters most is not temporary bans but systematic control – especially over enterprises that neglect regulations and fail to install air filters, as well as over chaotic urban development. Because of such construction, the city has lost entire parks, ponds, and other natural spaces. Add to this the massive amount of dust generated at construction sites, and the situation becomes even more alarming.



“Lesnoy”: Where the Air Feels Lighter

It's not only activists and deputies who are thinking about clean air – businesses are, too. In Tashkent, there is an eco café-bar called Lesnoy (“The Forest”), home to more than 2,000 living plants. A portion of its revenue goes to a tree-planting fund. The founder, **Ruslan Chagay**, shared the story and mission behind the project.

— How did the idea for “Lesnoy” come about?

R.Ch.: There's a catastrophic lack of fresh air and greenery in the city. I wanted to create a place where people could exhale and feel surrounded by a “living” environment. That's how “Lesnoy” was born – not just a café but a true oasis in the heart of Tashkent.

— Why was it important for you to fill the space with so many plants?

R.Ch.: Plants are living beings – they create an atmosphere deeper than any décor. They bring freshness and a sense of life. To maintain more than 2,500 plants, you need a whole team: at least four or five florists take care of them daily – watering, replanting, protecting them from disease, adjusting the light. It's hard work, but it's also a form of care for the living world that our guests have come to love.

— How does your project help improve air quality?

R.Ch.: For me, clean air is something Uzbekistan especially lacks today. We decided our contribution shouldn't stop at interior design. That's how our campaign “Plant a Tree – Give Life!” was born. On our menu, certain items are marked with an acorn symbol – when a guest orders one, they help plant a tree. We've already planted 100 saplings in New Uzbekistan Park, and this is just the beginning. The campaign runs twice a year. It's our way of ensuring that the next generation has more oxygen – and more life – around them.

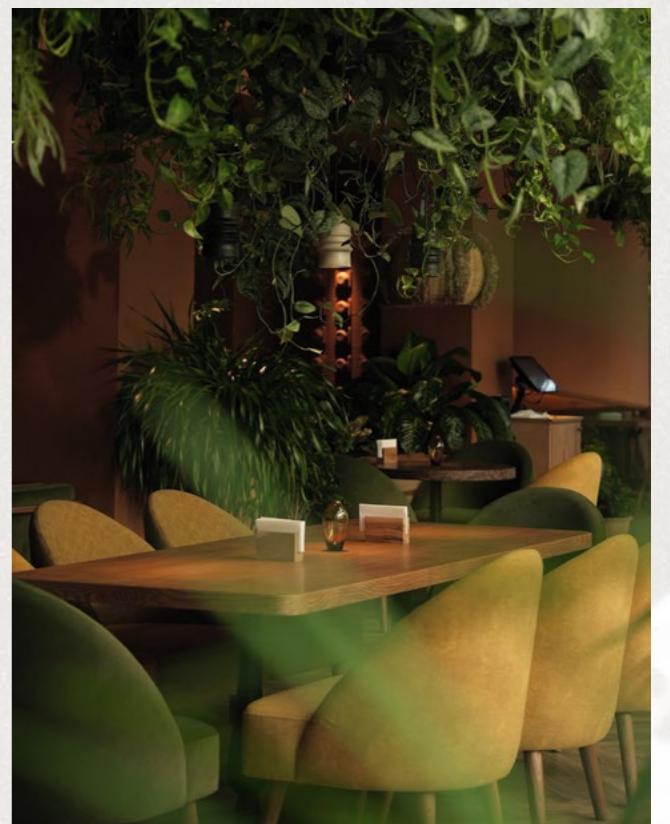
We also want to inspire others: cafés, businesses, city residents. When people see the idea works, they realize that making the city greener is easier than it seems.

— What kind of feedback do you get most often? Do guests notice the difference?

R.Ch.: The phrase we hear most often is, “It's easier to breathe here!” The plants are chosen specifically for their oxygen-producing properties, and the effect is truly noticeable. You don't need to leave the city to feel like you're in a forest.

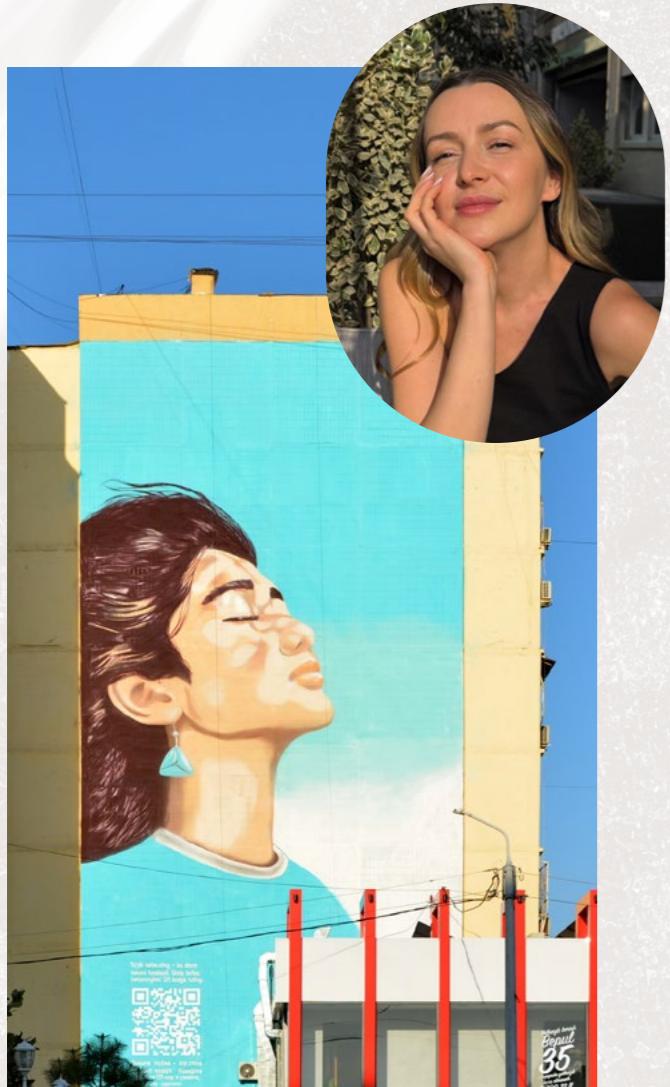
— Do you see your café not only as a gastronomic space but also as an educational one?

R.Ch.: Absolutely. We want people to reflect on nature and its value. Awareness starts with simple actions – planting a tree or keeping a plant at home. Next, we plan to expand our ecological mission: grow the tree-planting program, attract new partners, and give guests the chance to participate in plantings themselves.



A Mural Instead of a Forest

In Tashkent's Sergeli district, an eco-mural has appeared – one that not only brightens up the neighborhood but also cleans the air. Its creator, artist **Nadezhda Rixieva**, worked on the project in collaboration with TBC Bank.

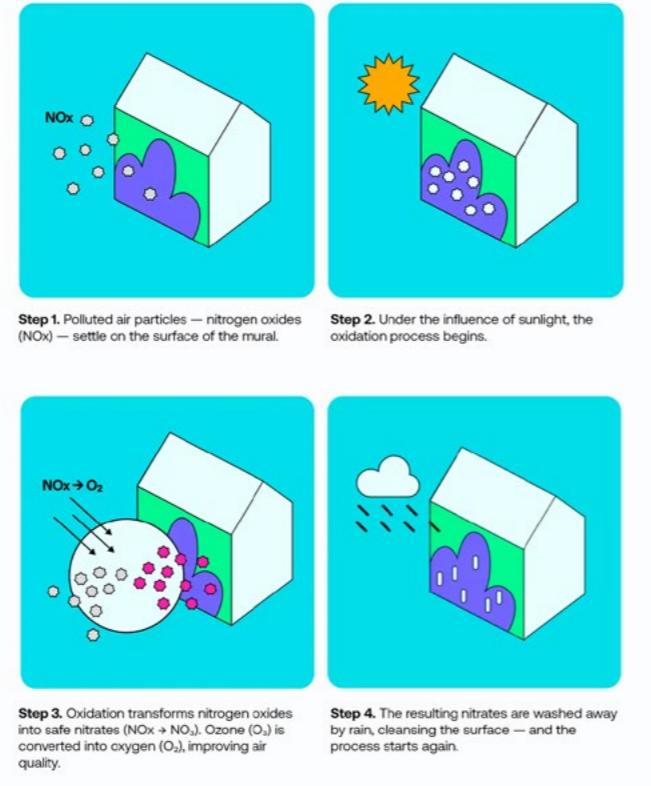


— What inspired you to take on this project?

N.R.: I was offered the chance to paint a building façade using air-purifying paint. I immediately agreed – the idea felt both meaningful and modern. In recent years, I've noticed how much dust surrounds us. Cars and streets get covered in a thick layer of it in just two days. It's frightening to think about what we're actually breathing.

— How does the eco-mural work?

N.R.: The paint I used is called Airlite. When exposed to sunlight, it neutralizes harmful substances, turning nitrogen oxides into harmless compounds. It's similar to how photosynthesis works in plants – or how the air feels cleaner after a thunderstorm.



— In your opinion, what can each of us do for cleaner air?

N.R.: The most important thing is awareness. We all work in different fields and live different lives, so we often don't have time to think about common problems. That's why it's crucial to make ecology part of everyday life – starting small: saving resources, consuming consciously, and building sustainable habits. That's the answer to what each person can do – start with yourself.

The idea of creating the eco-mural in Sergeli was initiated by TBC Bank. The goal was not only to draw attention to air pollution but also to offer a real solution. Nodira Sultonkhodjaeva, Marketing Director at TBC Uzbekistan, shared the project's concept.



— What inspired the idea of creating a mural that cleans the air?

N.S.: We wanted to find a way to draw people's attention to pollution. A mural makes the problem visible and emotional, and using Airlite paint – which literally purifies the air – proved to be the perfect tool.

This paint has been tested in several countries and has shown a significant reduction in nitrogen oxide levels. The sources of these pollutants are well known: vehicle emissions, power-plant combustion, and metallurgical waste. Back in 2007, Airlite was applied in the Umberto I tunnel in Rome, one of the city's most polluted areas. After just a month, the level of harmful substances dropped by 50%, and the tunnel became safe for pedestrians again. In January 2024, Rome's municipal authorities officially included this technology in their public works program.

— Why Sergeli?

N.S.: Sergeli is one of the fastest-growing districts of Tashkent, with a high population density, so the effect is especially noticeable here. The mural covers 250 square meters – equivalent, in terms of air purification, to a forest of the same size. At the same time, the coating requires almost no maintenance – rain naturally keeps the surface clean.

— Why combine ecology and art?

N.S.: Aesthetics is an “attention accelerator.” People stop, take photos, talk about it – and at that very moment, they learn about a technology that truly works. That's how “ecology” stops being an abstract word and becomes part of everyday urban life.

We noticed the mural especially resonates with young people – the visual language is familiar and relatable to them.

— Why choose Nadezhda Rixieva?

N.S.: Nadezhda is a well-known Tashkent artist with extensive experience working on large façades. Her sketch perfectly captured the idea of “free breathing” and immediately became the foundation of the project. We worked as one team: she was responsible for the artistic concept, and we handled materials and organization.

— How does this project fit into your CSR strategy?

N.S.: We choose initiatives with real impact. Our main areas are financial literacy, culture and art, technology, and sustainable development. We evaluate environmental projects based on three criteria: benefit to citizens, scalability, and educational potential. The mural meets all three.

We're now considering expanding the project – creating new eco-murals in different parts of the city. Negotiations with local authorities and developers are already underway.

— How will you measure the impact?

N.S.: Ultimately, our goal is to make urban life more environmentally friendly and everyday consumption more conscious. In concrete terms, we're tracking public awareness of our environmental initiatives in Uzbekistan – because the more people know about eco-projects, the faster we can move toward our goal.

One Follower — One Tree

You don't need to own a business to make your city greener – all you need is the desire. Blogger **Abdurakhim Abdulazizov** (@ekdim.k) launched the campaign “One Follower – One Tree”: for every new follower, he plants a tree.



“Breathing the air we have today is becoming really difficult. I realized that too many trees are being cut down, and that's part of the problem. That's when I decided that even a simple follow could make a difference. For every new follower, I plant a tree,” Abdurakhim explains. “At first, it seemed like a small initiative, but gradually people started to take interest, get inspired, and join the plantings. So far, I've been doing this alone, but in the future, I want to involve people from different regions and turn the campaign into a large-scale movement. For me, it's important not only to save nature but also to cultivate ecological awareness.”

Today, Abdurakhim's blog has 38,000 followers – and the number continues to grow, along with the number of trees. The stories in this article show that there are many ways to fight for clean air. Some create eco-projects, others plant trees, and some inspire thousands through their initiatives. But they all share one idea: ecological change begins with a simple step. Anyone can take it – and that is how the future, a future with air we can breathe, is built. ➔

CLEAR AIR AND BRIGHT IMPRESSIONS: 7 DESTINATIONS FOR THIS WINTER



Phuket, Thailand



From November to March, Phuket enjoys its most pleasant season: warm sunshine, calm seas, and almost no rain. Daytime temperatures hover around +28–30 °C, humidity drops compared to the summer months, and the gentle sea breeze keeps the climate comfortable even during the hottest hours. The water is crystal clear, the waves are moderate, and the sky remains bright and blue – ideal conditions for a perfect beach holiday. Those seeking tranquility can escape to nearby islands, where white sands and palm groves create a

postcard-like paradise.

Beyond its beaches, Phuket is a delight for food lovers – from street markets offering pad thai and fresh tropical fruit to seaside restaurants with panoramic views. In the evening, life shifts to bustling night bazaars filled with exotic flavors and colorful souvenirs. Adventure seekers will enjoy diving and snorkeling around coral reefs, jungle treks, and excursions to Buddhist temples. And for ultimate relaxation, massages and spa rituals in countless salons promise pure serenity.



Sochi, Russia



Even in the heart of January, Sochi's Black Sea coast greets visitors with green palms, yews, and blooming shrubs – it feels like an early spring has arrived. The mountains surrounding Sochi protect the shoreline from cold winds, and subzero temperatures are rare. Winters here are mild: the average temperature stays around +5–6 °C, and the mix of sea breeze and light precipitation makes the air pleasantly fresh. Even

when a moist wind blows in from the sea, a walk along the promenade brings an invigorating sense of clarity.

Sochi also offers a rare winter combination: mountain lifts to Krasnaya Polyana for skiing or snowboarding, snow-capped peaks, and – just a short drive away – waterfalls, botanical gardens, and emerald forests where palm trees blend surprisingly well with the winter landscape.



Phu Quoc, Vietnam



In winter, Phu Quoc welcomes travelers with gentle sunshine, crystal-clear waters, and the lush greenery of its jungles. This is the island's dry season: rainfall is rare, the sea is calm and warm, and a light ocean breeze eases the humidity. With average temperatures around +27 °C, the island breathes tropical summer even in January.

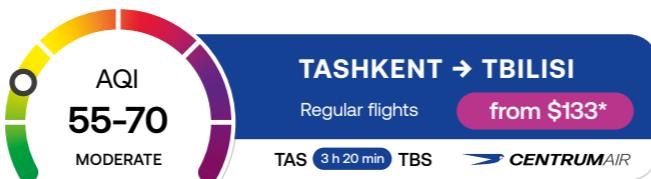
The winter months are especially comfortable – the heat is mild. In the morning, you can visit fishing villages for freshly caught seafood; in the afternoon, explore national parks with cascading waterfalls and tropical

trails; and in the evening, dine by the shore while admiring the sunset that earned Phu Quoc the nickname "the Island of Sunsets."

Phu Quoc offers a surprising balance of seclusion and activity: quiet bays and coconut groves coexist with diving centers, lively markets, and boat trips among the small islands of the archipelago. It's easy to find that feeling of "time standing still," when days flow slowly and every moment is filled with harmony.



Tbilisi, Georgia



In winter, Tbilisi feels especially soulful. The narrow streets of the Old Town wind between tiled roofs, mountains shimmer in the distance, and the air is filled with the aroma of fresh bread and fragrant spices. Although the capital lies in a valley, the climate is mild – average temperatures hover around +5 °C, and frost is rare.

Winter gives the city a calmer, more intimate charm: with fewer tourists, walks along the Kura River and

through the historic quarters become a quiet pleasure. And just an hour's drive away lie the ski resorts of Gudauri and Bakuriani, where crisp mountain air and snow-covered slopes await.

This blend of urban comfort, rich culture, and closeness to nature makes Tbilisi an ideal destination for those who wish to combine the coziness of a city escape with winter adventures in the mountains.



Mineralnye Vody, Russia



The Caucasian resorts are synonymous with wellness, and Mineralnye Vody is no exception. In winter, the mountain scenery and crisp, frosty air create a special atmosphere – even a simple walk in the park feels like a small act of healing. Low building density and the surrounding mountains keep the air exceptionally clean, while the view of snow-covered peaks adds a refreshing touch to each day.

Mineral springs, therapeutic treatments, and spa traditions become even more valuable in the cold season, when there's a natural desire to recharge and restore balance. The quiet rhythm, peaceful landscapes, and pure mountain air turn a stay here into a true retreat – a chance to step away from the rush and reconnect with yourself.



Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt

In winter, Sharm El Sheikh welcomes visitors with a mild climate: daytime temperatures stay around +22–26 °C, the air is dry and light, and there's no exhausting heat. Strolling along the coast brings a sense of openness and warmth, while swimming in the Red Sea is both refreshing and invigorating.

This season is particularly pleasant – there are fewer tourists than during peak months, offering the chance to fully enjoy the resort's calm atmosphere. Middle Eastern cuisine and vibrant markets add authenticity



and color, making the experience rich even without active excursions.

Sharm El Sheikh is also one of the world's top destinations for diving and snorkeling: coral reefs and a vibrant underwater world are just steps from the shore. Those seeking adventure can enjoy yacht cruises, desert safaris, and excursions through the Sinai Mountains. The resort perfectly combines the ease of a beach holiday with the thrill of new experiences, striking a balance between relaxation and discovery.



Baikal, Russia

If a true New Year's miracle exists, it must be here – on Lake Baikal. The lake sleeps beneath a sheet of crystal-clear ice through which you can see its endless purity. The air is so transparent it feels as though you could reach out and touch the horizon. The average winter temperature stays around -15 °C, yet the dry climate and complete absence of smog make the cold invigorating and every breath light. There is a special kind of silence here: only the crackling of ice and the whisper of wind between the



cliffs. You can glide across the mirror-like surface of the lake on skates, pausing to capture the transparent ice where white bubbles seem frozen in time – as if the air itself has stopped moving. Then head to Olkhon, Baikal's largest island, to ride a dog sled across the vast open spaces and hear how the snow beneath your feet echoes like a drum. At Baikal, you don't have to search for magic – it's already all around you, in every breath, every glint of ice, and in the realization that this place truly exists. ➔

*Prices may vary depending on availability. Limited seats at listed fares. Taxes and fees included.

AIRPORTS ON THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY: HOW AVIATION SEEKS BALANCE WITH NATURE



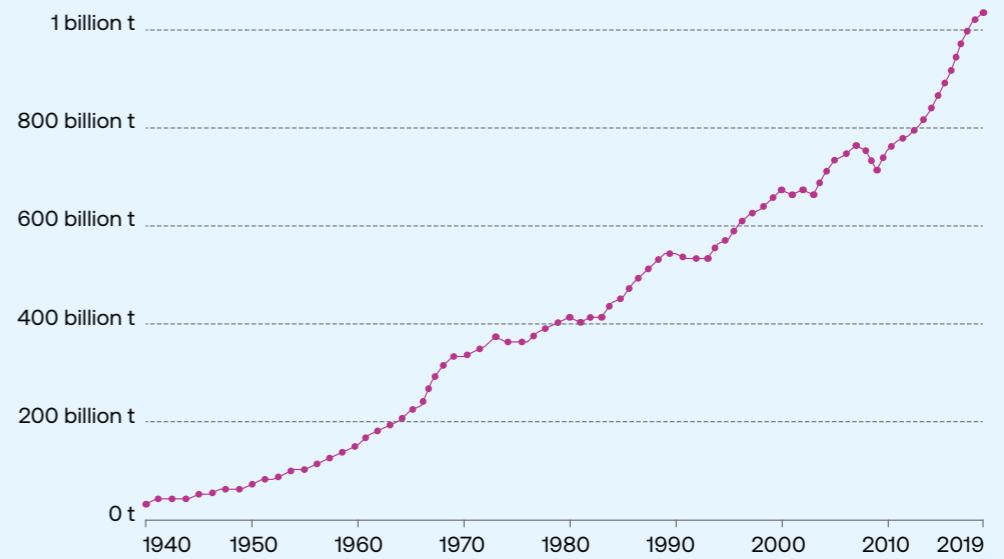
Why environmental standards matter

Today, aviation is among the largest contributors to the global carbon footprint. Each flight on a standard airliner releases as much CO₂ into the atmosphere as one car does in an entire year. The main culprit is aviation kerosene — a fuel without which air travel is still unimaginable. CO₂ is a greenhouse gas: it traps heat in the atmosphere and accelerates global climate change. We already feel the effects in everyday life — abnormal

heat, water shortages, more frequent natural disasters, and increasingly polluted air.

But emissions are only part of the story. Airports themselves are enormous consumers of resources. To operate a single major aviation hub requires as much energy and water as tens of thousands of households. Added to this are noise pollution, disruption of bird and animal migration routes, and various forms of environmental contamination.

GLOBAL CO₂ EMISSIONS FROM AVIATION, 1940 TO 2019



Data source: Pre-1990 data from Lee et al. (2021); 1990 onwards from Bergero et al. (2023)
Note: Does not include non-CO₂ forcings, and additional warming impacts at altitude.



Elena Smirnova
Lead Environmental Engineer at Tashkent International Airport named after Islam Karimov

“We view environmental responsibility as a strategic priority,” Elena emphasizes. “From daily resource monitoring to the introduction of modern technologies and the creation of new green spaces, every step matters.”

To understand how Uzbekistan is addressing these challenges, we spoke with Elena Smirnova, Lead Environmental Engineer at Tashkent International Airport named after Islam Karimov. She emphasized that the airport strictly adheres to the country’s environmental protection laws and is consistently working to minimize its ecological impact. For example, the airport fulfills its obligations to offset harmful atmospheric emissions by transferring funds to the state budget, which are then allocated to environmental projects.

Special attention is paid to water resources. The airport not only monitors the volume of drinking water consumed but also ensures its rational use: water is not used for watering greenery, washing equipment or vehicles, or for any other non-regulated purposes.

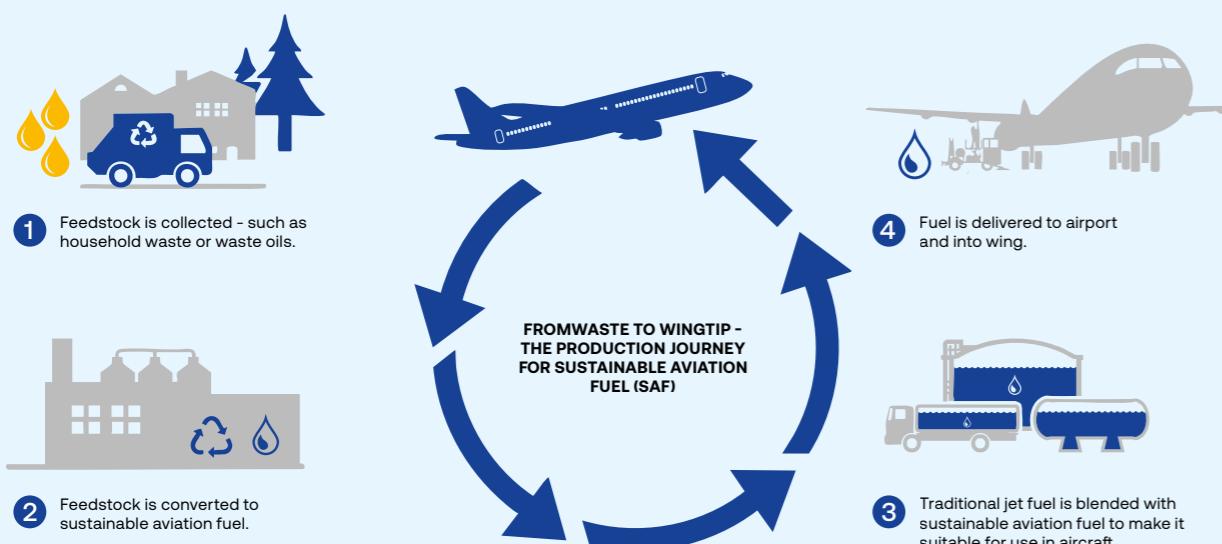
Preserving and expanding green zones is another key priority. The airport maintains existing plantings and continuously develops new ones. This includes regular treatment of plants against diseases and insects, inspections and irrigation, and a requirement that during reconstruction projects at least 25% of the area be dedicated to greenery. A green park has even been created near the international terminal.

Significant progress has also been made in waste management: mercury-containing lamps have been replaced with eco-friendly LED lighting. The airport's vehicle fleet is gradually being renewed – outdated vehicles are being phased out and replaced with electric models, reducing overall emissions.

An important part of the airport's environmental work is collaboration with airlines. Through careful scheduling of arrivals and departures, noise levels are reduced. Additionally, the adoption of new international-standard aviation fuels with lower emissions helps minimize the environmental impact of takeoffs and landings.



HOW IS SUSTAINABLE AVIATION FUEL MADE?



Using SAF can reduce lifecycle carbon emissions by up to 80% compared to the traditional jet fuel it replaces.

Who Sets the Rules?

Environmental standards cover everything – from noise levels and flight paths to aircraft design and fuel quality. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), established under the United Nations in 1944, develops these standards and monitors compliance. Uzbekistan has been among its member states since 1992.

In 2016, ICAO adopted new requirements for jet and turboprop aircraft: fewer harmful emissions without reducing flight performance. Fuel also receives special attention. Kerosene is gradually giving way to SAF – sustainable aviation fuel – produced from renewable sources such as recycled cooking oil. The reduction in emissions is impressive: up to 80 percent less carbon compared to conventional jet fuel.

Another global mechanism is the CORSIA program, which operates on a principle of "eco-exchange." If an airline exceeds its emissions cap, it must purchase

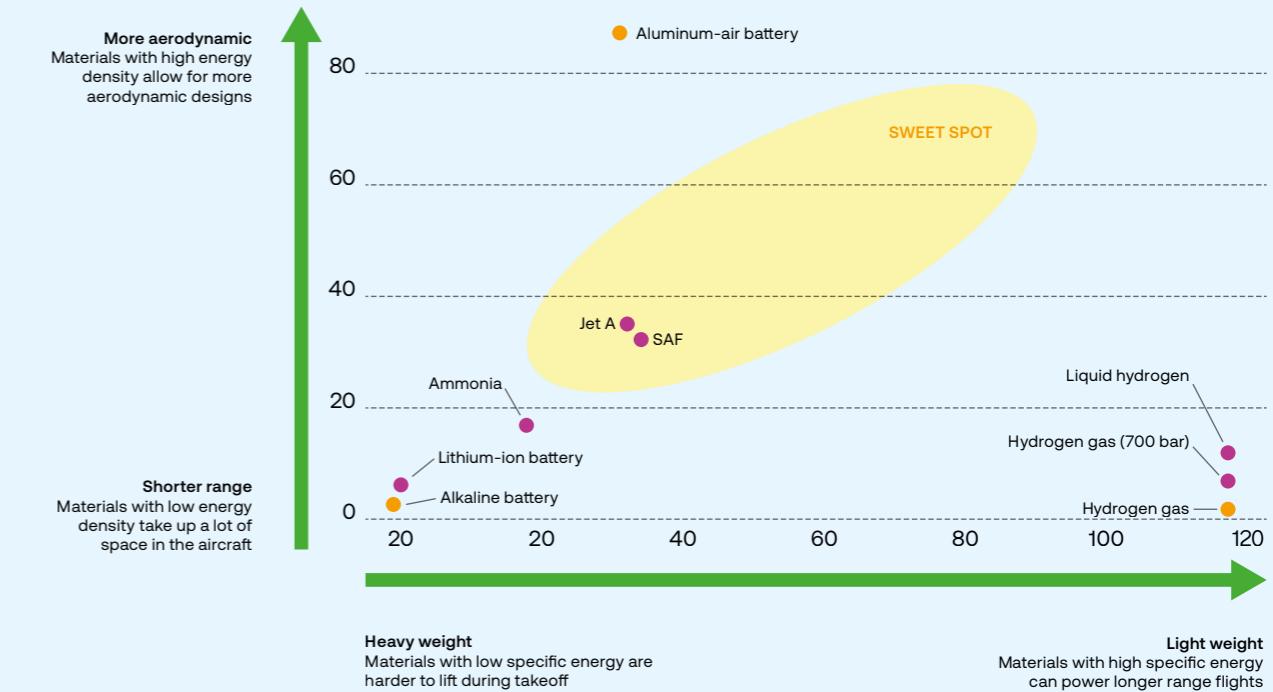
carbon credits, with the proceeds directed to environmental initiatives ranging from forest restoration to supporting green energy.

What's happening on the ground?

The environmental transformation in aviation doesn't end in the skies – much is happening right at the airports themselves. Energy-saving systems are helping cut gas and water consumption, LED lighting is replacing outdated energy-hungry lamps, and airport vehicle fleets are increasingly switching to electric power. To reduce noise pollution, flight approach routes are being redesigned, sound-absorbing materials are used in terminals, and new landing-gear designs are helping make aircraft quieter during takeoff and landing.

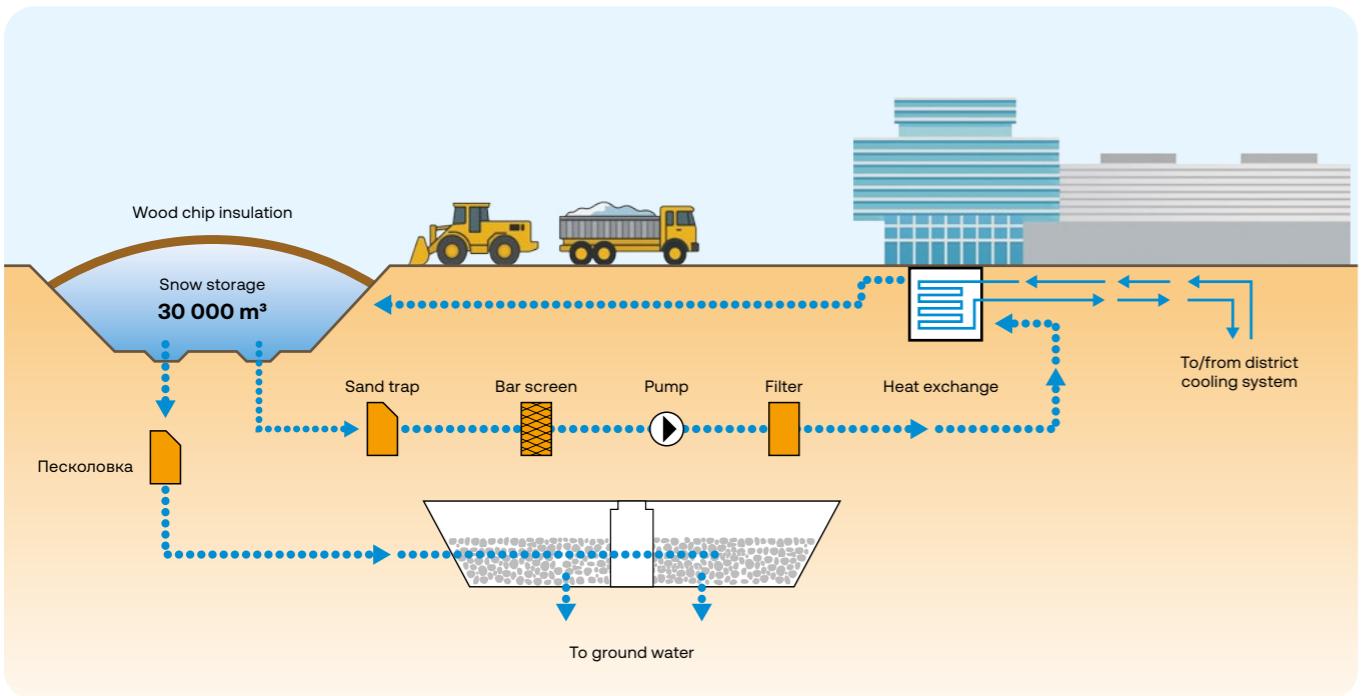
Yet even the most "green" initiatives have their critics. Environmentalists and civil organizations accuse the CORSIA program of being overly formal – instead

SPECIFIC ENERGY AND ENERGY DENSITY OF COMMONLY USED ENERGY SOURCES



Who's leading the way?

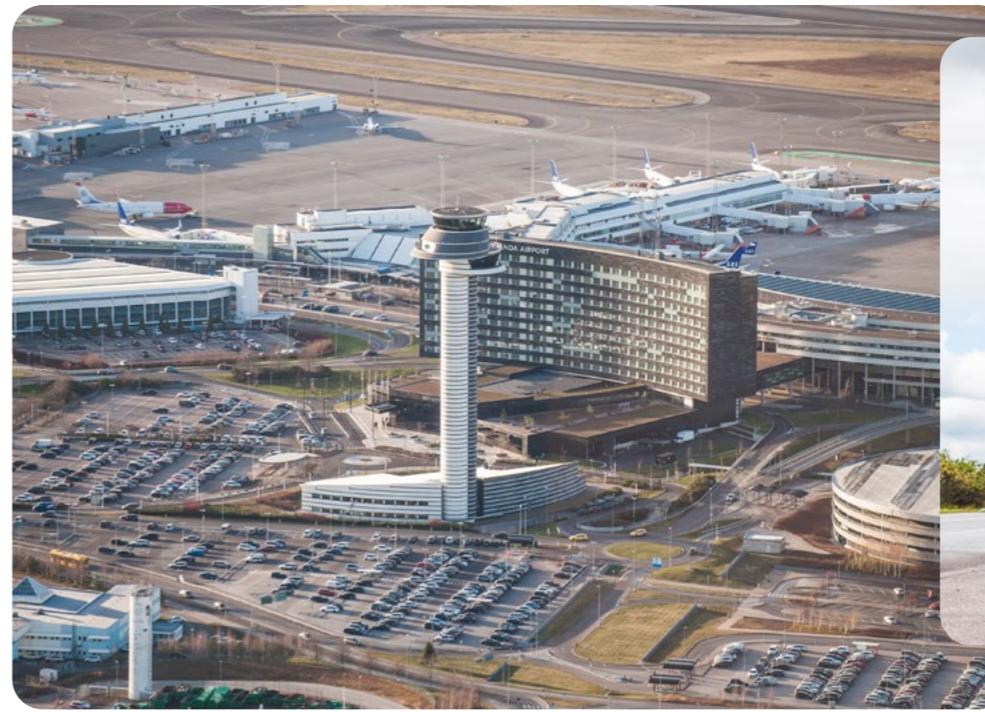
Despite the challenges, progress is undeniable. Today, more than 640 airports around the world participate in emission reduction programs – that's already 55% of global passenger traffic. Some have even achieved full carbon neutrality: 14 airports in total, with 13 located in Europe and one in New Zealand. Others are steadily moving toward that goal – including airports in Dallas (USA), the Galápagos Islands (Ecuador), Cape Town (South Africa), Australia, Oman, and four locations across India. The Nordic countries, as always, remain at the forefront of ecological innovation. Sustainability in aviation is not a passing trend – it's a genuine response to the challenges facing our planet. The journey is far from easy, yet airports are becoming the laboratories of the future, testing the very technologies that will determine the quality of the air we breathe tomorrow.



Oslo, Norway

The airport's terminal was built using recycled steel, and the concrete used in construction was made more sustainable by adding volcanic ash, which significantly reduced its carbon footprint. But the most impressive innovation is the snow-based cooling system. In winter, autonomous snow collectors gather snow from the runways and store it in large underground reservoirs. During the summer, this "natural air conditioner" is used to cool terminal buildings without additional energy consumption.

The results speak for themselves: CO₂ emissions have been reduced by 31 tons per year, and energy use has dropped by 2 GWh.



Stockholm, Sweden

Stockholm Arlanda Airport was among the first in the world to achieve carbon neutrality. Its runways are made with low-carbon concrete, and the air around the terminal is purified through photocatalytic membranes that break down pollutants. Even the ground transportation here runs sustainably – buses and taxis are powered by biogas.

Engineers also developed a creative climate-control system that uses groundwater from underground wells. In summer, it cools the buildings; in winter, it provides heating – all powered by eco-friendly biofuel.



Zurich, Switzerland

Zurich Airport has managed to cut harmful emissions by more than half, and following a major terminal reconstruction planned for completion by 2030, that number is expected to increase even further.

The secret lies in a comprehensive sustainability approach. Photovoltaic systems installed at gates and parking areas help purify the air, while water resources are treated as a renewable asset. Domestic wastewater is purified, rainwater is reused, and the fluids from de-icing operations are recycled through a unique technology: special microorganisms break down solid residues, returning the cleaned water to the system.

Changi, Singapore

Changi is widely recognized as one of the greenest airports in the world. Its gardens and waterfalls do more than beautify the space – they cool the air naturally, purify it, and create a microclimate of their own. Energy efficiency is ensured by solar panels and smart lighting systems, while rainwater and greywater are collected and reused through advanced filtration processes.

For travelers, this green philosophy can be felt everywhere – from the quiet of low-noise takeoffs to the pleasant coolness of the terminals, where eco-ventilation systems replace heavy air conditioning. Changi continues its steady journey toward full carbon neutrality, showing that an airport can be not just concrete and steel, but a living, breathing ecosystem.



Incheon, South Korea

Incheon is often called a “smart airport” – not only for its digital technologies but also for its integrated eco-architecture. Terminals are heated and cooled using geothermal energy, rooftops are covered with solar panels, and green belts around runways help reduce noise and purify the air.

Transportation is also at the heart of its sustainability plan: the airport’s bus and service vehicle fleet runs on electricity and hydrogen, while indoor gardens and parks serve not just as decoration but as natural oxygen generators. By 2040, Incheon aims to achieve net-zero emissions, turning one of East Asia’s busiest hubs into a model of sustainable infrastructure for the future. ➔

WHAT THE
INSTRUMENTS
DON'T TELL YOU

For a passenger, air is the endless expanse beyond the window. For a pilot, it's a living element with its own temperament — calm and friendly one moment, capricious and stormy the next. We met with two pilots — Ilya Kostyulin and Boris Kochubey. Ilya flies passenger "Airbus" aircraft for Centrum Air, while Boris pilots "Boeing" cargo jets for My Freighter. With genuine sincerity and deep love for their profession, they spoke about whether it's possible to foresee a thunderstorm "by eye", why a soft landing isn't always a good thing, and what it means to feel the airplane with your whole body.

C: It seems to us that air is not just an element but also an information field that pilots constantly have to "read." And this brings us to the concept of "situational awareness". Could you explain what that means?

B: It's mostly about the ability to forecast. For example, if you see an anticyclone on the weather chart, you already know the weather will be good.

I: It may sound like pure physics, but in reality, it's much more complex — it involves experience, knowledge, and even intuition. I know pilots with over ten thousand flight hours who can tell just by looking which cloud will cause turbulence and which won't. Or take "hidden thunderstorms." We're flying, and I suggest one route. My colleague says, "No, there'll be lightning there." The radar shows nothing — the mountains are blocking the signal. We climb higher — and sure enough, there's a storm front ahead. I ask, "Arthur, how did you know?" He just shrugs: "I just knew." That's experience.

B: I think that's knowledge that has turned into intuition — things learned so deeply that you no longer think about them; you just act.

I: Exactly. There are four stages of a pilot's professional growth. The first is unconscious incompetence — when you don't even know what you don't know. The second is conscious incompetence — when you realize what you can't do. The third is conscious competence — when you can do something and understand how it works. And the fourth is unconscious competence — when you do everything correctly automatically, without thinking.

But it's precisely this fourth stage that can be dangerous: if a pilot stops working on themselves, they begin to lose their skill and may gradually slip back into incompetence. And then they have to go through the entire cycle of development all over again.

In general, you always need to stay two steps ahead. A novice often doesn't even realize what's happening to the aircraft at any given moment. Especially on the Airbus — its logic of mode transitions is quite complex. You won't understand it until you see it for yourself. The first time, your situational awareness is zero. The second time, you start to grasp what's going on. That's how the knowledge base grows, and over time the pilot becomes ready for any turn of events.

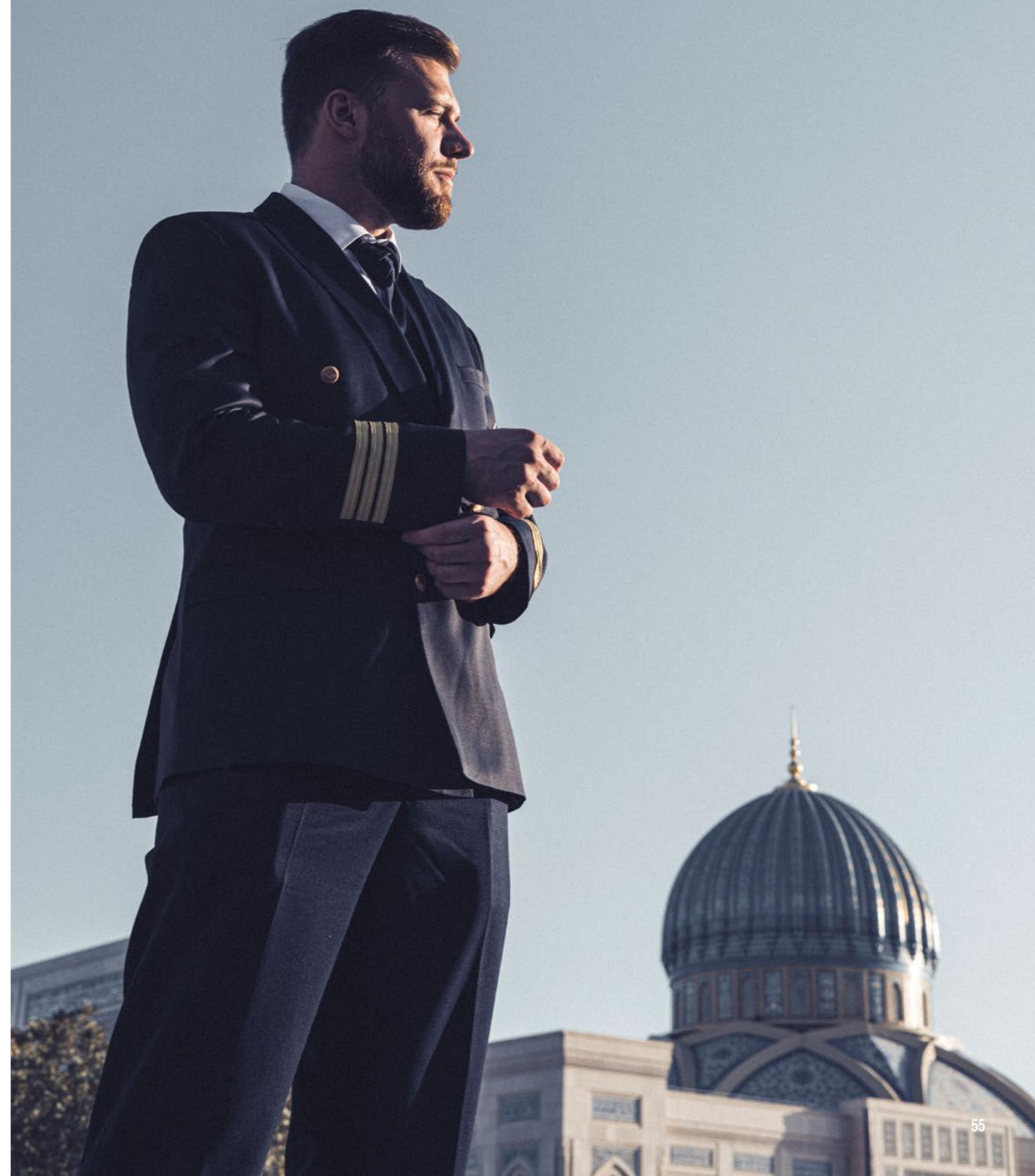
For example, there's this thing with the fire alarm activation. Truck drivers wouldn't get it.

B: What thing?

I: Sometimes someone decides to smoke in the lavatory, and the smoke detector goes off — it makes exactly the same sound as an engine fire alarm. The aircraft starts screaming: "ding-ding-ding!", and a warning lights up on the screen.

Imagine: it's night, just the two of you in the cockpit, hyper-focused — several cups of coffee in, surrounded by darkness. And suddenly — that alarm. If it's the fifth time during the flight someone's lit up, you calmly think, "Oh, here we go again..." But for a young pilot, facing that scenario for the first time, you can read a whole range of emotions on their face.

Ed. note: Dear passengers, please don't smoke in the lavatories. For pilots, your little puff sounds like a fire — with sirens and flashing red lights. Spare their nerves.





IF A PILOT STOPS WORKING ON THEMSELVES, THEY BEGIN TO LOSE THEIR SKILL AND MAY GRADUALLY SLIP BACK INTO INCOMPETENCE



C.: When an aircraft descends, from the outside it looks like a smooth glide through the sky — but behind that beauty lies precise geometry. Could you explain in simple terms what a glide path is?

B.: Simply put, a glide path is the approach trajectory — the “corridor” along which an aircraft descends toward the runway. The standard angle today is 3 degrees. In the USSR, it used to be 2.6.

C.: Why did it change?

I.: First, modern aircraft are faster. Second, buildings have gotten taller. Where a 2.6-degree angle was once enough, we now need 3 degrees. Sometimes the angle also depends on the terrain. In Trabzon, for example, the approach from the sea is at 3.5 degrees. I've heard there's

even a 5-degree approach somewhere in Europe. That means the vertical descent rate will be around 1,200 feet per minute (*Ed. note: 6 meters per second*), compared to the usual 800 feet — quite demanding for the pilot.

B.: Yes, similar approaches can be found in Austria too.

C.: So the steeper the angle, the more difficult the landing?

I.: Exactly. At 3.5 degrees, you have to pull the control column almost fully back during the flare. At such airports, the goal isn't a “soft” landing but a precise one. In Trabzon, there's no time for a graceful flare — the task is different: to touch down exactly where you should. If you stretch out the flare for too long, you might overshoot the touchdown zone. So as soon as you see the “piano keys” — that's your cue to land.

C: What is a “piano keys”?

I: It refers to the touchdown markings – those white rectangular stripes on the runway, like road markings. They indicate exactly where the aircraft should make contact with the runway. If the pilot keeps flaring too long in pursuit of a smooth landing, they’ll “eat up” part of the runway. That means there’s less distance left for braking, and that’s dangerous. In Trabzon, for instance, the runway is short and ends with a drop straight into the sea. If you run out of remaining distance, there’s nowhere to go but into the water. So yes, a smooth landing is nice – but in difficult conditions, precision and safety matter much more.

C: What’s more difficult for you — takeoff or landing?

B: Landing, of course. It’s the most challenging phase of flight. Statistically, that’s when most incidents occur. If something goes wrong, we have to go around, make another approach – and keep doing that until we’re safely on the ground.

I: Yes, from a piloting standpoint, landing is definitely more complex. But sometimes takeoffs come with such strong crosswinds, turbulence, or low visibility that they can easily rival any landing.

C: If we put instruments aside — how does your perception of the air itself change over the years?

B: Over time you start noticing details that used to slip by. For example, a drop in pressure always signals that bad weather is coming. When the pressure rises, it means good weather is on the way.

I: Right, but we don’t feel the pressure – we see it. The standard value is 1013 hectopascals, and every half hour we listen to the weather broadcast: 1012, then 1011, 1010... That tells us pressure is falling – clouds, rain, all that “beauty” is on its way. If it’s rising, it means clear skies ahead.

C: What parameters do you take into account before and during the flight?

I: Quite a few – cloud cover, visibility, wind, pressure, temperature. We don’t directly measure air density, but we understand its effect. In winter, the aircraft performs better – the air is denser, more “lift-friendly.” In summer, the air is hotter and thinner, which can cause performance issues.

B: Exactly. Plus, there are temperature-related limitations. For instance, in hot weather, we reduce engine thrust during takeoff to preserve engine life.

I: There’s also the issue of brake overheating. On Airbus aircraft operating in hot climates – especially where

there are no brake fans installed – you have to carefully monitor brake temperature before takeoff. The limit is 300 degrees.

B: On our aircraft, when it’s really hot, we don’t retract the landing gear immediately after takeoff.

I: Ours actually issues a warning – if the brakes overheat, the system may “recommend” extending the landing gear again. That’s because if the temperature exceeds 300 degrees and there’s a hydraulic fluid leak, it could ignite. So the system constantly monitors brake temperature to prevent that.

C: What causes the brakes to heat up?

B: Even before takeoff, the aircraft has to taxi to the runway. During taxiing we often need to brake, and that’s when the heating starts.

I: Borya, what’s the maximum takeoff weight of your aircraft?

B: About 185 tons.

I: And for the Airbus A330, it’s around 230 tons. Imagine the force required! The brake system works much like a car’s – you press the pedals, and the pads clamp onto the disc. But here everything is carbon, and the friction is enormous. After landing, brake temperatures can reach 500-600 degrees Celsius. There are also safety fuses: if the temperature rises to 925 degrees, the tire pressure relief system activates. That prevents the tire from exploding, because the internal pressure is extremely high – and if it bursts, the consequences can be fatal.

C: Are there no cooling systems?

B: There are, but not on every aircraft. On the A330, for example, brake fans are an optional feature.

I: Some A320s have them, but the A321 doesn’t. In one of the airlines I used to fly for, none of the aircraft had them – simply because they weren’t needed. But for operations in places like Saudi Arabia or Dubai, they’re absolutely essential!

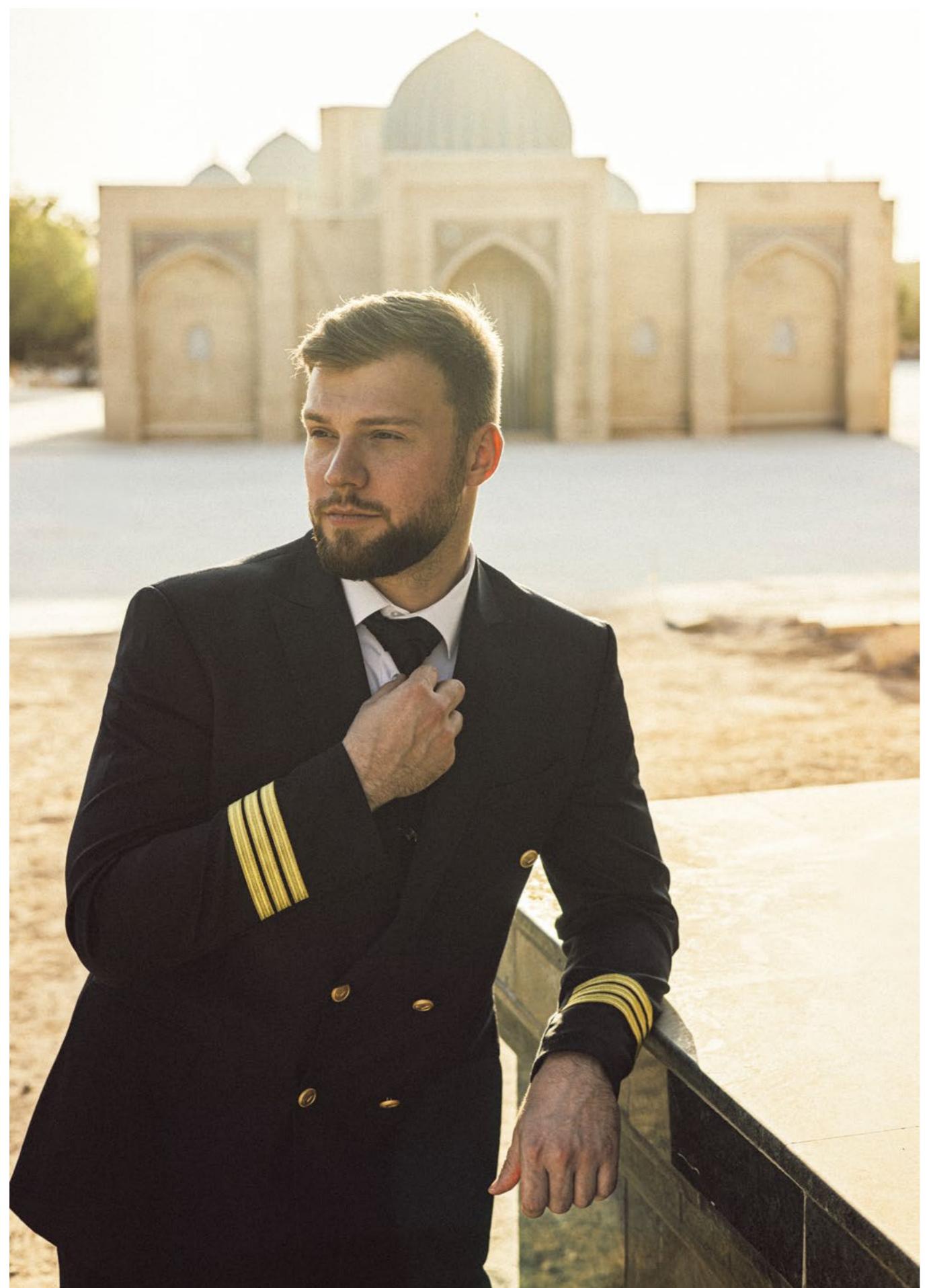
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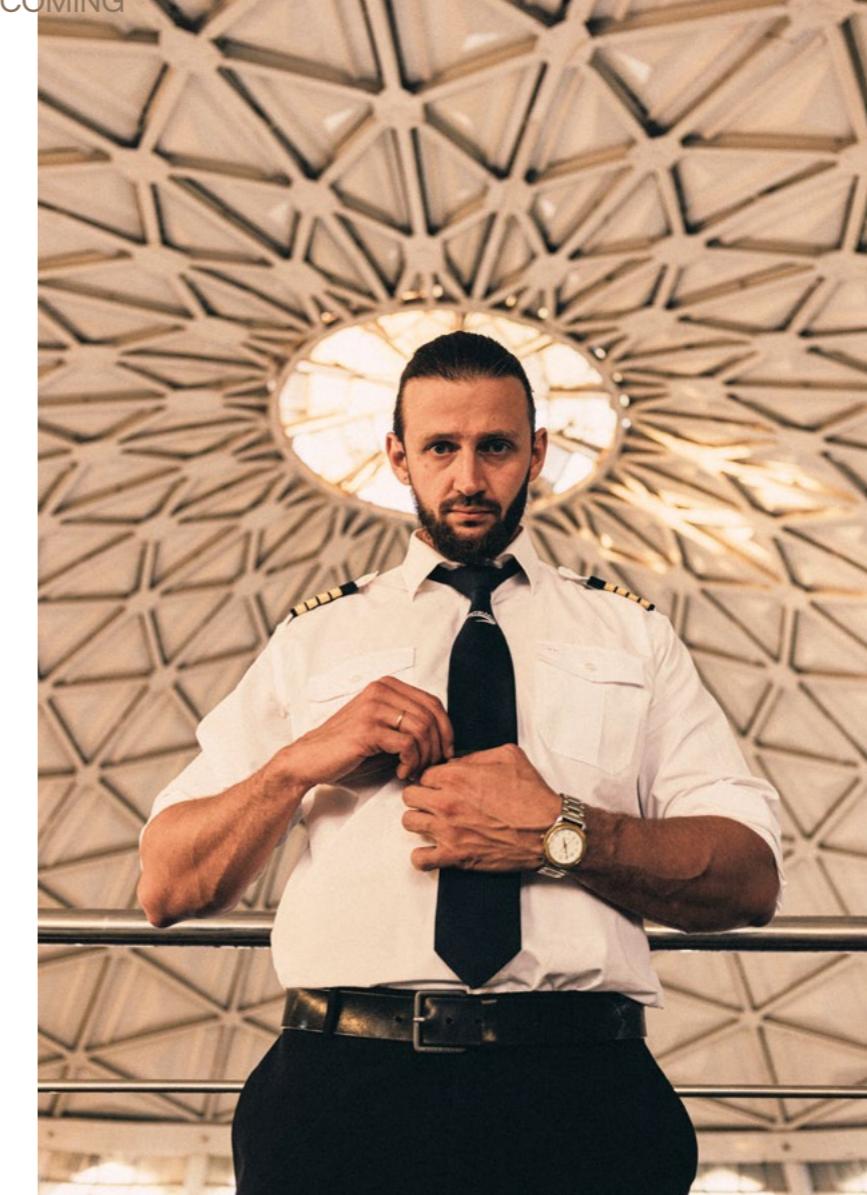
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C.: How does a crosswind affect takeoff roll?

I.: Let me explain with an example. The aircraft begins its takeoff roll, and the wind is coming from the right. Because of the weathercock effect, the nose starts turning into the wind. To keep the aircraft aligned with the runway, we apply an opposing force – use the rudder. By pressing the left pedal, the rudder turns the aircraft back, keeping it running straight down the centerline.

C: And which instrument readings are the most critical for you?

I: First and foremost – the indicated airspeed, then altitude and vertical speed. All of that appears on the Primary Flight Display, the main screen in front of the pilot that shows the key flight parameters.

B: If we put it in traditional terms, there's what's called the "six pack" – the six essential flight instruments. They include airspeed, the artificial horizon (showing the aircraft's attitude), altimeter, heading indicator, turn coordinator, and the vertical speed indicator, which shows the rate of climb or descent.

C: How much do you rely on navigation systems? Is it possible to fully trust automation when there's zero visibility?

I: Yes, modern systems make that possible. For instance, during a Category III approach – known as CAT III – the aircraft can land even in zero visibility. In this mode, the Instrument Landing System (ILS) guides the airplane along the localizer and glideslope all the way to the runway. It's the highest level of automation.

B: But it's important to understand that we still monitor every parameter of the approach. The responsibility always remains with the pilots, and often such automatic landings can actually be more demanding than landing the aircraft manually.

C: Does it ever happen that your intuition warns you before the instruments do?

B. (smiles): Of course. It's when you literally feel a sink with your body before the instruments even react. You just sense that the aircraft is starting to "fall through."

I: In that case, you gently pull the sidestick toward yourself to bring the aircraft back onto the glide path. That's something no simulator can truly replicate: first, you feel it physically, and only then see it on the instruments. But even with a sink, it's usually something you can anticipate. What's really unexpected, though, are lightning strikes. I haven't personally experienced one, but some of my colleagues have flown through areas of strong electrical activity.

B: Yes, it's beautiful but sudden. Once in China, during an approach, a bright blue flash appeared right in front of the nose.

THEORY IS IMPORTANT, BUT IT DOESN'T WORK WITHOUT PRACTICE. ONCE YOU'VE FELT SOMETHING, YOU RECOGNIZE IT INSTANTLY THE NEXT TIME

I: Sometimes plasma even builds up on the cockpit windshield. You know those toys where little lightning bolts appear when you bring your finger close? It looks about the same. But it's just a visual effect – it can't disable the systems.

C: Have you ever encountered anything unusual?

I: Yes, once – a temperature inversion in Astana. Normally, the temperature drops with altitude, but that time it actually increased. On the ground it was -30°C, and on the glide path it was -15°C. I didn't even know that could happen. Since then, I always check the temperature – if I see an anomaly, I brace for turbulence, because that time it shook us really hard.

C: And where does this ability to sense the invisible come from?

I: From experience. Theory is important, but it doesn't work without practice. Once you've felt something, you recognize it instantly the next time.

B: Yes, once you've flown through a thunderstorm, you'll never go in there again.

I: A good pilot always "flies ahead of the aircraft." We're constantly predicting two steps ahead.

C: What role does interaction with the other pilot play during a flight? Do differences in perception ever occur?

B: They do. For example, there's the illusion of a false bank. I've been experiencing that quite often lately.

I: In such cases, the cockpit windshield can create an angled perspective: one pilot may feel the plane is banking right, the other – left, even though it's actually flying straight. Another illusion can happen because of runway heat haze – when hot air rises above the ground, it creates a mirage effect, and you can't clearly see where the runway ends. I saw this recently in Dushanbe. You know, the aviation community today emphasizes how critical communication skills are. You must be able to "read" your colleague: if you notice something's off, don't be afraid to ask if everything's okay – and, if needed, take over. Openness between pilots in the cockpit is extremely important. In 2013, there was a tragic incident. A senior captain was asked to fly on a Saturday with a young co-pilot. He was clearly displeased and spent the entire flight criticizing and lecturing him. After about two hours, the young pilot completely shut down. Then, due to poor visibility, they were denied landing clearance. The instructor argued with the dispatcher, became very agitated, and – according to the investigation – suffered a stroke at around 200 meters altitude. He died in flight. The co-pilot, terrified after being humiliated the entire time, froze and failed to act. The aircraft drifted off the safe trajectory – and crashed.







HOME IS SIMPLE: A PLACE WHERE YOU'RE LOVED, AWAITED, AND CAN FINALLY SLEEP

B.: Yes, aircraft technology today is extremely reliable, but the human factor remains the most vulnerable one.

C.: Let's talk about what scares passengers the most — turbulence. What types of it do you distinguish?

I.: There are several. The simplest one is thermal turbulence — it occurs when the ground heats up, warm air rises, and the aircraft starts shaking. Then there's jet-stream turbulence — at higher altitudes, where powerful air currents collide. And, of course, the most well-known type is the one caused by cumulonimbus clouds.

B.: Yes, those clouds — we call them Cb, short for cumulonimbus — bring the most serious surprises. Inside them, enormous masses of water move vertically, creating powerful updrafts, downdrafts, and electrical discharges.

I.: Imagine this: tens of tons of water moving up and down inside a cloud, energy redistributing, the charge building up — and suddenly, lightning. That charge has to go somewhere — either into the ground or, sometimes, into the airplane. That's why we always try to avoid such clouds.

And then there's clear air turbulence. You're flying smoothly at 10 kilometers, not a single cloud around. Once, I was having lunch — a Greek salad and a cup of olive oil on the table. First a light shake, then calm again. And suddenly, the cup flips in the air, oil splashes over the documents, the autopilot disconnects. A few seconds later — silence. No one understood what had just happened. Boris, tell us something else.

B.: You're so good at this.

I.: (turning to the interviewer) He's wild, you know — out there in his trucks. Boris, at least talk to a person for once. You only ever talk to the boxes you haul.

C.: Do you perceive the air as a living environment at all?

B.: Honestly? No. For us, it's a working environment. But there's beauty up there, of course. The northern lights, the "shadow of the Earth" — when the sunset is behind you, the clouds turn purple, and ahead it's already night. And thunderstorms seen from afar — that's a mesmerizing sight.

C.: Have you ever had any funny incidents during flights?

B.: You know, passengers regularly mistake the cockpit door for the restroom. We see it on the camera — it's hilarious every time. Do they really think we're sitting in a little side room?

I.: I sometimes ran into celebrities waiting in line for the restroom. We'd exchange a few words — it was unexpectedly pleasant.

C.: It's well known that aviation has its own culture — habits, small rituals, superstitions. Do you have any personal traditions before or after a flight?

B.: I don't, though many of my colleagues are quite superstitious.

I.: I do! For example, I never fly wearing new clothes until they've "flown" with me unworn. We never use the word "last." And yes, I always pat the airplane before and after the flight.

C.: If you could take anyone into the cockpit with you, who would you invite?

I.: We're not allowed to take anyone without authorization, so I don't even imagine it.

B.: Hypothetically, I'd take my parents and my fiancée.

C.: Finally, I'd like to ask — after thousands of kilometers in the air, what does "home" mean to you?

I.: Home is where you can fall asleep peacefully.

B.: It may sound simple, but for me — it's the place where you're loved and awaited. ➔

THE ARCHITECTURE OF AIR: BRIDGES, TOWERS, AND SKYWAYS

Read this piece carefully if you're afraid of heights: we've gathered the most breathtaking landmarks from around the world. Let's explore how bridges became national treasures — and how cable cars and sky-high attractions have been climbing higher and higher over the years.



“AIRBORNE” LANDMARKS: FROM BRIDGES TO SKYSCRAPERS



The first place on this list rightfully belongs to a structure that seems the simplest of all — the bridge. Originally, bridges were purely functional parts of urban infrastructure: they connected streets and settlements or served as strategic crossings during wartime.

Over time, however, practicality gave way to symbolism. Today, many bridges have become the calling cards of major tourist cities — think of London's gothic-style [① Tower Bridge](#), rising an impressive 240 meters high.

Other icons include San Francisco's [② Golden Gate Bridge](#) and New York's [③ Brooklyn Bridge](#) — true film stars that have appeared countless times in opening scenes and episodes of early 2000s TV shows.

Most of the world's tallest modern bridges are found in China — and the reason is simple: geography. To develop infrastructure in mountainous terrain, engineers are forced to span vast gorges. The undisputed record holder is the [④ Huaijiang Canyon suspension bridge](#) in Guizhou Province, soaring 625 meters above the Beipan River.



Skyscrapers with observation decks are no less breathtaking. The idea seems simple: the higher the building, the stronger the emotions. Yet even here, there's room for creativity. On the 103rd floor of Chicago's ① [Willis Tower](#) – the tallest building in the United States – four glass balconies allow visitors to literally “float” 412 meters above the ground. The skyscraper is also a movie favorite, featured in *Brother 2* (2000), *Divergent* (2014), *Jupiter Ascending* (2015), and several *Transformers* films.

Singapore took things even further. The world-famous ② [SkyPark](#) features the Infinity Pool – its edge seamlessly merges with the building's rim, creating the illusion that the water flows straight into the sky. The height of this breathtaking viewing deck is about 200 meters.

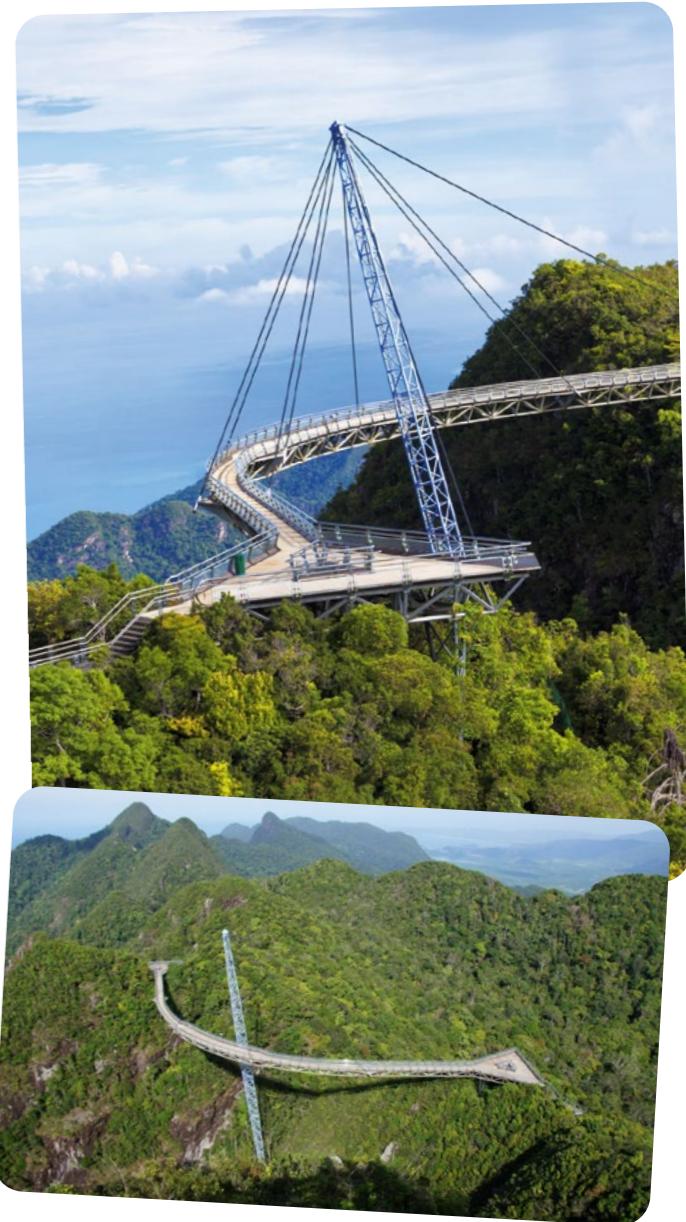
And for those seeking a more “natural” version of high-altitude adventure, there's the ③ [Gulmarg cable car](#) in India. It carries travelers from 2,000 meters up to nearly 4,000, unveiling stunning panoramic views of the Himalayas – the kind that make you forget to breathe.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD'S MOST BREATHTAKING LANDMARKS

Langkawi Sky Bridge, Malaysia

Suspended 700 meters above sea level, the Langkawi Sky Bridge is held by just a single pylon. Its graceful, curved design creates the thrilling illusion of floating over the abyss. From the bridge, visitors can take in panoramic views of lush rainforests, mountain ridges, the ocean, and even distant islands invisible from the ground.

You can reach this breathtaking spot in three ways: by the Langkawi Cable Car, the inclined SkyGlide elevator, or on foot along scenic mountain trails.



Canton Tower, Guangzhou, China

Canton Tower – the iconic symbol of Guangzhou – is one of the tallest towers in the world, rising to 600 meters. Observation decks begin at 450 meters, and even higher, thrill-seekers will find the Bubble Tram – 16 transparent pods gliding in a circular motion around the tower's crown.

Visitors can step onto a glass floor or venture to the world's highest open-air observation deck, perched at 488 meters. The tower's unique structure of interwoven steel tubes and cables forms a mesmerizing lattice facade – a design that gives the impression the entire building is gently twisting around its axis.



Mahanakhon Tower, Bangkok, Thailand

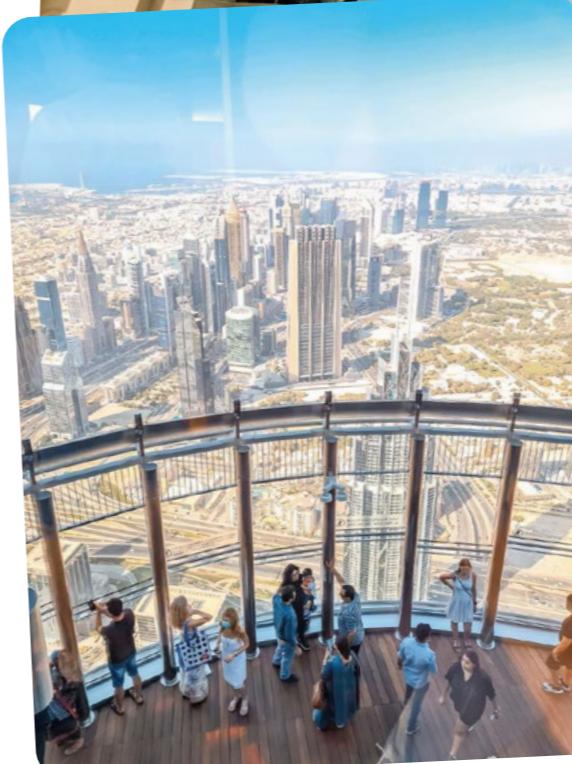
King Power Mahanakhon – the second tallest skyscraper in Bangkok, also known as the “Pixel Tower.” From the outside, it looks as if some of its blocks are missing – like pixels on a loading image.

On the 78th floor, visitors can experience the Skywalk, a glass-floored observation deck reached by a high-speed elevator traveling at 8 meters per second. At the top, guests will also find another highlight – Sky Beach Bar, the highest rooftop bar in Thailand.



Gudauri Cable Car, Georgia

On the northern slopes of Georgia lies the country's most advanced and longest cable car – Kobi-Gudauri. Stretching over 7.5 km, it connects the Cross Pass (2,100 meters) with the upper station at more than 2,900 meters above sea level. Each enclosed cabin accommodates up to 10 passengers, offering a smooth and scenic ascent. Along the way, travelers are treated to sweeping views of the majestic Caucasus Mountains – best admired from above.



Dubai's Sky-High Attractions, UAE

Dubai is the true capital of height records. It's home to Burj Khalifa – the tallest building in the world. On the 124th and 125th floors lies At The Top, an observation deck 555 meters above the ground, where visitors can enjoy panoramic city views, an interactive tour, fine dining, or a stylish bar.

Another record-breaking attraction is Ain Dubai – the world's tallest observation wheel (210 meters). Its spacious, air-conditioned cabins come equipped with interactive screens displaying city information. They can even be rented for private events – complete with a personal butler.

UZBEKISTAN'S "AIRBORNE" LANDMARKS



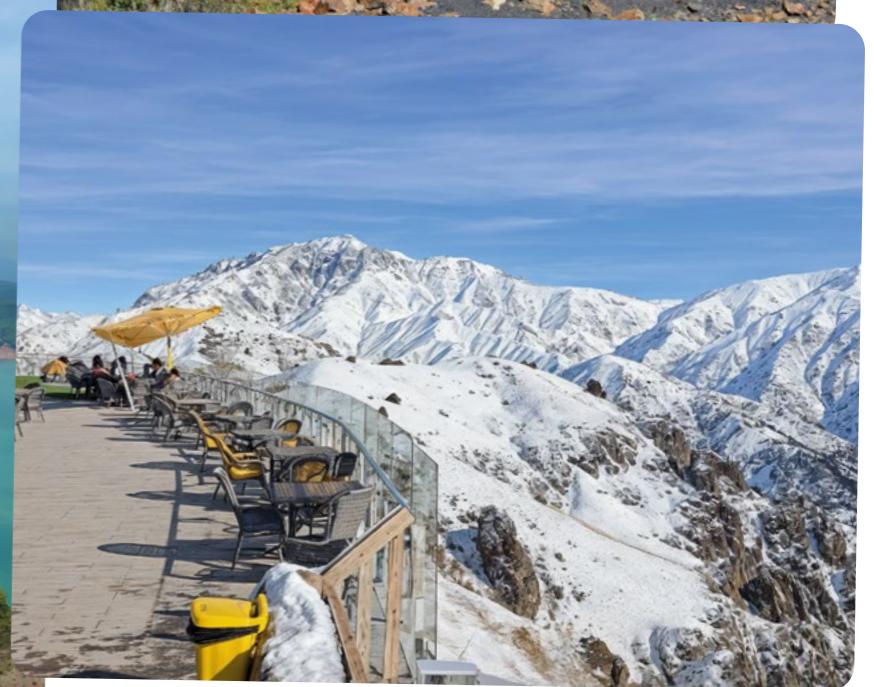
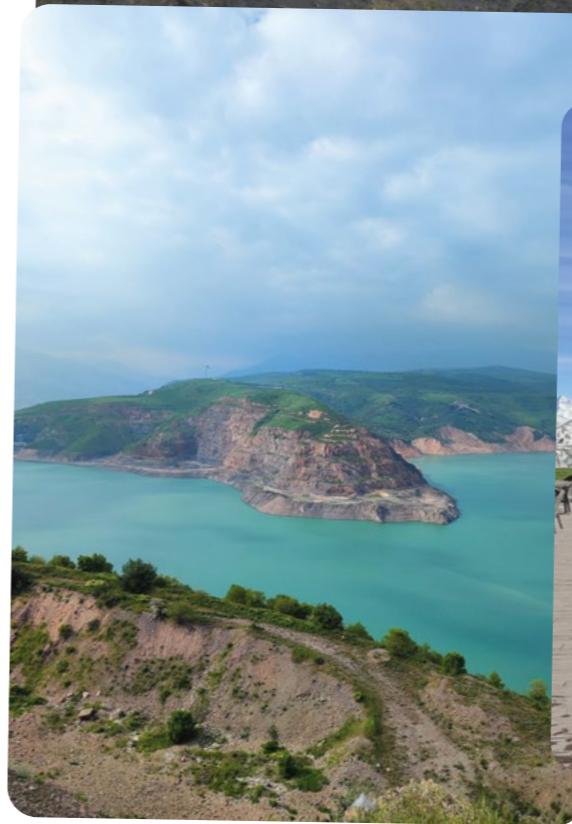
Tashkent TV Tower Observation Deck

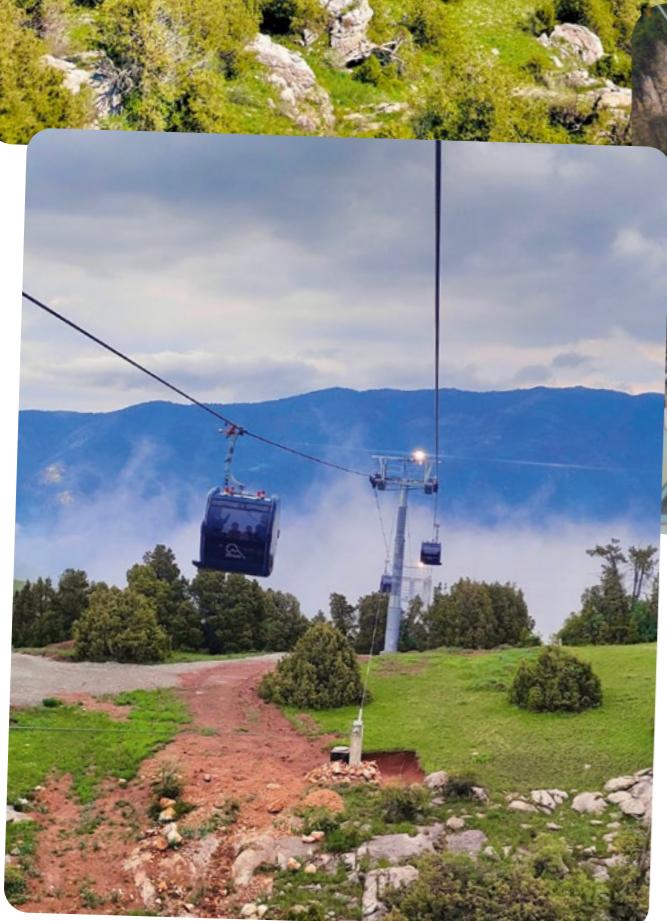
The crown jewel of Tashkent's skyline, the Tashkent TV Tower, rises 375 meters high – making it the tallest structure in Central Asia. From its observation deck at 110 meters, visitors can take in breathtaking panoramic views of the capital.

Beyond the stunning scenery, guests can enjoy a guided tour of the tower's lobby – a masterpiece in itself. Designed by artist Abdumalik Bukharbaev, the interior blends Florentine and Roman motifs, with three intricate mosaic panels that give the space a museum-like atmosphere. Tours are held daily.

Charvak and Chimgan: Mountain Viewpoints

The Charvak Reservoir area is dotted with numerous viewing platforms offering spectacular panoramas of mountain ranges and shimmering waters. For hiking enthusiasts, Chimgan and Beldersay boast scenic trails with dizzying viewpoints where the peaks seem to rise straight into the sky.





Zaamin: Suspension Bridge and Cable Car

In the picturesque Zaamin region (Jizzakh province), travelers can find a record-breaking suspension bridge – 150 meters high and 305 meters long, the longest of its kind in Central Asia. The area also features a 2.5 km cable car gliding above pine forests. For thrill-seekers, there's even an extreme jump platform from a height of 150 meters.



Chodak: Mirror Bridges

Another remarkable attraction awaits in Chodak (Namangan Province) – two dazzling mirror bridges stretching 200 and 400 meters long, connecting mountain peaks at around 700 meters above sea level. The transparent surface creates the illusion of walking through the air, while special sections with “cracking glass” visual effects add an extra dose of adrenaline. From here, visitors can admire breathtaking views of mountain rivers, waterfalls, and scenic gorges. ➔

ON THE EDGE OF THE ELEMENTS



He stood atop waves as high as a house — falling, rising, and heading back into the ocean again. Then he would soar through the air, leaping off cliffs and feeling kilometers of emptiness beneath him. Andrey Karr is one of the first Russian big-wave surfers and BASE jumpers — a man for whom movement is a way of life, and the elements are a language of self-discovery.

His life is a balance of adrenaline, silence, and honesty with himself.

We spoke about how he came to extreme sports, what makes fear different from panic, why Nazaré is the Everest of surfing, and why sometimes the dream of a family feels more important than the ocean.



— How did your connection with sports begin? Were you drawn to extreme activities since childhood?

— My whole family are climbers and mountaineers. They went to the mountains, skied, flew paragliders. All of that surrounded me from an early age and felt completely normal. My parents never set out to make me do sports — it was just something I absorbed with my mother's milk. Of course, not everything was bright and easy. Mountaineering is not exactly a pleasant pastime, especially for a child. There were no tragic incidents, but even back then I felt it was a bit too much — so for the next twenty years I didn't even want to think about climbing.

— How did you discover big wave surfing and become the first to do it in Russia?

— To be honest, technically I'm not the very first big wave surfer in Russia. That title probably belongs to Seva Shulgin, who once surfed the Jaws wave in Ha-

waii — off the north shore of Maui. The waves were about eight to ten meters then, and he even made a film about it.

But if we're talking about true big wave — ten meters and higher — then yes, Andrey Ovchinnikov and I were the ones who paved the way for Russian surfing. I first made it to Nazaré in Portugal — home to the biggest waves on the planet — in 2015. At that time, there was a small group of surfers led by Garrett McNamara, who had discovered that wave four years earlier. I was able to learn from them, and Garrett himself taught me how to handle a jet ski in those conditions.

In reality, there's no strict definition of what a "big wave" is. A big wave is when the surf is five meters today, and you're sitting there waiting for a six-meter one. But really, it's not about the height — it's about the inner drive to keep coming back to the ocean again and again, in any weather and any storm.

MY PARENTS NEVER SET OUT TO MAKE ME DO SPORTS – IT WAS JUST SOMETHING I ABSORBED WITH MY MOTHER'S MILK

Photo by Kirill Umrikhin
kirillumrikhin.com



— Do you remember the moment you first decided to take on a 20-meter wave?

— Back in 2008, when I had just started surfing and was studying the legendary spots, I came across Teahupo'o in French Polynesia – and instantly knew that one day I had to ride it.

Then, in 2015, some Norwegian friends of mine were planning a trip to Portugal and invited me along. I had this thought: it's either now or never. So I got on a plane – one-way ticket, 316 euros in my pocket.

Ed. note: Teahupo'o (or Chopu) is a legendary wave. It forms due to a sharp drop in seabed depth and gathers such power that when it breaks, it pulls the water downward – below sea level. Because of the unique bottom shape, the water folds into one massive wall, leaving the reef almost exposed underneath. Surfers call Teahupo'o the heaviest and most dangerous wave on the planet. In 2018, Andrey Carr succeeded in conquering it.

— What do you feel when you're on top of a wave?

— In fact, it's not really about the moment when you're on the wave itself. Sure, there are times when a raging

wall of water is chasing you, and you're really on the edge. But it all begins the moment you head out into the ocean. Waves the size of ten-story buildings roll by, there's no chance of any rescue reaching you here, and your mind instantly switches to the here and now mode – full focus. And once you finally catch the wave, everything else disappears – there's only the moment itself and what's happening within it. You feel every tiny ripple on the surface, the glide of the board, the vibration of the fins – those small blades at the bottom that control speed and maneuverability. Sometimes your eyes see nothing but the point ahead – behind you rises a giant shadow, thousands of tons of water are collapsing, and all that matters is not slipping, not burying the board's nose, not getting thrown off the straps. The main thing is not to fall.

There's a stereotype that extreme athletes live for adrenaline, but that's not true. Nothing happens for the sake of adrenaline – it's just a tool. Its surge activates every human faculty: intellect, body, concentration. Adrenaline isn't the goal; it's the fuel. An essential part, but far from the essence.



— Our issue is dedicated to air. You seem to know more about it than most, having a background in base jumping. What does it feel like when your body leaves the ground and all that's left is air?

— To be honest, it's hard to recall exactly how base jumping felt — I started jumping with a parachute a bit earlier, at fourteen. Even before that, I was inspired by the projects of Valery Rozov, then Dima Kiselev and Dan Linchevskiy (Ed. note: *pioneers of Russian base jumping and various extreme projects, who inspired an entire generation of athletes*). So I didn't really see another path other than base jumping. At sixteen, I started jumping off rusty antennas and buildings in Moscow, and through that experience, everything else in my life essentially followed.

Norway has always been the mecca of base jumping — that's where people truly learned to fly. That's also where proximity flying originated — when you don't fly away from the cliff but glide along the landscape at 200-300 kilometers per hour. Everyone starting out hopes to get there, jump off the Troll Wall, and touch history.

I first got to Norway in 2008 — at the World Base Race, the first-ever wingsuit race (Ed. note: *wingsuit — a special suit with "wings" between arms and legs, allowing a person to glide through the air*). Since then, my life has been closely tied to that country.

To actually take the leap, you don't need anything special — sometimes just one emotionally volatile parent, resulting in a serious lack of self-love and, consequently, a constant need for external validation. But

you only realize that closer to forty. At sixteen, you just have to channel your recklessness into a parachute path. That's how base jumpers are born.

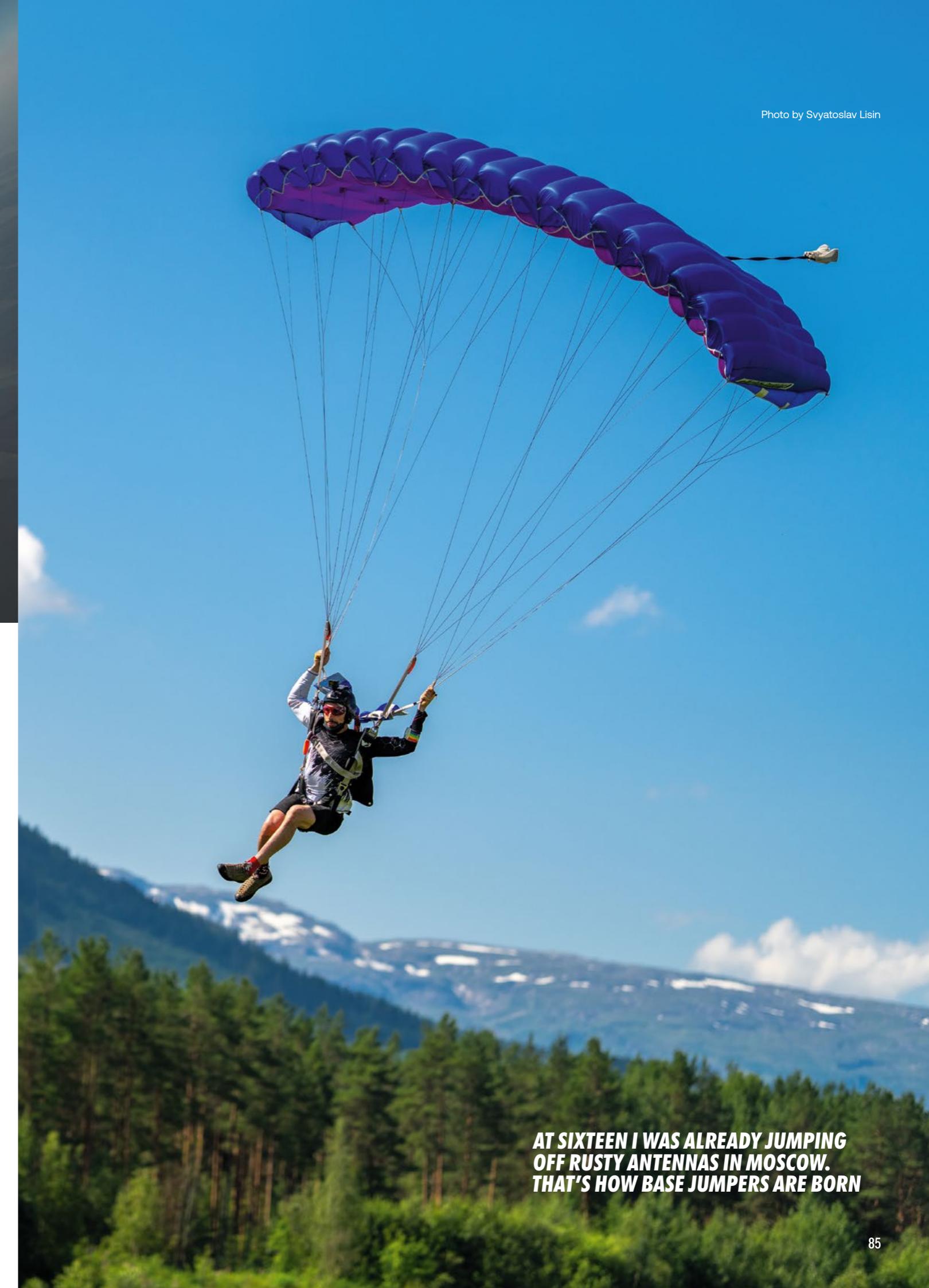
Now I think differently: this sport is worth coming to at sixty, when much is already behind you — you've seen and tried a lot, and you've already made the world a little better. Otherwise — life is at the mercy of the wind. Fifty-fifty chance.

— You've also had experience with highlining — walking on a rope above a sea crevice. How did you decide to try it?

— The idea came to me in Nazaré. At some point, I just thought: why not be the person who does this? I went to "Decathlon", bought a slackline set and set it up in a park. But it was unbearably boring. I went back to the store, grabbed a rope, harness, a couple of carabiners, and went to the cliffs. I had never done highlining before, but I grew up around ropes — for me, that was a familiar environment. That's how my first highline came about. Completely crazy in terms of safety: everything was wrong, but I trusted the ropes.

A friend filmed it, we posted the video, and it blew up: tons of comments, highliners threw stones at me and my approach. I then set up a few more highlines on the cliffs, filmed stories, went live. And then a Portuguese team wrote to me: they offered to help properly install a line on a lighthouse, just so I wouldn't rig anything myself anymore. That's how the project was born.

Photo by Svyatoslav Lisin



AT SIXTEEN I WAS ALREADY JUMPING OFF RUSTY ANTENNAS IN MOSCOW. THAT'S HOW BASE JUMPERS ARE BORN

Photo by Marat Daminov
@maratdaminov



ADRENALINE ISN'T THE GOAL – IT'S THE FUEL



Photo by Aidan Williams
@aidanwilliamsphoto

— Do you feel fear?

— I'm afraid of heights, but with a parachute, I feel very confident. However, fear of water – especially deep water – freezes me. I'm afraid of drowning and of the unknown that lies beneath, in the depths. When you train constantly, confidence gradually takes control over fear. Funny enough, in giant waves, I feel much calmer than, say, swimming across a deep lake, knowing that beneath me is an abyss. With proper training, fear can simply be tucked away, and you only experience it later, back on shore. But it's important to distinguish: there's fear, and there's panic. Fear is good – it mobilizes you, while panic paralyzes. Making friends with fear – that's the real challenge.

— Does your perception of life change after these extreme activities?

— Absolutely. There's a reevaluation of values: you start really thinking about what's important and what isn't. Maybe it's because you voluntarily put yourself on the edge and, for the first time, not only realize but can literally feel how fragile life is. In everyday life, we rarely think about it, but extreme sports quickly bring you back to reality – especially when something tragic happens nearby.

— And if we compare the height of a wave to the height of a building: standing on the roof of a ten-story building and on the crest of a wave of the same height — is it the same feeling?

— Not at all. A wave is like a living mountain. You don't immediately reach the top and fear falling down — it's much scarier to end up in the wrong place. The wave keeps growing and can crash on you, which is far more dangerous than simply falling into water.

When it hits you, you turn into a puppet: it spins you, hits you, drags you down. The sensation is like being in the dark without air, and you never know how long you'll be underwater. In these moments, you can't fight it — you can only relax and convince yourself that you'll make it. No matter how scary it is and how much you want to breathe, sooner or later it will throw you back to the surface.

— Are there training exercises that help prepare for falling off a big wave?

— In this kind of training, it's important to break skills down into separate components: if you practice breath-holding, you develop tolerance to carbon dioxide. You also need to be comfortable with the board. Separately, experience in operating a jet ski is crucial, so you can save your life or a teammate's if necessary. Some athletes go even further — they create conditions for themselves that closely simulate what happens after falling off a wave. CO₂ tolerance is key. Imagine: you're working your arms and legs hard, expending tons of energy, your body's carbon dioxide levels rise, and then suddenly you need to hold your breath for two, maybe even three minutes. Sometimes this happens on an exhale, which makes it much harder. Another type of preparation is cardio and overall physical conditioning. Endurance, strength, concentration. We practice all of this separately and then put it together like a puzzle.

— What has been your most difficult experience in surfing?

— The hardest part of surfing for me is the inability to do it consistently. Resources have always been scarce: we had a sponsor for one season, but before and after that, I had to pay for everything myself — and that's tens of thousands of euros. So, for several years, I lived from one credit limit to another.

It's tough knowing that you're capable of catching the next record wave — physically and mentally — but you can't continue, not because of fear, but because of money. Especially when you see people around you who have the means, the support, and the infrastructure. In other countries, it's an entire industry; here, it's a matter of personal resources and luck.

Ed. note: Surfing is one of the most expensive sports. A full set of equipment can cost upwards of ten thousand euros — including the board, safety vests, wetsuits, and rescue gear. Add a jet ski with all the necessary equipment — another twenty thousand. Without a partner on the jet ski, a big-wave surfer simply cannot get onto the wave: that person tows you out, meets you below, and rescues you if something goes wrong. Fuel and infrastructure add tens of thousands more.



Photo by Kirill Umrikhin
kirillumrikhin.com

NAZARÉ IS THE EVEREST OF SURFING — A PLACE OF POWER, NOT A PLACE YOU RETURN TO WITHOUT PURPOSE



Photo by Kirill Umrikhin
kirillumrikhin.com

— After all those trials — the fear, the moments on the edge between life and the elements — you were noticed and invited to take part in a film that later appeared on Netflix. How did that happen, and what did the experience mean to you?

— Actually, Netflix only acquired the film. Originally, it was a French project called *Nuit de la Glisse*, directed by Thierry Donard. He was amazed that, after 30 years of filming, he finally found a big-wave surfer from Russia. He came to shoot the most powerful storm of the year, and during the work, someone told him there was a Russian guy out there.

When someone decides to make a whole film about what you do, it's an opportunity to share a huge part of your life — first and foremost, with your loved ones. I didn't see any special mission in it. I attended the premieres in Paris, Geneva, and Zurich — I don't know what the audience felt, but I hope the film impressed them. Or at least inspired them in some way.

— As a surfer and traveler, where do you feel most comfortable? Where would you like to return?

— When it comes to big-wave surfing, it's definitely Portugal. Nazaré is the true Everest of the surfing world. There are no other waves like it anywhere on the planet. Their formation is directly linked to the unique underwater landscape: beneath the coast lies the Great Atlan-

tic Canyon — the deepest canyon in the world. When the storms begin, the waves there grow several times larger than anywhere else. Overall, Nazaré is a place of power for me, but it's not somewhere I want to return to just for the sake of it — I want to go there with a purpose: to become better than I was yesterday.

When it comes to travel in general, I rarely want to return somewhere — I'd rather explore new places: to conquer waves I haven't yet seen, climb mountains I haven't yet visited. I've been to about forty countries, but three points on the map are especially meaningful to me — Portugal, Indonesia, and Norway. Each of them is connected to a part of my life and a unique experience: in Portugal — big-wave surfing; in Norway — BASE jumping; in Indonesia — surfing too, but softer, with waves three to five meters high at most.

Portugal is cold and harsh. Indonesia, on the other hand, is warm and gentle. The waves there are almost perfect — smooth surface, clear water, and long "tubes" that a surfer can ride inside.

Life in Indonesia is also simpler and calmer. There are countless places there unlike anywhere else on the planet. It's the perfect space for travel, self-discovery, and inner exploration.

Of course, I managed to visit less than I'd like to — I spent most of my time in the water, among the waves.

— What lessons have you learned from so many journeys?

— Traveling makes you rethink everything you've experienced before. There are countless peoples, places, cultures, and traditions in the world — often completely different from what you grew up with. It's important to feel that difference firsthand: only then you can see life more broadly, accept other points of view, and, ultimately, other people. To truly understand how the world works, you need to live through as many diverse experiences as possible. When you face all this "different," you start to see your own life in a new way. I think that's what truly makes us better.



Photo by Marat Daminov
@maratdaminov

TRAVELING FORCES YOU TO RETHINK
EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW



Photo by Kirill Umrikhin
kirillumrikhin.com

— Do you travel in search of peace?

— Not exactly. Nature and sports are always the initial impulse — they're what make me pack up and go. I've never had the desire to "go on a retreat"; I find peace in movement.

— Do you notice the effects of climate change while in the ocean?

— Yes, the climate is definitely changing. But how drastically, and whether this process can be reversed, is still hard to tell.

For surfers, strangely enough, there's even a positive side to it: there are more storms in the Atlantic now, which means more record-breaking waves. The seasons are changing too — sometimes storms arrive when it should be calm.

But these are indirect signs. The more obvious ones are in the mountains: glaciers in the Alps are disappearing, ones I personally remember from my childhood. When you see things like that, you realize that something is wrong with the planet.

— Can big wave surfing draw attention to this issue?

— Extreme sports are inherently quite self-centered, and talking about ecology in this context often feels forced. Of course, you can use your personal content and write something like "think about the planet," but realistically, it's unlikely to truly move anyone.

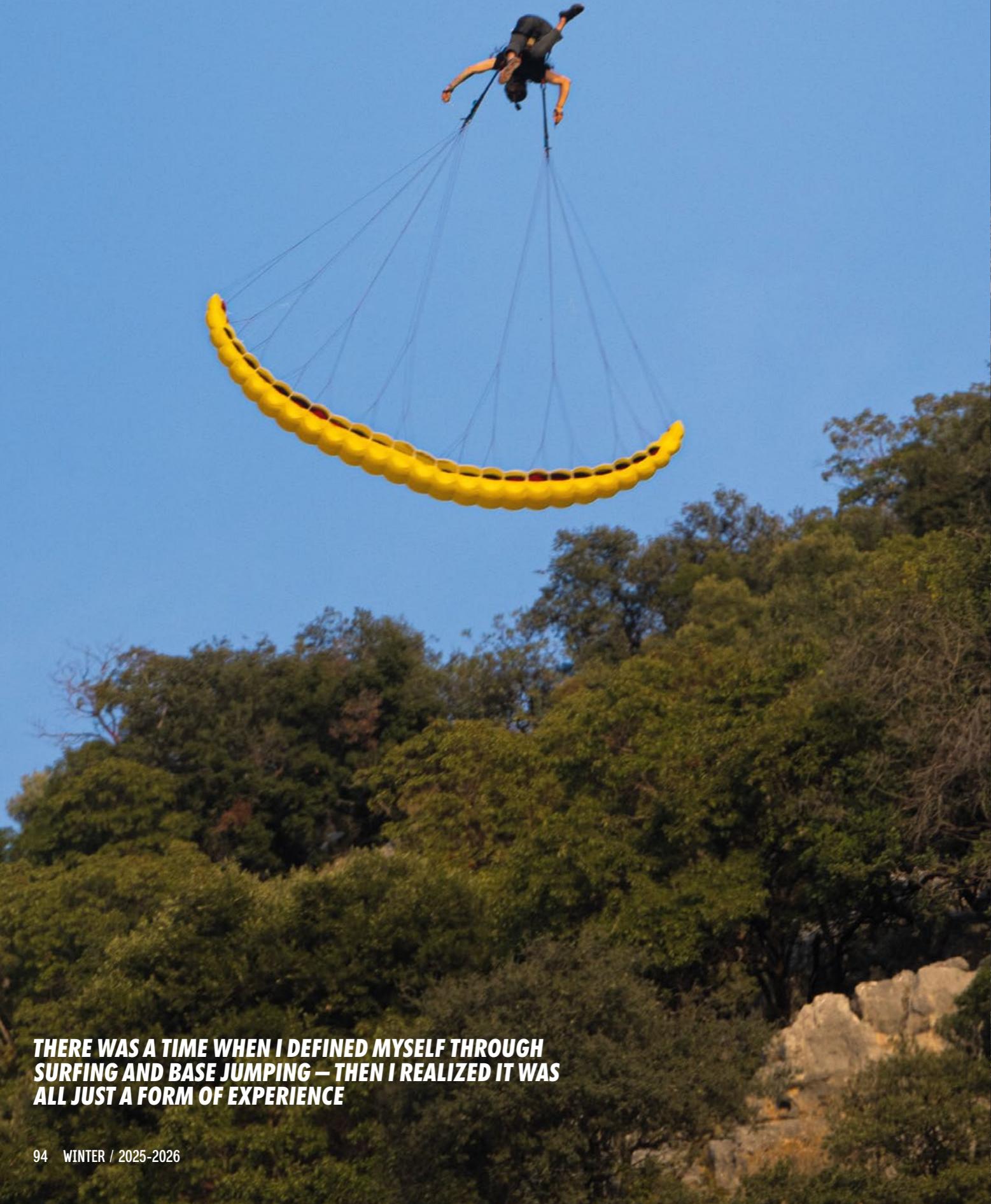
Twenty years ago, such messages still resonated through major film projects, but today, in the era of endless content and fleeting attention, they simply get lost in the noise.

I FIND PEACE IN MOVEMENT



Photo by Evgeny Ivkov
@surfinglens

Photo by Marat Daminov
@maratdaminov



— What does your life look like now? What inspires you when there's no ocean or waves?

— Right now, I just work in an office. I'm trying to get a mortgage, I go to therapy, and I dream of having a family. It may sound ordinary, but at this point, those things feel far more important than all the mountains, oceans, and dizzying adventures. Though, of course, I can't imagine my future without them either.

— How would you like to be remembered?

— I wouldn't want to be remembered only for surfing or extreme sports. There was a time when I really defined myself through those things – surfing, BASE jumping, filming, traveling... But over time, I realized that all of this is just a form of experience. Now I feel closer to the word "human." I have the same problems as everyone else, the same desires as most people. Yes, I manage to do some unusual things, but I don't see them as defining. What truly matters is your beliefs – and how you treat people and the world around you. ➤



THE FLYING CARPET: AN ART THAT CONNECTS GENERATIONS

In a traditional Uzbek home, a carpet has never been just a household item – it has always been a living symbol. It lay beneath one's feet, adorned the walls, was rolled into a bride's dowry, and carried within its patterns the destiny of a family. Every curve whispered the voices of centuries, and every thread seemed to connect the world of the living with the memory of their ancestors. For the people of Central Asia, a carpet represented harmony within space: a home began not with its walls, but with the pattern on the floor – where the sun, the earth, water, and prayer were woven together.

Archaeologists still find traces of carpet weaving in the Zarafshan and Fergana valleys, where more than two and a half thousand years ago women wove woolen fabrics decorated with sun-like ornaments. In the sands of Khorezm and ancient Bactria, numerous fragments of textiles dyed with natural pigments have been discovered. Over the centuries, these traditions

were enriched by the nomadic heritage of the Saka and Massagetae tribes, for whom the carpet served as a wall, a bed, and even a map of the world. With the rise of the Great Silk Road, the patterns and colors grew even more diverse – from Chinese silks to Persian motifs, from Turkmen geometry to Indian dyes – all woven together into a single masterpiece.

On October 18–19, 2025, the ancient city of Khiva hosted the international exhibition "Carpets in Splendor" on the grounds of the Arda Khiva tourist complex. The event brought together artisans from Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries. The festival showcased traditional schools of carpet weaving, national patterns, and contemporary original works that reflected both the region's rich heritage and new trends in decorative and applied arts.



Each region of Uzbekistan has developed its own distinct artistic style. In Khiva and Khorezm, carpets are known for their precise lines and deep burgundy tones that symbolize the strength of the earth. The recurring "kurak" patterns – solar rhombuses made from patchwork pieces – serve as a reminder of life's unity.

Bukhara is famous for its silk carpets, where Persian refinement meets Turkic vitality. The "gul" (flower) and "sarma" (spiral) motifs represent fertility and the eternal flow of time.

In Samarkand, artisans favor soft, organic patterns – leaves, grapevines, and flowing water – making their carpets seem to breathe like a garden. Meanwhile, the Fergana Valley is a true kingdom of color: local crafts-women still use natural dyes from pomegranate, indigo, and madder roots to create a vivid palette of golden, blue, and fiery red hues.

In Surkhandarya and Karakalpakstan, coarse woolen threads and large ornaments prevail – a legacy of Afghan and Turkmen nomads. Here, the carpet serves as a talisman: every pattern is an amulet against the evil eye.



The creation of a carpet began long before the first motif appeared. In spring, sheep were shorn; the wool was washed, combed, and spun by hand on a spindle. Dyes came directly from nature: saffron for yellow, walnut husks for brown, onion skins for copper, and indigo for sky blue. On wooden looms called “arga”, women stretched the warp and tied each knot by hand while humming ancient songs. The process could last for weeks or even months. Every carpet was unique, infused with the energy of its maker’s hands and the spirit of the home.

The carpet’s ornamentation is a kind of ancient script:

- “Kush” – a pair of birds – symbolizes peace and harmony;
- “Oy va quyosh” (moon and sun) – the unity of masculine and feminine principles;
- “Egam” – a stepped pattern – represents a person’s path toward perfection;
- “Suv belgisi” – the sign of water – purification and protection from evil;
- “Buzoq izi” – the calf’s footprint – a wish for abundance and fertility.



One can read an entire philosophy in the patterns: the world was perceived not as chaos, but as sacred order, where every form was part of cosmic symmetry.

Weaving in Central Asia has always been considered a woman’s art. Girls were taught to weave from childhood – it was not only a skill but also a form of upbringing. The first carpet a girl wove became part of her dowry, and sometimes even served as a kind of diary in which she “wrote” her emotions and dreams through ornament. On wedding days, a carpet was laid under the couple’s feet so that their path would be soft and blessed.

Recently, cooperatives and schools have begun to open in Samarkand, Urgench, Nurata, and Chirchik, where young women are once again learning this ancient craft. It is a source of great pride that UNESCO programs have recognized Uzbek carpet weaving as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Today, artisans create carpets not only for daily life but also for galleries, weaving modern lines and colors into traditional motifs.

A carpet is movement captured in stillness. In its patterns, time does not flow – it whirls. Every loop preserves the breath of the weaver, every thread – her prayer. A woven carpet lives for decades, outlasting generations, witnessing celebrations, farewells, and prayers. It unites space – from the sands of Khorezm to the snows of the Tien Shan – like a woven map of Central Asia’s memory.

Text: Khurshid Tashkent

Photos: Nurbek Nishanbaev, Nuriddin Sultanbaev, State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development

Symphony of BALANCE and PRECISION



Have you ever wondered what happens to an aircraft before it takes off? We often see it being refueled and loaded with luggage, but behind the scenes lies a world of meticulous coordination. Every precise, synchronized action determines whether the flight will depart as planned.

The key role here belongs to ground handling. My Freighter—an airline specializing in cargo transportation and operating passenger flights under the Centrum Air brand—places great emphasis on this stage. Proper placement and secure fastening of baggage are not just formalities but essential safety measures.

The true heroes of this process are the loadmasters. They are masters of balance, weight, and restraint systems. It's their responsibility to ensure that every kilogram on board is perfectly positioned and securely fixed. Some remain at the airport, while others travel with the crew, overseeing the process in flight. Behind them lie dozens of countries, thousands of flight hours, and countless journeys. Their work often goes unnoticed, yet they are among those who make every smooth takeoff and gentle landing possible.



ALBERT GATAULIN

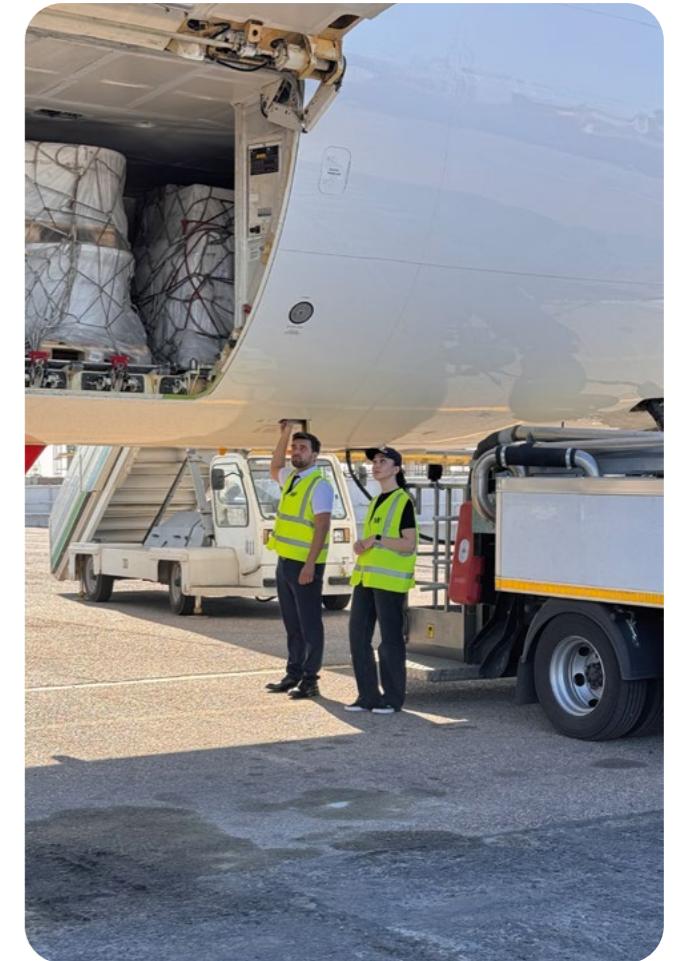
— Did you dream of working in aviation, or did circumstances simply lead you there?

— Like many people fascinated by aviation, my love for airplanes began early. I was always drawn to everything that moves—on land, water, and especially in the sky. I dreamed of traveling, seeing the world, and somehow combining that with my career—and that dream came true. Although, to be honest, my path to becoming a loadmaster wasn't exactly planned.

When I accepted the offer to join My Freighter, which was a brand-new airline at the time, I didn't fully know what awaited me or whether I'd be able to find myself in this field. But curiosity and a passion for travel prevailed—and now, three years later, I'm still discovering new horizons.

I started on the ground: handling passenger flights in Tashkent, overseeing aircraft loading, coordinating ground services, preparing flight documentation, and ensuring the airport provided the necessary equipment. Later, I began flying as a loadmaster—first on the Boeing 747 freighter, then on the 767.

I truly enjoy being in the air, being part of a team that does meaningful and fascinating work. My engineering background also comes in handy—it's saved the day more than once.





– What does your work on a flight involve?

– It involves organizing and supervising the aircraft's ground handling. I have to make sure that all the necessary equipment – stairs, fuel trucks, ground power units, loaders – is delivered on time. If there are passengers with reduced mobility on board, an ambulift is always required.

Special attention is given to loading and unloading. I need to ensure everything is done safely: cargo must not damage the aircraft or tip it backward. It's also important to monitor how cargo is placed and secured. Sometimes I give instructions on how to properly fasten unusual items; other times, I do it myself. For example, I secure spare wheels or equipment with straps so that nothing moves or gets damaged during the flight.

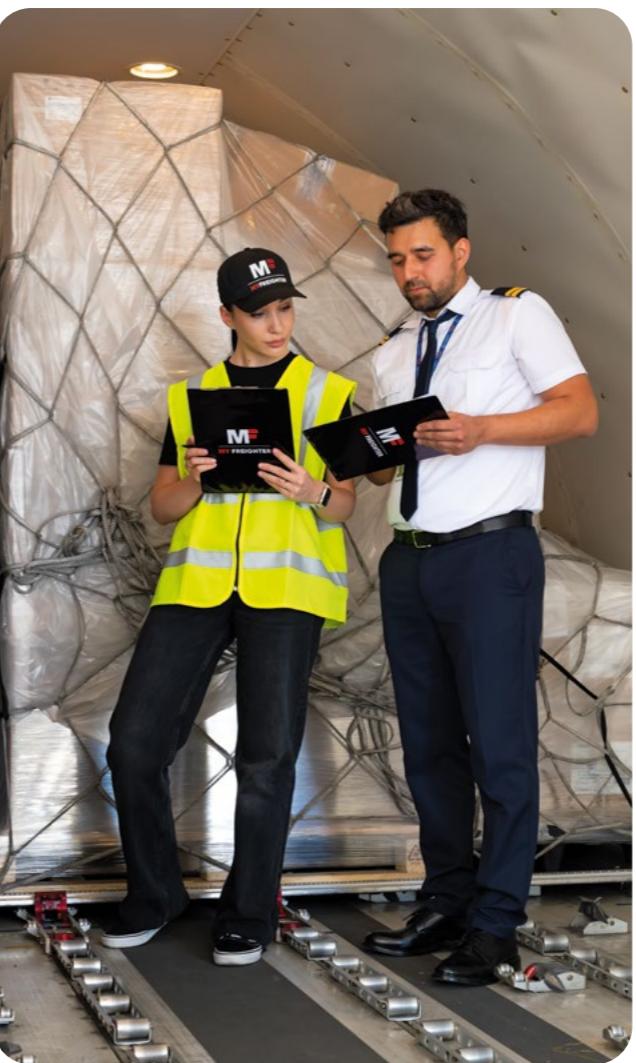
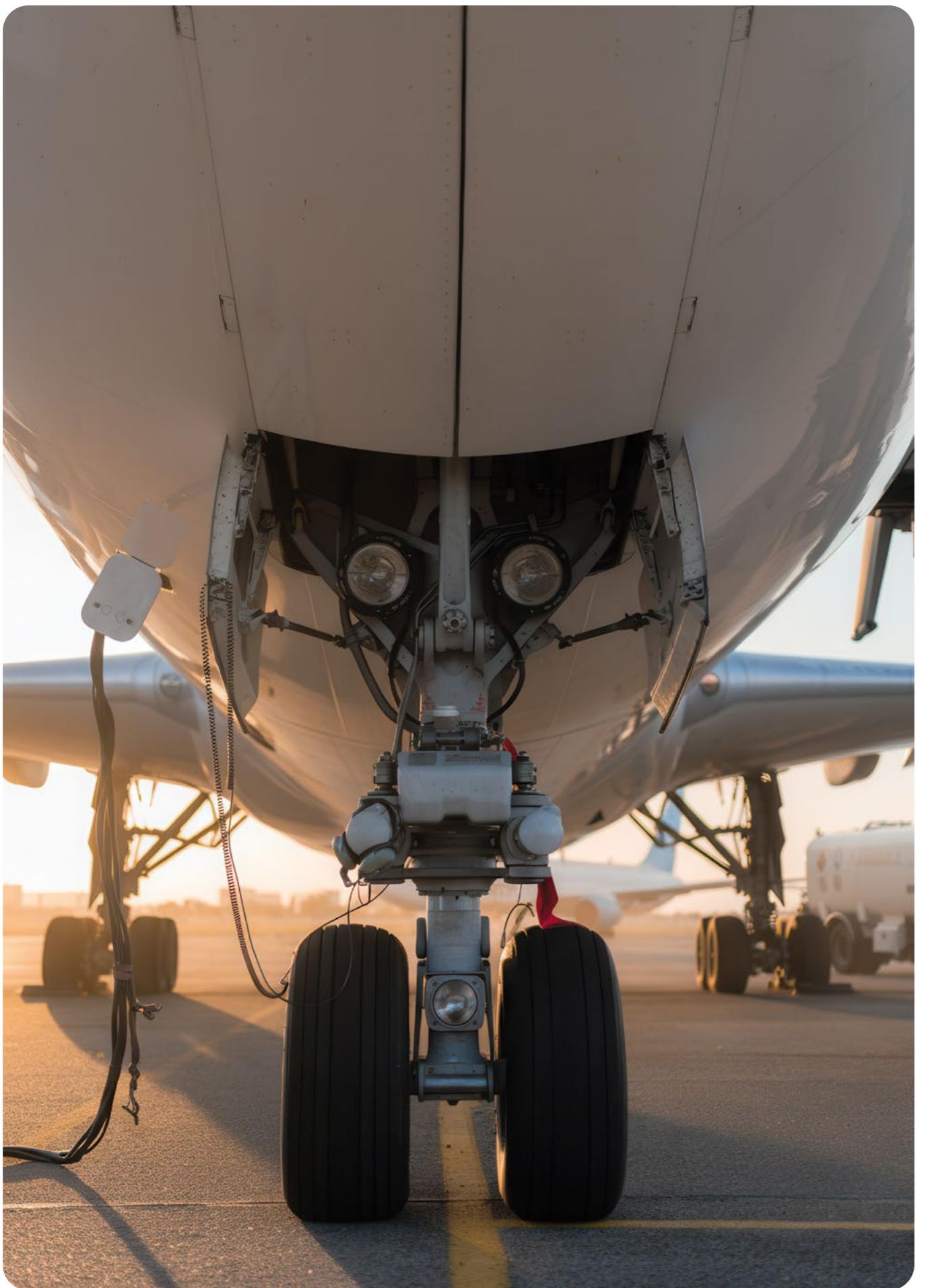
In some cases, I calculate the center of gravity and prepare the loading plan – this is necessary to ensure baggage and cargo are correctly positioned. I stay in constant contact with the company's flight operations center to make joint decisions if needed, for example, adjusting the departure time.

– Where have you traveled as a loadmaster?

– Thanks to my work, I've visited many countries across

Europe and various parts of China. Madrid left a strong impression with its lively and welcoming people, and Shenzhen and Guangzhou amazed me with their incredible cuisine, picturesque landscapes, and friendly locals. At the beginning of my career, we frequently flew to the hot city of Dubai.

There were also special flights, like humanitarian missions. On one occasion, we were urgently sent to Herat after a devastating earthquake. We delivered 100 tons of humanitarian aid from the Uzbekistan government – food, tents, and everything needed for temporary shelter for those affected. The challenge was that we had only returned from another flight the night before. Still, we spent the entire next day and night preparing the cargo, loading the aircraft, and taking off early in the morning. Landing and takeoff were only possible during daylight: there was no electricity in Herat, the visual signalling system was out, and flights after dark were prohibited. But we knew people were counting on us, and despite being exhausted, we made sure to arrive in the morning, unload, and depart before sunset. It was an intense and meaningful flight. It felt great to know you were part of a team that genuinely helps people.



– In your opinion, is it difficult to become a loadmaster?

– If you start from scratch, it requires perseverance, readiness for intensive training, and, of course, good physical condition. The training is very intensive. The first aircraft I worked on was a Boeing 747 freighter – not an easy plane, with many nuances. Sometimes we stayed up until three in the morning after a full day of training to complete homework – calculating the loading and balance for a practice flight. Often, there was only one correct solution, and everything had to be calculated in detail, following all parameters.

When you master the second, third, or fourth type of aircraft, it gets easier: you already have a base, much becomes intuitive, but at the first stage, not everyone manages. In addition, the job requires endurance. The schedule is irregular, flights are exhausting, and trips are frequent. Sometimes you wake up in another city in the morning and try to figure out: where am I, what time is it, isn't it time for the next flight? Some people don't cope – they leave flying, preferring stable ground work for a smaller salary but with a regular schedule. Another challenging aspect is the constant separation from loved ones. Not everyone is ready for that.

– How long are your trips usually?

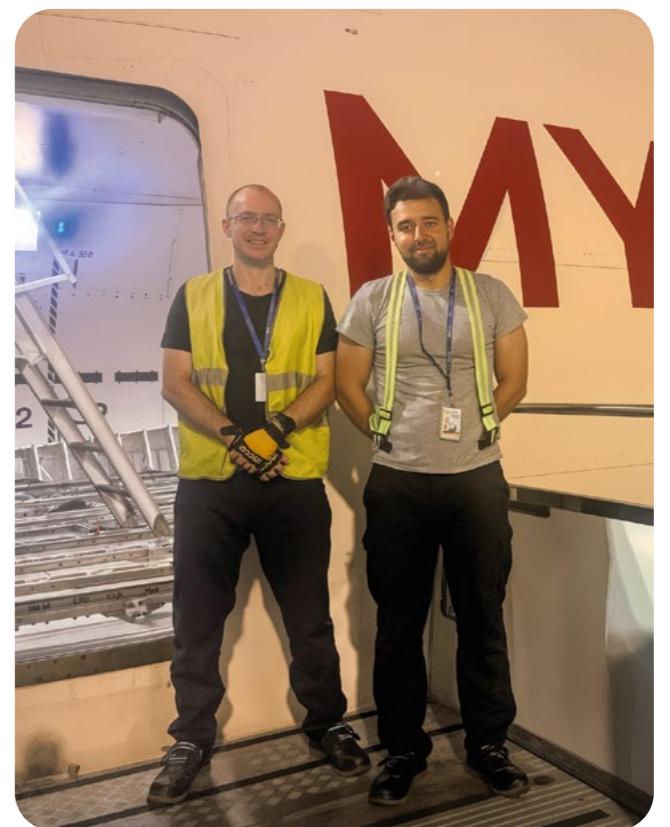
– It varies. Sometimes you fly out for one night and return ten days later. Most trips last from one to several days, so I always carry a small suitcase with enough clothes for a couple of nights – just in case a flight is delayed or a new route from an intermediate airport appears unexpectedly.

But for me, the benefits clearly outweigh the drawbacks. Every flight is a new experience, a new country, or a familiar city you want to revisit. Today you're sunbathing on the sandy shore of the Mediterranean, and in a couple of days you're walking through the narrow streets of a historic European town. Then you return home with a suitcase full of impressions and souvenirs from a long trip – isn't that amazing?

– What advice would you give to those just starting this path?

– During my work, I've met many wonderful people – pilots, engineers, and ground staff in various countries. Being a loadmaster made me realize that communication is very important in our field. The ability to communicate is not just a useful skill; it's the key to new opportunities and personal growth.

Every time I go to the airport, I look forward to meeting my colleagues and already know that the flight will be interesting. So, to newcomers, I would say: approach your work with openness and curiosity. This profession offers travel, experiences, and, if approached with heart, can become a true lifelong career. May your flights be smooth, and your journeys thrilling.



IVAN LUZHNETSKY**– How did you become a loadmaster?**

– Since childhood, I was drawn to the sky – airplanes, space, adventures. I was into model aviation, devoured science and science fiction literature, and watched documentaries like Jacques-Yves Cousteau's *Undersea Odyssey*. All of this shaped my worldview and my desire to connect my life with aviation. I approached the profession of a loadmaster consciously. I started working at the airport in the ground handling department, while simultaneously seeking opportunities for training to eventually fly as part of a crew.

Typically, loadmaster training is organized by airlines depending on their aircraft types and standards. In this sense, I was lucky: at My Freighter, the training was serious and intensive, but thanks to my prior experience, much of it was familiar. Even at the theoretical stage, we clearly understood what we would face – and this helped me integrate into the job more quickly.

– What do you enjoy most about your work?

– First and foremost, the feeling of being part of a team that does challenging but important work. I enjoy knowing that I am handling tasks on which much depends. And also the flight itself: the view from the cabin, the clouds, the starry sky at night... At cruising altitude, the stars look completely different from the ground – brighter, closer. And when you fly around a storm front at night and see lightning flashing inside the clouds, it's simply mesmerizing.

**– Is it more comfortable to fly on a cargo plane than on a passenger plane?**

– On cargo Boeing 767s, there are several extra seats for the crew. Of course, it's not business class, but it's quite comfortable for a long flight. On the smaller Boeing 757, however, there's only a double folding seat, like on a flight attendant's jump seat, so much depends on the type of aircraft.

– What's the most challenging part of being a loadmaster?

– Multitasking. You often have to manage several processes at once. For example, the pilots are still on their way from the hotel, but the fuel truck has already arrived at the aircraft – so you have to make quick decisions about refueling. And right at that moment, you receive information that additional cargo has been added to the flight. That means the dispatcher must recalculate the fuel volume, while you have to recalculate the aircraft's balance and promptly pass new loading instructions to the ground agent.

And keep in mind – that agent isn't only handling your flight. He might have two other regular flights to oversee, and everything must be completed on time. If you don't coordinate all the services properly, the flight will be delayed, and the schedule will suffer. It's not easy, but that's what makes it interesting. A loadmaster is the key link between all ground services – you could say a conductor on a technical stage, ensuring that the entire ground operation runs smoothly.

– Which countries have impressed you the most?

– Israel and China. In Israel, I loved the sea and the chance to surf whenever I had free time. In China, I'm drawn to the culture, the language, and the architecture. Plus, it's a great opportunity to practice languages – besides English, I also speak German and Chinese.

– Had you already traveled much before becoming a loadmaster?

– Yes, quite a lot before joining My Freighter. I spent a year in Senegal teaching astronomy, three years teaching English in China, took part in archaeological excavations in Germany, and went scuba diving in the Philippines, Egypt, Turkey, and again in Senegal. I've also hiked across the Alps, the Caucasus, the Tien Shan, and the Sayan Mountains.

Travel has always been an important part of my life – and, in a way, it's what eventually led me to the profession I have today.

– Have you ever found yourself in difficult or risky situations?

– There have been plenty of adventures, that's for sure. Once, I went to the Philippines for a diving trip, and right then the Taal volcano erupted. It was as if all the tourists had vanished overnight – only a few Chinese divers and I remained. To be honest, I even enjoyed it: quiet, no crowds. Luckily, the volcano calmed down quickly and without any serious consequences.

But another situation was far more serious – I caught

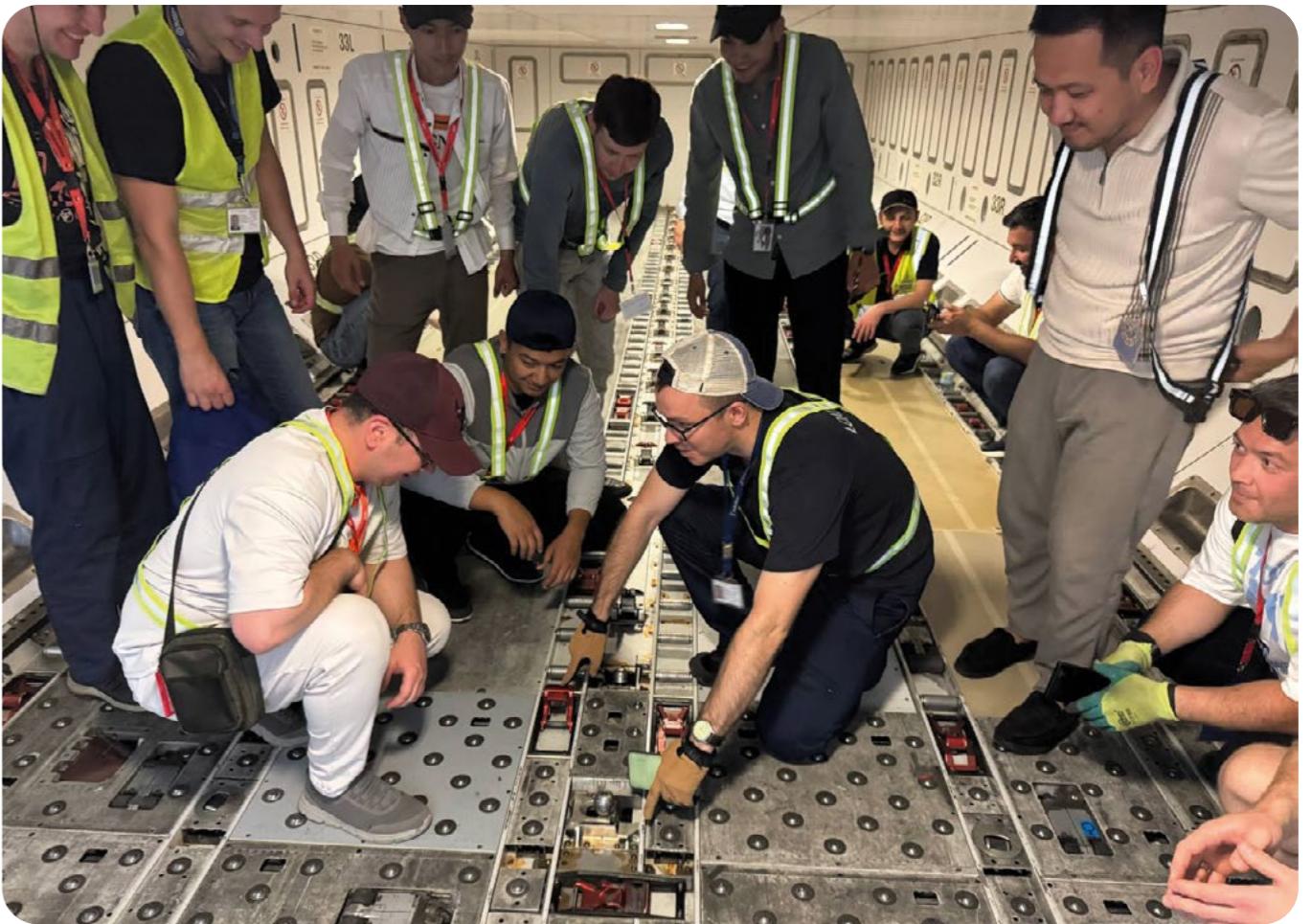
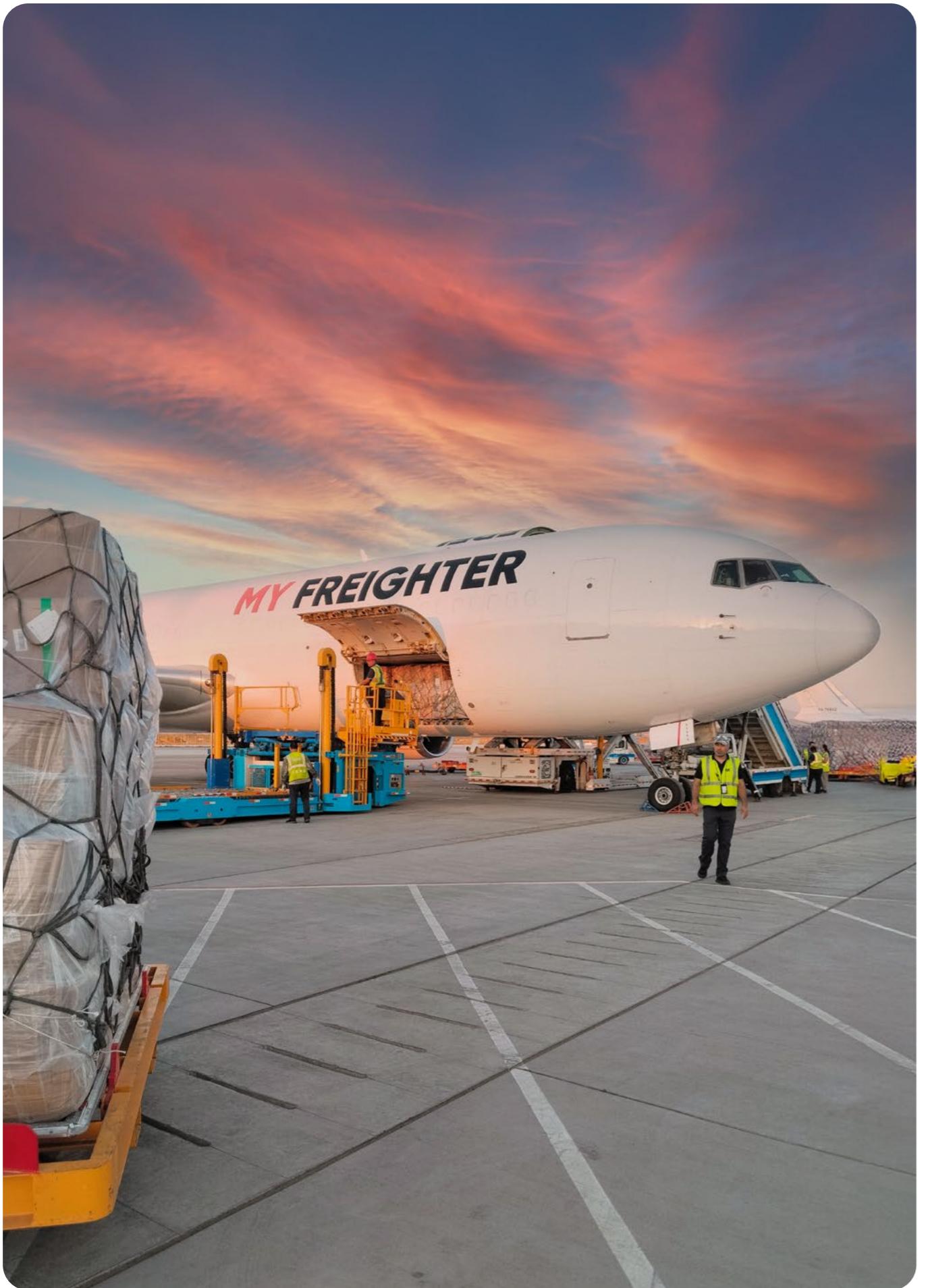
malaria while in Africa. It's a treacherous disease: high fever, severe chills, and to make things worse, there are different strains in different regions, so the treatment can vary. I went through four local hospitals, feeling worse by the hour, and no one could make a proper diagnosis. By the third day, I was completely bedridden and thought, "That's it, I'm done for." What saved me was being urgently taken to a French Foreign Legion clinic, where, by pure luck, there was a doctor with the right experience. He recognized the symptoms immediately and prescribed the correct treatment.

– Are health risks taken into account when you fly as a loadmaster?

– In our company, yes. For example, before flying to regions with higher health risks, we receive vaccinations, including for yellow fever. In addition, we have insurance that covers medical assistance during business trips. It's an important part of preparation, especially since our work involves frequent flights across different climate zones.

– How does your family react to your long business trips?

– I think everyone who chooses this path has to be ready for long absences. When you're younger, it feels easier, but with time, it gets harder. Still, someone has to do this challenging job. I suppose it takes a certain mindset – with a bit of adventurism. A "sky nomad" simply can't live any other way.



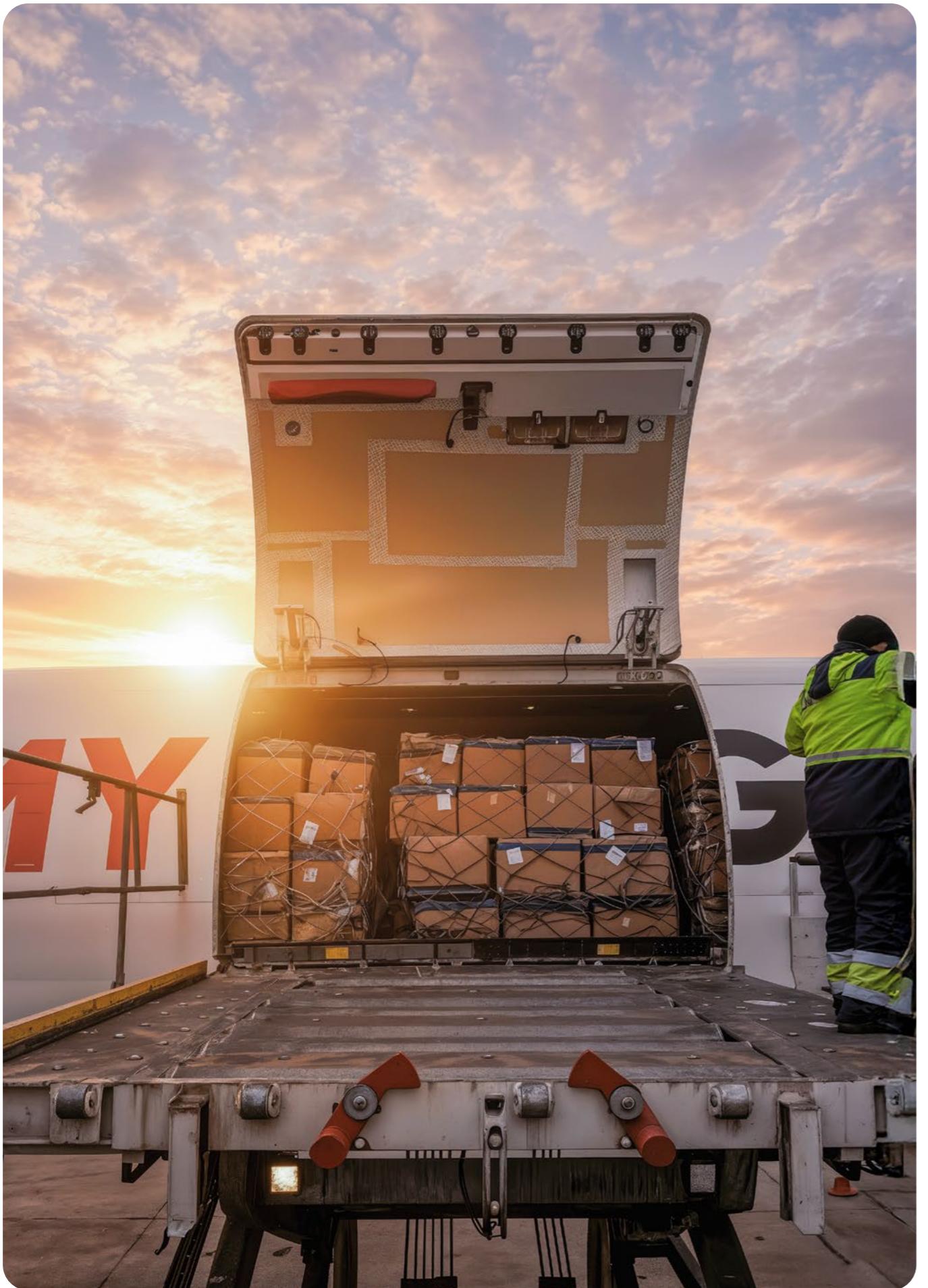
ALEKSEI GREBINYAK

– How did your career in aviation begin?

– I've been fascinated by aviation since childhood, even though no one in my family was connected to it: my father was an officer, and my mother was a teacher. When I was little, we often flew to visit my grandparents during the summer, and I loved watching the clouds, planes, and helicopters. Of course, I dreamed of becoming a pilot, but my eyesight didn't allow it.

I got closer to the sky after finishing school – I started parachute jumping at an aero club and read everything I could about aviation. As a student, I joined the airport's passenger service department, but I only saw airplanes through the terminal windows, while I wanted to be right there on the airfield, "under the wing."

After university, I completed my military service and then joined a major cargo airline. We were trained from scratch – handling dangerous goods, calculating load and balance, and preparing cargo for transportation. I started working on the ramp, later moved to the office, where I processed requests from the commercial department, but continued to fly as a loadmaster to stay connected to real operations. Since then, I've always tried to focus on production needs rather than just "office theory."



When My Freighter was just beginning operations, I was invited to take part in launching the company's flight operations. Much of it was familiar, but there were plenty of new challenges too. And that's exactly what makes this work valuable – new challenges and new experience.

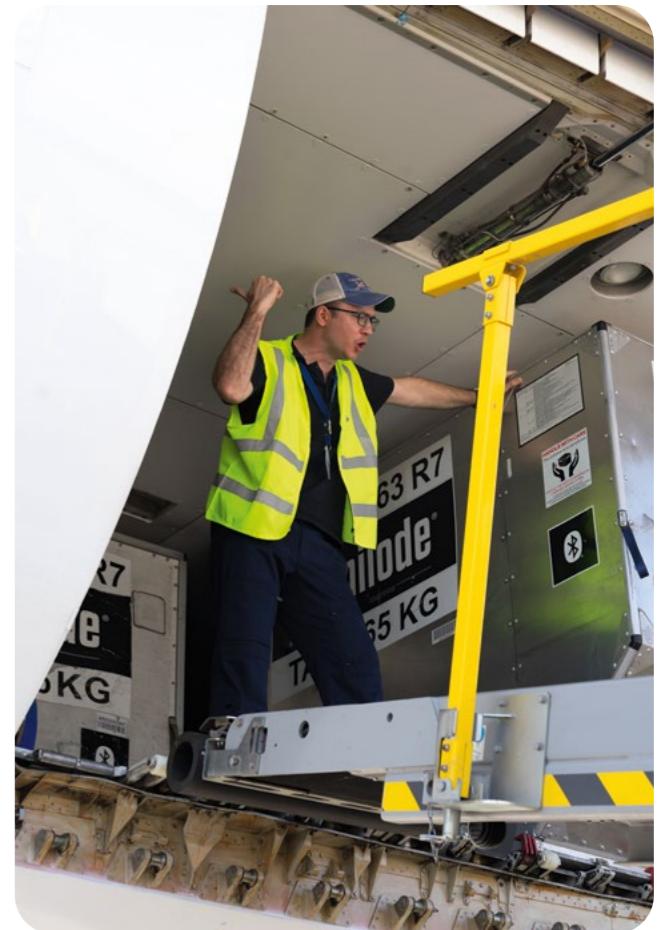
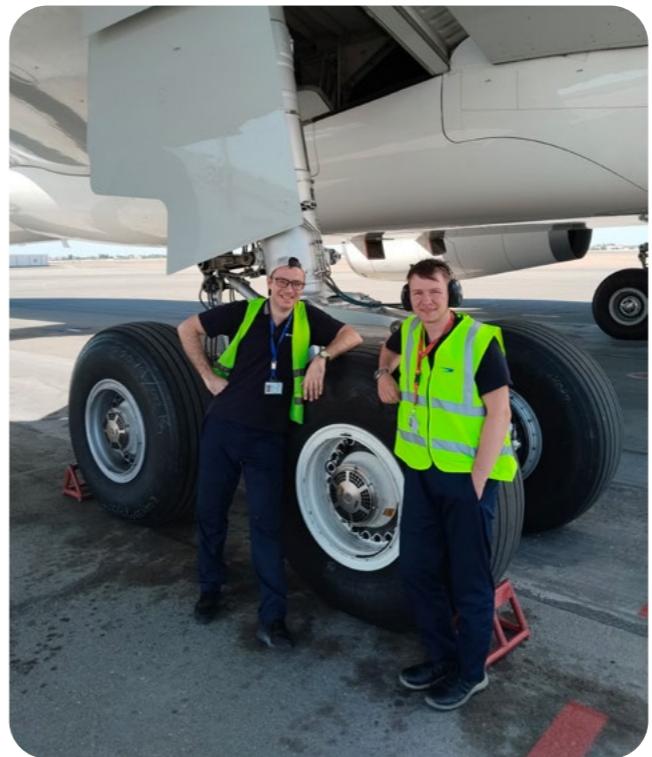
– How long does loadmaster training usually take?

– On average, it's at least a month of intensive theoretical training, followed by practical work – first at the base airport and then on actual flights. Training a loadmaster means training a highly specialized professional, and not everyone makes it through: some fail the medical requirements, others struggle with calculations or load planning.

There are international standards for the required knowledge and skills. A loadmaster must understand the rules for transporting dangerous goods, know the structural limits of an aircraft, be able to calculate load and balance, prepare cargo for transport, work efficiently on the ramp, and strictly follow aviation safety regulations.

– How diverse is the geography of your work?

– In the first nine years of flying alone, I visited about sixty countries across five continents. Sometimes just for a day or two, like in Africa or Europe; sometimes for extended business trips. Even before joining My Freighter, I spent a month in Japan and another in South Korea, combining remote office work with flight operations. Other colleagues also had remarkable routes – some flew to the U.S. for several months, others spent up to three months operating flights to Antarctica with overnight stays there. Since joining My Freighter, I've visited China, the Czech Republic, Vietnam, and Egypt, delivered humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, and transported cargo from Pakistan. So if you're lucky, the geography is truly impressive.



– Have you ever made mistakes in calculations or routine operations?

– Of course – we're all human, and mistakes can happen, especially when you're tired or sleep-deprived. After several nights without proper rest, the risk of error increases significantly. That's why it's essential to know your checklists and procedures perfectly – they're the foundation of safety. I always emphasize this when training newcomers: a tired person is the one most likely to make a critical mistake, and in our job, that's simply unacceptable.

– What advice would you give to those who dream of working in aviation and want to fly?

– First of all, learn English. It's crucial for studying technical materials and communicating with instructors and colleagues around the world. Take care of your health and physical fitness – flying doesn't make you healthier, and loadmasters often have to work literally "at height." The cargo deck can be three to five meters above the ground, and sometimes you have to climb ladders in the rain or wind. You don't need to be as fit as an astronaut, but you shouldn't get dizzy from fatigue either.

And most importantly – be eager to learn and never get complacent. In our profession, the "learned-passed-forgotten" approach doesn't work. Physics is not the place for improvisation. Here, everything matters: knowledge, precision, and attention. ➔

FIRST *in the AIR*

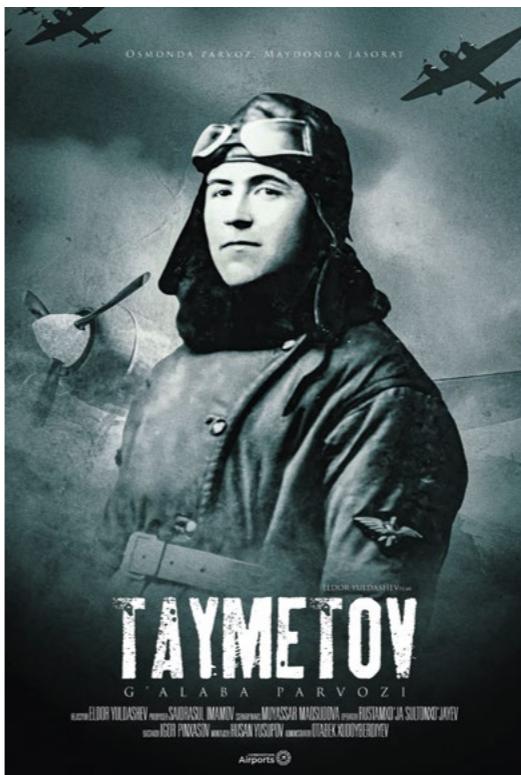


Air is not only the element we breathe — it is the space where heroism is born and dreams take flight. For Uzbekistan, the sky became a stage of firsts: the region's first airplane took off here, the first airport opened its gates, and the first national pilot rose into the air. In his author's column, Eldar Yuldashev — PhD in Film Studies, academician of the Istanbul Film Academy, and founder of the Tashkent branch of VGIK — tells how the history of Uzbekistan's aviation is more than a chronicle: it is an inspiring story of courage, pioneering spirit, and remembrance.

It was destined that Tashkent would become the birthplace of both the first aircraft and the first air harbor in Central Asia. Uniting these two milestones is the figure who became a symbol of Uzbek aviation — the first national pilot, **Abdusamat Taymetov**. He would later take the controls of a legendary aircraft and head the Tashkent Airport.

This story forms a kind of “golden triangle” of regional firsts — the pilot, the aircraft, and the airport. It is brought to life in the documentary **“Taymetov. The Herald of Victory”** — the only large-scale project in Uzbekistan dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Created with the support of Uzbekistan Airports, the film immediately drew attention far beyond the country's borders. Its premiere took place in one of the world's oldest cinemas — Moscow's Khudozhestvenny on Arbat Square. This iconic theater once hosted the 1926 premiere of Battleship Potemkin, hailed as the greatest film of all time; in 1931, the first Soviet sound film Road to Life; and in 1936, the first color film Grunya Kornakova. And now, in 2025, it became home to the premiere of the Uzbek film about Taymetov.



Within its first month, the film won three international awards: the Diploma for Best Film at the 19th International Media Forum Dialogue of Cultures, recognition as Best Debut at the 34th Golden Knight Film Forum, and the Press Award at the Eurasia Film Festival, surpassing ninety competing films — including works by masters of Uzbek cinema such as Zulfikar Musakov's "Umida", "A Dream of Fujiyama" and Muzaffar Erkinov's "Makhtumkuli Firaqi".

The screening also coincided with the 34th anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence. To mark the occasion, the film was presented across the CIS countries and China — from Almaty to Harbin.

The story of Taymetov and the Uzbek sky is a true saga of leadership, courage, and the heroism of an entire nation. Let us take a closer look at how it all began.



Boris Lisunov
a Soviet aircraft designer and the organizer
of the Li-2 aircraft production



THE FIRST AIRCRAFT OF CENTRAL ASIA

In December 1941, employees and equipment from an aircraft plant in the Moscow suburb of Khimki were evacuated to Tashkent in 17 train convoys. Just nine months later, with the support of the republic's leadership and its people, a completely new winged machine took to the skies – the first Li-2 aircraft, created on the basis of the PS-84 by engineer Boris Lisunov.

However, in 1942, when the formation of long-range aviation began, it became clear that the country was critically short of heavy bombers. The solution came swiftly: the Li-2 was modified into a night bomber. These aircraft took part in key wartime operations – from bombing and reconnaissance missions to evacuating the wounded and delivering ammunition. And if the T-34 tank and the “Katyusha” rocket launcher became the symbols of Victory on the ground, then in the air, that symbol was the Tashkent-built Li-2.

The aircraft produced in Tashkent served as the

main air bridge to besieged Leningrad – delivering food and supplies, and on return flights carrying out civilians, including skilled workers, scientists, and children. It was in this way that the Leningrad Conservatory was evacuated to Tashkent.

Flying up to two missions a day, these aircraft delivered up to 150 tons of food to the city. In just a few months, they transported 5,000 tons of supplies and evacuated 50,000 people. In memory of this feat, the centerpiece of the Road of Life museum in St. Petersburg features the Li-2 itself.

In total, the Tashkent plant produced 4,276 of these aircraft – half of them during the hard years of war. Today, monuments to this legendary aircraft stand across the world – from Dikson Island to Warsaw – and even the People's Bank of China issued a banknote depicting it. Remarkably, one Li-2 is still in service today: it belongs to the fleet of the Hungarian airline Malév and bears the name of aviation engineer Theodore von Kármán.

THE FIRST AIR HARBOR OF CENTRAL ASIA

The first airport in the region also appeared in Tashkent. On May 12, 1924, the very first passenger flight departed from here on the Tashkent-Bishkek-Almaty route. Within a year, the new airfield served around a thousand passengers, five tons of cargo, and 200 kilograms of mail, establishing Uzbekistan as the main aviation hub of the region.

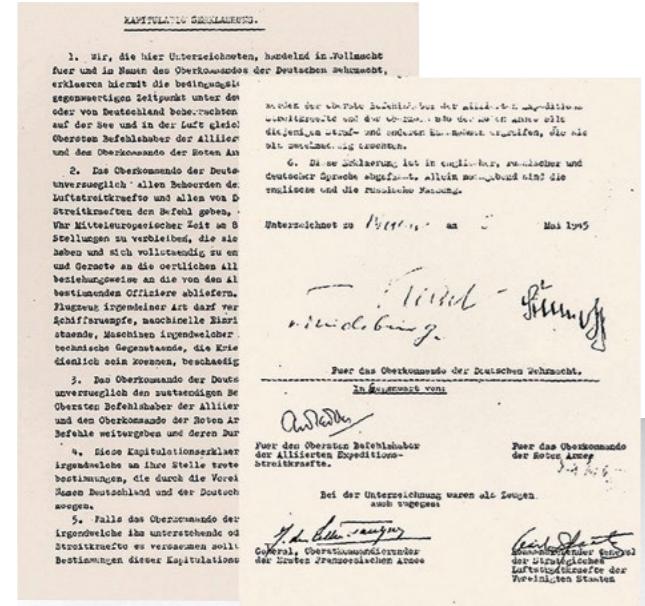
Soon, Tashkent connected not only the cities of Central Asia but also international routes: in 1927, the Tashkent-Kabul line was opened, and in 1930, the first flights from Moscow were received.



In 1958, the airport – again the first in the region! – was granted international Class I status. It also became a stage for aviation premieres: on September 20, 1972, the supersonic Tu-144 made its maiden flight here, and on December 26, 1982, Tashkent Airport became the only airport in Central Asia (and the second after Moscow) capable of receiving and servicing a four-engine, medium-range, wide-body first-class passenger aircraft, the Il-86.

Today, Tashkent International Airport named after Islam Karimov is undergoing a major modernization while continuing to hold its position as one of the key aviation hubs of the region.

ON MAY 9, 1945, ABDUSAMAT TAYMETOV DELIVERED FROM BERLIN
TO MOSCOW THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN HUMAN HISTORY –
THE ACT OF UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF GERMANY



THE FIRST UZBEK IN THE AIR

From the very first days of the war against Nazi Germany, almost the entire personnel of Uzbek civil aviation units were incorporated into the Air Force: 2,500 aviators from Uzbekistan fought on the front lines. Among them was Abdusamat Taymetov. On May 9, 1945, he delivered from Berlin to Moscow the most important document in human history – the Act of unconditional surrender of Germany, along with the Victory Banner from the Reichstag and the standards for the parade on Red square.

His path to this historic day was far from easy. From 1941 to 1943, Taymetov was repeatedly denied deploy-

ment to the front. Only in 1944 did he enter the thick of the war, yet that year alone he completed around 200 night sorties beyond the front line, parachuting in reconnaissance and sabotage teams. By 1945, he served as a captain in the 19th special purpose aviation regiment.

On May 6, 1945, Captain Taymetov returned from an important mission in distant Tehran to a military base near Moscow, unaware that the very next day he would undertake a highly secret operation that would mark the final chapter of World War II. For decades, this mission remained classified, and Taymetov himself remained silent, bound by non-disclosure agreements. Until the declassification of the "secret" stamp, the nation knew nothing.



After the war, Taymetov returned to Uzbekistan, joining the civil aviation system. He continued flying and later spent many years heading Tashkent Airport, under his leadership gaining the status of a first-class international airport.

Taymetov was always a pioneer. He led the first flight training institution, once located in Syrdarya, and initiated the first pension reform for flight personnel, dramatically increasing retirement benefits for veteran aviators.

Equally remarkable was his wife, Bibiniso Baltabaeva. As the first uzbek female parachutist in history, she performed many heroic deeds for the benefit of the Motherland – but that is another story... ➤



PROFESSION – THE SKY

What do the sky and a woman who has chosen it as her profession have in common? Neither needs to prove anything — both rely only on height and precision. She speaks about her work calmly, without grand words, but with that unmistakable sparkle in her eyes that tells you at once: this is love. Real love — one that demands discipline, patience, and inner quiet. In this issue — a conversation between Gio Kardava and Syusan Mamedova, a pilot at Centrum Air, about focus and patience, the sky without pathos, and freedom without romanticism. About a profession where the essence lies not in fear or adrenaline, but in respect.

— Tell me, what did you hear most often at the start of your career? Was it something like, “This isn’t a woman’s job,” or rather, “You’re doing great, keep it up”?

— I began flying in Europe, and to be honest, people there take it quite naturally. There’s no prejudice about a woman in the cockpit — it’s fairly common, nothing sensational. I never encountered discrimination or remarks like “this isn’t for women.” Not once.

— And how much flying experience do you have in Europe?

— Quite a lot. I flew small single-engine aircraft, often solo — without a co-pilot or anyone else. I flew around Vilnius, all over Slovakia and Austria, so yes, I’ve had plenty of experience.

— You’ve already touched on this a bit, but let’s go deeper. How are women pilots generally perceived in the places you’ve flown?

— Wherever I’ve worked, I’ve never really faced the idea that a woman “can’t be a pilot.” The attitude is mostly professional: if you do your job well, it doesn’t matter whether you’re a man or a woman. In Europe, that question has long been settled. In the U.S. — I’m currently flying under an American license — there’s even more encouragement. You often hear things like, “Go ahead! Keep going! You’re doing great! Go, girl!”

Uzbekistan is moving toward a bright future, and women here are no longer a rarity. Yes, maybe one or two per company, but still — progress. In our airline, I’m the first, but I’m sure others will follow. Gradually, people are realizing that a woman can master any profession, no matter how demanding it is. And the pilot’s profession is demanding — both mentally and physically.

IF YOU DO YOUR JOB WELL,
IT DOESN’T MATTER WHETHER
YOU’RE A MAN OR A WOMAN

— Do you have a community of women pilots? Maybe a Telegram chat or something like that?

— Since there aren’t many of us here, I don’t personally know other female pilots, but I’m part of a Facebook group called Female Pilots. It brings together women pilots from all over the world — they share their achievements, discuss challenges, including discrimination. Interestingly, most of those stories actually come from the U.S., which might sound surprising.

Sometimes I read through the threads and see women writing: “The captain said something snarky,” “they didn’t greet me,” “someone made a ‘joke.’” It’s interesting to read their experiences — everyone’s path is different, and sometimes I just think, “What a journey! Well done, girls.”

— How many members are there?

— Several thousand. Mostly from the U.S. and Mexico, but really — from everywhere.

— Have you ever faced prejudice like, “If the pilot is a woman, I’m not boarding that plane”?

— Yes, actually! When Centrum Air posted on Instagram about me joining as a pilot, there were a few comments like that. What’s interesting is that most of them came from women rather than men. Men would joke playfully, but women were serious. I was honestly surprised. I didn’t respond, of course — everyone’s entitled to an opinion — but there were some very firm comments like, “No way, I wouldn’t board a plane flown by a woman.”

Recently someone wrote, “Just don’t forget to turn on the blinkers.” There were only one or two comments like that, so I don’t even react. Usually, those come from people who aren’t very educated or happy — they just post unpleasant things.

Criticism is fine, even necessary, but it should be constructive. That’s the kind worth responding to. If it’s just empty noise — then it’s not true. Most comments, though, are kind and supportive. People write warm words, and you can feel that.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES IN OUR PROFESSION

— Are there any distinctly female qualities that help you in your work?

— Definitely. Attention to detail helps a lot — and it's one of the most important qualities in our profession. We constantly monitor the aircraft's systems: dozens of displays, data, figures, indicators — you always need to stay focused.

And, as far as I know, women tend to have better peripheral vision. So even if you're not looking directly at a display, you can still catch changes out of the corner of your eye — that's important too. Attentiveness, diligence — though I wouldn't say those are exclusively female traits. And patience, of course. It's especially useful when working with colleagues. People are all different, and you have to find your way with each one. So yes, patience helps a great deal.

— What do you consider the most "masculine" and the most "feminine" aspects of your profession?

— Aside from attentiveness and patience... I do think women are generally more patient than men. As for what's most masculine — probably everything else, starting with the uniform.

I'd also highlight focus and composure — things without which this job is impossible. You have to be able to keep emotions in check. Women tend to be more emotional by nature, and that can be challenging — especially when you hear something that could be taken the wrong way. But it's important to understand that a colleague is addressing you as a professional, not as a woman — and to take it that way.

I'd also say that caring for your colleague is a feminine touch — and something essential. After all, aviation places great emphasis on CRM (*Ed. note: Crew Resource Management — a system designed to ensure effective teamwork and communication within the crew*). It's about synergy, about creating the right atmosphere in the cockpit. It should be comfortable, calm, not tense. A captain isn't an authoritarian boss, but a colleague who respects the opinions of the first officer and the cabin crew.

For example, this is how I try to take care of my colleagues: we often have very early flights — five or six in the morning. I know my colleague might not have had time for breakfast, so I bring along a snack bar — in sealed packaging — and share it. It may seem like a small thing, but it's pleasant and useful. Flying on an empty stomach isn't a good idea — your focus should be on the job, not on hunger. Sleep and nutrition are the foundation of flying.

— Have you ever found yourself being the "mom" on board — the one who looks after everyone and keeps things in order?

— I'd say not a mom, but a caring friend. I try to show attention on every flight, no matter who I'm flying with, even if I'm meeting the person for the first time. I might ask, "Do you need anything?" Sometimes I'll ask the flight attendants for help if the captain is busy. It's not difficult for me — if I have a free moment, which, honestly, first officers almost never do.

— So asking, "How are you feeling today?" — that matters too?

— Absolutely. Simple things like that set the tone, especially when the day starts early or the flight is long.

— Where do you feel more confident — on the ground or in the air?

— Good question. When you're just starting to fly, you don't yet have full confidence. You know the procedures, but until you've lived through different in-flight situations, there's still a touch of uncertainty. It's not a weakness — just a stage.

Before this, I spent sixteen years as a flight attendant. I was a professional — I knew exactly what I was doing, and I did it not just well, but excellently. I held a good position, and they didn't really want to let me go — it's not easy to find a flight attendant who takes responsibility, cares about passengers, and makes their journey comfortable and memorable. So back then I felt absolutely confident. I believe that, with time, I'll reach the same level of confidence as a pilot too.

— If you had the chance to fly alone — no passengers, no route, no schedule — where would you go?

— Oh, I've actually done that. When I was earning my license in Europe, I had to log a certain number of solo hours. You decide when to fly yourself: have breakfast, go to the airfield, and if the aircraft is available — you refuel it and take off for a cross-country flight (*Ed. note: flights between countries or cities that require the use of navigation procedures*), purely for pleasure. I mostly flew over mountain regions — Slovakia, Austria, Hungary. It was breathtaking, unforgettable.

You feel absolute freedom: you're not tied to passengers or schedules. You fly until you run out of fuel. There's real joy in that. I honestly love what I do. I love that there's always room to grow, that there's no ceiling.

— What was harder — mastering all the nuances of the profession or proving to people that you truly deserve to be a pilot?

— Definitely learning the systems. One hundred percent. And I don't try to prove anything to anyone — only to myself. It doesn't really matter what people think of me, especially those I might see once in my life. Spending energy trying to convince someone otherwise just means wasting it in the wrong direction.





But mastering the aircraft – its types, its systems – that's truly challenging. It's serious machinery. You don't just have to know it – you have to respect it. A modern airplane is a flying computer, and in this profession, you never stop learning. It's not like you become a first officer, then a captain – and that's it, you can relax. No. You study, review, and refresh your knowledge every single day. There are always new materials, bulletins, and articles being published. You read accident and incident reports to understand how to prevent mistakes. It's a never-ending process. If you're a professional pilot, you're always a student.

— Listening to you, it sounds like you're a real aviation geek in the best possible way...

— Well, I guess I am (smiles). I'm genuinely fascinated by all of it. I think this profession attracts people who are truly in love with the sky. It's not just a job – it's a lifestyle. It's physically demanding: constant flights, early mornings, night duties, being away from home, missing holidays, birthdays, family gatherings. You sacrifice a lot for this profession – and without genuine, heartfelt love for it, it would be very hard to endure.

— Where does your love for flying come from?

— My father was a military engineer-mechanic. He served in Kamchatka and Chukotka. He always dreamed of becoming a pilot himself, but for some reason, it didn't work out. I remember having toy airplanes as a child – I think my father planted that love for aviation in me subconsciously. He used to show me his DMB album – it had drawings of fighter jets, aerobatic maneuvers, beautiful sketches. I guess all of that stayed somewhere deep inside me.

Honestly, I never thought I'd become a pilot. I couldn't even imagine flying – it wasn't part of any plan.

The decision came later. At some point, I realized I was capable of more than being a senior flight attendant. I never wanted to be an instructor – I wanted to fly, not sit in an office. And when I felt I had the strength and potential, I decided to give it a try. I did – and I loved it. Easy paths aren't really for me. I like things that challenge me, that require effort and focus. The journey was long and far from simple, as it usually is in aviation. But maybe that's what makes it so valuable. When you go through challenges, mistakes, situations that test and harden you – all that builds your inner strength. And the taste of victory becomes that much sweeter.

A MODERN AIRPLANE IS A FLYING COMPUTER, AND IN THIS PROFESSION, YOU NEVER STOP LEARNING

Every step is a victory. Getting your PPL (*Ed. note: Private Pilot License – the first major milestone in a pilot's career*) is a victory. Proving to yourself that you can. Lifting an airplane into the sky for the first time – even a small one, but on your own. Every pilot remembers that day – a moment that stays with you forever.

— Tell us about that moment.

— I'd love to. It was in 2016, in Vilnius. I completed the training quite fast – in about three months, while working at the same time. I'd fly to Moscow for work, earn money for flights, then come back to Vilnius to take exams and log flight hours.

And then came August 18. I'd been waiting for that day for a long time – the weather often kept me grounded. In August, Vilnius already gets strong crosswinds that make flying unsafe. There's a wind limit, and if it's exceeded, you simply don't take off. So I waited for several days.

That day, my instructor and I did three circuits around the airfield. I had no idea that this would be the day. I thought it was just another flight. And then he said, "Stop the plane, don't shut it down – I'm getting out." I asked, "Where are you going?" He smiled: "That's it. You're on your own. Three takeoffs and three landings." And suddenly you realize – this is it. There's no one next to you anymore. No instructor, no colleague. Just you, the plane, and the weather.

Surprisingly, there was no panic. I felt nervous, yes, but not in a way that clouds your mind. It was pure excitement – the realization that you're doing what you've dreamed of. My instructor didn't intervene, didn't say a word over the radio. Of course, he was watching from the ground, worrying, like any instructor would for their "birdie." When I landed, he ran up with his phone – he'd filmed my flight. "So, how was it? How do you feel?" he asked. I still have that video – sometimes I rewatch it.

That day will stay with me forever – because it was the moment I proved to myself that I could.

— That's beautiful. Do you remember the moment you said to yourself, "I'm a pilot"?

— I think I'm still living that moment. I haven't fully realized it yet.

— Imposter syndrome?

— Yes. I'm never really satisfied with myself. I always feel like I could do better. I've just passed the check, the program with my assigned captain, and tomorrow I start another one – this time with an instructor. After that, I'll finally be able to fly with any captain.

It's such an exciting period right now – very intense! The induction program was tough, but incredibly engaging. And I had amazing instructors – each of them shared a piece of their experience, knowledge, and attitude toward this profession. I'm so grateful to all of them.

Especially to the one who prepared me for my check. I adore him with all my heart – as a mentor, a colleague, a friend. He believed in me as a professional, and that means the world.



IF YOU FEEL POTENTIAL INSIDE YOU – TRY. DON'T BE AFRAID. DON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE BUT YOURSELF

When someone believes in you, it gives you wings. Sure, I don't have much experience yet, and doubts do come up. But instructors like mine teach you not to be afraid – to take action.

Then you start demanding more from yourself. Sometimes even unrealistically much. But over time you realize: you just need to work calmly, learn from your mistakes, and not dwell on them. Mistakes are part of the journey. The main thing is to recognize and correct them. I recently posted a quote: "Give yourself time to grow." That's exactly about me. It's such an interesting stage in my life.

— That's wonderful. I hope it lasts as long as possible – in terms of excitement, not uncertainty.

— Yes, I really don't want to stop. I want to be the kind of professional people feel safe and comfortable flying with. To make them feel reliability beside them. And maybe, in some way, for my path to become an example. I'm sure more girls will join our company. Maybe I've helped clear the path for them just a little. It's a big responsibility – challenging, but incredibly inspiring.

— Then tell me, what would you say to a girl who reads this interview and decides she wants to become a pilot?

— Go for it! You have to go after your goals. If you feel potential inside you – try. Don't be afraid. Don't listen to anyone but yourself. There will always be people saying: "Why do you need this?", "It's too expensive!", "It'll take too long!", "You should be building a family!", "What about kids?"

Don't listen. Listen to yourself and your heart. There are so many opportunities today – all the information is out there. Don't know English? Learn it. YouTube, courses, online lessons – everything's available. The main thing is to stay focused on your goal and move toward it step by step.

It will be hard. Sometimes you'll want to give up. You might even think, "Maybe this isn't for me." But the key is not to stop. Everything is possible if you truly want to fly. Yes, there will be times when... actually, not even "seems like" – you really will want to give up. It happened to me a couple of times. It was really hard. I thought, "Maybe this isn't for me, there are too many obstacles. Maybe it's a sign." But you just need to rest for a day or two – and then get back up and keep going. There's no other way.

— Let's get a bit more grounded now and talk about the "math" behind this profession. Roughly speaking – how much does it cost to become a pilot?

— I know that in Russia, you can apply for a government-funded spot at one of several flight schools, or to an aviation institute in Moscow or Saint Petersburg. You go through the selection process and study for free. There's also a paid option, but I'm not sure about the current costs in Russia, because I got my licenses in Europe and the U.S.

Speaking of Europe – at that time, the minimum cost to go from zero to a CPL was around 70 to 100 thousand euros. And that's without travel costs, food, or accommodation. Now it's probably a bit higher. Plus, there's also the type rating (*Ed. note: a special qualification that allows a pilot to operate a specific type of aircraft*). I invested my own money. It used to be that a company could sponsor your training, and then you'd repay it through a percentage of your salary – not a small percentage, but still manageable. That happens less often now.

So, going back to your earlier question – you really do have to invest in yourself. The more you grow as a professional, the more you put into your development, the more interesting you become on the job market. If you're already a qualified pilot, even with low flight hours, your chances of getting hired are much higher. It's expensive, yes – but it's possible. You just have to work for it. Or take loans – I know many people who do that. I was lucky: I had a well-paid job, so I could afford it. It was hard – all my money went into training, I had nothing left. But I did it. My European license cost around 70,000 euros, and my American one – about 50,000.

— Speaking of personality, what did you have to change in yourself to adapt to the profession, to train, to actually become a pilot?

— To act fast, make decisions quickly, and stay calm under stress – not emotional. That takes practice too. Women are often more sentimental, empathetic, emotional – so you have to train not just stress tolerance, but emotional self-control, the ability to stay neutral. That really helps in this job.

I also learned to get ready in record time. From the moment you open your eyes to the moment you walk out the door – half an hour, max. It took me years to learn that, because I can't leave the house looking messy. After all, you meet people, and people judge by appearance first. At the very least, you have to look neat and clean.

What else? Punctuality. I've always had it, but in aviation, it's crucial. I come to work 15-20 minutes early – sometimes half an hour. I'm always afraid of being late. In all my years of flying, I've never once been late. I think that's every crew member's worst nightmare – to oversleep on a flight. Ask any flight attendant or pilot – they'll tell you the same.



IN THE COCKPIT, THERE ARE NO MEN OR WOMEN – ONLY TWO PROFESSIONALS

— And tell me please, do you ever have an inner fear that female pilots are forgiven fewer mistakes than male pilots? I have a feeling that might be the case.

— I don't think that's true. Because the moment we step into the cockpit and take our seats, we're no longer a man and a woman – we're two professionals. There are no "boys" or "girls" there – only colleagues. I've never felt that anyone held me to a different standard or expected something special from me compared to young male first officers. Honestly, that's never happened to me.

— And what's the most unpleasant part of your job?

— Night flights. Not just rare night flights, but when they come one after another. The human body is designed to sleep at night, and we're working instead – we have to stay fully focused.

Disrupted circadian rhythms are one of the biggest downsides of the profession. But then again, we chose this path, we love it, we find it fascinating. And for the feeling you get when you take off and land an aircraft – it's worth every sacrifice. Without love for the profession, you simply can't do it.

— Is there any "forbidden topic" among pilots – something people don't talk about openly but still whisper about?

— Oh, everything is banal and simple. We even have it written down: no politics, no talk about "ratings" – meaning who flies where and how much. As for deeper topics... I can't say what men talk about between flights. I haven't been around long enough to know that. But from what I see, it's all pretty down-to-earth: someone's hoping for an interesting route but doesn't get it, or the opposite – someone got a great flight and won't stop talking about it. Just everyday things, work jokes. We're all human – we share our joys and frustrations like anyone else.

— Psychologists often say that to detach from everyday problems, you should imagine yourself as a soaring bird, looking down from above. Given your profession, you actually see the world from several kilometers high. Do you ever feel like a godlike observer watching human life below? Or, on the contrary, does it make you feel how fragile life really is?

— Neither, really. But I do feel a kind of deep calm when I look out the window. It's breathtakingly beautiful. Every time, I'm reminded that I made the right choice. So no, I don't feel superior to anyone – quite the opposite. When you look at the world from above, you realize how small we all are, like tiny grains of sand in the universe. Yet there's always this joy – the quiet happiness of knowing that I chose this path. It's challenging, but deeply fulfilling. And when I'm flying, I often think: "Yes, it was worth it".

— When and where have you seen the most beautiful view?

— Always when flying into a sunset. It's absolutely stunning. Clouds at sunset are pure magic – sometimes the shapes and colors are so unreal, it takes your breath away. I often tell people who are afraid of flying: just look out the window – it's beautiful out there. Forget your fear for a second – there's a whole other world beyond it.

My favorite moment is when you enter a cloud or skim right past it. It feels like surfing through the sky. That's pure joy. You just sit there, watching this beauty unfold – like a front-row spectator. And that's one of the most wonderful feelings in our profession.

— You've actually anticipated my next question. Your job is all about precision and algorithms – everything is calculated and systematic. Is there any room for magic in that precision?

— The magic is right outside the window. It's incredible! Watching sunsets and sunrises every day – that's something truly precious. It's easy to take it for granted, but you shouldn't. People on the ground, especially in winter, often see only gray skies – the sun rarely appears over much of Europe. But for us, it's always there. We see the sun every single day.

— The theme of this issue is "Air." So I can't resist asking: what has the airspace taught you – or given you?

— I wouldn't say taught, more like gifted. It gave me a sense of freedom. It reminds me that all our worries are so small. When you're high above the ground, with cities, countries, seas, and oceans beneath you, you realize that everything that once seemed huge is actually tiny. All our troubles – they're just dust in the wind.

— A bit of philosophy, huh?

— Yes, I guess I'm in a philosophical phase of life right now.

— Wonderful. Tell me – what happens when the autopilot is on? You just switch it on and relax?

— Not exactly. Maybe just a little – you can recline your seatback to sit more comfortably – but the work doesn't stop. We monitor the systems and parameters, maintain radio communication with dispatchers, keep an eye on the autopilot – making sure it's really doing what it should. You can't just trust the system and relax. We're there precisely to keep it under control.

— Pilots often talk about rituals. Do you have one of your own?

— When I board the aircraft, the first thing I do while still on the stairs – is gently touch the fuselage near the door with my right hand and say, "Hello, my dear." That's my main ritual. I treat the airplane as a living being, a partner – not just a metal machine. You have to talk to it. And when you do, everything goes perfectly.





**MAYBE, IN A PAST LIFE, I WAS
A BIRD – AND IN THIS ONE,
I BECAME A PILOT TO SEE
THE SAME VIEW**

— You mentioned the sacrifices people in your profession have to make. Is there a point when you land and turn back into just a woman, a daughter, a friend? For example, many actors struggle with that — they stay in character even in real life.

— It's different for us. Actors have to get into a certain emotional state, while we have procedures, flight stages — everything is structured. So when I'm at work, I don't "become" a pilot emotionally — I just follow the procedures.

When you come home, you take off your uniform, hang it up — and that's it, you're an ordinary person again. With the same everyday, down-to-earth things as everyone else. Home is where you recharge. The job is intense and demands concentration, so time with family and loved ones is true rest. There's no special switch — you just walk in and think, "How good it feels to be home."

— Has your attitude toward the word "control" changed after so many hours in the cockpit?

— I don't think it's about the number of flights. It's more about flying a big aircraft — serious equipment. There are so many procedures; everything is laid out precisely, and the job requires constant control. You have to follow those procedures flawlessly, and "control" becomes, probably, one of the most important words in our work. It's constant monitoring, analysis, attention — the process never stops, not for a second. It can be tiring, especially on long flights, but it's the foundation of safety.

At first, it was hard — it's a sitting job, and mentally you're always alert. But with experience, your operational memory clears up, and you have more mental space for new tasks. Still, control is our essence. Without it, we wouldn't be flying.

— Do you remember ever feeling real fear? Not in theory — truly scared.

— Yes, a couple of times. Once in Kaliningrad, we were landing in very strong, gusty winds. Back then, I was still working as a flight attendant. All the other aircraft diverted, but we landed. We were the only aircraft that made it. Everyone else turned around, but our captain decided to land — and he did.

In general, I'm not afraid of flying. I don't feel tension, even when I'm traveling as a passenger. Many pilots or flight attendants actually become more anxious when they're not in control, but not me. I just put on my headphones, fasten my seatbelt, look out the window — and that's all.

— Almost everyone knows someone who's afraid of flying. What would you tell an aerophobe — from a professional's point of view?

— I think first of all, an aerophobe needs a psychologist. It's an inner, psychological issue. Everyone has their own reason for fear: someone's seen too many news reports, someone had a bad flight experience, someone is just naturally anxious. So there's no universal advice.

From my side, I'd just say this: look out the window — it's beautiful up there. Get distracted from the fear, just observe.

— I'd like to end our conversation on a romantic note. If you could be reborn, would you choose to be a pilot again?

— I think so. It's an incredible profession, so interesting. Every day, lifting that bird into the sky and landing it — that feeling is incomparable. And it never fades, at least for me, not yet. I'm only at the beginning of my career, but I think my colleagues would agree: every flight feels like the first.

No two flights are ever the same — different weather, different mood, even your own inner state changes. Every time it's new, every time it's emotional.

If I could be reborn, maybe I'd become a bird. Sometimes I watch them gliding in the air — so free, so light. I think, "They must feel amazing — just flying." As a child, I used to dream that I could fly — not over mountains or anywhere in particular, just flying, feeling the air. I guess that's the thirst for freedom and beauty. So maybe, in a past life, I was a bird — and in this one, I became a pilot to see the same view.

— What kind of bird would you be?

— Something small. Not a swan — they don't fly that high. Maybe a tiny one, light, the kind that can ride the air currents and isn't afraid of the wind. Let's say a swallow. They're always in the sky — they sleep, eat, live in flight. Very much like us. ➔



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