

Phoenix East Aviation

A Florida melting pot of international culture and affordable pilot training

When it comes to selecting a good flight school, the phrase “reasonably priced” doesn’t usually come into the equation. While reputation, experience and equipment are prime factors, students have come to accept that low-priced flight instruction and excellent quality can be mutually exclusive. Phoenix East Aviation Academy (PEA) has changed all that.

Located in sunny, spring-break-friendly Daytona Beach, Fla., Phoenix East Aviation offers several professional pilot programs that won’t leave students in the poorhouse. For less than \$39,000, a private pilot can complete the one-year “Professional Program I” and graduate with instrument, commercial, multi-engine, CFI and CFII ratings. A zero-time student can add the private certificate for around \$9,000. The program also includes unusual attitude and upset training in the school’s Decathlon 8KCAB.

A variety of other programs meet the needs of just about any pilot. Options include multi-engine emphasis courses as well as an ATP program for less than \$17,000 that includes extensive courses in human factors, crew resource management and Part 135 operations.

The cost of living in Daytona Beach adds to the incentive; apartments can be found for \$500 to \$800 a month. Daytona Beach boasts “350 flying days a year,” owing to its location along Florida’s central eastern coast. The result is an attractive option for students looking for an aviation career without mortgaging the farm.

“It’s important that prospective students also realize we’re a high-quality



Phoenix East’s diverse student body trains in a fleet of airplanes that includes Cessna 172SPs, Diamond DA42s and a Decathlon 8KCAB (above).

operation offering the very best in training, equipment and placement,” says Phoenix East CEO Ghassan Reslan. “Our graduates are flying for the best airlines and flight departments around the world.” A quick check of the school’s recent placements shows graduates flying for DHL, FedEx and such international airlines as El Al, Singapore and Air Lithuania.

Indeed, Phoenix East has considerable experience in the international area and offers streamlined programs specifically targeting students from around the world. PEA actively recruits students from other countries, especially India.

More than half of the student body is composed of foreign students. The cultural diversity among the 300 students is a small part of what makes Phoenix East unique. This international focus has allowed the school to become authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to issue the M-1 student visa for those foreign students who wish to obtain an aviation education.

Pat Cobleigh, marketing director for Phoenix East, tells us, “PEA is also authorized by the State Department to issue the J-1 visa to trainees who wish to take part in the Exchange Visitor Program.” In this program, trainees complete a professional pilot training program, from zero-time all the way through the commercial license with instrument and multi-engine ratings, and then continue training for the CFI and the CFII.

Students who successfully complete this program are offered interviews for employment as flight instructors with Phoenix East, allowing them to log significant hours in PEA’s fleet. This time counts toward their ATP ratings.

Phoenix East offers a specialized “India Airline Program” for students from that country wishing to earn their professional pilot ratings. The school’s training meets the Directorate General of Civil Aviation requirements, which allows Indian students to successfully convert their ratings from the United States to comparable ratings in India, all under Part 141 training.

“Our students become ambassadors to the world,” says Reslan. “We promote avi-

ation. We go out of our way to help students achieve their goals.” This focus on individual needs has translated into a 98% success rate for foreign students.

Andrew Williams is a pilot from India who earned his glider rating and 100 hours of flight time there. He came to Phoenix East to pursue his dream of becoming a professional pilot. “I always wanted to fly—it was never a question,” says Williams, “and I can say that my training at PEA was excellent. I’m extremely happy.”

Now working as a flight instructor, Williams has his eyes set on an airline cockpit. “I don’t know exactly where I’ll end up because there are so many opportunities to fly in other countries,” says Williams between flights. “There are fantastic chances for advancement at Phoenix; if you work hard, you’re rewarded.”

The pace at Phoenix East is brisk, and students are kept on their toes. The airspace environment around Daytona Beach International Airport is busy and complex. “We’re the second-busiest in the nation in terms of takeoffs and landings,” reports Reslan. “If students can operate here, they can operate anywhere.” The school’s fleet of nearly 30 airplanes, including Cessna 172SPs, Piper Senecas, Diamond DA42s and a Decathlon 8KCAB, keeps students flying with minimal scheduling conflicts. The school recently ordered two new Cessna Citation Mustang jets.

One of the most unique offerings at Phoenix East is its new Airline Dispatcher program. The six-week, FAA-approved program includes meteorology, flight-planning, FARs, global navigation and other courses related to practical dispatch operations. Graduates receive FAA certification and are qualified to work as professional airline dispatchers.

If you factor that Phoenix East Aviation is nationally accredited by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training, and that training here counts toward college credit, you get a good sense of why students have been flocking here since the school opened in 1972.

Is now a good time to come to PEA? Ghassan Reslan thinks so. “Now is the best time to become a pilot because—other than the U.S.—everybody is hiring. Internationally, we’re just seeing the beginning of pilot demand.”

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