

**61<sup>ST</sup> CONFERENCE OF  
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION  
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION**

*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
7 – 11 September 2026*

**AGENDA ITEM 3:        AVIATION SAFETY**

**IMPROVING COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR  
DRONES OPERATED BY TOURISTS IN DESTINATION STATE**

(Presented by Singapore and Thailand)

**SUMMARY**

The rapid proliferation of affordable consumer drones has made them increasingly common travel accessories for tourists. However, this trend has created a significant and growing compliance challenge for destination States. Tourists frequently operate drones abroad without sufficient knowledge of local requirements. This information gap has serious implications. From an aviation safety perspective, tourist-operated drones in restricted airspace pose genuine risks to operations by manned aircraft. Security-sensitive locations face comparable exposure as well. This paper discusses the challenges associated with tourist-operated drones and the initiative to study the issue and develop practical recommendations for States' consideration.

The Conference is invited to:

- a)        note the information contained in this paper; and
- b)        consider joining Singapore and Thailand in examining challenges associated with tourist-operated drones and developing recommendations on practical actions that may be taken by States / jurisdictions that would be shared at the next DGCA Conference.

## **IMPROVING COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR DRONES OPERATED BY TOURISTS IN DESTINATION STATE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The proliferation of consumer drones has reshaped how tourists document their holiday experiences abroad. Once largely confined to professional and military use, drones are now widely available at a low cost, allowing tourists to carry the drones during their travels to capture attractive aerial views of landscapes and heritage sites with ease.

1.2 This trend has presented regulatory challenges for States. Drone requirements vary across States / jurisdictions, and tourists may not be familiar with local environment (e.g. locations of airports / restricted airspace) or regulatory requirements (e.g. registration, permits, airspace or location-specific restrictions that are imposed through no-fly zones) at their destinations.

1.3 Unauthorised drone activities in the vicinity of an aerodrome can have an adverse impact on the safety and security of flights. This paper discusses the challenges faced by States concerning drone activities of tourists. It also sets out the initiative by Singapore and Thailand to study the challenges and identify measures towards improving tourists' compliance of drones activities.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 Advances in drone technology in recent years contributed to the growth of recreational drone use. Improvements in battery performance, miniaturisation and manufacturing have reduced the cost of consumer-grade drones while improving their capability, including longer flight times, higher-resolution cameras and more intuitive controls. Their reduced size and weight have also made them easier to carry during travel.

2.2 As international leisure travel continues to grow and expand, a rising number of tourists are choosing to bring drones on their travels, seeking to document their experiences from perspectives that were previously difficult to obtain. This convergence of accessible technology and a desire for immersive travel documentation has made recreational drones an increasingly common travel accessory.

2.3 This increasing use of drones by tourists abroad has created a range of challenges for States, of particular concern are aviation safety and security. Drones operated in close proximity to airports or within restricted airspace pose a severe risk to manned aviation. Unlike birds or kites, drones are more rigid and contain dense components such as batteries and motors, meaning a collision with a manned aircraft could cause significant damage. Thus, even brief drone incursions can trigger emergency responses and flight diversions, and, in the most serious cases, may result in mid-air collisions. In response, States have taken a strong enforcement stance against non-compliant drone operations, with some prosecuting offenders and others publishing regular drone sightings at their airports, to signal that authorities take a serious view of such activities<sup>1</sup>.

2.4 Many States also have security-sensitive locations where drone operations are prohibited. Unlike local professional operators who are familiar with the environment, trained and licensed and have an incentive to study the regulatory requirements, tourists may have little awareness of airspace restrictions, safe flight operations practices, or prohibitions on overflying security-sensitive areas. The lack of awareness is a key contributor to inadvertent violations which has become a recurring and serious problem for States worldwide. Coupled with the variation of regulatory requirements across States, it is a complex landscape that tourists frequently navigate without adequate knowledge, resulting in non-compliance.

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<sup>1</sup> The FAA website states that the FAA receives a monthly average of 100 drone sighting reports near its airport. [Drone Sightings Near Airports | Federal Aviation Administration](#)

### **3. DISCUSSION**

3.1 Addressing the challenges associated with tourist-operated drones requires a practical and proportionate approach. The aviation safety and security concerns outlined above are compounded by the structural difficulty of reaching out to tourists who are transient, diverse in origin, and often unfamiliar with the regulatory environment of the State they are visiting. Any effective response should therefore take into account both the regulatory priorities of destination States and the need for a cogent communication platform that can reach tourists before and during their travels.

3.2 Many States already regulate domestic drone operations through registration requirements, permit applications, airspace clearances and public-awareness efforts. In some jurisdictions, approvals from multiple agencies may also be required. While such measures may be effective for residents and domestic operators, they may be less effective for tourists, who are unfamiliar with local regulations and are often present in the destination State for only a short period.

3.3 Addressing this challenge will require action on multiple fronts, and no single measure is likely to be sufficient on its own. Broader international harmonisation of drone regulations, while desirable, will take considerable time to achieve. Inter-State information-sharing arrangements, though useful, tend to be bilateral in nature and resource-intensive to establish. Mandatory geo-fencing implemented at the manufacturer level could offer a technical safeguard, but would require a robust and equally resource-intensive inspection regime. While each of these approaches has merit, none provides a near-term, practical solution to the compliance gap that destination States are experiencing today. There is therefore value in first putting together a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the challenges States face, so that any recommendations put forward are grounded in evidence and can command broad support.

3.4 In view of the above, Singapore and Thailand are coming together to drive an initiative to study the challenges and develop practical recommendations. As part of the initiative, Singapore and Thailand would:

- a) identify existing challenges that hinder compliance by tourists in destination States, including through surveys and questionnaires;
- b) analyse the data received and identify practical measures to improve compliance by tourists; and
- c) share the consolidated information with States.

3.5 Singapore and Thailand welcome States to join the initiative. Singapore and Thailand will share its report at the next DGCA Conference, it would set out the challenges identified and provide recommendations on practical actions that may be taken by States / jurisdictions with the ultimate aim of upholding safety and security of aviation.

### **4. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

4.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) consider joining Singapore and Thailand in examining challenges associated with tourist-operated drones and developing recommendations on practical actions that may be taken by States / jurisdictions that would be shared at the next DGCA Conference.