

Florida's abundant lakes and waterways have provided aviation users with an exciting and unique way to access the state from the air – seaplanes! Since Florida hosted the first commercial flight by a seaplane in 1914, seaplane activity has expanded rapidly to include several bases available for public use. The following profiles highlight just four of Florida's public-use seaplane bases and how they provide a unique service in Florida's aviation system.

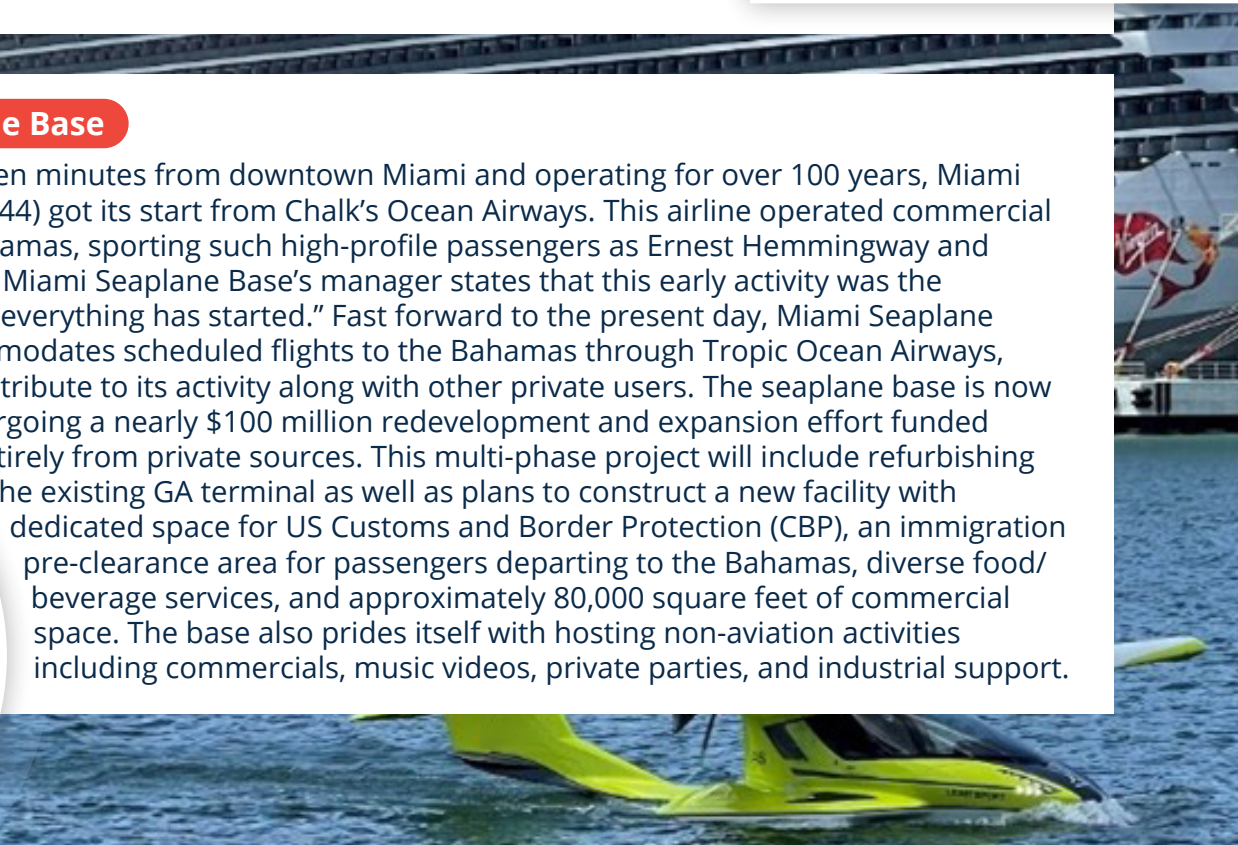
Jack Brown's Seaplane Base

Jack Brown's Seaplane Base (F57) is a family-owned and operated public-use seaplane base located in Winter Haven. Founded in 1963 by Jack Brown, the seaplane base was originally a fixed-base operator at Winter Haven Regional Airport (GIF). It has since been established as a separate facility with a connecting taxiway. Flight training is the most frequent activity at the seaplane base, with the onsite flight school able to provide current pilots with a seaplane rating in as little as two days! Pilots have the option to fly three types of seaplanes available at the base, ranging from a Piper PA-J3 Cub to a Cessna 172. Combined with an onsite FAA examiner, the seaplane base has attracted more than 22,000 pilots from around the world. The seaplane base also engages with the community by offering its maintenance shop for demos and classes to local aerospace clubs, high schools, and colleges in the area. The robust flight training program and community engagement has allowed Jack Brown to be a treasured destination and provide a unique economic impact to the heart of central Florida.



Miami Seaplane Base

Located only seven minutes from downtown Miami and operating for over 100 years, Miami Seaplane Base (X44) got its start from Chalk's Ocean Airways. This airline operated commercial flights to the Bahamas, sporting such high-profile passengers as Ernest Hemmingway and Howard Hughes. Miami Seaplane Base's manager states that this early activity was the "genesis for how everything has started." Fast forward to the present day, Miami Seaplane Base now accommodates scheduled flights to the Bahamas through Tropic Ocean Airways, which contribute to its activity along with other private users. The seaplane base is now undergoing a nearly \$100 million redevelopment and expansion effort funded entirely from private sources. This multi-phase project will include refurbishing the existing GA terminal as well as plans to construct a new facility with dedicated space for US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an immigration pre-clearance area for passengers departing to the Bahamas, diverse food/ beverage services, and approximately 80,000 square feet of commercial space. The base also prides itself with hosting non-aviation activities including commercials, music videos, private parties, and industrial support.



St. Cloud Seaplane Base

As the newest facility in Florida's airport system, St. Cloud Seaplane Base (3FL) provides a unique aviation gateway to central Florida. The seaplane base's origins date to the 1940s, with the U.S. Navy planning on a "flying boat facility" on East Lake. These plans never came to fruition, but the lake was reevaluated in the 2010s as a site for a public-use seaplane base. The city of St. Cloud and the director of Kissimmee Gateway Airport (ISM), initiated these conversations and recognized that the site could be developed with Lakefront Park. During the initial planning of the seaplane base, the Kissimmee Gateway Airport director expressed optimism that the facility will fill a void in the greater Orlando region for seaplane activity, noting that "We are already in an 'airport rich' environment, but not when it comes to seaplanes." In June 2020, the seaplane base was activated and designated as a public-use facility for seaplane activity. Since being established, the seaplane base has typically seen touch-go and short transient activity. To support more itinerant traffic, the seaplane base has joint plans with the Lakefront Park to install a floating dock for visitors eager to explore the area.



Source: www.aroundosceola.com/news/st-cloud-seeks-input-city-seaplane-base-lakefront-park

Tavares Seaplane Base

Tavares Seaplane Base (FA1) is an excellent case of an aviation facility being embraced by the surrounding community. Located in Tavares, about 27 miles northwest of Orlando, the seaplane base has inspired the city to brand itself as "America's Seaplane City" and model many community features around seaplanes. From the lamp posts being shaped as seaplanes, to the water park having several seaplane features, the city takes pride in its seaplane base. The city also prides itself as being only a few miles away from a historic landmark: in 1914, the first licensed airline pilot, Tony Janus, flew a Benoist airboat off Lake Eustis, recording the first seaplane flight. After the widespread damage caused by Hurricane Irma, Tavares invested in repairing and replacing facilities at the seaplane base, including constructing new docks, fueling services, and a new marina space that the facility manager notes "changed the face of the seaplane base." Tavares Seaplane Base has now returned to hosting several free community events throughout the year including airshows, fly-ins, and aircraft competitions like shortest takeoff and most accurate landing. These events are held biennially and regularly attract over 10,000 attendees.



Overview

Florida's diverse array of seaplane bases have provided a unique edge to the state's robust aviation offerings, generating an additional form of tourism and new economic activity for the state. These profiles have illustrated how seaplanes are integral to Florida's aviation history and will be part of its aviation future as well.