Plane spotting takes off, thanks to the Internet

THERE are not many leisure activities you can do that don’t require you to fork out some money – whether it is going to a club, swimming at a public pool, taking up golf lessons, or going to the cinema or bowling alley.

But thankfully, some still exist, including spending a day just lazing by the beach – if you don’t factor in the cost of whipping up picnic goodies or renting bicycles.

At Changi Beach, a time-honoured pastime is still going strong – if not getting a revival, thanks to the Internet.

Together with Tanah Merah Coast Road and Laguna Golf Course, this place in the eastern part of Singapore is popular with plane enthusiasts.

Or, as they are called, plane spotters.

From all of these locations, you can get close to planes during their landing or take-offs at Changi Airport.

Changi Beach is the first patch of land a plane encounters just before landing at the runway L02, which is closer to Terminal 1.

Tanah Merah Coast road runs along the fence erected to barricade runway 02, close to Terminal 2.

And Laguna Golf Resort lies in between the two runways.

It can get a little noisy out there, but the aviation enthusiasts can’t wish for more. These places are often crowded with plane spotters.

Plane spotting is a hobby as old as planes themselves.

Throughout history, plane spotters have been the ones who have provided some of the most beautiful shots of planes, up close and personal.

In World War II, they were strategically employed by the British forces to spy on German planes, in civilian clothes.

Today, the hobby has taken a different turn. Profiles of plane spotters often include airport staff members, air traffic controllers and other people from a variety of backgrounds.

Some enthusiasts like only the military aircrafts, but a growing number are drooling over the latest commercial airliners.

These days, they take interesting pictures of planes landing or taking off, or even tutoring to the gate. These are then often shared on online forums such as Airline.net.

Others pitch in with their comments on the photos, the airline and even the plane model, and the photo is accompanied by a number of threads on the airline industry itself, which includes specific future plans for airlines and more.

Hobbyists get their kick out of getting their predictions right.

For example, the latest speculations include whether Virgin Atlantic’s new Airbus A380 will feature double beds, or whether the new Jet Airways service from Mumbai to San Francisco will fly via Shanghai or Brussels.

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

When the latest Airbus A380 made an appearance in Singapore Airlines’ colours here last year, you could find “paparazzi” with their cameras mounted on overhead bridges and on trees near the airport.

Some of the best shots have the maximum hits on Airlines.net.

Other places people like to plane-spot in Singapore include the Terminal 1 viewing gallery. For those in transit, the open-air sunflower garden and swimming pool at the airport are exciting alternatives.

Though Singapore has recently gained popularity among diehard fans, traditional spotting powerhouses have included Hong Kong’s old Kai Tak airport, for its very last right-angle turn required to land; the Los Angeles International Airport, for the sheer variety of planes that can be spotted there; and the Netherlands Antilles, tiny islands in the Caribbean where spotters literally have to lie flat to avoid being blown away by the powerful thrust of a landing plane. (Think John Cassack and Billy Bob Thornton in Pushing Tin.)

It’s a thrill that is worth any ride on a rollercoaster.

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