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Singapore's **Best Law Firms 2027**

The lawyer-pilot flying above the competition

Salem Ibrahim's experience in courtroom, cockpit gives him an edge in aviation law

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Finding a lawyer who understands aviation law in an air hub like Singapore is not uncommon. Finding one like Salem Ibrahim, who is also a licensed pilot, is a rarity.

Being equally adept in the courtroom and the cockpit, the founder and managing director of the firm of Salem Ibrahim LLC, who has more than 38 years of legal experience, brings a rare dual-lens expertise to the field.

His legal background and specialised piloting credentials – with multi-engine, instrument and gas-turbine ratings – have established his firm as a premier boutique practice for cross-border aviation matters.

In The Straits Times/Statista Singapore's Best Law Firms 2027 survey, Salem Ibrahim LLC topped the rankings for aviation, aerospace and space law, a new category in the annual survey. The practice earned the survey's only five-star rating in the category, outranking global and regional heavyweights.

Salem credits his elder brother, Ahmad Ibrahim, who served as Singapore's first attorney-general, as his inspiration for going into law.

Salem's interest in aviation started in 1982 when he earned his basic pilot's licence at the Republic of Singapore Flying Club. Over the years, he upgraded his credentials to meet commercial operational standards, earning a private pilot's licence with multi-engine and instrument ratings. He also completed specialised gas turbine training in the United States, acquiring engineering fluency in jet propulsion and turbine-engine mechanics.

On how he came to combine his two loves, he said: "My trajectory into aviation law was never clinical or academic; it was forged by a lifelong, parallel passion for the sky and the Bar. My foundational technical education began in the cockpit. I found all this to be mentally challenging."

For over a decade, he owned and piloted a twin-piston aircraft, navigating the complex micro-climates, island routes and air traffic control networks of South-east Asia before spreading his wings farther to Australia, New Zealand and the US.

He said: "My unique flight background allows me to sit across from regulatory boards, insurance underwriters and investigators not merely as an attorney quoting statutes, but as an active commander who speaks the exact technical and operational language of the cockpit."

Aviation deals are vastly different from real estate transactions as aircraft routinely cross international borders long before money changes hands.

Salem explained how a US-registered aircraft might be owned by an Asian investor through an offshore holding company, financed by a European bank and leased to a charter fleet to sell unused flight hours.

"Ownership, registration, financing and operations must be designed together as one decision because each part affects the rest," he said.

Salem's legal advantage stems directly from his ability to read air traffic clearances, radio transcripts and flight plans like a pilot, and argue them like a trial lawyer. His firm handles maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) disputes, pilot liability cases and cross-border regulatory issues.



Veteran lawyer Salem Ibrahim in a private plane on Sept 10. His legal background and specialised piloting credentials have established his firm as a premier boutique practice for cross-border aviation matters. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

In one high-profile case in 2008, he defended the pilot involved in an airspace intrusion incident over Singapore skies that triggered two Republic of Singapore Air Force F-16 fighter jets to intercept the Cessna 208 aircraft, resulting in a 50-minute shutdown of all commercial air traffic at Changi Airport.

Salem successfully defended the pilot's operational exposure, resulting in a $5,000 fine imposed by the court, with no jail time. His firm also handled the parallel corporate aircraft claims linked to the incident.

Business jet transactions are a big part of his firm's work. In a deal in 2025, the firm acted for a fast-rising luxury business jet charter company in the purchase and US$21 million (S$26.8 million) financing of a Gulfstream G550 for international charter operations. In one year alone, from 2016 to 2017, his firm handled business jet transactions exceeding US$530 million.

Looking ahead, Salem sees rapid developments in three areas of aerospace law:

Autonomous aerial systems. Aerospace law must adapt to manage the integration of autonomous aerial systems – such as urban cargo drones and electric vertical take-off and landing networks – requiring entirely new legal frameworks for airspace control, local flight paths and tort liability.

Commercial space law. As private entities expand beyond low-Earth orbit, legal expertise is increasingly needed to navigate space debris liability, commercial satellite constellations, private space tourism and contentious resource extraction rights off Earth.

Green and digital aviation. Strict environmental, social and governance mandates and decarbonisation targets are driving complex legal issues around sustainable aviation fuel procurement and greenwashing litigation. Concurrently, as aircraft become data-driven, software-reliant nodes, attorneys must bridge the gap between digital coding and physical aviation to address cybervulnerabilities, algorithmic navigation liabilities and evolving hull insurance risks.

Salem believes that the prospects for aviation law in Singapore remain bright and welcomed ST's decision to introduce aviation, aerospace and space law as a separate field in its Singapore's Best Law Firms 2027 survey.

"It is recognition that the field is a distinct specialisation and makes it visible to a new generation of lawyers deciding where to build their careers," he said.

"Singapore's position as an aviation powerhouse is secure. The MRO sector's expansion signals a robust future for the industry. But to sustain this momentum, we must cultivate a new breed of legal professional – one that respects the complexity of the machine as much as the letter of the law."