

Global solar flight to start, end in Abu Dhabi

September 25 2014, by Adam Schreck



In this Monday, April 14, 2014 file photo, people stand around the new experimental aircraft "Solar Impulse 2" during the first exit for solar generator tests at the airbase in Payerne, Switzerland. Clean-energy company Masdar said Thursday that the Solar Impulse 2 plane will attempt its historic journey in March from the Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Project founders Bertrand Piccard and Andre Borschberg hope to complete the journey over four or five months, including stopovers. (AP Photo/Keystone, Laurent Gillieron, File)

A Swiss-made solar-powered aircraft is planned to start and finish its first round-the-world flight from the United Arab Emirates capital of

Abu Dhabi, a government-backed renewable energy company in the oil-rich Gulf federation said Thursday.

The choice of Abu Dhabi as the launch site for the historic journey is likely to bolster the wealthy emirate's efforts to position itself as a champion of renewable energy. It controls the bulk of the vast petroleum reserves in the Emirates, a seven-state federation that ranks among the largest oil exporters in OPEC.

Masdar, the Abu Dhabi government's clean-energy company, said the Solar Impulse 2 plane will attempt its historic journey in March.

Project founders Bertrand Piccard and Andre Borschberg hope to complete the journey over four or five months, including stopovers in Asia, North America and either Europe or North Africa.

Some legs of the trip, such as over the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, could involve five or six straight days of flying.

"We have chosen this location as being the best and most suitable departure and return point for the round-the-world tour, due to its climate, infrastructure and commitment to clean technologies," Borschberg said in a statement.

The project team will arrive in Abu Dhabi in January and spend two months training and testing with Masdar before takeoff, the Emirati company said. It hopes the plane's stay will boost young Emiratis' interest in fields such as aeronautics and [renewable energy](#).



In this Monday, June 2, 2014 file photo, German test pilot Markus Scherdel steers the solar-powered Solar Impulse 2 aircraft for its maiden flight at its base in Payerne, Switzerland. Clean-energy company Masdar said Thursday, Sept. 25, 2014 that the Solar Impulse 2 plane will attempt its historic journey in March from the Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Project founders Bertrand Piccard and Andre Borschberg hope to complete the journey over four or five months, including stopovers. (AP Photo/Denis Balibouse,Pool, File)

The Solar Impulse 2 was unveiled in April and is a larger version of a single-seat prototype that first flew five years ago. The founders say the plane in theory can stay airborne indefinitely by soaking up sunlight using some 17,200 solar cells arrayed on wings that span 72 meters (236 feet).

It made a 2 hour and 17 minute inaugural flight above western Switzerland in June.

Abu Dhabi has pumped billions of dollars into low-carbon energy initiatives in recent years and is trying to reduce the share of its electricity supply that comes from fossil fuels, primarily by developing solar and nuclear power projects. The city is home to the International Renewable Energy Agency, and its Masdar project is developing what aims to be an environmentally sustainable model city in the desert.

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