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Words by Nigel Tisdall

# ON THE WINGS OF PRIVATE JETS

If there's one phrase that sums up the sublime joy of travelling by private jet it is surely the wise words of Aldo Gucci, the eldest son of Guccio Gucci who founded one of Italy's best known luxury brands after starting life as a lift boy at London's Savoy hotel.

"Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten," he observed, and the chance to whizz around this wonderful planet in our own small and superlative plane, flying when and where we please with a minimum of hassle, has to be one of the most perfect experiences money can buy.

It's not just about the comfort and ease, the 15-minute check-in time or the chance to take pets and all manner of luggage. There's the more serious issues of privacy and security, and the efficient use of our time – and of course, flying in PJs is damn good fun too.

Not surprisingly, more and more of us are finding the means and schemes to hop on a private jet. What was once seen as the sky-high preserve of tycoons, politicians and the stars of sport and entertainment is now being transformed by new, tech-based business models that tune into today's on-demand and sharing economies. In the past you either owned an aircraft or chartered it. Now you can buy a share in a jet (fractional ownership), sign up for a card guaranteeing so many hours of instant jet travel, join a club offering discounted seats on popular routes, and make use of vacant repositioning flights.

"Most of our bookings are made between 48 and 72 hours before take-off," says Antony Rivolta, co-founder of the Monaco-based empty leg specialist Jetpartner.net. Another company catering to the app-powered lifestyle is JetSmarter, pioneered in Fort Lauderdale but now also in London, which runs an Uber-like service that offers regular jet shuttles and seat-only deals at the touch of a smartphone.

All this is good news for those of us who like to fly in style to and from that dream yacht moored in the warmth and sunshine. "The seasonality of superyacht and private jet charter is incredibly similar," reflects Clive Jackson, chief executive officer of the London-headquartered private jet charter company Victor. "We see a lot of members flying to Mediterranean and Caribbean hotspots every summer – this includes attending events like the Monaco Yacht Show or connecting with charters in Nice, Cannes, Ibiza, Miami, St Barths and St Maarten." Over half of the company's charter bookings are now made with the help of its iOS app, with clients often calling the captain of a yacht to arrange for it to meet them close to where they will land.

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In tandem with this, leisure travellers are increasingly enjoying the benefits of what has traditionally been seen as a corporate privilege. Twenty-one years ago Seattle-based TCS World Travel launched an innovative round-the-world trip using a reconfigured Balair jet to visit a cavalcade of bucket-list wonders from the Amazon to Papua New Guinea. Today the company has an additional London office and its escorted group tours feature the Four Seasons Private Jet and cruises with Seadream Yacht Club. Abercrombie & Kent has its own lavish programme of private jet journeys, while in Africa Elewana Collection's 'Sky Safari' of Tanzania, which whisks passengers around on a Grand Cessna Caravan fitted with club class seats, recently expanded into Kenya. We can expect a lot more of these 'aerial-hopping' holidays in future, if only because once you've experienced the bliss of touring by private jet or VIP turbo-prop, you can never go back.



A further boost to this seductive market is the increasing power and sophistication of the aircraft now cruising the heavens. The forthcoming HondaJet promises to be "a highly cost-effective small jet to rival existing contenders", says Carol Cork from the St Albans-based booking service PrivateFly. She also expects Embraer's Legacy 450, with its full digital flight controls, large stand-up cabin and interiors by BMW, to create a lot of interest.

For Clive Jackson, today's golden tickets are aboard the latest ultra-long-range aircraft. "The Bombardier Global 5000 and 6000, and Gulfstream G550 and G650, are among our hottest charter requests," he reports. The last, in its extended range version, can carry eight passengers up to 6,400 nautical miles without a fuel stop, travelling just under the speed of sound.



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There's plenty more to come as aircraft manufacturers strive to find the perfect balance between speed, style and efficiency. Currently in development, Bombardier's 13-passenger Global 8000 jet will have a range of 7,900 nautical miles, so you can whisk your party from London to a superyacht in California, Brazil or Indonesia in one simple hop. Meanwhile, the twin joys of air and water have been brought together in Embraer's 1000Q Skyacht One, which poses the exciting question 'what if a yacht could fly?' Featuring a hand-painted trompe l'oeil mahogany 'hull' and a rudder-like stabiliser, with navigation-themed interiors and bathroom taps designed like powerboat throttles, it marries the exclusive thrills of a private jet flight with the shimmering realm of oceangoing luxury.

Other head-turning glimpses of the future include windowless jets fitted with high definition projection screens offering a real-time 360-degree view, and Lilium, a German-designed two-passenger electric jet with vertical take-off that's set to launch in 2018. Then there's the holy grail of commercial supersonic flight, ideally without the boom, which has been frustratingly absent since the demise of Concorde in 2003.

The Spike S-512 supersonic jet now being developed by Boston-based Spike Aerospace promises speeds of up to Mach 1.6, while another enticing prospect is the Aerion AS2 from the Nevada-headquartered Aerion Corporation, which will cut the flight time from London to New York to four-and-a-half-hours. When it comes to the wonders of modern t



**Previous spread**  
An open vista above the clouds  
**Photograph:** @Rob Allen/  
coolairphotography.com

**Opposite page:**  
**Top:** Bombardier Global 6000  
is one of Victor's hottest  
charter requests

**Left:** Private jet charter company  
Victor sees a lot of members  
flying to Mediterranean and  
Caribbean hotspots every  
summer

**This page:**  
**Top:** The Skyacht One designed  
by Sotostudios  
**Photograph:** @Sotostudios/  
Embraer