



GET ONBOARD

Surf Air

Surf Air, which launched in Europe in October, offers monthly memberships from £1,450, with unlimited flights on routes between London, Amsterdam, Zurich, Geneva, Dublin and Cannes. Ibiza and Paris are next. surfair.com/eu

PrivateFly

PrivateFly offers keenly priced charters and empty-leg trips. We found a flight from Biggin Hill to Cannes on an eight-seater Cessna C550 Citation Bravo for £2,280 (standard price is £9,200) – that's £285 per head. privatefly.com

Victor app

Download Victor's app for a screenful of tempting late prices (anyone for Stansted to Ibiza for £5,212 on a six-seater next Monday?). flyvictor.com

Four Seasons Private Jet

The 52-bed Four Seasons Private Jet is dropping into Kyoto, the Maldives, the Serengeti and St Petersburg this year. Oof. TCS World Travel's 24-day 'International Intrigue' itinerary, from £95,000 per person, departs from Seattle on 3 September. tcsworldtravel.com

Abercrombie & Kent

'The Tropics to the Arctic' is Abercrombie & Kent's most popular private-jet journey, a 25-night aerial odyssey taking in rarities like Easter Island, the Solomon Islands, Mongolia and Uzbekistan. From £103,630 per person, with no single supplement, departing from Fort Lauderdale on 1 May on a Boeing 757 with 50 guests. abercrombiekent.com/privatejet

National Geographic Expeditions

Get spiritual on a 21-day 'Sacred Places' journey with National Geographic Expeditions, visiting holy hotspots like Jerusalem, Amritsar and the rock-hewn churches of Ethiopia. From £49,000 on a 77-guest jet, departing from Rome on 29 April. nationalgeographicexpeditions.com

Captain's Choice

A 14-day Captain's Choice 'Outback, Top End and Kimberley' journey is an epic 12-flight Australian odyssey from Sydney to Darwin and back – you'll travel aboard a 28-guest Embraer ERJ 135 – with stops including Broome, Uluru and Birdsville. The all-inclusive itinerary costs from £11,550 and departs on 13 August. captainschoice.co.uk

Elewana Collection

Safari on a whole new level aboard Elewana Collection's super-comfy Cessna Grand Caravan E, kitted out with eight business-class-style seats. An eight-day Kenya SkySafari, which departs from Nairobi every other day year-round, with stops at lodges in Amboseli, Meru and the Maasai Mara, costs from £4,829. skysafari.com

Have you

always suspected that flying ought to be a bit... different? That there might be a way of getting through an airport without having a nervous breakdown? That maybe you can avoid shoving a fortnight's worth of clothes into a case the size of a shoebox, only to then get in an inelegant scuffle with your fellow passengers about the overhead locker? That perhaps the food on board needn't just be a choice of horrid chicken or horrid beef, and – just imagine – the staff might be genuinely pleased to see you (or at least *really* good at pretending)?

Well, it turns out your suspicions are completely correct. That is exactly how flying can be – if you happen to have access to a private jet. If, until recently, you happened to be a tycoon, or a rock star, or perhaps a head of state. But we have good news! Flying privately is becoming more accessible – quicker, easier and cheaper(ish).

A small jet carrying four now costs around £3,000 for a one-hour flight from Biggin Hill to Paris Le Bourget

'The cost of chartering a private jet is 10 to 20 per cent less than it was five years ago,' says Carol Cork of charter specialist PrivateFly. 'On-demand charters have been steadily gaining market share,' she says, 'especially with leisure and entry-level customers.' And they're getting younger too. Some recent data-crunching by PrivateFly found the average age of passengers is 41, and 30 per cent of them are women.

Apps are shaking things up – like nifty new Surf Air, which brings the idea of car-pooling to the skies. Their fleet of Pilatus PC-12s can be used for unlimited scheduled flights. 'It's like a private members' club in the skies,' says Surf Air Europe CEO Simon Talling-Smith. You pay a monthly membership (from £1,450), and you can then fly as much as you want on scheduled European routes. You share the flights with up to eight other members, but the app means you can book within 30 seconds, fly from a private terminal (Luton Private Aviation Terminal in London) and don't need to turn up for your flight until 15 minutes before departure.

Then there are the apps that list 'empty leg' private-jet trips – basically a way of filling empty flights that are returning to base or en route to their next scheduled departure point. Best part: rates are winningly discounted. A quick look at the Victor app, which accesses over 7,000 aircraft worldwide, pings up some seductive possibilities – like Farnborough to Avignon for £3,413 for six. Not exactly bargain-basement, but no longer pie in the sky either.

Empty legs are just the headline deals. 'They're one per cent of our business,' explains Victor's founder and CEO, Clive Jackson. Founded in 2011, his jet-charter company now books over 300 flights a month, often at great speed – the record is 72 minutes for a £55,000 one-way charter from London to Antigua for a client who needed to sail in a regatta.

Urgent needs aside, the real plus-points of private jetting are the convenience, the time-saving, the security, the total lack of airport hell and, yes, the sheer glamour of it all. Tot up all the plus-points, possibly splitting the costs among your party, and chartering a private jet doesn't seem quite so extravagant. A small jet carrying four now costs around £3,000 for a one-hour flight to Europe – from Biggin Hill to Paris Le Bourget, for instance. Or how about £68,800 for a London to New York return on a fabulous Gulfstream G450 seating 12? That's a little over £5,000 per head.

Tour operators are clocking on too, offering air-hopping holidays in customised private jets to whisk groups of passengers around the wonders of the world. Usually lasting two to three weeks, they attract well-heeled, cultured types who want zero hassle (no long queues at security, civilised departure times, unseen fairies dealing with luggage).

It's a proper trend, with top-of-the-heap experts such as andBeyond and Aman twiggling how much we like this type of travel. Both launched group expeditions by private jet last year, and Crystal Cruises and Oetker Collection will start similar programmes later in 2017. TCS World Travel, which has been offering planet-circling adventures for over 20 years, has this down pat. For its trips aboard the stonking Four Seasons Private Jet, for example, the plane always flies west and only in the day, with a two- or three-night stop in between legs – nothing too taxing.

Unlike your next 'normal' flight, which is likely to feel more taxing than ever. There had to be a downside somewhere. □

THE JET PACK

Come on, admit it, you've had long and detailed dreams about owning a plane (which definitely don't involve printing off your own luggage tag). Well, now's the time to make those dreams a reality... Sort of. By Nigel Tisdall and Francisca Kellett