

# Flying high

PRIVATE JETS USED TO BE THE EXCLUSIVE PRESERVE OF THE FABULOUSLY WEALTHY, A SPRINKLING OF THE BUSINESS ELITE, AND A HANDFUL OF HOLLYWOOD'S RICHEST AND MOST GLAMOROUS CELEBRITIES. BACK IN THE SIXTIES, STARS OF THE SILVER SCREEN LIKE FRANK SINATRA AND CARY GRANT BECAME THE FIRST GENERATION OF EXECUTIVE TRAVELLERS FLYING DOWN TO LAS VEGAS. BUT, AS ALEC LOM DISCOVERS, THOSE PIONEERING DAYS ARE LONG GONE

Today, thousands of corporate and private clients charter a jet every year, prompting a huge expansion of the aviation charter industry for business and leisure over the past decade. The sector has rapidly – and literally – taken off around the world. The figures speak for themselves. One of the largest operators of business jets in Europe, Netjets, which was founded in 1996, had built up an impressive list of 80 private clients by the year 2002. Three years later, that figure had soared to nearly 1,000 customers. And last year, due to substantially increased demand for its services, the company's client base grew once again, to 1,300 customers.

Netjets flies its customers to 850 airports in 125 countries and the company now boasts an impressive fleet of 114 aircraft. Corporate clients include executives from leading international companies such as Nokia, Gillette and General Electric. VIPs from the world of sport, like Tiger Woods, Tim Henman and Roger Federer are also regularly welcomed onboard. Netjets, which organised 62,000 flights last year, estimates that the company has grown by 1,500 per cent since 2002 – pretty impressive – and other rivals in the sector are reporting similar upward trends. So what exactly has brought about this extraordinary boom in the



private jet charter industry? "The reason this increase has happened is all to do with more and more hassle at the major airports," explains Malcolm Ginsberg, veteran aviation writer, respected industry commentator and the founding editor of *Air and Business Travel News*. "It's all about delays from security and the weight of numbers of passengers passing through the terminals.

"If you can avoid the hassle of Heathrow, and fly out of Northolt instead, you can be airborne in 10 or 15 minutes. Your pilot will go when you want to go, not when he wants to go. From a corporate point of view, it can also be extremely cost-effective."

It is certainly a sobering realisation that, no matter how much you pay for your seat on a commercial airline, first or business class travel provides you with no immunity whatsoever from crowded airports, delayed flights and bad connections. Mounting concern about security and the terrorist threat means that many who can afford to do so now increasingly opt for the private jet, where such risks are minimised and you are free to dictate your own schedule.

As for safety standards, private charter companies are sticklers for safety. Netjets, for example, maintains that it



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## TAKING OFF



spends more on safety than many airlines. "Safety is an obsession at Netjets," stresses the company, a large proportion of whose pilots are ex-military. "From pilot qualifications and training to maintenance and operations, we never rest."

As you might expect, the Green debate is also on charter companies' radar, as despite their industry's rapid expansion, they are keenly aware of today's environmental issues. Some charter firms hire environmental consultants to advise them on development; for others, the declared aim is to work towards making their business carbon-neutral in the future.

Despite all these various issues, one of the top priorities for experienced, well-established charter companies remains attending to all the trimmings of your itinerary, whether this entails collecting you from your home or office by chauffeur-driven limousine, or sorting your travel permits and visas for you, or arranging personalised in-flight food and entertainment. High-quality service is the name of the game.

Attention to detail is a priority for another leading UK private jet charter company, Avolus, (named from the Latin volare - to fly). It bills itself as a luxury integrated transport provider, "a one-stop solution designed for the world's travelling elite". Avolus, a young company established in 2004 and projecting a £4 million turnover this year, offers chauffeured limousines, helicopters, yachts and jets for charter, with a client list evenly balanced between private and corporate contracts. So what is a typical customer?



Examples of private and leisure clients range from the wedding celebration planned in Marbella for a wealthy family, who flew in cousins from Italy, France, Hungary and Poland. Security and privacy were essential and the media were specifically not invited. Guests were driven in limousines to private airports, where chartered jets then landed at Malaga airport's secure airstrip, away from commercial runways and terminals. Guests on board the Hawker 800XP jets were able to change into their glamorous frocks, away from prying lenses, then set off by limousine, refreshed and ready for the fun.



A very private Eastern European house-hunting entrepreneur proved another typical client. Keen to avoid the crowds, he chartered a jet to Switzerland where he and his wife carried on their search in a Sikorsky 76 helicopter.

**IF YOU CAN AVOID THE HASSLE OF HEATHROW, AND FLY OUT OF NORTHOLT INSTEAD, YOU CAN BE AIRBORNE IN 10 OR 15 MINUTES. YOUR PILOT WILL GO WHEN YOU WANT TO GO, NOT WHEN HE WANTS TO GO. AND FROM A CORPORATE POINT OF VIEW, IT CAN ALSO BE EXTREMELY COST-EFFECTIVE**



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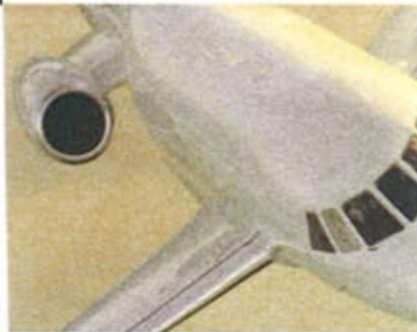


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Having identified their ideal new home from the air and inspected it on the ground, the deal was done by email as they flew back.

There is little doubt that the corporate sector has woken up to the fact that chartering a private jet can be a cost-effective, time-saving expenditure that is well worth making. Corporate entertaining, including private jet charter, is an investment many top companies regard as not just worthwhile but a priority. Typical destinations include Zurich, for long weekends at the luxury Swiss resort of St Moritz; Nice, for St Tropez; and New York, famed worldwide for administering retail therapy.

Typical business clients would be the team of investment bankers who were looking to stage a financial roadshow across Europe in order to launch an Initial Public Offering (IPO), of privately owned equity, simultaneously across multiple stock markets. Believing that pre-launch intelligence would boost appetite for the stock, they chartered a Cessna Citation and within 48 hours had made presentations to private equity groups and stockbrokers in Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn, Lisbon and Madrid. Flying in comfort allowed them time and stretch-out space for cat naps between presentations.



Editor Malcolm Ginsberg, who recently flew in the company of two of the world's most famous business entrepreneurs, Virgin's Richard Branson and Easyjet's Stelios Haji-Ioannou, adds: "If you are, say, a London-based company, with outlets in Rome and Madrid, it is far more cost-effective to fly your executive team to those capitals by private jet than on scheduled flights."

Another typical business client was a famous, prize-winning film director, hunting for locations for a forthcoming costume drama. With back-up from limousines and a helicopter, the director, his cameraman and PA were collected at 5am, were airborne by 6am and were back home 12 hours later, having scouted seven potential locations in north-west England. Thanks to the efficiency of his chartered private jet, the film director's shots were safely in the can. Now we just have to wait and see whether he wins an Oscar.

# Travellers iscoverers...



"...especially those who travel by air. There are no signposts in the air to show a man has passed that way before. There are no channels marked. The flier breaks each second into new uncharted seas." A M Lindbergh, 1935

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HERE'S **LA DOLCE VITA'S** TAKE ON THE WORLD OF PRIVATE AVIATION. WE VISIT SOME OF THE LEADING PRIVATE AVIATION CHARTER COMPANIES, AND WHAT THEY CAN OFFER



**Background:** Established ten years ago and has built up a strong base of European, American and UK clients. Customers are 50 per cent corporate, 50 per cent private.

**What's on offer:** Helicopters only: the twin-engine Agusta 109E Power Elite (six passengers) and the Sikorsky S-76C+ (seats nine passengers). And new to the fleet for 2008 is the Agusta A109S Grand (for up to six passengers).

**Key destinations:** UK, mainly major cities, country estates or any destination with room for a helicopter to land. Flights from Battersley heliport.

**Any other services:** Helicopters offer luxuriously appointed, air-conditioned cabins with complimentary minibar.

**Background:** Established in 2004, a one-stop-shop for the world's travelling elite. Private and corporate clients.

**What's on offer:** A range of more than a dozen different short-, medium- and long-range jets, from the Cessna Citation (seven-ten passengers) or the Cessna Excel (eight-nine passengers) to the Falcon 2000 (up to 13 passengers) or the Airbus 319 (30 passengers).

**Key destinations:** Financial centres across Europe and worldwide.

**Any other services:** Chauffeured limousines, helicopters, luxury yachts and coaches.

**Website:** [www.thechartercompany.co.uk](http://www.thechartercompany.co.uk)

**Background:** Founded in 1996 and claims to be the largest operator of business jets in Europe.

**What's on offer:** Ten aircraft types, flying to 1,000 airports across Europe. Jets include the Beechcraft Hawker 400XP (seven-seater), Dassault Falcon 2000 (ten passengers) and the Gulfstream 500V (14-seater).

**Key destinations:** New York (business and shopping), Zurich (en route to St Moritz), Nice (for St Tropez), Düsseldorf and Rome.

**Any other services:** Fleet of 133 private jets to choose from.

**Website:** [www.airpartner.com](http://www.airpartner.com)

**Background:** Leading international business aviation group with headquarters in Geneva and bases in Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Munich, Zurich and the US. Established for 30 years and employs 540 staff.

**What's on offer:** A fleet of 50 aircraft ranging from the seven-seater Learjet 60, to the Challenger 604 (12-seater), the Boeing Business Jet BBJ 1 and 2 (seats 56+) and operates four Airbus A319 aircraft (126 passengers).

**Key destinations:** Worldwide.

**Any other services:** Bell 407 helicopter charter (seats five). Prides itself on providing service 'beyond VIP level'.



**Background:** Air charter specialist established in 2003 and recently acquired Caledon 136 operating from London Dagen Hill Airport and Cannes in the South of France. Employing an 80 full-time staff.

**What's on offer:** Hawkeye 800 capable of two- and a half hours' cruising time) and the Eurocopter 328 (seats 15 passengers).

**Key destinations:** French Riviera, for the Monaco Grand Prix and Cannes Film Festival.

**Any other services:** Luxury yachts, seating can be configured for in-flight board meetings on all jets and yachts, doorway to runway service with chauffeur-driven limousines on stand-by; private helicopter transfer also available.

**Website:** [www.flycal.com](http://www.flycal.com)



**Background:** Based in London, the company offers customised solutions to your every aviation need, creating the in-flight experience to suit your style and budget. Claims more than £750 million of successful contracts to its credit.

**What's on offer:** A wide range of new-generation jets, including Europe's largest fleet of Learjets.

**Key destinations:** Has experience from project launches for 1,500 guests in Nice, to birthday weekends in the South Pacific for 300 friends. From Arctic trooping exercises, to night approaches into Barra, the AirPartner team has seen them all.

**Any other services:** Can put your branding on the aircraft livery and inside the cabin. Will even put your logo on crew uniforms.

**Website:** [www.airpartner.com](http://www.airpartner.com)



**Background:** A global charter company, formed in 2002, with headquarters in Washington DC, and bases in London and Hong Kong. Soon to open a new Middle East operation with a base in Dubai.

**What's on offer:** Access to a fleet of 920 business jets, including Bombardier Learjet 31A, 40, 45/45XR and 60; Bombardier Challenger 300, 601-3R, 604 and 800; Bombardier Global Express.

**Key destinations:** Europe, Middle East, Asia Pacific.

**Any other services:** See website.

**How to book:** call +44 (0) 1252 526460

**Website:** [www.flycal.com](http://www.flycal.com)

**Background:** Employing 550 staff, the company headquarters is in Zurich, Switzerland, with operating bases in Copenhagen, Berlin, London, Sydney, Johannesburg, Dubai, Riyadh and Monterrey.

**What's on offer:** A 40-strong fleet, comprising a wide range of aircraft.

**Key destinations:** Worldwide.

**Any other services:** Land arrangements, including attending to permits and visas, car hire, chauffeurs, accommodation, secretarial and boardroom services.

**How to book:** Call +41 44 804 1616 or +41(0)3088754747.

**Website:** [www.flycal.com](http://www.flycal.com)