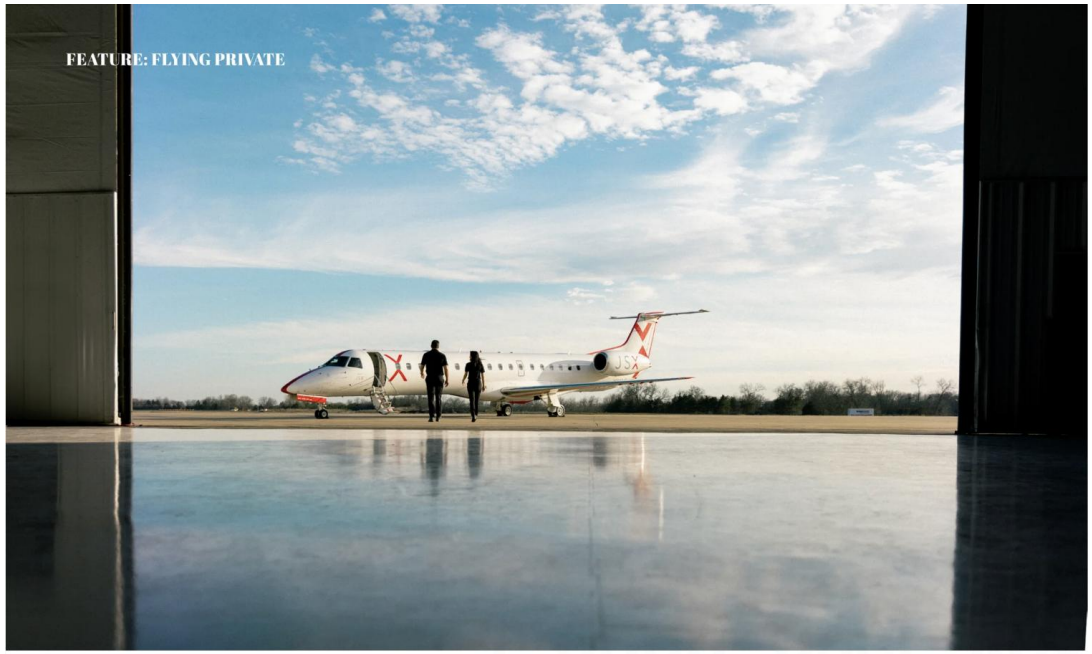

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What's new, what's next and what's changing across airlines, airports and aviation



Flying High, Buying Time

Convenience, comfort and efficiency drive private aviation options. BY ELYSE GLICKMAN

Ready for Takeoff: View of JSX aircraft from inside hangar

PHOTO: © JSX

During "the Golden Age of Air Travel," in the 1950s and '60s, getting aboard an airplane was a special occasion, with passengers wearing their best outfits to suit the exclusive setting and lavish dining. This changed during the 1970s and into the 1980s, when commercial air travel became more democratized, thanks in part to the U.S. Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, and luxury was contained within business- and first-class cabins. In the last 30 years, as discount carriers found their audience, more shifts took place in major carriers' premium cabins and lounges.

Through it all, private jet and charter companies maintained a mystique that reflected a platinum standard of service viewed by the public as the domain of celebrities, heads of state and captains of industry. Today's owners and managers in the private and charter jet subset of the aviation industry are taking the value propositions in a more pragmatic direction with new definitions of service in focus beyond the plush perks and packages differentiating one carrier from the next.

According to David Drabinsky, CEO, JSX, and Doug Gollan, editor in chief, *Private Jet Card Comparisons* (a data-driven buyers' guide for the private aviation market), one of the biggest selling points for today's upscale flyer is "buying time" by hiring a private or charter jet. "Despite the press releases about lifestyle partnerships, V.I.P. access, celebrity chefs and in-flight beauty treatments, private aviation is a time machine," said Gollan.

New developments broaden what private jet and charter firms can offer to both business and leisure travelers. Gollan explained leisure passengers wanting to spend more time at their weekend getaway destination will be able to choose a flight time to their liking and circumvent security, luggage drop-off and other time-consuming airport tasks. Private and chartered jets, meanwhile, can be an efficiency tool for business travelers who need to visit multiple facilities and locations in a short time, mitigating time that may be wasted on commercial carriers. They can also be hired for cargo charter, when missing parts or supplies need to be expedited quickly to keep production moving.



Travel Companion: JSX makes bringing pets along hassle-free.

PHOTO: © JSX

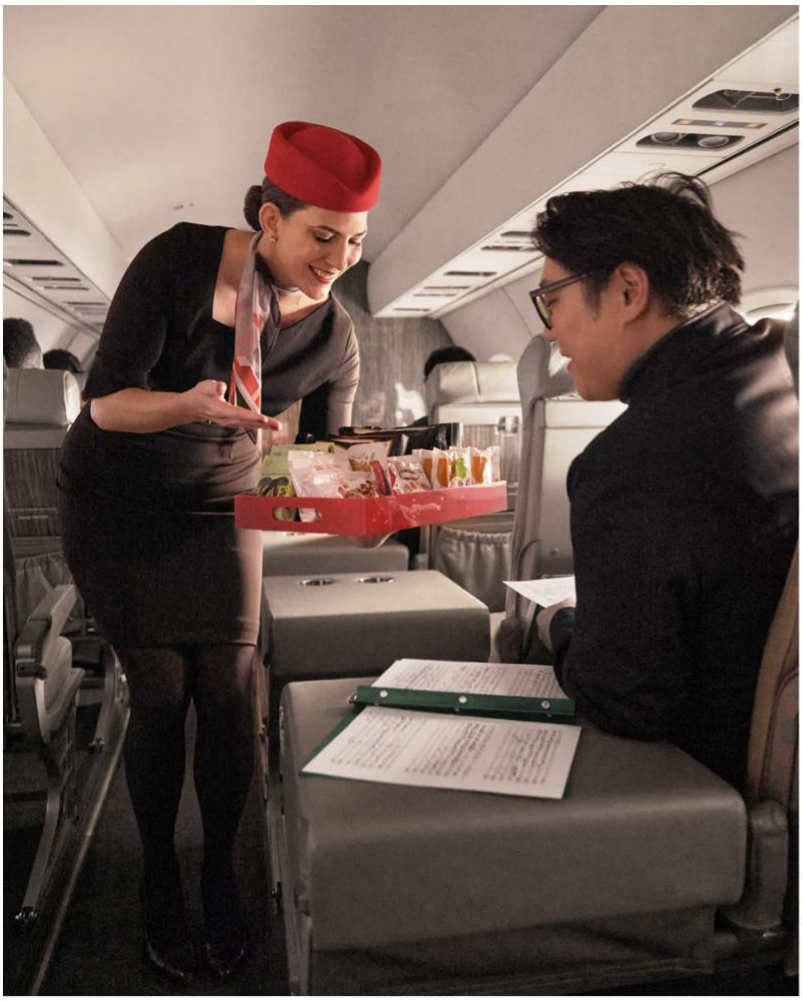
While a mainstream airport is hypothetically convenient for a first-class passenger flying non-stop with carry-on luggage and TSA Known Traveler or Clear, Gollan said, based on his publication's recent study, an estimated 50 percent of private jet clients said poor commercial airline and airport experiences provided the impetus to choose private aviation.

"Our research shows that 90 percent use both airlines and private aviation, yet 90 percent say the motivation for choosing private aviation is time savings," he explained. "This includes using more convenient airports (access to 5,000 airports compared to fewer than 500 major market airports with scheduled airline service), flying non-stop, and steering clear of congested airport terminals and airline schedules that don't fit their needs. Other key drivers include traveling with pets and having baggage they don't want to check."

Drabinsky, meanwhile, indicated the "private charter part of the industry" hasn't changed much in many respects since JSX was founded in 2016. However, he insisted beyond the luxury elements, clients are "buying time" by bypassing the security gauntlet of commercial airline terminals and other inconveniences. JSX also recently introduced the ATR 42 turboprop plane to the fleet, further expanding access to more private airports. While it seats 30 people like many other JSX planes, the cabin is wider and taller (6 feet, 3 inches or 6 feet, 4 inches versus 6 feet, 1 inch) and is outfitted with upgraded interiors that make the flight quieter and more comfortable.

"We offer Illy coffee, snacks and a place to freshen up for guests who show up at least 20 minutes before their departure," said Drabinsky, adding many JSX customers who own their own jet still fly charters. "Our lounges are toned down (compared to some competitors) because our goal is to keep the price per person as low as possible, resulting in a competitive

Articles



In-Flight Experience: In-flight service on JSX aircraft

PHOTO: © JSX

fare for individuals in groups up to 30. The strategy is tied to growing our business by making the experience available to more people."

Improved in-flight WiFi from high-speed providers like Starlink is also a major trend for charter and private jet flyers, according to both Gollan and Drabinsky. "Several companies, including NetJets, Flexjet and FlyExclusive, have announced the addition of Starlink, although Gogo and others offer competitive services," said Gollan. "The percentage of our subscribers who say they need WiFi increases every year. While it is important for passengers on longer flights and bigger jets, more people want WiFi on shorter flights. However, when considering a private jet or charter flight, it is important to keep in mind not all of them have WiFi. Some carriers include it in charter or jet card pricing, while others charge additional fees based on usage."

Although Drabinsky emphasized JSX's value proposition, it also offers clients personalized and exclusive charter experiences. He cited a recent example of a couple who chartered two planes to transport 60 guests to a surprise destination for their wedding. "It's all about the event and the experience, and everything's pointing that way in travel now," he said. "Clients want to invest in experiences that have meaning and create specific memories and can plan it with us based on their budget."

Ben Klein, CEO, Los Angeles-based Aero, also observed greater personalization as a trend continues to gain momentum. When chartering a whole jet doesn't make sense, Klein said his clients are still able to book a single seat and still get the private experience along with value.

"They want something that's not just luxury but a curated experience that's been designed and tested," he said. "While the flight itself was once an afterthought, a way to reach the hotel you actually chose, flying Aero is part of the trip that is anticipated as much as anything waiting at the destination. As 40 percent of our guests would otherwise fly their own plane or charter, they know exactly what 'private' costs. For frequent trips to a second home on our route map with just a few people, they choose our scheduled service instead because buying a couple of seats rather than the whole aircraft is a real saving."

Currently, Aero serves Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Napa Valley, Palm Springs, Aspen, Sun Valley and Los Cabos, with New York City and Maui just added. Refreshments are sourced from buzzy purveyors such as Los Angeles organic grocer Erewhon and Champagne producer Veuve Clicquot. "We've brought Nancy Silverton aboard to design a three-course tasting menu for our flight to the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, and we put amenities like the Theramask Infrared in guests' hands at altitude," Klein said. "The hotel partnerships go beyond a discount: Fly Aero and stay at Aman New York or the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills, and you unlock resort credits, room upgrades and more with our Concierge arranging flight and hotel as one package."

Other upgraded custom experiences include Flexjet's LXi cabins featuring collaborations with luxury brands Riva and Bentley and dinner service with tableside salad preparation on larger jets. VistaJet has partnerships with top chefs and restaurants, in-flight beauty treatments, and programming for kids such as a live "Mad Hatter" tea party. New arrival StellaExperiences has flown onto the map by boasting access to a global network of 7,000 aircraft operators. The mother- and daughter-owned company launched this past February with an inaugural flight on a 19-seat luxury aircraft from its Addison Airport/Dallas headquarters to a championship game between the Seattle Seahawks and the New England Patriots in San Francisco.

Memberships, jet cards and fractional programs for frequent private flyers also have distinctive perks, according to Gollan, who said that the best loyalty programs are "mainly driven by ensuring the terms and policies first fit their needs." Flyers can also work with firms like PlaneSense, which offers the Pilatus PC-12 turboprop and PC-24 light jet, which are great for short runways and have extensive baggage space for sporting equipment. While there are subscribers who have fractional shares or jet cards with one company, they may use PlaneSense for trips with specific demands. He likened it to having a convertible and SUV in your driveway for different kinds of excursions.

The experts also shared some quick tips for finding the right jet and carrier. Klein suggested when booking charter, always vet the operator: safety ratings, route expertise and, where you can, an owner-operator for fewer availability headaches and smoother recovery on anything mechanical. Gollan, meanwhile, recommended selecting an aircraft or carrier that can fly non-stop with the number of passengers and luggage in your plans. "Using an experience broker is our best tip," he said. "Beyond that, you can look for a stand-up cabin, which creates a more social environment. On smaller jets, where the cabin height is 5 feet or less, lavatories can be cramped, so that may be a reason to take a larger jet."