

GLOBETROTTING IN STYLE

What is it like to spend three weeks flying around the globe in the lap of luxury? Private jet trips are opening up a whole new world of opportunity for discerning elite travelers.

By Laura Begley Bloom



The new, fully customized Four Seasons Private Jet will be ready in 2021 and accommodates up to 48 travellers.

CREDIT TK



I'M JUST SETTLING IN FOR THE FOUR-HOUR FLIGHT FROM LONDON TO MOSCOW.

I've got a plush orange cashmere blanket draped over my legs as I stretch out on a white Italian leather flatbed seat. I flick through the movie options on my personal iPad and contemplate which Bulgari beauty product I should try next. A flight attendant offers me a glass of champagne and a snack. But it's not just any snack. On her trolley is a chic ice sculpture with the words "Four Seasons" etched

into the side. Sitting on top of the ice is a mountain of caviar.

Clearly, this isn't your average airline experience. It's just one small moment during the trip of a lifetime: a three-week journey on the Four Seasons Private Jet, which offers extraordinary adventures in a sleek black Boeing 757, starting at a cool \$147,000 per person.

Along with a few dozen other

privileged passengers, I am traveling from London to Moscow, Dubai, the Seychelles, the Serengeti, Florence, and back to London, enjoying lavish meals cooked by the jet's private chef, staying in breathtaking Four Seasons properties, and savoring exclusive experiences like truffle hunting in the Italian countryside.

While it's hard to imagine enjoying this kind of extreme luxury even once in a lifetime, on the jet with me are passengers who have gone on multiple trips like this. Four of my fellow passengers are taking their second Four Seasons Private Jet trip in less than a year.

ULTIMATE COMFORT

Clockwise, from far left: The interior of the Four Seasons Jet; Abercrombie & Kent's private 757; in-flight temptations; the lounge area in the new Four Seasons Jet.

Indeed, there is booming demand in the ultra-high-net-worth space for these kinds of hyper-luxurious private aviation vacations, and the travel industry is responding. Four Seasons has announced that in 2021 it is coming out with a new custom-built Airbus A321neo, with trips starting at \$163,000 per person. High-end companies including Abercrombie & Kent, Aman, and Crystal Cruises are also vying for wealthy private-jet travelers with time on their hands and extensive bucket lists to check off. Meanwhile, boutique companies like National

Geographic and TCS World Travel run less expensive around-the-world jet trips—that is, if you consider rates starting in the \$75,000–\$78,000 range a bargain.

The appeal? The access you get, the company you keep, and the unparalleled extravagance of being on a private jet that whisks you from one location to the next.

"The allure of these trips is growing," says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of Embark, a luxury travel advisory that caters to the ultra-elite. "For our clients, it gives them the ability to canvass the world in a limited time frame

and the convenience of weaving destinations together without endless connections, trekking through crowded airports, and suffering through painful layovers."

Another major advantage of flying private is having a staff at the ready to cater to your every need. Take my departure from London. I pull up to a stylish private jet terminal at Stansted airport and barely have time to drink a perfectly frothed cappuccino before the boarding call is made. Four Seasons' Journey Staff has done all the advance work. There are no lines. No bags to handle.



LUXE TOUCHES

Clockwise, from top left, Sea views from the Four Seasons Dubai at Jumeirah Beach; the entrance to the resort; a private Moscow shopping experience; staff at the Four Seasons Hotel Moscow; a spice market in Dubai.

OUR ARRIVAL AT EACH FOUR SEASONS PROPERTY IS SOMETHING TO BEHOLD.

No customs forms to fill out. I'm ushered through the fastest security check I've ever seen. A red carpet leads to the Four Seasons Private Jet. The crew escorts me to my seat and hands me a stylish gray duffel filled with treats that are mine to keep, like a pair of Bose noise-cancelling headphones.

Everything along the way is overseen by Javier Loureiro. His title is Director of Guest Experience and Onboard Concierge, but they should just call him "the magician," since he can make anything happen. For instance, Loureiro once orchestrated a last-minute wedding for a couple who decided to elope in the Maldives during their private jet trip.

All the menus—on land and in the air—are curated by Executive Chef Kerry Sear, who goes shopping in each destination and incorporates local ingredients whenever possible. For instance, on the flight from Dubai to the Seychelles, we start a meal with a cup of traditional Arabic coffee. A flight attendant reveals that the crew took hours of lessons to perfect the art of pouring in the gracious Arabic style. This is followed by Middle Eastern-inspired dishes like baked pomfret and gulf prawn, accompanied by a chickpea stew with spinach and spelt. Dessert? There are no fewer than four

choices, including a sticky date cake with pomegranate.

Our arrival at each Four Seasons property is something to behold. When we enter the Four Seasons Hotel Moscow, a group of musicians and dancers in elaborate dresses and embroidered headdresses are swirling around the lobby. They offer up bread and salt, a traditional way to greet dignitaries. Everyone is invited to a reception in the hotel's sprawling Royal Suite. There, we sample

Russian caviar and taste some of the country's finest artisanal vodkas while gazing over Red Square.

While private jet trips like this are proliferating and are still a discovery for many luxury travelers, the concept is not new, despite the recent blitz, says Doug Gollan, editor of Private Jet Card Comparisons, a buyer's guide that's been called the Kelley Blue Book of jet card programs. "In the 1970s, tour operators offered similar 'private tours' using chartered Concordes as



OH, THE PLACES SHE WENT

FEATURE
TRAVEL

a novelty,” he says.

The idea took hold in 1989, when Abercrombie & Kent launched around-the-world journeys aboard a refitted Lockheed L-1011 Tristar jet. In later years, the company chartered the Concorde. Now A&K hosts trips on a tricked-out 757. “A lot of people have neither the time or the energy to think of these things, nor the logistics to make them happen,” says Abercrombie & Kent founder Geoffrey Kent. “We make it possible.”

But until Four Seasons came on the scene in 2015 and shook things up, the idea of taking a private around-the-world trip with a group of other travelers on a massive jet was still a relatively under-the-radar concept. Now the sky is truly the limit to what you can dream up: Mandarin Oriental Hotels has partnered with the private jet company XO to bring wealthy families on college tours. Victor, a UK charter broker, escorts golf fans on a specially configured A340-VIP for 26 days of pitch-perfect play around the earth. For time-starved travelers, there’s even a private jet that will take you on a one-day journey from Cape Town to Antarctica—for a price.

“Private jet trips are becoming increasingly popular because time is a person’s greatest luxury,” says Tiffany Dowd, founder and president of Luxe Social Media, who went on an around-the-world jet trip with A&K back in 2014 that was hosted by Geoffrey Kent himself. “A private jet excursion



“PRIVATE JET TRIPS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY POPULAR BECAUSE TIME IS A PERSON’S GREATEST LUXURY,” SAYS TIFFANY DOWD.

allows a luxury traveler who may already be well traveled to experience some of the world’s most exotic and remote locations on one itinerary. If someone were to plan the same itinerary themselves, it would take twice as much time and cost much more than one of these organized private jet trips.”

Of course, the benefit of flying private is obvious. “When you arrive, you are whisked away for events like a VIP,” says Gollan. In my case, that includes experiences like having dinner at a 500-year-old Florentine palazzo while being entertained by opera singers and violinists. Getting a behind-the-scenes tour of the Bolshoi in Moscow. Riding in Formula One race cars in Dubai. Visiting the Vallee de Mai Nature Reserve, a magnificent rain forest in the Seychelles that was once thought to be the

original Garden of Eden.

But what amazes me the most are the bucket-list moments that I don’t expect. Like having the pilot do an impromptu flyover at Mount Kilimanjaro, giving all the passengers a chance to peer into the crater of the world’s tallest freestanding mountain. That’s a powerful memory that I’ll never forget.

TRAVEL DETAILS

The Four Seasons Private Jet Experience offers multiple trips a year. Each trip includes transportation on the private jet, hotel accommodations, transfers, food and drink, activities, and tips. Next up: The three-week “Remote Wonders,” which departs on December 31, 2019, from Dubai and visits Hoi An, Vietnam; Angkor Wat; Bangkok; Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai, Thailand; the Seychelles; Rwanda; and the Serengeti. The trip starts at \$169,000 per person (with a \$22,200 single supplement).



EXOTIC VISTAS

Clockwise from top, far left: Dining under the stars in Tanzania; the writer and a guide in the Serengeti; Brunelleschi’s famous frescoed dome in Florence’s church of Santa Maria del Fiore; the view from a private ocean-view villa at the Four Seasons Resort, Seychelles; room service in the Seychelles; tropical floral details.

