



Travel

## **Eight Reasons You Need To Fly Private**

[Rebecca Ruiz](#), 02.06.08, 6:00 PM ET

For those who fly privately, price is often no object. Take, for example, a hedge fund manager who recently hired the Long Island, N.Y.-based Talon Air to fly him and five guests to Las Vegas on a Gulfstream IV.

The party began their four-day trip with a catered meal from the exclusive Japanese restaurant Nobu. They relaxed in reclining leather seats and sped toward Sin City at 570 miles per hour. On the return flight, they again enjoyed a Nobu meal, this one prepared at the Las Vegas restaurant.

The total cost? \$86,000, which included a \$5,000 bill for [catering](#).

Not all passengers on private planes spend so extravagantly, but the industry is a lucrative one. There are 166 million people who use general aviation annually, which includes private or corporate jets, according to the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA). Two-thirds of total general aviation flight time is used for business purposes. The business-jet market has also been steadily growing since the mid-90s, when the North American fleet of jets topped 6,000. There are now more than 10,000 business jets in North America and over 14,000 worldwide, according to Honeywell Aerospace.

Growing demand is due partly to an increasingly globalized world in which sales teams from New York meet clients in India or Russia regularly. The interest in private travel has also correlated with the dismal performances of domestic commercial airlines. Only 80% of flights were on time in November 2007, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, a discouraging statistic for business travelers who need reliable transportation.

Increased market competitiveness has yielded a dizzying array of choices for both luxury and business clients when it comes to flying solo. Pete Bunce, CEO and president of GAMA, says that the spectrum of choices is impressive.

"If you've got business in Japan, you'll want a [plane] with tremendous long capability," Bunce says. "If you're a big person, like a football player, you'll want something that will fit your size. The choices allow virtually anyone to tailor how they want to fly."

### **Prime Perks**

Space, distance and safety are hallmarks of private planes, but today there are also added perks like gourmet catering, in-flight yoga and [massages](#), and [state-of-the-art entertainment](#).

Adam Katz, owner and operator of Talon Air, says that he offers clients like Andy Roddick and Pete Sampras the "ultimate in concierge service." On Talon Air, baggage can be shipped from one's home to one's final destination without the client ever touching it. Also onboard are cashmere blankets, crystal and broadband [wireless Internet](#).

"Safe and efficient flying is the basic assumption," Katz says, "but it's our boutique concierge business model that transcends everything else." Like on other luxury charter services, Talon Air pricing varies based on distance, but expect the total bill to climb into the tens of thousands.

Business travelers on the company dime may fly less luxuriously, but they can still enjoy high-end amenities like espresso, satellite radio and television, and even a camera-view of the cockpit dashboard.

Duncan Aviation, a company based in Lincoln, Neb., that specializes in retrofitting older jets, has installed in its jets each of these features and more, including liquid-crystal display screens up to 42 inches and custom dividers for those who desire privacy. Modifications aren't cheap, though. The divider can cost anywhere from \$70,000 to \$90,000, the espresso machine from \$12,000 to \$20,000, the TV system \$20,000 and wireless Internet \$500,000.

Despite the cringe-worthy price tags of these options, they pale in comparison to the original cost of the plane, which can easily start at \$10 million.

"In the scheme of things, [it's] minuscule," says Tracie Boesch, a senior completion sales representative at Duncan Aviation. "If there's a need for a component, it's more than justified. It's simply using the aircraft as a business tool in the most efficient way you can."

### **In Pictures: Eight Reasons You Need To Fly Private**


#### **Spa Treatments**



→ Talon Air clients can spend their flights receiving unlimited facials, manicures or pedicures at a cost of \$400 for the entire day. Passengers on Blue Star Jets can also enjoy facials and acupuncture as a part of spa packages that cost between \$2,300 and \$7,500. Clients have also been known to bring stylists onboard to help them prep for big events.

#### **Gourmet Catering**





Most charter services will cater flights with a meal of your choice, even if that means hiring your favorite restaurant to prepare an onboard feast. The costs vary depending on the request, but a Talon Air passenger who recently ordered two meals for six from the Japanese restaurant Nobu paid \$5,000.

### **Massage Therapy or Yoga Instruction**

If flying tenses your muscles or raises your blood pressure, try the spa package offered by Blue Star Jets. A private neck and shoulder rub and reflexology will soothe any rattled nerves, and personal yoga instruction for stretching and body alignment will ameliorate flying soreness. Prices range from \$2,300 to \$7,500.

### **Wireless Internet**

Executives on the go can't afford to be without Internet access. That's why most private planes are equipped with varying speeds of wi-fi that can enable surfing or video conferencing. It may also be the priciest perk of all: According to Duncan Aviation, a Lincoln, Neb., company that specializes in retrofitting older jets, the cost of installing wireless can reach \$500,000.

### **Gourmet Coffee**

Frequent-flier coffee snobs can rejoice. There are private planes outfitted with espresso and cappuccino machines. And if the plane you are flying isn't yet equipped to brew the finest grounds at 40,000 feet, chances are your request will be honored by the operator, who may pay up to \$20,000 to have a machine installed.

### **Luxury Accommodations**

Reclining leather seats are standard on business and luxury charters, and privacy can be had quickly with built-in dividers. A Boeing Business Jet, one of which costs \$45.5 million dollars, takes posh accommodations to a new level. The basic model provides 807 square feet, while the BBJ3 offers 1,120. In these planes, passengers don't sleep in a reclining chair, but in a bed.

### **State-of-the-Art Entertainment**

Commercial airlines may be adding greater in-flight entertainment options, but they still can't compare with the amenities onboard a private plane. According to Duncan Aviation, a Lincoln, Neb., company that specializes in retrofitting older jets, popular upgrades include XM or Sirius radio, the capability to broadcast live television, LCD screens and DVD players at every seat.

### **Great View**

While most passengers on commercial airlines have to crane their necks to see out the window, private-plane passengers can see images transmitted to a TV in the cabin from a camera placed on the cockpit, belly or tail of the plane. The cameras are costly--\$15,000 for an interior placement and \$30,000 to \$50,000 for an exterior placement--but the view can be astonishing.