

Beyond First Class: Going Private

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"Immediately following [the terrorist threat], we had about a 60 percent uptick in requests for charters," said [Paul Svensen](#), chief operating officer of [JetNetwork](#), a private flight company based in Miami. "We saw a surge in contracts signed and money being wired, and we believe it is a result of what's going on."

Private air travel, whether by corporate jet or by charter flight, offers travelers substantial time savings because they can typically drive directly to the aircraft — no shoe removal required. Also, private travel is relatively free from the carry-on restrictions commercial flights have had to impose lately. The pilots will reserve the right to check luggage if they think they need to, but it's a world away from the liquid and gel ban commercial travelers are having to endure.

Svensen said a lot of the new interest is for shorter business travel routes made longer by the new restrictions and longer security lines, such as flights between New York and Chicago, Boston and Washington, D.C..

A big increase in enquiries was echoed by James Butler, founder of [Shaircraft Solutions](#), a company that advises clients on private air travel.

There are several options, aside from buying your own plane. (Prices dropped dramatically after the Sept. 11 attacks, but a private jet is still out of reach for all but the wealthiest of travelers.) Private travel is still expensive, but it's getting cheaper. "We're not less expensive, but we're not double anymore," said Svensen.

The fractional ownership model, which experienced a growth spurt in the late 1990s, lost its appeal somewhat after the events of 9/11 helped erode the worth of ownership contracts and as cheaper ways to travel privately emerged. But the programs are still available, through companies like [NetJets](#). This is generally the priciest way to do private flight, because you're buying part of the plane. NetJets fractional shares start at about \$406,000. (If you have to ask, you probably can't afford it.)

Then there's the time share model, where you buy hours of flight, usually on a network or fleet of planes, so there's a lot of flexibility with scheduling. That's cheaper.

Operators require a deposit, then charge by the flight hour. For example, JetNetwork's Gold membership status, the lowest under its FlightCard program, requires a \$100,000 deposit and charges from \$3,200 to \$7,400 an hour, depending on the type and size of the jet.

For corporations, the nice thing about these programs is that they can be bought and then used by any executive, and reservations are usually required no more than 48 hours in advance.

Per-seat air taxi services like [DayJet](#) claims to cost "a price comparable to that of an overnight stay (including airfare, hotel, and per diem.)"

All of these services may come cheaper with the emergence of light jets that can carry a pilot and three or four travelers. "That may lower hourly costs below a thousand dollars, but they are just coming in to the market," said Shaircraft's Butler.

But the best part of private travel and the reason it is taking off isn't just about cost. It's about giving travelers everything they can't get commercially right now: speed, security, and virtually unrestricted carry-on privileges.

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