

The ultimate in jet setting

Private planes that tailor the business or leisure travel experience the way no commercial flight can

BY RAHITA ELIAS

FORMULA 1 champion Lewis Hamilton owns one. Madonna caused quite a furore when she decided to charter one. Welcome to the world of private jet travel. Private jets are really the only way to fly if you do not want to be constrained by airline schedules and routings. A private jet, whether you are travelling for business or pleasure, will tailor your travel experience the way no commercial flight can. You are in the pilot seat, steering how, where and when you want to fly.

In Singapore, private jet companies tend to use Seletar Airport. Mike Ryan, commercial and operations director of UK-based Victor, says: "It's all about having quicker access to aircraft upon arrival and being up in the air quicker. Chartering privately lets travellers avoid busy commercial airports, which makes their journey more convenient and comfortable."

Victor does not own its own jets, but offers an Uber-like app. Instead of booking car hire, Victor helps you book a plane to jet you to your desired destination. Through its app, a member can compare planes and charter rates, book and manage flights simply and quickly.

Mr Ryan says: "Victor works with 191 trusted partner operators, who manage their own aircraft, or manage them on behalf of other owners. Travellers have clear information across a wide selection of aircraft to make the flight choices that are right for them."

The app provides multiple quotations within 60 minutes for the booking of specific jets via specific, named and trusted operators.

"Hence, the customer is always in control and achieves the best value and tailored flying experience," says Mr Ryan.

Through its partners, Victor's 45,000 members have access to a wide range of aircraft from the very light jet two-seater Citation Mustangs to super mid-size jets such as the eight-seater Citation Sovereign as well as the long-range Gulfstream IV-SP.

Mr Ryan says that the Citation Mustangs are ideal for short hops, while the Sovereign's combination of range, performance and luggage capacity makes it popular for skiing holidays in Europe. The Gulfstream, which can accommodate between 12 and 16 passengers, is popular for trans-Atlantic business and leisure travel.

Victor's service attracts both business and leisure travellers.

Mr Ryan explains: "Our customers come from all over the world and, as such, rely on a globally on-demand private jet charter service that can get them where they want, when they want – all in seamless, hassle-free style."

"Some customers will fly with family or friends in search of sun, sea, epicurean excellence and unmatched cultural experiences. Mediterranean resorts such as Ibiza and Mallorca were popular this summer, as well as events like the Monaco Grand Prix and Venice Film Festival," says Mr Ryan.

"Currently, we're seeing a lot of European execs taking multi-leg business trips across Asia, by private charter, to efficiently oversee their booming manufacturing operations there. They save precious time by avoiding Asia's busy commercial airports, travelling how and when they want to maximise the productivity of their visit."

Private jet travel is not just for people. Mr Ryan says: "Victor does also have a no-hassle 'pets on jets' programme, allowing members' pets to travel in suitable VIP style. When you fly 'furs class' with Victor you can take your pet in the cabin with you, and avoid the stress of having to put your pet in the hold. On one particular private flight we were able to accommodate six French bulldogs as passengers."

Victor can advise customers on how to fly their pets on a private jet, including details concerning pet passports and which partner operators permit pet travel.

One chartering company that does own planes is Johor-based Executive Jets Asia (EJA).

EJA's chief executive officer Prithpal Singh says his customers "come from all over the world" and are business people who like the flexibility of private jet travel.

The company owns a fleet of five jets, which are based in a purpose-built hangar and maintenance centre at Senai International Airport. EJA had moved from Seletar Airport to lower-cost Senai in 2010, but still serves the Singapore market.

Its planes range in size from a seven-seater to a 14-seater. EJA's smallest jet is able to fly non-stop for five hours or 3,500 km, while the largest can fly for up to eight hours non-stop. Its fleet has an average age of 10 years.

Mr Singh says: "They all fly at about the same speed as normal commercial airliners and at an altitude of over 35,000 feet or over 10,000 metres. As we are a charter airline, we fly on whatever routes



TRAVEL SMART
Victor iOS app



GOING PLACES
(Top) Victor can advise customers on how to fly their pets on a private jet; (below) in addition to its own fleet, Executive Jets Asia can also offer jets owned by third parties



PHOTO: EXECUTIVE JETS ASIA

the customer chooses. It costs between US\$4,500 to US\$10,000 per flying hour to charter a jet. The price depends on the size and model of the jet."

In addition to its own fleet, Executive Jets Asia can also offer jets owned by third parties.

A three-person team consisting of two pilots and one cabin crew, adds Mr Singh, typically mans the planes. "All aircraft are fully crewed by highly experienced pilots with thousands of flying hours. Cabin crew are also specially trained to attend to VIP clients," says Mr Singh.

As with Victor, EJA uses Seletar Airport for its Singapore flights.

While private jets do offer travel flexibility and convenience, some may choose to use a combination of commercial and private flights to cover both the long-haul and medium to short-haul segments of their travel.

That is why Etihad Airways from the United Arab Emirates has tied up with private jet charter providers such as Victor to complement and promote its exclu-

sive The Residence and First Apartment cabins. The airline has seen strong interest and demand within the private jet market for these super luxurious cabins on its Airbus A380 planes, and is using the private jet charter distribution network to enhance its reach in this customer segment.

Mr Ryan says: "Working alongside Etihad Airways, Victor is able to provide the most complete luxury air travel experience, an experience meeting every single need of discerning international travellers across both commercial and private flights."

"The partnership allows customers the ultimate customer convenience of chartering a seamless private aircraft connection to and from their international A380 Etihad Airways flights. This ensures they can travel exactly where they want in comfort and style, enjoying a simplified, seamless end-to-end journey that combines the best of both commercial and private flight. Victor's innovative technology allows travellers to finalise and book their complete journey through the Victor iOS app." ■