

MAGAZINE · PASSIONS

# You don't need your own private jet to fly private-ish

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April 8, 2023 at 11:30 AM EDT



JSX's Embraer 145 jets serve 22 destinations, with more to come.

COURTESY OF JSX

During a shareholder imbroglio in season three of the [HBO](#) show *Succession*, interim Waystar Royco CEO Gerri Kellman drops the hammer on the assembled members of the Roy family: “They want to take away the private jets.”



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The petulant youngest son, Roman Roy, reacts like he’s just been told he has to fly basic economy on Spirit: “The PJs? No.”

*Succession* plays the moment for satirical chuckles, but Roman’s horror speaks a universal truth: Flying commercial can be a dreadful, dehumanizing experience, even in the front of the plane. First class won’t protect you from airport chaos, a psychologically ravaged crew, a broken tray table, or a seatmate with bare feet.

Alex Wilcox says he gets it. That’s why he cofounded an alternative: JSX, a Dallas-based air carrier with a fleet of 37 (and growing) 30-seat Embraer 145 jets serving 22 (and growing) destinations. “I hate that everybody hates to fly now because [the airline industry] has made it such a miserable experience,” says Wilcox, an industry veteran who was a founding executive at JetBlue. “It’s lowest-common-denominator, cost-driven, and it doesn’t have to be that way.”

JSX is one of several players, including Aero, XO, and Blade, in this ascendant aviation space. Call it public charter, flying club, semiprivate,

private-ish—it's not how the Roys fly, but it's certainly not commercial, boasting many of the benefits of a private jet, at a more attainable price. Fares on JSX range from \$199 to \$1,299 one-way, making a “PJ” an attainable luxury for many business-class customers. For a flight from Dallas to Cabo in May 2023, for example, nonstops started at \$649 on JSX and \$529 in American business. It prompts the question: Why fly commercial? I suppose if you have a soft spot for scalding-outside/frozen-inside frittatas and glitchy internet, you might take AA. Give me JSX's snack basket and rapid gate-to-gate Starlink Wi-Fi any day.

PJ-lite operators aren't all pouring Dom Pérignon or giving away Bulgari goody bags like some international airlines do for premium-cabin passengers, but they do deliver on the ultimate luxury of flying private: extra time.

**They might not be pouring Dom Pérignon, but PJ-lite operators do deliver on the ultimate luxury of flying private: time.**

For my Dallas-to-Cabo flight, I arrived at JSX's private terminal on the back side of Love Field 40 minutes prior to departure. (For domestic flights you have to show up only 20 minutes before takeoff.) There was a five-minute line to check passports and drop luggage; then, after a complimentary cappuccino in the spacious, simply furnished lounge, we were ready to board.

My wife and I passed through streamlined security and walked across the tarmac to our jet, gleaming white with a red stripe down its nose. Instead of the usual cramped two-to-one layout I'd seen when Embraers are used by commercial airlines as puddle jumpers (with a capacity of 50 passengers, instead of JSX's 30), I found a softly lit cabin with ample headspace. One comfortably cushioned shark-gray leather seat sat on either side of the aisle, with tidy cocktail tables. We took off 10 minutes after boarding.

Private jet companies saw a major pandemic-era spike, with the ability to socially distance more effectively drawing customers who were nervous about boarding a cramped commercial flight, explains Michele Sullivan, founder of Kona Shuttle, a membership-based service connecting Oaklanders and Angelenos to their second homes in Hawaii. "During COVID we had people say, 'I want to travel but I'm scared,'" she notes. According to the FAA, private aviation in 2021 was up 45.8% from 2020—which more than made up for that first pandemic year's 21% drop from 2019. And the demand since has only grown: Last year, flight volume climbed another 5.3%, accounting for 5.37 million domestic and international arrivals and departures. Sullivan said even she was surprised by the continued growth at Kona: "We imagined once COVID stopped, [demand] would taper off, and that hasn't happened."

This fall, Sullivan will open a Miami-based fly-share, Fleet Clubs, whose 200 members will pay \$50,000 annually for 20 roundtrips to the Hamptons or \$90,000 to Vail on handsome pine-green Boeing 737s. "These are the top two destinations for Miami," says Fleet CEO Bernard Schwartz, whose résumé includes stints at Auberge and Four Seasons.



Fleet Clubs will offer a plush journey from Miami to the Hamptons or Vail.

COURTESY OF FLEET CLUBS

Another way to experience private-ish travel is reminiscent of high-end cruising. Luxury adventurers can see the world via jet-packaged vacations: a 22-day souk-to-safari Africa itinerary with Abercrombie & Kent (starting at \$134,500 per person), for example, or maybe the Himalayas (for about \$99,000) with Aman Jet Expeditions, which has retrofitted an [Airbus](#) that usually carries over 100 for just 16 guests. “Usually, you think of the time on the plane as lost time,” says Catherine Heald, cofounder and CEO of Remote Lands, which manages Aman Jet Expeditions. “But when you’re on our Airbus, everybody’s happy to get back on, like, ‘Oooh, we’re back!’ ” While calling at destinations such as Kyoto, Palawan, and Marrakech, the Aman Airbus cocoons its guests in buttercream leather, rosé bubbles, and lemongrass-coconut crème caramel.

There are some downsides to flying semiprivate. Environmentally, fewer passengers on board mean a greater carbon footprint per person. And there’s a higher rate of accidents in private flying versus commercial, according to the National Transportation Safety Board (though the data does not segregate hobbyist pilots from the professional ones).



Aman Jet Expeditions carries just 16 guests in a retrofitted Airbus that most airlines would pack with 100 passengers.

COURTESY OF AMAN

Flight routes for this kind of service are limited, and private-ish airlines are subject to the same ferocious demand for seats as major carriers. For membership-based services, applications tend to operate on personal referrals and involve background checks. “You can’t just be anyone and buy a seat,” says Schwartz.

Luckily for me, JSX takes a more democratic approach: I could book online as I would a flight on any other airline.

Back on my Cabo-bound jet, buoyed by that impeccable internet, I was browsing sample bookings on the JSX app when I looked across the aisle and found my Shiv-Roy-in-training wife on a business call. *You can’t do that on an airplane!* I mouthed in alarm. She shrugged and gestured around as if to say, *We’re on a private jet, Tom.*

Private-ish, to be clear. But honestly, once you’re on board, it’s all a matter of semantics.

*This article appears in the [April/May 2023 issue](#) of Fortune with the headline, “Flying private-ish.”*