

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Private jet bookings take off as affluent avoid commercial flights

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Magellan private jet. Image courtesy of Magellan Jets

By DIANNA DILWORTH

With travel bans and cancelled flights, the airline industry is taking a beating because of the spread of COVID-19, but many affluent travelers instead are opting for private jets for travel.

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While many people have cut back on travel, those wealthy individuals that are looking for air transportation are turning to private jets.

"The private aviation segment is used to being in the middle of crisis situations, often evacuating people in advance of hurricanes and bringing in supplies and evacuations immediately after, often when commercial airlines have stopped flights," said Doug Gollan, founder and editor in chief of [Privatejetcardcomparisons.com](https://www.privatejetcardcomparisons.com), New York.

Flying high

Magellan Jets is seeing a large uptick in both corporate and leisure travel, mainly coming from individuals or corporations who may have opted to fly commercial.

On the leisure side, families with young children or elderly members do not want to take the risk and fly commercial, so they are going on vacations on jets. Many are traveling to resorts that offer villa options or to second homes.

"We are definitely seeing a trend of destinations that are less dense, whether that's South Florida, the islands, places where people have second homes and vacation homes, that could be Colorado, that could be Jackson Hole," said Anthony Tivnan, cofounder/president of [Magellan Jets](https://www.MagellanJets.com), Quincy, MA.

"These are all great locations and destinations, providing lower risk environments because there is less congestion and masses of people," he said. "We're seeing a lot of travel from the Northeast [United States]."

"I don't believe that has anything to do with the coronavirus, I just think it's because the destinations, the second homes, are generally South or other places around the country," he said.

On the corporate side, companies are opting to show more corporate responsibility and ensure they are not

potentially exposing your colleagues and customers they meet with, so they are traveling by private jet to reduce the risk of contamination and spread.

"Affluent consumers are definitely not grounding," Mr. Tivnan said. "What we're actually seeing is an uptick in leisure, which is also in line with the month that we're in, March being spring break.

"We are certainly seeing an uptick from an experience perspective," he said. "No stopping there."



Anthony Tivnan is co-founder/president of Magellan Jets

New procedures

Because private aviation accesses more than 5,000 airports in the United States compared to around 500 for airlines, they can serve more people.

To encourage private jet bookings, operators are implementing more stringent cleaning between flights.

Flight crews are being tested and, in some cases, passengers have to sign affidavits that they have not been in specific high-risk areas in the past 14 days.

Additionally, if a plane is known to have carried somebody with the virus, some operators are grounding that aircraft for a period of time.

"Business travel is down," Mr. Gollan said. "However, regular users who might split flying between commercial airlines and private jets are going to 100 percent fly privately.

"A private jet trip has less than 20 touch points versus over 700 if you take an airline flight, so the risk of having contact with somebody who has COVID-19 is 30x less when you fly privately," he said.

"If you can afford it, flying privately is compelling, particularly if you are or are in contact with high-risk people."



Doug Gollan

Marketing security

During times of uncertainty, affluent consumers want to feel safe and private jets are creating messaging that supports and informs them.

Beyond simply cleaning planes, private jet companies are also using marketing that eases consumer worries and makes them feel that flying is still a viable option for avoiding the virus.

"What we're doing is putting our best foot forward by educating our members, customers and prospective customers," Mr. Tivnan said.

"Just providing good information, what we're doing in terms of taking out some of the risk and providing a clean space for them and their families to travel," he said.

Not knowing how the virus will progress or what rules the government will impose can also make people hesitant to book travel.

Many airlines and private jet companies are offering flexibility and waiving fees to put people at ease.

"As demand for private jets spikes with each announcement, companies are first making sure they can handle current customers before accepting new ones," Mr. Gollan said.

"Certain jet card programs allow you to buy now, and then fly when you need, in some cases with as little as eight to 24 hours' notice," he said.

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