

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Private jets fly higher in COVID-19

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Joshua Herbert is founder/CEO of Magellan Jets

By **Maryanne Maina**

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One industry that seems to be flying high is aviation, specifically private jets. There has been an increase in the use of private jets by traditional users and a large number of new clients.

Joshua Herbert, founder/CEO of U.S.-based Magellan Jets, said that in April and May there was no business. Before COVID-19, the company had a lot of clients going to Africa, Paris and London.

"We have had an increase in clients from July, August and September," Mr. Herbert said. "New customer acquisition is high for business roadshows and short day trips. This new client base is well travelled but were not private jet clients.

"Our business now is 40 percent business and 60 percent leisure, it is mostly a client base of 50 years and older," he said.

Sky's the limit

Magellan Jets, based in Massachusetts, has an annual membership fee with a guaranteed plane within 10 hours of request.

Concierge services that cater to a high-spending clientele are also flourishing in this period.

"We have new members and demand for private jets is high, and the demand is increasing," said Stuart McNeill, CEO of Knightsbridge Circle.

"The amount of money spent depends on the outer and size of the aircraft. We have members who spend \$1 million-plus per year on private jet charters."

Knightsbridge Circle is an exclusive members-only concierge company in London that caters to a global clientele and the client base includes Africans. Membership is \$40,000 per annum and there is also the elite tier that is \$175,000 per year.

"We evolved quickly to the new demands," Mr. McNeill said. "Instead of organizing hotel and restaurant reservations, we were arranging virtual wine tastings, COVID tests, delivering fitness equipment to members homes

and enrolling them into online educational courses.

"But the demand is high for private jets since COVID," he said.

"Passengers who in the past would have flown First class are now using private jets," he said. "Business travel is non-existent now. Everything we have done has been leisure. Our busiest destination this summer was the South of France."

Continue to soar

Mr. McNeill said that there has been a growing demand for jets from Morocco.

"Our members were busy in the Mediterranean this summer and now the focus is turning to Africa, Indian Ocean, Caribbean as the weather there is very pleasant. "

Fliers on Magellan Jets can enjoy different experiences such as masseuses on board, and most of the planes have beds.

"Discretion is our strength," Magellan Jets' Mr. Herbert said. "Many of our planes have beds in one room and the other room has TV and this room can be for the nanny or PA, often with a bed too.

"On a recent trip to South Africa during COVID, our clients were served with fine dining South African cuisines to prepare them for their trip," he said.

Magellan Jets also has ambulance services. The company serves destinations in the European Union, United States and all over Africa.

"We took clients in summer to Capri in Italy via chopper and we also took our clients to Monaco as many of them have homes and boats in Monaco," Mr. Herbert said.

"Private aviation is doing well in this industry, as you fly well," he said. "You know who is on the plane with you."

For the elite tier client members of Knightsbridge Circle, there are exceptional private jet rates.

"There is a one to one relationship with their personal manager," Mr. McNeill said. "When our member arrives at their destination, their Knightsbridge Circle Personal Manager is there to greet them and assist them to the hotel/house. It is the most exclusive service in the World."

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