

THE SPIRIT OF HIGH SOCIETY

# HONG KONG TATLER

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MACHINE OR ROCK GOD?

FEBRUARY 2009 HK\$45







Discerning travellers  
can experience private jet  
ownership without the costs  
of owning their own plane



# Buying Time

ON BOARD AN ASIA JET PARTNERS PRIVATE CHARTER FLIGHT TO HANOI, OLIVIA TOTH DISCOVERS THAT, WHEN MONEY IS NO OBJECT, TIME IS THE MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY OF ALL

**A**S SEASONED TRAVELLERS know all too well, navigating airports can require near-yogic patience. Journeys are often riddled with hurdles, from check-in to security to passport control, and frequently end with a stressful speed walk to the gate. And that's assuming the plane takes off on time. Commercial flight delays, along with gridlock traffic and root canals, rank among life's more painful experiences.

Fortunately, help is at hand in the form of Asia Jet Partners' private jet charter. Asia Jet, as they are known, ensure you don't have to be Donald Trump, A-Rod or J Lo to get a slice of the ultimate VIP travel experience, right here in Hong Kong.

I glimpse what life in a perfect world might be like as I take a chauffeur-driven Bentley

Continental to the Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC), the standalone terminal for private jet owners at Hong Kong International Airport. Joining me is Asia Jet founder and CEO Justin Lee Firestone. As soon as we arrive, a friendly member of staff whisks away our passports, ID cards and luggage. Waiting on the tarmac just outside is our Gulfstream G200, complete with pilot, co-pilot and a smiling air hostess. In layman's terms, this 10-seater plane is the daddy of twin-engine, large-cabin, mid-range, business jets for people who spend as much of their time in the air as they do on terra firma. Were I not already an instant convert, the 7.3-metre, butterscotch leather-seated cabin with plush, shag-pile carpets would seal the deal. "The best thing about flying on a private jet," explains Firestone, "is that if there's anything not to your liking, if the temperature's too hot or too cold, you have the controls right at your fingertips. You can also go and speak to the crew, who will show you how to adjust the temperature, programme the DVD, help you with your in-flight phone."

Unclipping my 24-karat gold safety-belt buckle, I swivel around in my seat to face Firestone and Metrojet CEO Chris Buchholz. Thanks to Asia Jet's private jet card, discerning travellers can experience the benefits and flexibility of private jet ownership without incurring the costs of owning their own plane. It's a business model that replicates that of US fractional aircraft ownership pioneer NetJets, whose Marquis Jet pre-paid lease "card" programme offers pre-bought flight time, to be topped up as necessary, as well as fractional jet ownership.

Metrojet maintains the same exclusive alliance with Asia Jet. Firestone cut his teeth as Marquis Jet's former senior vice-president, single-handedly enlisting an A-list client roster of US athletes and Hollywood celebrities, who couldn't get enough of the ease and convenience of the jet-card programme. Metrojet's position as Hong Kong's only fully licensed business-jet operator means, rather fabulously, that the five Gulfstream G200 planes are on call 24/7, 365 days a year. Smaller-cabin aircraft are set to be added to the fleet this year, which, accord-

ing to Firestone, "would make it a little bit more cost effective to fly." An added bonus of the alliance is that Asia Jet can tap into the luxury services of the Peninsula Hotel via Metrojet, which is part of the Kadoorie Group. "We're certainly trying to replicate the Peninsula experience in the air," says

Buchholz, a trained pilot who has made it his mission to create a peerless flight experience, from the nuts and bolts of on-ground maintenance to the service crews who man the flights. "Our flight attendants go through training at the Peninsula and you do as much as you can in a small cabin environment," he says modestly.

Guiding us to a reversible table and hydraulic seats, which fold out as flat beds for night flights, our air hostess sets the table for a silver-service breakfast. The only hurdle here is whether to choose smoked salmon, the full English or a Continental breakfast. I later discover that my dietary preferences have been duly noted for my next flight. Deciding which of the two DVD players to use or whether to plug my iPod into the cabin's surround-sound speaker system is about as taxing as the flight gets. And even a trip to the walnut-veneered bathroom, stocked with luxury amenities to rival a hotel suite, is a roomy pleasure. As we prepare to land at Hanoi's Noi Bai airport, our air hostess delivers the final, priceless touch – a personally administered pearl of hand cream. Despite the addictive comfort and pampering, I come to the realisation that the ultimate luxury of booking an Asia Jet private charter is time. "With a private jet, you're never late or early," explains Buchholz. "If you arrive early, we just take off earlier; if you arrive late, we're ready. So you never get stressed out, you never miss your flight, and you always fly direct." ■

**PRIVATE SKY**  
TOP Chartering a Gulfstream G200 is now a seamless experience out of Hong Kong, with Asia Jet Partners  
BELOW Asia Jet Partner's fleet is expertly serviced by Metrojet



**DREAM TEAM**  
TOP RIGHT Asia Jet Partners founder and CEO Justin Lee Firestone with Metrojet CEO Chris Buchholz  
INSET Arriving by chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce Phantom is part of the experience