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SUMMER 2008

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# Private jets take off

The second-home market looks set to become more exotic with the increase in private aviation, says CATHERINE MOYE

**A**S the launch of Heathrow's Terminal 5 recently demonstrated, air travel is often akin to preparing for battle. A flak jacket and emergency rations are almost as necessary as suitcases. Even if you dampen the trauma by travelling first class, there's no guarantee you won't find yourself sitting next to a spitting-mad Naomi Campbell for the duration of the flight.

So, it's hardly surprising that the coolest travellers now opt to charter their own planes. As one hedge-fund manager with homes in Kensington, Hampshire and southern France says: 'It's not a question of wanting to travel business or first on a scheduled airline. You just don't want to check in and travel with loads of other people, full stop. That's why VLJs (very light jets) are going to be so big.'

Such is the growth in private air travel over the past 10 years that companies such as NetJets have become multi-million-pound entities. Furthermore, true high-fliers are using private jets to head for previously inaccessible parts of the globe, bringing them into the second-homes market and seeing some of the world's most desirable houses being built in places scheduled airlines simply don't reach.

Much closer to home, the glamorous allure of the small aircraft is enabling them to streamline trips to their Swiss ski chalet or Mediterranean villa—with no more luggage than a passport and a toothbrush.

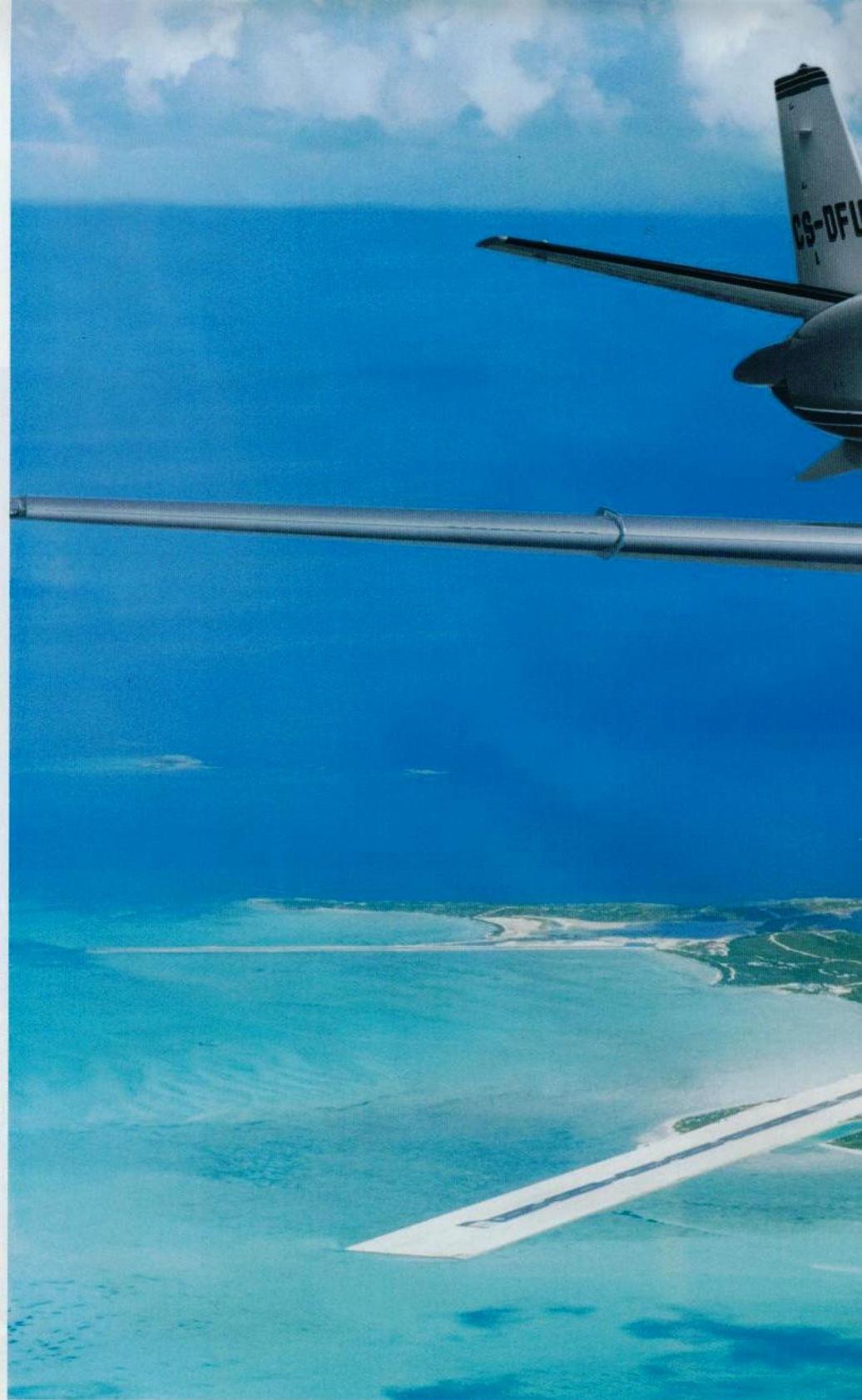
'One of the many advantages of private air travel is that you can fly directly to a small airport, such as Sion in Switzerland, and be no more than 15 minutes from the slopes,' says Gavin Copus, senior passenger manager at Air Charter Service, which provides charter aircraft worldwide. 'That

means that if you leave to go skiing at noon on Friday, you can be on the slopes before it gets dark.'

With a light jet costing about £7,000 to charter, Mr Copus reckons that, by the time you've got the kids and the nanny on board, his fees are competitive with flying business class. Furthermore, you can work to your own schedule. 'We get the City penthouse types leaving from London City Airport and the Hampshire set leaving from Farnborough to go to

their holiday homes for an extended weekend,' he says. 'Chartering a jet means they can pick the closest airport to their office or house in the UK and fly to the nearest airport to their house abroad.'

Mr Copus reckons that about 30% of the company's business is leisure based and it's a growth sector—especially with second-home owners and boat lovers flying to chill out on their yachts. 'Our most popular destinations for second homers are the ski areas of Geneva, Chambery,





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**Happy landings: at 5,700ft, the airstrip at Ambergris Cay in the Turks and Caicos is the Caribbean's longest private landing site and can accommodate aircraft sizes up to a GV**

St Moritz, Sion and St Gallen.' The French Riviera and western France, especially Bordeaux, Tours, Nantes and Brest are also firmly on the map for aerial 'second homers', as are the Balearic Islands of Mallorca and Ibiza. In the summer months, plane-to-yacht accounts for much of the traffic. 'Olbia in Sardinia is the place to be in the summer, and Valencia is get-

ting very popular,' reveals Mr Copus.

More than 2,000 airports in Europe are open to private jets and most get you a lot closer to your door than the most convenient airline route. Naomi Heaton of London Central Portfolio, experts in asset property management, owns a ski chalet in Saanen near Gstaad, overlooking the tiny local airstrip. She reckons it

can't be bettered for celebrity watching. 'You'd think we'd hate it, but we all rush to the balcony when we hear the private jets coming down,' says Miss Heaton. 'Bernie Ecclestone is our most regular visitor, but Michael Schumacher also lands there. The list goes on and on.'

Surrounded by cows grazing in fields, the tiny airstrip gives the rich immediate access to their chalets in the region. And although the planes are state-of-the-art, Miss Heaton finds their scale and bright ➤

colours evocative of an earlier, more romantic, era of travel. 'My aspiration is to get to our apartment on a private plane.'

Netjets operates a fractional ownership scheme, whereby people own a share of an aircraft that buys them a minimum of 100 hours of flying time. It's seen explosive growth in the past few years. Rob Hersov, the company's vice chairman, believes: 'Firstly, it's due to the boom in the economy. And secondly, because people hate airports, and want privacy and exclusivity in their flying that commercial airlines can't give them.'

Long-haul flights also provide a growth area. 'People will use their miles to go house hunting, and they'll look at places such as Mozambique and Tanzania,' Mr Hersov says. 'Half the analysis is "where can I fly to be reasonably exclusive?" There are lots of new airports opening up to service the rise in private aviation, but they're much more likely to be in the new rather than the established destinations, where there's more space for them.'

Indeed, discerning high-net-worth individuals are seeking luxury homes in remote and high-on-inaccessible locations. The sales hook for getting them to these virgin corners of the planet is a challenging journey. The narrower the landing strip or more unusual the 'arrival experience' (by seaplane, helicopter or private yacht), the greater the exclusivity appeal and the higher the cost. 'It's not just a property trend, it's a lifestyle and tourism trend,' says James Davies, development director of Hamptons International. 'It's aspirational and about the fact that you can reach this place that most people wouldn't have the resources to get to. But once you get to your hideaway, you want all the luxuries as well.'

Modern wizardry, such as private jets and the internet, have updated the desert-island romance of novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island*, but it's unlikely that the original castaways would recognise the package of trimmings that comes as standard with a 21st-century remote hideaway. Soneva Kiri, a development of 46 1,275sq m pool-villas on the Thai island of Koh Kood, is only reachable by private plane, followed by a speedboat. The developers, British-born Sonu Shivdasani and his Swedish wife Eva, want buyers of the villas to feel they're in a modern-day Garden of Eden. 'With people living fast-paced lives in cities,

when the time comes to get away, there's nothing more attractive than a serene, natural destination in the middle of nowhere—without having to sacrifice luxuries such as '89 Cristal.'

Architect Richard Hywel Evans has just about cornered the market in top-end hotel-villa resorts in the world's most obscure locations. 'More and more people phone us with more and more remote and extraordinary islands that we buzz off and have a look at,' says Mr Evans. 'I'm currently building a pontoon hotel, 100 miles off the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, where you can go scuba



**'With a light jet costing about £7,000 to charter, by the time you've got the kids and the nanny on board, fees are competitive with flying business class'**

diving out of your bedroom window.'

He's also constructing 28 villas, plus 'five A-frame grass huts', at Zil Pasyon on Félicité, a private island in the Indian Ocean an hour-and-a-half's boat ride from the Seychelles capital of Mahé. Mr Evans believes that, for all their *Treasure Island* allure, it's the exponential growth in private air travel that's fuelling the boom in the market for far-flung homes. 'It's just like it was with boats a couple of decades ago. Once people have got a plane, or a franchise on a plane, they can go where they like, and so you have all these new destinations opening up.'

Courting the super-rich is now the government policy in many remote locations in the world's established second-home markets. The way to bring your country into economic viability today is to preserve its pristine appeal and only permit a handful of very high-end developments. In the Caribbean, the more undeveloped and inaccessible islands of Antigua, Grenada and the Grenadines are marketing themselves as more elite—and somehow ethically purer—than Barbados, with its package-tour crowds.

Perched on the Tongue of the Ocean in the Bahamas, Kamalame Cay is a private island hideaway, designed and built by the Hew family from the ground up. 'My favourite way to arrive on Kamalame is by sea plane,' says David Hew. 'Guests arrive in Nassau and then transfer to the private terminal and land right in the creek that runs behind the Cay.' Alternatively, one could arrive by helicopter and land on the end of the island. 'Either way, stepping off the plane directly on to the beach is one of the greatest ways to start a holiday.'

Ambergris Cay, a 1,100-acre development on one of the more southerly Turks and Caicos Islands, is being marketed by Quintessentially Estates, the real-estate arm of the high-end concierge service. The company has just launched Quintessentially Private Jets, allowing house hunters to view properties by the most convenient method of transport —

jets and helicopters. 'Our clients will often view properties in their lunch hour, or utilise the helicopter service to get a better understanding of a location,' says Lucy Russell, Quintessentially Estates' managing director. 'We can fly clients all over the UK, Ireland and into France and the Benelux countries. We can also fly to other destinations on special request.'

Budget airline flights to Europe and around the Mediterranean opened up a mass market in overseas second homes. The era of private air travel is ushering in a new breed of luxury villa connoisseur, who wants to be far from that madding crowd.

## Contacts

- **Netjets:** [www.netjets.com](http://www.netjets.com)
- **Air Charter Service:** [www.aircharter.co.uk](http://www.aircharter.co.uk)
- **Soneva Kiri** through Aylesford (020 7351 2383) and Cluttons Resorts (020 7584 3050). [www.sixsenses.com/soneva-kiri](http://www.sixsenses.com/soneva-kiri)
- **Zil Pasyon, Erna Low Property,** 020-7590 1624, [www.zilpasyon.com](http://www.zilpasyon.com)
- **Four Seasons Residences,** through Hamptons International on 020-7758 8447, [www.hamptons-int.com](http://www.hamptons-int.com)
- **Kalamene Cay:** [www.kamalame.com](http://www.kamalame.com)
- **Ambergris Cay** through Quintessentially Estates [www.quintessentiallyestates.com](http://www.quintessentiallyestates.com)



## Now boarding at an airport near you

Having a private plane will give you access to some of the world's most exclusive developments. Here are six you should steer a course for

### Soneva Kiri Villas



- **Location:** Koh Kood, Thailand
- **Price:** Villas start at £2.5 million
- **Flight time from London:** 12hrs to Bangkok, quick transfer through the airport then an hour in the resort's Cessna, which lands on a tiny island opposite the villas, and it's a five-minute speedboat trip. *Aylesford International (020-7351 2383); Cluttons Resorts (020-7584 3050); www.sixsenses.com/soneva-kiri*

### Zil Payson Villas



- **Location:** Félicité Island, Seychelles
- **Price:** £1.8 million
- **Flight time from London:** 10hrs to Mahé, then a 15-minute helicopter ride in the resort's own brand-new Eurocopter: 'the BMW of helicopters' according to the architect of the 28 villas, Richard Hywell-Evans. *Erna Low Property: 020-7590 1624; www.zilpayson.com*

### Kamalame Cay



- **Location:** Island off the coast of Andros Island, Bahamas
- **Price:** beachfront lots available for \$1 million plus the cost of building
- **Flight-time from London:** 'Guests arrive in Nassau (9hrs 30mins) and then transfer to the private terminal and land right in the creek that runs behind the Cay' *01733 887423; www.kamalame.co.uk*

### Lindbergh's Landing



- **Location:** Miami, Florida
- **Price:** \$2.699 million
- **Flight-time from London:** 9hrs. Home-owners in Lindbergh's Landing have their own private airport and this house has its own hanger. Set in more than five acres, the six-bedroom house has excellent equestrian facilities. *Mayfair International Realty; 0870 112 7099; www.mayfairinternationalrealty.com*

### Long Bay



- **Location:** Sarasota Bay
- **Price:** \$5.55 million
- **Flight-time from London:** 9hrs to Orlando. This modern house is close to the local airport. And there are private aviation companies near the property, which negotiate accommodations for a person's private airplane and/or jet. *Mayfair International Realty; 0870 112 7099; www.mayfairinternationalrealty.com*

### Ambergris Cay



- **Location:** Turks and Caicos
- **Price:** \$3.6m
- **Flight-time from London:** 9hrs flying time from the UK and access to the island is via the longest private airstrip in the Caribbean. On-island customs & immigration centre allows for jets to land direct. *Quintessentially Estates; 0845 224 3658 www.quintessentiallyestates.com*