

Private jets taking off among China's affluent



Growing affluence has led to the growth of the luxury travel market in China.

There are more companies offering travel packages on private jets, and for the ultra rich, who can afford their own planes, aircraft manufacturers will even customise their interiors.

One such private jet is designed to look like a European palace. Intricate wood carvings adorn the walls, and oil paintings decorate the ceiling. There are cushy leather chairs if one needs to hold a meeting, or one could just adjourn to the bedroom for a nap.

Those with money to spend can have any design they want.

Li Bing, sales director at Boeing Business Jets, said: "Last year, we sold four Boeing business jets. Among which three were sold to China, all to individual buyers."

Aircraft manufacturers are customising the interiors of their jets, to cater to a booming Chinese market.

David Velupillai, marketing director at Airbus Corporate Jets, said: "We can do a round table for six. Because the round table is the centre of Asian family life, but we can also convert that table into a square which is better for playing mahjong and other games. We can even do a karaoke bar."

It costs some US\$10 million for a more humble private jet to about

US\$68 million to buy an Airbus ACJ318. And this does not include the few million US dollars each year needed for maintenance and fuel fees.

Rupert Hoogewerf, founder of the Hurun Report, said: "They just want the best. Like if they buy a car, they are going to buy a Rolls-Royce or Bentley. You got to have one in your collection if you are over a certain status. Rolls-Royce sells a thousand units a year. I am sure it is not going to be long before we sell out at least a hundred jets a year as well."

Eurocopter has collaborated with Hermes and Mercedes Benz to develop two designer helicopters, spacious enough to put golf clubs.

Bruno Boulnois, CEO of Eurocopter China, said: "Our model can accommodate eight VIP passengers in a very luxurious environment. The colour is very auspicious in the Chinese mood, red colour."

For those who own a jet but do not know where to go, or want to charter one for an exclusive weekend, Private Jet Journeys will help arrange their getaway.

The trip could include meeting celebrities, or doing as many things as one wants to in the shortest time.

The company is one of several that have chosen to set up base in China, in recent years.

Jane McBride, CEO of Private Jet Journeys, said: "It can be something as simple as flying in New York...taking your family to Boston...visiting Harvard or MIT with your daughter or son, then flying to Miami, boarding a private yacht to cruise to the Bahamas, where you meet with your investment banker in the Caribbean, perhaps you do some investments, shopping there. And you fly out to Las Vegas...to replenish your coffers after your travels."

A luxury travel package that covers two to three cities would cost about US\$300,000, and that would be considered small change, for those who are rich enough to have their own private jet.

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