

island hopping

where to touch down and how long to linger? by private jet, all options are blissfully at your beck and call

Around its equatorial middle, our planet is rife with exotic atolls and palm-fringed isles adrift in cerulean seas. But there's a reason the yachting set has always counted the Caribbean among the world's best destinations for setting sail.

The proximity of its sand-spun islands — both to one another and to the mainland beaches — means that a relatively short vacation itinerary here can include several culturally diverse and exciting destinations.

And when your mode of transport moves from the sea to the sky, exploring the Caribbean by private jet, your travels go all the smoother.

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TRAVEL WITHOUT THE 'BAGGAGE'

On a commercial flight with typical layovers and delays, it's possible to arrive home feeling rested from your vacation but exhausted from the logistics of getting there and back. Private aviation is about creating a perfect end-to-end experience. Increasingly, private-jet travel is becoming de rigueur for luxury jet-setters looking to make the most of their free time.

The experience goes far beyond eliminating the indignities of crowded departure lounges, security lines and baggage snafus at commercial airports. The option to fly private also affords an indulgence of access — small private jets allow you to better reach out-of-the-way destinations that don't welcome larger commercial jets.

Indeed, with private-jet travel, it's the pleasure of the overall travel experience that's priceless.

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TODAY?

Cliché it may be, but the sky is literally the limit when you charter a private jet for a tour of the Caribbean. Want to set off from West Palm Beach for the Bahamas, stopping off in Nassau for some duty-free shopping before heading on to Great Abaco? Consider it done.

Care for a spot of in-flight aromatherapy and a massage prior to landing in Montego Bay? As you wish.



get away

READY FOR TAKEOFF: Wearing a double-face cashmere cropped jacket (\$2,833) and cashmere skirt (\$1,545) by Louis Vuitton, Krista ankle-strap pumps (\$1,300) and a chinchilla jacket (\$19,000) from Miller's Furs (millerfurs.com), our frequent flyer boards a Celebrity Jet (celebrityjet.com), which easily accommodates both her discerning eye and complete collection of LV monogram luggage, including the exotic multicolor monogram shoulder bag (\$4,500) and shearing tote (\$3,300). Other bags in the collection range from \$1,970 to \$5,400 and are available at Louis Vuitton boutiques (866-VUITTON; louisvuitton.com). Lisa sunglasses by Tom Ford (\$460), available at Bloomingdale's. Albion pavé diamond ring (\$2,250), aqua chalcedony and diamond ring (\$3,100) and pavé diamond hoop earrings (\$3,750) all by David Yurman, available at Neiman Marcus.

Wondering what's on that alluring islet that popped into view shortly after takeoff? Often, private-jet pilots are capable of changing your itinerary en route.

Perhaps you're already a fractional or full owner of a private jet, or simply looking to charter a Gulfstream for an indulgent getaway — your wish is the command of the pilot and crew. And whether you're leaving from Miami, Boston, New York or beyond, your plane will come to you.

Traveling by private jet gives you the option of departing from a smaller airport, rather than from a crowded major hub (Opa-locka Executive Airport instead of Miami International, for example, or Teterboro over LaGuardia). And most often, customs agents will board your plane to take care of the necessary paperwork, making the arrival process all the easier.

If all that indulgence seems too good to be true, get used to it — private-jet travel is all about the person willing to pay for the greatest travel luxury.

a treasure trove of baubles wrought from antique sea glass. And **John Bull** (go-abacos.com/johnbull/index.html), in business since 1929, is considered one of the Caribbean's prime duty-free shopping destinations, with everything from Mikimoto pearls to Italian leather. Stop by **Sapodilly's**, on the harbor, for a lunchtime burger and an icy Kalik beer. And just across the street, look for **Show Bow's** conch stand (go-abacos.com/conch/index.html), where the lively owner slices and dices the island's staple seafood.

DESTINATION 2: PUERTO RICO

Your next leg, to Puerto Rico, is a longer one, so consider arranging something special in-flight. A catered meal or a pedicure, perhaps?

El Yunque National Forest (fs.fed.us/r8/caribbean), the only tropical rainforest managed by the U.S. Forest Service, makes another great day trip from the resort.

DESTINATION 3: ST. THOMAS

Fifty miles east of San Juan and a short half-hour hop by private jet are St. Thomas and the U.S. Virgin Islands. **The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas** reopened this fall after a \$40 million renovation and enhancement. When you're not enjoying the resort's indulgent amenities — including services at its luxurious **Prada Spa — Fungi's on the Beach** (agaveterrace.com/fg1.html), nearby, is a great spot for reggae swaying, sunset ogling and the requisite libations that go along with such leisurely pursuits. **The Agave Terrace** (agaveterrace.com/ag1.html), a good lunch spot, offers sublime views from a cliff-top setting. Shop for fine

and the two-hour flight to Montego Bay. **The Ritz-Carlton Golf & Spa Resort, Rose Hall** commands a pristine private beach that's blissfully remote. For sunset, take the resort shuttle to **White Witch Restaurant**, in historic Rose Hall overlooking the White Witch Golf Course, for stunning panoramic views of the Caribbean that are best enjoyed with a Champagne cocktail. At **Jasmine** restaurant at The Ritz-Carlton, Caribbean specialties get the Asian treatment (Asian grilled filet mignon with taro-root purée, perhaps?). And for mass entertainment and some of the best people-watching in the Caribbean, a promenade on the **Hip Strip** in Montego Bay (also known as Gloucester Avenue) is a must. It's worth a day trip (hire a private driver at the hotel)



We recommend at least 12 to 14 days to take in all six of these Caribbean destinations. But don't worry — should you decide to change your schedule or destinations, your jet will be waiting.

DESTINATION 1: THE BAHAMAS

From Miami, it's roughly a 45-minute hop to the airport on Great Abaco in the Bahamas (you can fly nonstop from most other East Coast cities, too). At **The Abaco Club**, A Ritz-Carlton Managed Club, set on a 534-acre private peninsula, nonmembers are welcome to stay in luxurious private cabanas. Pry yourself from the resort's stunning double-crescent beach (if you can) to visit the town of Marsh Harbour. Local jewelry designer Marlee Mason's atelier, **Silver Moon Designs** (silvermoonrise.com), is

The flight of roughly two hours and 15 minutes transports you from the laid-back Bahamas to one of the Caribbean's most thriving capital cities. **The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel, Spa & Casino**, oceanfront in Isla Verde, is within minutes of both the international airport and historic Old San Juan. Visit the **Plaza del Mercado** in the barrio of Santurce, where vendors hawk yams, yucca and medicinal herbs in lively surrounds. Then hit **Clubman** (on Avenida Ponce de León) to shop for the island's iconic *guayabera* men's dress shirts. Join the locals for Cuban sandwiches and *café con leche* at Isla Verde's longstanding bakery, **Panadería Española Repostería** (Centro Comercial Villamar). Or sample the magnificent offerings at **BLT** or **Il Mulino** at The Ritz-Carlton. At the tour desk at the hotel you can also book a foray to the seaside enclave of **Fajardo**, where you'll experience the beauty of a bioluminescent lagoon on a moonless night.

jewelry and timepieces at **Jewels** (jewelsonline.com) in Charlotte Amalie (the famed *bijouterie* also has a smaller location inside The Ritz-Carlton). And consider day-tripping to tiny **St. John** by ferry (there's no airport on the island) from the town of Red Hook, mere minutes from the resort. The crossing takes about 40 minutes, and you can spend a leisurely afternoon exploring the pristine beauty of **Virgin Islands National Park** (nps.gov/viis), which encompasses more than half of St. John's rugged volcanic terrain.

DESTINATION 4: JAMAICA

When you're ready to move on from St. Thomas (we know, it's difficult to imagine), board your jet for Jamaica

to the famed seven-mile stretch of baby-powder beach at **Negril**, where **Rick's Café** (rickscafejamaica.com) sees all walks of life converging for sunset cocktails, live reggae music and spectacular cliff diving.

DESTINATION 5: GRAND CAYMAN

Your next hop, a short 45-minute flight, lands you in Grand Cayman. Imagine enjoying a leisurely breakfast in Jamaica, answering e-mails in-flight, and arriving in time for a late-morning round of golf at Greg Norman's sublime **Blue Tip** golf course. The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman sits on the island's storied **Seven Mile Beach**, where exclusive accommodations at **The Reserve** feature some of the most sought after luxury settings in the Caribbean. Chef Eric Ripert, regarded as the world's finest seafood chef, showcases his talents at the resort's flagship restaurant, **Blue by Eric Ripert**, where the tasting menu reads like a sashimi rainbow of the island's

Opposite page: The restaurant, Blue by Eric Ripert, at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman, is regarded as one of the best in the world (left). Stingrays fly through the great blue in Grand Cayman (right).

This page: Cliff diving in Jamaica (left) and beach dining at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun (right).

freshest catches. Another culinary landmark is the **Cracked Conch by the Sea** (crackedconch.com.ky), where you can lunch on conch chowder two ways, spice red or creamy white, on a breezy patio overlooking the ocean. The walk-in humidor at the **Bar at Cohiba Lounge**, a short stroll from the resort, is the stuff of cigar lovers' dreams, with Cuban, Nicaraguan and Dominican stogies offered at duty-free prices. And for day trips, interact with Southern stingrays during a snorkeling trip to **Stingray City** or visit the spectacular **Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park** (botanic-park.ky) to admire rare orchids and butterflies native to the Cayman Islands. Also look into the **Ambassadors of the Environment by Jean-Michel Cousteau** program at The Ritz-Carlton, which features six guided activities per day, from snorkeling trips and kayaking in the mangroves to learning about sea turtles and solar energy.

DESTINATION 6: CANCÚN

From Grand Cayman, it's a little over an hour flying time to Cancún, Mexico, where you'll be sipping margaritas in no time in the elegant surroundings of **The Lobby Lounge** at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun. **La Isla Shopping Mall**, a stone's throw from the resort, is considered Cancún's best overall shopping destination. And at the **Luxury Avenue Mall** (luxuryavenue.com), you'll find all the lesser brands weeded out — all the better to hone in on the Cartier, Ermenegildo Zegna and Montblanc offerings. Visit the resort's tour desk to plan day trips to Mayan ruins, such as those at **Chichén Itzá** and **Tulum**. Discover a surprise folk art museum at **La Casa del Arte Popular Mexicano** (museoartepopularmexicano.org), where the collection includes everything from antique tortilla presses to conquistadors' facemasks. Back at the resort, be sure to check out **The Culinary Center** to cook with professional chefs, who offer hands-on instruction with the area's freshest ingredients.

And when you're finally ready to return home? Your jet will be ready for an immediate departure. ● **BY TERRY WARD**

why
'charter'
a course?

While its founder **Dennis Adams** admits that private-jet travel is still very much the purview of super-wealthy CEOs and, yes, celebrities, his charter company, **Celebrity Jet**, is poised for an even more dramatic takeoff. "It's one of the fastest-growing industries in the world right now," says Adams, whose other companies, Celebrity Limousine and Livery Coach Software, lead the luxury-transportation category. With access to information about any jet anywhere, including "empty leg" charters, Adams can have you booked and in the air within hours of your call. Whether you're

arranging an executive meeting in Europe or a family trip to the Caribbean, flexibility is his forté. And if **avoiding the paparazzi is paramount**, there is no more discreet service: "No waiting in endless security and baggage-claim lines, top-notch on-board catering and in-flight concierges who act more as personal assistants," Adams says, "is what it's all about for our clients. Once you figure in what your time is worth and what your privacy is worth, chartering *can* be more cost-effective than owning or even flying commercial first class."



plane geometry

Light jets, such as the Learjet 31 and Cessna Citation II, typically have a range of up to 1,300 miles and are spacious enough for up to five passengers. The experience is roughly like riding in a limousine — while there's no dancing in the aisles, it's a comfortable way to go. Remember, the more people in your entourage, the less luggage you'll be allowed.

Midsize jets, such as the Gulfstream G150, can accommodate up to 10 passengers with a range of about 3,000 miles, and are a major step up from light jets when it comes to overall cabin space and comfort, as well as luggage allowance.

Super midsize jets and heavy jets, including the Dassault Falcon 2000 and Gulfstream G550, are considered the Rolls-Royces of private aviation, and are the ultimate splurge — there is simply no more decadent way to take to the skies. Typically, the cabin accommodates 10 to 14 passengers and plenty of suitcases. Range is 3,000 to 5,000 miles, and catering and flight-attendant services are standard.

Some services to explore:

● **Marquis Jet** offers clients exclusive access to the NetJets fleet and uses a card system in which you purchase flight time in 25-hour blocks (prices vary depending on the aircraft). You can book domestic flights with as little as 10 hours' notice,

and 48 hours is enough lead time to go virtually anywhere in the world. The company also arranges overflight exemptions for repeat travelers, which means that on your way home from the Caribbean you can fly nonstop to your final destination and go through customs there — instead of having to touch down for customs immediately after re-entering United States airspace, which is standard practice (212-499-3790; marquisjet.com).

● **Celebrity Jet Charter**. With a pricing structure tailored for each individual trip, Celebrity Jet's website offers information about hourly rates for chartering various jets, as well as special rates for "empty leg" flights, when a plane is being repositioned from one location to another. Concierge services take care of everything from ground transportation to catering (888-416-5387; celebrityjet.com).

● **Luxury Air Jets**. Specializing in private charters and executive travel, Luxury Air Jets accesses more than 6,000 airports worldwide wide range of jets. The company's fee schedule includes block hour sales as well as a "pay as you fly" option, so you can decide in advance just how committed you want to be (866-420-5060; luxuryairjets.com). —*T.W.*