

## Travel Like A Billionaire

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Some people are smarter travelers than others. Thanks to a combination of resourcefulness, experience and a little forward planning, while you might still be foraging for an overpriced sandwich at the airport, sitting in your underwear in your hotel room waiting for your clothes to come back from the dry cleaner, or waiting on an endless taxi queue, they are fed, clothed and on their way.

To be sure, such expedience is often directly related to one's net worth or celebrity. Do you ever see **Bill Gates** or **Warren Buffett** fetching their own luggage or removing their shoes and belts as they pass through airport security? You bet you don't. After all, even if they are flying on a commercial airline, billionaires—and movie stars and heads of state—usually have a team of assistants ensuring that their employer's travel experience is as smooth as **Donald Trump** in front of a roomful of overseas investors.

Most of us can't afford to have a full-time retinue stage-managing our every movement. That doesn't mean, however, that such tranquil transit is beyond our reach. There are a number of different companies around the world that provide services to make the more mundane, but increasingly more irritating, aspects of travel relatively stress-free.

Some of these companies are dedicated to easing the traveler's life. For an annual fee, London-based **Quintessentially** will provide concierge service to its globe-trotting members in every major city in the world, from booking tee times in Dubai to snagging theater tickets in Texas.

Other companies, which were not originally intended to assist travelers, can also be taken advantage of. For example, **Nicholas Negroponte**, the founding chairman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab and an avatar of the late 1990s tech boom, is famous for his predilection for FedExing his laundry during extended road trips. Instead of carrying a cumbersome bag, Professor Negroponte would arrange to have clean clothes FedExed to his hotels and then use the return receipt to send back his dirty ones.

But obtaining dinner reservations at trendy out-of-town restaurants and clean socks aren't the only options. These days, given many airlines' need for downsizing, there are many flights on which food is not available. And, even if a hot meal is served, often the tournedos of beef or the steamed salmon are less than appetizing. Why sacrifice your taste buds or digestive tract to such indignities? Instead, you can order a gourmet meal ahead of time from a company like Los Angeles-based **SkyMeals**, which will deliver such delicacies as center-cut seared tuna with wasabi aioli to your home, hotel or even the airport.

While paying an extra \$30 for a decent meal from **SkyMeals** may not strike some as an extravagance, the ultimate in no-hassle travel can really punish your AmEx card. If money is no object, there is no better or more comfortable way to travel than by private plane. In recent years, such companies as **Sentient Jet** and **SkyBridge Private Air** have begun to offer planes on demand—without charging monthly fees or jet fuel costs.

Sentient Jet, based in Norwell, Mass., operates on a fully refundable membership program, which works like a debit card that can be applied to flights. Members open an account, which starts at \$100,000, and all flights are deducted from that amount. Onboard catering is included, as well as concierge services. Rates start at \$2,850 per hour on a light aircraft.

Hermosa Beach, Calif.-based SkyBridge Private Air offers on-demand chartered jets, which means that anyone can book a plane at any time. Booking a plane for 13 passengers flying round-trip from New York to London starts at \$69,000. While this may sound steep, a typical business-class ticket on that route costs \$6,000, or \$78,000 for the entire group.

Not every convenience costs quite so much. Today nearly all major hotel chains and airlines offer membership rewards programs that provide a raft of services, depending on how much you spend per year, from free upgrades to access to private lounges.

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