More and more people are taking advantage of jet company schemes to fly privately. UK travel writer and award-winning documentary maker Charlotte Metcalf steers us through the options.

“Let’s hire a private jet – it’s cheap!” Don’t laugh. I scoffed, too, but if you are wily and organized, chartering a private jet will cost less per person than a budget airline. Fill a six-seater Hawker 400XP and you can fly from London to Malaga in southern Spain for £250 ($388), almost half the £486 or $753 it would cost flying British Airways Economy. Jetsuite.com offers last minute and limited offer group bookings within the US and prices start at an astonishing $536 (£346) each way for the whole jet. Recently, I even saw a Piaggio P180 Avanti for £200 ($310) per person to fly back to the UK from Nice, in the south of France, rather than the £231 ($358) it would have cost on budget airline easyJet. The snag is that you can’t always choose the airport (in this case the jet was flying back to Birmingham, in the heart of the UK, rather than to London) and you have to fill the jet to make it worthwhile. But then no-one expected to swan into a billionaire’s lifestyle without a bit of effort.

As early as 1986 NetJets was experimenting with ways of filling its planes by pioneering ‘fractional ownership’. A sixteenth of a jet buys you around 50 hours of flying time. This obviously involves paying more money upfront but it’s worth it if you fly a lot or travel regularly from regions on the edge of continents, like Greenland.

The average fractional owner travels 400 hours, so if you fly less than 200 hours you are probably better off buying a Jet Card. You pay a flat fee and that guarantees access to private planes usually for a set number of hours. For example, Magellan Jets allows you to buy a 25-hour Jet Card and also has a ‘build-a-card’ option. A Jet Card means you don’t need to own a plane, or even a fraction of one and the only drawback is that you won’t always travel on the same aircraft.

Jet owners are benefitting from Jet Cards too, creating their own Jet Card programs, which vary hugely from heavy hitters like NetJets to individuals selling blocks of time on their own aircraft. If you search hard enough, a ten-hour Jet Card can be bought for less than $50,000. Drew Callen, President of Boston JetSearch, has said there are now ‘50 ways to skin the cat’. The options are so numerous that there are even companies to help you sift through them, like the booking platform PrivateFly that claims it can find private flights to any number of destinations at cheaper prices than national airlines.

Empty legging

Another way that jet companies are bringing their prices within the average traveler’s reach is by ‘empty legging’, offering tickets on a route without passengers — for example, returning home empty after dropping off a VIP. It does mean booking the other leg of your journey separately and it can be risky — if said VIP changes his mind and decides he’d like to fly back from Aspen, Co to Chicago, Ill after all, your travel plans can be thwarted at an hour’s notice. Long haul empty legs are available further in advance but they’re more expensive.

A typical fare from London to Hong Kong in a Gulfstream GIV would be £3,750 ($5,812) a person, still cheaper than flying in first class. PrivateFly is gaining in popularity as its

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This year’s US Flag Day celebrations in Maine, home to Bangor International Airport and the Maine Troop Greeters (www.flybangor.com/troop-greeters), had an added poignancy as the local community paid tribute to its veterans of the Vietnam War.

Timed to coincide with the date when Americans reflect on the foundations of the nation’s freedom and reaffirm their belief in liberty and justice, the June 14 remembrance ceremony for the ‘vets’ formed part of a 10-year program commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.

The commemorations follow a proclamation by President Obama, in which he declared March 29, 2012 as Vietnam Veterans Day, calling upon Americans to “observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.” Since then there have been such ceremonies across the country in a decade long celebration that will end in 2023 with the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

To mark the occasion in Maine a specially designed and minted commemorative coin was distributed at Bangor’s Cross Insurance Center. The coin is in the distinctive green, yellow and red colors of the Vietnam Service Medal, awarded to those who served in the 10-year long conflict.

The Antonov holds two world airlifting records — a single-item payload (a gas power station generator weighing 418,834 pounds) and a total payload of 559,577 pounds.

The six-story high jet has a wing span of 88 m, weighs 285,000 kg and is 84 m long. “With a top speed of 850 km/h, it nonetheless has a lumbering grace that makes it a crowd-pleaser every time it visits,” says BGR Marketing Manager Risteen Bahr.

‘Contrails’ was never intended as a self-congratulatory promotional piece. Rather, its intention is to keep our various stakeholders abreast of the latest developments here at BGR.

It would be remiss of me, however, not to pay tribute to the airport’s remarkable snow team, which has received yet another commendation in the annual Balchen/Post Awards, the industry ‘Oscars’ for snow and ice control. Keeping the runway and airfield clear of the large amounts of snow we see in Bangor is no mean feat and I am happy to use this column to acknowledge the team’s achievements.

Elsewhere in our newsletter we report on improvements to our Alpha taxiway, as well as the installation of a new runway weather sensing system, all designed to enhance the BGR customer experience.

Finally, our lead article by consumer journalist Charlotte Metcalf shows that you don’t have to be mega-wealthy to live the life of a private jet traveler. What with fractional ownership, empty legging and Jet cards, it’s often difficult to determine who’s a VIP and who’s a mere mortal, like the rest of us. Suffice to say that all those passing through Bangor International are VIP’s to us.
I'M LEAVING continued from page 1

‘empty leg’ chartering prices remain the same regardless of how many passengers are on board. So a Citation 1 from London to Cannes on the French Riviera that would normally cost around £7,227 ($11,201) would cost an astonishingly low £1,200 ($1,860) on an ‘empty leg’ route, even if you were the only person flying. Fill the seven-seater and that works out at £171 ($265) per person, considerably less than easyJet (£183 or $283 to Nice, to which add transfer charges to Cannes as the small airport cannot support larger aircraft). Private jet travel really can cost less than trudging around on a budget airline.

Certainly, Jet Cards and ‘empty legging’ are here to stay. Both cleverly target travelers who can afford to travel comfortably and privately but are not so hugely wealthy that they own their own plane. “I think these hybrid programs are going to become the dominant product,” says private aviation consultant, Richard Ziskind. “I can’t even see today why a business guy needs to own his own aircraft. For the majority, ad hoc charter is sufficient.”

Once the exclusive domain of VIP’s, billionaires and celebrities, the private jet lounge is now just as likely to be welcoming everyday business travelers and private pleasure seekers on a regular basis. The sky is no longer the limit.

Charlotte Metcalf was travel editor at The Spectator and is currently the editor of Formula Life magazine.

Infrastructure improvements
a boon to pilots

A new runway weather sensing system and an upgrade to the airport’s Alpha taxiway are among a number of infrastructure improvements announced by Operations Superintendent Robbie Beaton.

The weather sensing system, which may be accessed remotely by up to 10 users, provides accurate, real time information on runway weather conditions, allowing BGR to alert pilots much earlier than in the past. “The system is not only of use in the winter, when it provides runway temperatures and helps determine which type of treatment is best suited for prevailing snow and ice, but at this time of the year, too, when wind speed dictates which way incoming aircraft land,” says Beaton. “We’re able to alert pilots some 20 minutes away from their approach.”

Rehabilitation of the airport’s Alpha taxiway, the area between the main runway and the terminal building, will improve the pavement, which is in need of milling and repaving. The work will be carried out in sections over the next five years.
Closest U.S. Airport Provides Quick Service

by Curt Epstein, May 16, 2015

For many corporate aircraft heading west from Europe, their first glimpse of the U.S. isn’t the spires of New York City, but the shores of Maine. Bangor Aviation Services, the municipally-owned and operated FBO at Bangor International Airport, the closest U.S. airport to Europe, sees upwards of 400 private flights each month from business jets crossing the Atlantic. While Maine is lacking in neither scenic beauty nor New England charm, that isn’t what draws the flocks of private travelers.

“We’re a tech stop,” said Kevin Kipler, the airport’s ramp service manager. “That’s what we’re known for in the business, and aircraft primarily come here to clear customs, to get their fuel, get serviced and get out of here.”

As part of its quick-turn fame, U.S. Customs and Immigration is available 24 hours a day at the airport’s customs office. While the passengers are being processed through customs, their aircraft is simultaneously being serviced outside. “If their final destination is maybe New York, they may have to wait two hours [there] before they see customs,” noted Kipler. “Here they are going to see it and be gone in 30 minutes.” Due to its customs service and 11,440-ft runway, the airport also receives between 100 and 200 transatlantic diversions a year, for a variety of reasons including medical emergencies, mechanical problems, low fuel, or security issues.

The airport-owned FBO, which operates 24 hours a day, is somewhat unusual. Except for two dedicated customer service representatives, it shares its 22-person staff with the airport. “The people that work out of the FBO aren’t strictly just FBO employees,” Kipler told AIN. “In the course of a day they could fuel a [Cessna] 152, do a lav on a CRJ700, and then help with an air start on the Antonov 224.”

His NATA Safety 1st-trained staff performs fueling for all aircraft at the airport, with six Jet A tankers ranging from 10,000 gallons down to 3,000 gallons, plus hydrant carts that can fuel jetliner-class airplanes directly from pipes connected to the 3-million-gallon fuel farm. All told, on the general aviation side alone, Kipler estimates the airport pumps more than a million gallons of fuel a month.

As far as aircraft services go, the FBO can provide lav, water and international trash disposal, along with oxygen and nitrogen service. Given its Northeast location, winters can be severe, so Type I and Type IV deicing is available with optional forced air, from a trio of trucks. Given its ownership by the airport, the FBO is in little danger of running out of aircraft parking space, with more than 20 acres of ramp area available. The airport recently concluded a $5 million construction project to redo more than 17 acres of tarmac, including strengthening the apron near the FBO to accommodate bizliner-size aircraft such as the BBJ or ACJ.

Bangor International has FAA/EASA-certified technicians on call around the clock to perform light maintenance or liaison with OEM authorized service centers in a diagnostic function in case of more serious private aircraft repairs.

Some of the many aircraft on display at this year’s EBACE in Geneva, Switzerland.

This article first appeared as part of the 2015 EBACE coverage in AINonline, with whose kind permission it is reproduced here.