



ABU DHABI'S ROYAL JET OFFERS VIP ALTERNATIVE TO TRAVELLING FIRST CLASS

News / Business aviation



If you fill a large executive jet with passengers then it can work out a lot cheaper than flying everybody in first or business class on a scheduled flight. Plus you get all the advantages of customised travel to smaller airfields with rapid VIP transit facilities and the opportunity to choose your own flight times.

Abu Dhabi's Royal Jet, for example, can fly a party of 34 in a Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) to London for about US\$150,000 return, rather less than the cost of flying the same group in premium classes.

Royal Jet took delivery of its latest BBJ last week, a buy which according to Rob DiCastrì, the company's president and chief executive, is already proving popular with customers.

"We have taken numerous orders already, with the schedule filling up quickly," he says.

To give a flavour of the experience, Royal Jet invited the media for a demonstration flight to circle Abu Dhabi. The airline has its own VIP terminal at the back of Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Once inside there's a comfortable waiting lounge with canapés and passport formalities are quickly sorted out. Then it's a few minutes' walk to your waiting plane outside.

The Edese Doret-designed interior boasts a cosy bedroom with en suite marble-effect bathroom, but no shower. Then there are eight first-class, lie-flat seats, eight business-class seats, and a separate section at the back with 18 economy-sized seats.

There is LED mood lighting controlled from an iPad, individual TV screens with limited video content options and large conference or dining tables between the forward and backward-facing seats in the front cabin.

Eliminating the overhead luggage racks creates a much more spacious cabin than a normal Boeing 737, although I felt the design a little heavy on chrome around the windows and table.

This is the first BBJ in the world to be equipped with high-speed broadband Wi-Fi to allow the streaming of live TV and Netflix.

In the cockpit the aircraft benefits from Enhanced Vision System technology for safer landing in bad visibility such as fog and useful in smaller airports without the most advanced aviation guidance systems.

Q&A

Royal Jet's Rob DiCastrì tells -Peter Cooper more about the company:

Who is Royal Jet?

We are the region's leading VVIP executive jet operator, winning the regional World Travel Association award for the past nine years, flying 8,000-10,000 charter hours a year. Royal Jet has operated for 13 years. Our primary role is as a back up to the UAE Presidential Flight with a fleet of 13 aircraft, of which seven are the larger Boeing 737 business jets rather than the more normal small executive jets.

How's business?

It's a tough market. We are selling off our smaller jets because it takes 50-60 hours a month of charter to break even, and the demand is just not there. The majority of our customers are from the UAE ministries, major families and a smaller number of corporates.

Growth plans?

We want to grow but in a smart way. The pie has shrunk and competition is fierce. The days of ordering planes and hoping for customers are over.

Can you really compete with first class?

Yes, this is an industry trend with consolidators like Jetsmarter selling individual seats on executive jets, and we work with them too. They are doing for us what booking.com has done for hotels. Indeed, we can offer more than first class on a scheduled airline as you can order your favourite food, arrive 15 minutes before your flight, travel to small airports, follow your own

schedule and do business in private on the aircraft. Baggage allowances are also way higher.

Abu Dhabi's Royal Jet offers VIP alternative to travelling first class

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