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Travel Feature

# Lavish Private Planes

Jennifer Coutts Clay 12.18.06, 12:01 AM ET



**In Pictures: Lavish Private Planes**

Save a little sympathy for the billionaires out there.

Their calendars are packed with international events. They attend summits on government fiscal policy and meet politicians to discuss emergency funding for drought-ridden nations. Or, as was recently reported about billionaire investor Warren Buffett, they perform financial feats like bailing out Lloyds of London.

Transporting your entourage from country X to country Y in time for the next urgent gathering of the great and the good can be a complex undertaking. When they fly commercial, billionaires and their fellow travelers must struggle through seething crowds at airport terminals and wait in long lines for airline check-in and security processing. They sit scrunched like human pretzels in too-small seats where flight attendants sometimes cannot even provide a drink of water.

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Or they do something about it.

Eager to make their trips as hassle-free as possible, many of these individuals have taken to flying on private jets. Typically these small airplanes carry between six and 20 people, and check-in is handled at the general-aviation section of an airport. Passenger boarding and disembarkation take place on specially reserved areas of the tarmac, and helicopter connections can usually be provided if required.

Recently, however, a new trend has emerged at the very top of the market: the conversion for private ownership of much larger--and more expensive--jets that are normally associated with commercial airlines. These are planes like the Airbus A319 and A320; the Boeing (nyse: BA - news - people ) B737 and B757; and even the twin-aisle wide-bodies, the B747, B767 and B777.

Then there is the Airbus A380--a 555-passenger, double-decker jet set to be introduced into commercial service next year pending FAA approval. Aviation officials predict it's just a matter of time until it takes to the skies with all the accoutrements of a private palace.

What might the double-deck luxury interior look like? Lufthansa Technik, a provider of technical support and maintenance for over 300 of the world's airlines and operators, has designed an Airbus A380 for potential private clients that includes rooms with king-sized beds, deep pile carpeting and

en-suite bathrooms; an office with Web and e-mail access; a dining room that can be used for entertaining guests or conducting business meetings; and a theater.

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For billionaire aviation enthusiasts ownership of a customized Airbus A380 represents treasure beyond price. And while commercial passengers are likely never to experience the deluxe accommodations of the privately owned Airbus A380s of the future-- as seen here--it seems some are willing to spread the wealth. British billionaire Sir Richard Branson has already declared his intention to install for the general flying public a range of products in the Upper Class cabin on his Virgin Atlantic fleet of Airbus A380s, including double bedrooms, bars, beauty salons and casinos.

So perhaps in the future, even non-VIP passengers will be able to enjoy an era of luxurious and glamorous flying made possible by this new airplane.

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Jennifer Coutts Clay is the author of Jetliner Cabins, available at jetlinercabins.com.

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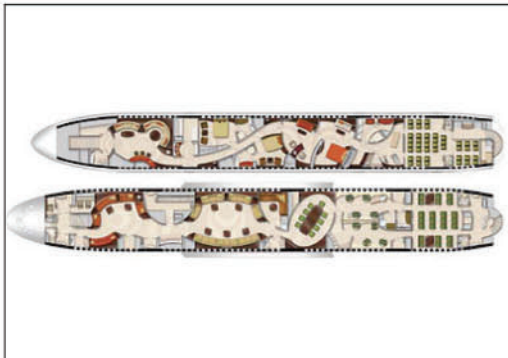


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Eager to make flying as hassle-free as possible, some billionaires are buying commercial aircraft and converting them for private use. The cream of the crop? The Airbus A380.

**Airbus A380**

The largest passenger airplane ever built, the Airbus A380 the ultimate acquisition in the billionaire bracket. Priced at close to \$250 million, the Airbus A380 is way beyond reach of those who are merely multimillionaires.



© Lufthansa Technik

**Floor Plans**

Instead of the traditional rectilinear format for aisles and cabin dividers, the designers have incorporated S-curve and C-curve pathways linking individual zones that can be customized according to buyer preferences. Near the back of each deck there are traditional rows of cinema-style seating--suitable for an accompanying employee entourage or press corps.



© Lufthansa Technik

**Upper Deck Guest Area**

This zone can be used for small business meetings, private dining or relaxing. The couch in the corner resembles an oversized ottoman and can be converted to sleeping accommodations. The corner cabinets can be filled with planter boxes or floral arrangements, providing a welcoming personal touch.



© Lufthansa Technik

**Upper Deck Private Bedroom**

Utilizing the entire width of the cabin, this magnificent master bedroom features a sumptuous king-size bed, deep-pile wall-to-wall carpeting, and an elegant sofa. As in the other zones, the cabinetry is made of highly polished wood-finish surfaces inlaid with contrasting shades and graining. En-suite bathrooms include shower units and, if desired, gold-plated plumbing accessories.

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### Upper Deck Private Office

Those working in flight will be able to use their cellphones; Web and e-mail access will also be available, ensuring global connectivity at all times. Carry-on bags can be placed in the roomy overhead stowage bins that run along the sides of the cabin, and blinds positioned in front of the windows can be opened and closed according to individual preference.



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### Upper Deck Private Lounge

Travelers looking for some downtime can chill out in cozy alcoves along the windows, and enjoy audio and video programs on demand, including computer games and immediate access to a wide range of high-quality movies stored digitally on the system's servers. The staircase visible in the back wall leads to the nose area of the main deck.



© Lufthansa Technik

### Main Deck--Conference Dining

This room may be used for entertaining guests or conducting business meetings. Near the entryway one TV screen is visible, but add a few more and it would also be possible to use the cabin dividers and partitions as "video walls," to display simultaneously a range of high-impact programming--for instance, business-news reports or party-style disco dancing.



© Lufthansa Technik

### Main Deck

The design team has also created an aerial meeting room and auditorium. Plush seating is spread around the cabin's perimeter, and the room gets plenty of light--perfect for enjoying an evening cocktail or relaxing with a book.