

# general news

[www.bangkokpost.com](http://www.bangkokpost.com)

## THIS IS LIFE

**Fine flying** 'lite Traveler' magazine's Douglas D Gollan talks about the rapid rise of the luxury private jet as the preferred travel option of the super rich

by Brian Kent

Elite Traveler is the private jet in-flight magazine. It is the lifestyle magazine for people who prefer to avoid the delays and restrictions that present-day conditions have inflicted on airlines, and who opt for the airborne equivalent of fine dining with the level of service, comfort and exclusivity afforded by private jet transport. With a cost of \$10,000 US per travel hour, we are talking only about the uber-rich.

In the words of a colleague, Douglas D Gollan "is the sharpest never misses a trick," and yet the manner of the co-founder, president, and editor-in-chief of this influential in-flight publication is cheerfully unassuming and displays no surprise at having the wealthiest people in the world as his readership.

What led you to choose a career in travel publications?

It kind of chose me, really. My dad was in travel publishing and had formerly been in the airline business. They used to tell me that when I was small they would sit me on a stack of airline schedules so I could reach the table. So I guess you can say that air travel is in my blood.

When was your first air travel experience?

When I was four years old. We lived in New York but my father was Scottish, and we flew from New York to Reykjavik in Iceland and on to Glasgow to see my grandparents.

What was the first step in your career?

With a trade magazine called Travel Agent. It's 75 years old and always had a good reputation. I started out on the editorial side and eventually became its aviation correspondent at a really exciting time in the industry.

What time was that?

In the late '80s, the first years after airlines were deregulated. Everything was changing then; there were mergers, bankruptcies, alliances. The first one was British Airways and United Airlines.

How old were you when all this was happening?

I was 25 years old and talking to CEOs of the big global airlines. I learned so much about the business and where it was going, it was like getting a Harvard degree without having to study for it. I was with Travel Agent for 14 years, and it was sold in the late '90s.

Was that when you had the idea for "Elite Traveler"?

At that time, we were beginning to hear a lot of dissatisfaction with mainstream airlines, and wealthier people were turning more and more towards private jet travel to avoid the hassles of regular air travel. People who travel a lot and spend a lot don't want to put up with the waiting time and the inconveniences imposed on airlines for security reasons, so they were opting for private jet travel in increasing numbers. That's why, with two other people, we started the magazine.

With so many travel magazines on the market, what did you want "Elite Traveler" to be?

Essentially, the in-flight magazine for the very rich whose preferred mode of transport is the luxury private jet. Elite Traveler reflects the private jet lifestyle.

You mean, there wasn't one?

Right. We did our research and we found there was no publications with distribution into private jets, yet there was a great interest in the very rich consumer. They're the people who have said "no" to the declining standards of service in regular airlines. Luxury private jet travel is their alternative, and Elite Traveler reflects their lifestyle. So we were in the right place at the right time.

Is this a growing market?

Growth has been exponential since 2001, and the forecast is that it will triple in size in the next 10 years. In Russia and China it's increasing in size already, and they will be huge in the next few years. There are a lot more very rich travellers now, too, people for whom money isn't an issue. If they want to make the short trip from Hong Kong to Bangkok, it would cost about \$40,000. From a cost perspective, that's like you and me getting a cup of coffee at Starbucks to them.

But aren't long haul flights a problem?

There are more and more private jets with a global range these days. I don't mean the private 747s, but the Gulfstream 550 is one, with a range of 12 or 13 hours. However, long-haul is still where the airlines like Cathay Pacific and British Airways excel in the front of the plane..

We often think of the very rich as being older people. What age are your readers?

All ages, but we know that the median age is under 40. And we also know through research that their income is more than 12 times higher than other travel and lifestyle magazines.

I remember that line by Scott Fitzgerald: "The rich are different from you and me." What are they looking for?

They want freedom of movement to enjoy their lives. With a private jet you arrive at the airport and the customs and security people come to you. The limo is waiting on the tarmac and you're on your way. And not everyone's going on vacation. This way they can do meetings at either side of the country in the same day.

Is it exclusivity that rich people want?

Not always. There are places where you can be seen or not seen right in the same neighbourhood. In LA if you want to be seen, take a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel and sit by the pool. If you want to be exclusive, go to the L'Ermitage. You can be there for three weeks

before anyone notices you. When you see celebrities it's because they want you to see them. But when they don't, they'll know the best places to go. And Elite Traveler will keep them updated.

Is that what you do for your readers?

It's part of what we offer. We give the kind of detailed information they won't find anywhere else, the kind of information a group of friends would exchange at dinner, talking about the spa they've just been to, or hideaway resort they've just heard about. We don't just list the best hotels; we take you inside the best suites so you can get a feel for the design, the ambiance and the details. We give you the direct number of the general manager so you can communicate your individual requirements to him. For instance, the CEO of a major fashion house is a pianist and so is his wife, and wherever they go, they know there will always be a grand piano in the suite waiting for them.

What sort of details are readers interested in?

Someone might want to know the therapist who gave Sir Mick Jagger a massage at Amanpuri. We can tell them. If they want to have the same guide who took Jennifer Lopez around, we can give them the name and phone number. Here's another: if you see a watch advertised in Elite Traveler, you'll also find the name and number of the boutique where you can buy it. People will call them up from the jet. We view ourselves as a trusted adviser - and if you don't see it in the magazine, there's a reason for that.

Do you have a personal favourite destination?

There are several great resorts with an out-of-this-world quality that will give you a magical experience. I'd give the Villa d'Este on Lake Como near Milan as one example. When you go through the gates, you might think you're in heaven. And when go inside, you know you are!

You've been to Thailand many times. Do you think we have the kind of destinations that will appeal to your readers?

Absolutely! I'd take the limo to Lebua and The Dome! There are international airports with access to all the international tourism destinations, great hotels and resorts - and suddenly, more restaurants and places where people want to go to outside of hotels. I think you have some hot properties in Thailand and we'll be hearing more about them.