

Are Around The World Luxury Jet Cruises Worth It?

You can circumnavigate the world in just 24 days, if you're willing to pay six-figure prices for the privilege. Here's why more travelers are signing up.



Courtesy TCS World Travel | JASON EDWARDS

Fancy traveling around the world in a flying hotel with 50-odd other people? If yes, you're not alone.

More travelers than ever are choosing to climb aboard airliners that have been reconfigured and refashioned as ultra-luxe private jets with sleek leather bar-lounges, lie-flat beds and tricked-out kitchens heavily staffed by a motley crew of pilots, flight attendants, engineers, doctors, cameramen, tour leaders and 'expedition guides' trained to help you make the most of it. After all, what's a 'round the world adventure without a few *passepartout* companions?

Apart from jaw dropping luxury, the air cruise appeal is all about time.

These transcontinental tours offer curated itineraries and insider access to some of the world's best hotels and experiences while eliminating the hassles (and considerable time loss) of flying commercially. What used to take months via 20th century ocean liners can now happen in a matter of weeks. For the privilege, passengers are willing to pay more than ever — from \$80,000 to up to \$215,000 per person. And prices are rising; **Four Seasons' ticket prices** have increased over 80% since 2015.



A kangaroo in Perth, Australia, a stop on Safrans du Monde's World Tour Special Edition
2024 @TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Tour operator **TCS World Travel** was early to this rarefied airspace. The company operated its first group jet expedition in 1995, and has since clocked over 300 private tours in 200 destinations. Despite Covid-era border closures, rising fuel costs, and serious concerns surrounding the climate impact of **private jet carbon emissions**, TCS Chief Customer Officer Chris Kollas claims the following: “TCS is a profitable, self-sustaining company and our primary business continues to be operating group jet expeditions.”

Eventually, hoteliers not only saw, but seized this opportunity. In 2015, **Four Seasons** launched its own Round-the-World tour (in partnership with TCS operators), pioneering the hotel brand/private jet mashup and

entrenching brand loyalty in the process; on these tours, guests stay exclusively in Four Seasons properties. When I covered the launch for [Bloomberg](#), much of the hype surrounded just how luxurious the on-board experience could be (Bose headphones? Bvlgari toiletries? Private chef? Check, check, check.) Since then, luxury entrants like [Aman Resorts](#), [Abercrombie & Kent](#), French travel agency [Safrans du Monde](#), and adventure-travel outfits like [National Geographic](#) have been creating ever-more personalized and far-flung itineraries to satisfy the most discerning of guests. As ever, the proliferation of product is driven by demand.

In just a few weeks, Safrans du Monde will turn its Airbus A340 into a flying hotel, taking 50 passengers on its “[Special Edition](#)” tour, personally accompanied by the company’s French globetrotting founder and CEO, Guy Bigiaoui. The group will visit nine destinations in 24 days, including Hawaii, Fiji, Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, the Maldives and Tanzania, before returning to Paris. “Part of the enrichment of this kind of trip is what you share with your fellow travelers. Clients understand that even before they start the trip; they know they like to travel as individuals, but they’re open to what this whole group experience will bring to them in terms of meaningful, memorable human exchanges,” says Bigiaoui.



If you're considering taking any of these trips, the observations of a few fellow travelers might help inform your decision, over-and-above the brochure. According to passengers who took 'round the world tours in 2023, these are the top pros and cons:

The Pros

- **The Paperwork Is Sorted** | Visas, insurance, and itineraries are all organized with impressive speed and efficiency. Not only is the full itinerary and all meals, drinks, accommodations, entertainment, and even tips pre-arranged, you don't have to worry about your luggage. It will be waiting for you in each hotel room upon arrival. "If you can afford to do it, any of these places are accessible. The destinations themselves were not really the thing. Not having to do any of the research about the locations made it so easy, we didn't have to think about it. Our hotels were phenomenal. That was a huge plus to us," says Tony Staub, co-owner of Deer Creek Preserve in Maryland.
- **The Plane Is Very Comfortable** | Air cruise operators don't own their aircraft. They are often leasing a commercial Airbus A321 (narrow body) or Airbus A340 (wide-body), rather than a [Boeing](#). These jets can handle 300 passengers, but they're redesigned with a "VIP configuration" to pamper fewer guests, with ample room to rest and sleep, or socialize and cavort at leisure. In an Airbus A340, there are two extra tanks for fuel and four engines, which means you can avoid having to land and refuel.
- **Food and Drinks Are Unlimited (And Fancy)** | Traveling with a group is much easier when you're not worried about the bill at a restaurant. When you're dining out, choose what you want to eat or drink. It's included in the price. On board *Safrans du Monde*, for example, appetizers, canapés, and 3-course meals are prepared by private chef Paul Caussé. While in-flight, guests can socialize at the on-board bar and enjoy an extensive list of fine wines, spirits and champagne, standard for around-the-world tickets.

- **Events Are Unforgettable** | “The parties and shows Safrans put on were surprising and amazing. They rented out the whole temple at Angkor Wat [a Buddhist temple in Cambodia], and had this extravagant, catered event. They’d brought in back up trailers, rented lights, generators, dancers, and fancy meals. There was a lot of decadence,” says Leslye Staub, Tony’s spouse and co-owner of Deer Creek Preserve. “Our first night in Brazil was unbelievable. The group that won Carnival that year came and did their competition performance for us in our hotel banquet hall! We would absolutely travel with Safrans again; they did a fantastic job with extra touches.”



Flying to the Maldives with Safrans du Monde. SAFRANS DU MONDE

The Cons

- **Not Enough Free Time** | “We felt like we were not in any place long enough. It was a tiny little taste of the world. We just want more time in each location; even just half a day of free time. The problem is how much longer can you make the trip, and how much more expensive can it be before you scare people away? After 24 days, people were exhausted at the end,” says passenger Leslye Staub.

- **Your Itinerary Can Change, Without Notice** | Before Safrans took off on its October tour last year, war broke out between Israel and Palestine. The original itinerary included Jordan and Petra, but these visits were canceled. Organizers quickly rerouted to Jaipur, India. By all accounts, the Jaipur hotel and Bollywood party experience became a group favorite.
- **Your Aircraft Can Change, Without Notice** | In some locales, it's simply not possible to land an Airbus. "We had to take a commercial flight to Bora Bora, and it was delayed by 5 hours, in a hot, sweaty airport. In Peru we had to take a commercial flight both ways to Cusco. Flight control said: this plane is too big, you can't land here. So Safrans bought commercial tickets for everyone. Couples were broken up, our seats were scattered. It didn't go over very well," adds Staub. How often does this kind of thing happen and why? Danielle Shehab, Senior Passenger Charter Broker for [Chapman Freeborn Airchartering](#), explains that aircraft carriers must obtain landing permits ahead of time. But when locations change, due to inclement weather, political unrest, or technical failures, obtaining new permits isn't necessarily quick or easy. "The issue can come down to permits. We work backup options. The backup can be booking commercial tickets, or delaying the trip by a day, or even replacing the aircraft — but that's not something that we've seen a lot of. The challenge is getting permits. There are ways to expedite that."

- **Rethink Your Luggage Situation** | Between locations, you might suddenly be told to downsize. Small charter flights often can't handle heavy weight, and passengers are asked to be flexible. Staub adds: "On Easter Island, at 10:30 at night, we get off the dinner bus and they tell us: oh, you can have one bag for Bora Bora for the next four days. You need to rethink your entire luggage situation. We didn't know we needed to pack that way. In a couple different destinations, you can only have your carry-on. That was tricky. There's a lot of repacking."



A lemur takes the leap in Madagascar. (via TCS World Travel). COURTESY TCS WORLD TRAVEL / MARTIN MECNAROWSKI

Despite the reroutes, the last-minute packing, and the exhaustion, the pros far outweigh the cons. These passengers say they're already booking their next 'round the world trip.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferleighparker/2024/02/28/are-around-the-world-luxury-jet-cruises-worth-it/?sh=26bc63203050>