

PENTA

Cruising Through the Air for the Ultimate World Tour



With familiar names such as Aman and Four Seasons in the game, air cruises—a concept that connects travelers to multiple destinations on a single trip via a private jet—are trending among elite circles today.

The Paris-based Safrans du Monde, however, was a frontrunner in the space when Guy Bigiaoui launched the brand in 2003. The former airline-industry veteran who worked in sales for carriers such as Air France and Alitalia (now defunct), says that he envisioned offering travelers the ultimate world tour.

“My dream was to visit places all over the globe on one getaway without spending a lot of time, and I decided to bring the idea to life with Safrans du Monde,” Bigiaoui says. “The trips I’ve designed are meant to be journeys of a lifetime. Settle into your seat on board your private jet, sip a glass of Dom Perignon, and take off for 25 days. You wake up every three days in a new universe.”

Safrans du Monde offers two air cruises a year on an Airbus A340 that has been refitted with 100 seats, a lounge and a bar. They span between 24 to 25 days each and hit a diversity of locations, including Easter Island, Bora Bora, Tasmania, Queenstown, Singapore, and the Serengeti; the price begins at around US\$81,000 per person.

Bigiaoui, 60, spoke with *Penta* about his air cruises and what experiences and amenities his guests seek most on these getaways.

Penta: Safrans du Monde offers two styles of air cruises. Can you explain what they are, and how they differ?

Guy Bigiaoui: The seats on board our Airbus A340, which has fully flat beds, are the same for all guests. However, our Première Safrans guests enjoy significant upgrades on all the other moments of the tour, such as menus and wine selection on board, smaller groups during visits, stays in larger rooms or suites and special excursions, such as a luxury train in Machu Picchu and helicopter flights in multiple destinations.

How do you choose your destinations?

The itineraries are meant to offer a panoramic vision, and each destination illustrates a different facet of the world. It may be for its unique natural beauty or fauna, its cultural exception, or the paradise feeling it brings such as with the Maldives.

The flight durations are also considered. If the trip entails one long flight such as eight hours, for example, the next air trip will be three or four.

Who is your customer, and how has that changed over the years?

We welcome solos, couples, and friends traveling together. They are mainly American and Europeans, mostly aged between 55 and 75 and share a strong desire to see the world without sacrificing luxury.

Quite often, they love the trips so much that they book another air cruise.

In recent years, we have seen more clients in their 30s and 40s, who have come into money at a young age and want to spend it on the exclusivity that an air cruise gives them.

What changes has your company seen in travel trends since the pandemic?

Since the pandemic, we started to observe luxury travelers who want to get the most out of their time and money. They want quality experiences that allow for deeper exploration of places and enriching encounters with local people. They're more interested in capturing memories and not acquiring material goods.

When it comes to on-the-ground experiences, which ones resonate most with travelers?

Dining under the stars in a privatized Angkor temple while the majestic apsara dancers of the Royal Ballet of Cambodia bring back life to the carved "bas reliefs" of

Angkor Wat visited earlier the same day. Soaking in the sunset on Easter Island while holding a glass of champagne. These are the two most talked about ones.

Luxury travel is also about responsibility, so sometimes we visit a school or a community and may participate in a project such as repainting a building.

We also add in surprises every step of the way that our guests comment on again and again. I can't say what they are because they wouldn't be surprises anymore.

What amenities do travelers value most, both in the air and at hotels?

The French touch when it comes to food and wine, the space on board, the freedom to choose among a variety of explorations at destinations, the quality of our local guides, and our team of at least 12 people, who are at their disposal throughout the journey such as me as the host, our tour leaders, coordinators, and videographer who creates a 30-minute movie that's personalized for each guest.

They also appreciate the physician and chef who fly with us on the plane.

On the ground, our guests enjoy our carefully picked restaurants and hotels with large rooms and the small size of each independent group that gives this rare feeling that you're traveling with a group of your friends.

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