

How to Find the Right Air Charter

By James D. Butler, Shaircraft Solutions LLC



In two previous articles, I discussed the benefits of flying privately and the various types of private air travel investments that are available to you, including fractional ownership, jet card programs and traditional charter.

If you're trying private air travel for the first time, traditional charter is likely to be the best way to dip your toe in the water. There are no long term commitments or big capital outlays. Just like renting a limousine, you pay only the cost of your trip.

More specifically, charter may be attractive if your travel profile looks like this:

- You fly roundtrips on the same day (so that you minimize "deadhead" costs of flying the aircraft back to its home base from your outbound leg and back to pick you up for your return flight.)
- You make travel plans well in advance (so that we can thoroughly investigate the market.)
- We can identify reputable and safe charter operators near your home base who fly aircraft that satisfy your needs and who have the aircraft inventory to deliver reliable service and availability when you need it. (Again, this will limit

the cost of positioning aircraft.)

- Your usage may vary substantially over time so that "pay as you go" charter is better for you than locking into a program with a "use it or lose it" commitment.

There are at least one thousand charter operators in the United States. Although you certainly can find charter operators on the

- What is the five year accident/incident history of the operator?
- Has the operator been approved by a reputable safety rating service like ARG/US or Wyvern?
- What model and year is the aircraft you'll be flying? What avionics and other safety equipment does it have? Is it in compliance

If you're trying private air travel for the first time, traditional charter is likely to be the best way to dip your toe in the water. There are no long term commitments or big capital outlays.

internet, this isn't quite like buying a set of steak knives. Charter flying is expensive and, more importantly, you're putting your life and the lives of your family members in the hands of the operator, its aircraft and pilots.

Here are some questions you should ask to make certain not only that the price is right, but also that you'll enjoy the flight and be as safe as possible.

- How long has the operator been in business?

with all FAA directives and manufacturer maintenance requirements? What is its damage history? If it's an older aircraft, has it recently been refurbished?

- What is the seating layout of the aircraft? What is its luggage capacity? Is the cabin height and width sufficient such that you'll be comfortable? Is the lavatory separated from the rest of the cabin by a door?
- How many hours have the pilots flown overall and in this particular type of aircraft?




- What is the aircraft's range? Will it be able to fly your trip without a fuel stop?
- What back up aircraft will be available in the event of mechanical or other problems with the scheduled aircraft?
- Is the price quote firm and, if so, for how long? What, if any, additional charges will there be? (Expect to pay a 7.5% federal excise tax, but be clear as to whether there will be any fuel surcharge. In today's environment with

- What standard catering items will be provided?
- What is the cancellation policy? (The operator rightly is concerned about tying up aircraft but any cancellation fees should be based on costs actually incurred by the operator.)

When we at Shaircraft Solutions book charter flights for our clients, we prefer operators with whom we've done business before and who have a proven track record. Even with these operators, we

So if you're thinking about charter, don't just shop for the lowest price. You wouldn't do that when you're looking for a surgeon, so why would you do it when choosing a charter company?

Our goal is to find our clients the best price for their flight with an experienced operator on a well maintained and appropriately equipped aircraft flown by top notch pilots, all with a spotless safety record. That should be your goal as well. 

Copyright © 2011 by Shaircraft Solutions LLC. All Rights Reserved.

So if you're thinking about charter, don't just shop for the lowest price. You wouldn't do that when you're looking for a surgeon, so why would you do it when choosing a charter company?

escalating fuel costs, many operators will only guarantee a price without a fuel surcharge for a short time. In addition, many operators add a 3% - 5% surcharge for credit card payments. Some will waive this fee if you agree to hold the reservation with a credit card but to wire payment within a short period of time after the trip.)

ask for updated answers in writing to all these questions. It's also essential that you read and negotiate the charter agreement. (The operator will tell you that, "It's just boilerplate. Nothing to worry about. Everyone signs the same thing." Often enough, that's just not the case. There can be room to negotiate important provisions of this contract.)



James D. Butler is an attorney and CEO of Shaircraft Solutions (www.shaircraft.com) - a Maryland-based consulting firm advising individuals and businesses with respect to the full range of private air

travel investments, including fractional ownership, jet card and charter programs, and specializing in fractional share valuation disputes. Butler also authors Inside Private Air Travel – a blog offering an unvarnished and timely look at the private jet industry as a whole as well as the latest developments with specific jet companies. He can be reached directly at jbutler@shaircraft.com or (301) 652-9885.