THE PRIVATE JET LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

ELITE TRAVELER

NOV/DEC 2013

THE ULTIMATE HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

$50.00
CONFIDANTE

BY MARY GOSTELLOW

It seems everyone is getting into the private jet market. Emirates, the airline that first turned its first-class "seats" into private cabins with Hollywood-style mirrors and much else besides, is considered by many to be the leader when it comes to luxury aboard scheduled carriers. Now it is launching Emirates Executive, a customized A319 with a maximum capacity of 19 guests.

Dubai-based Ali AlBawardi is a polo-loving supermarket king who is also into resorts. Back home, he owns Desert Palm, which has four working polo fields. He is big on Africa at the moment. Last year he put a different label on his Bilila Lodge, a luxury safari resort in the Serengeti that is now, following extensive renovations, a Four Seasons. He rather likes the brand; he co-owns Four Seasons Resort Seychelles and is working on the transformation of the historic, village-like Westcliff in Johannesburg, also to become Four Seasons. But the entrepreneur does not put all his eggs in one basket.

Per Aquum, in which colorful American entrepreneur Bill Heinecke's Minor Hotel Group recently acquired a sizable stake, manages Desert Palm. Similarly, AlBawardi gave the venerable Kilimanjaro Hotel in Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam, to Hyatt who, it is rumored, may well run the project AlBawardi has just purchased in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Heinecke is also getting to know Africa well. From his Bangkok base he seems to roam the world piloting his own Gulfstream V. In September, he arrived in Paris as a passenger on another G550, as part of a 16-strong group of Bangkok-based wine connoisseurs, most of whom hail from Scandinavia. The group had been invited to France by Per Enqvist, Danish-born founder of PANDORA jewelry, which in 2010 achieved an IPO of $2.1 billion. Enqvist is now also based in Bangkok, where he successfully bid, at a charity auction, for a lavish week in France. The lucky group dined at a Danish smorgasbord courtesy of the St. Regis Bangkok on the initial flight, ate at Michelin-star spots in Paris, where they were based at Le Meurice, and drank nothing but the finest champagnes when they were hosted by LVMH at various cellars in Epernay and Reims.

Private planes were in their element at the recent wedding of Elle Macpherson and Jeffrey Soffer at Laucala Island, on the 12-square-mile island of the same name in Fiji. The Laucala airstrip conveniently—at least for keeping paparazzi away—only takes private jets. Laucala, which has just 25 villas but a staggeringly large workforce of 329, is owned by Red Bull mastermind and co-owner, the Austrian Dietrich Mateschitz.