

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

A smattering of tiny airstrips allow those in the know to fly straight into the heart of the world's most remote regions

WORDS Leo Bear

Left: Courchevel Altiport in the French Alps offers pilots a thrilling landing challenge

Anyone who has ever landed at Gustaf III Airport on the island of St Barts will know the thrill of landing on a tiny runway. The approach involves hurtling towards an airstrip so small that pilots require special training to land. Courchevel Altiport in the French Alps provides a similarly exhilarating experience. Pilots must navigate a short uphill runway, affixed to the edge of a steep precipice. So dramatic are the surroundings, the runway even featured in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

These are just two examples of the many discreet landing strips scattered across the globe – entry points for jet-setters who are truly in the know. For decades, locales such as Lugano, St Tropez La Môle and Goodwood have been part of an elite travel club, and now – with time becoming an increasingly precious commodity – more travellers than ever are seeking to make use of these lesser-known gateways.

Located in the heart of some of Europe's most remote and idyllic destinations, these secluded landing strips require skill and experience and, above all, the right technology to access. Private aviation specialist Jetfly

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offers just that. This forward-thinking company operates a fleet of Pilatus PC-12 aircraft. Small, powerful and with large buffering wheels, the PC-12 benefits from slow take-off and landing speeds that enable it to land on very short runways. ‘A mere 700 metres of asphalt is all a PC-12 needs in order to take off and land,’ explains Jonathan Clough, UK director of Jetfly. ‘This means we can make use of three times more airports than any other private jet company.’

As well as an impressive tech spec, the Pilatus PC-12 is as good-looking a plane as you’ll ever see. It has the old-fashioned curves of a single-engine turboprop combined with the clean Swiss lines of a smart air-cruiser. Designer Philippe Starck once described the PC-12 as

‘the Range Rover of the air’, and his distinctive brand of cool adorns the livery of Jetfly’s fleet today.

Inside the cabin there’s space for eight passengers and two pilots. The cream leather interiors are as luxurious as any five-star hotel suite and menus are tailored to clients’ preferences – fine wines are brought in specifically. Perhaps most helpful of all is the aircraft’s generous baggage compartment, which has sufficient space for all manner of luggage and sporting equipment, from skis and fishing apparel to bicycles and golf clubs – just the sort of gear you might need when arriving at Dornoch in the Scottish Highlands, which happens to be just 10 minutes from Skibo Castle. ✦

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Above: The PC-12 is small but powerful, with space for eight passengers and two pilots