

TAG Aviation
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Exit the M3 at junction 4a, take the A327 signposted Ively road, drive past seven small roundabouts and, just past the Monkey Puzzle pub on your left, you'll arrive at the home of Britain's first powered flight: TAG Farnborough Airport. After you're waved through the VIP gate (the man in the hut will already have your details), the first thing you'll notice are the metallic, otherworldly buildings. The 5,000sq m terminal has an aluminum shingle facade and gently bends to mimic an aircraft wing; the 34m-high control tower, with its two domed, glass-fronted offices to either side, peeps up like a submarine periscope; while the enormous 12,500sq m hangar, split into three swooshing sections, resembles silver waves spied from a distance. It's less Heathrow, more Houston.

You won't, however, have much time to take all this in. "You'll park up and it's a 20 yard walk to the terminal," explains Graham Williamson, TAG Aviation's president of aircraft management and charter. "Inside, you'll be greeted by your captain and then a concierge will escort you straight to the aircraft, which will already be ready to go. It's probably another 20 yards to the ramp. Then you're in the air."

Today, Farnborough is the UK's only airport dedicated to business flights, run by the sister business of the famed Swiss watch marque. Of course, this base's discretion means it's frequently visited by singers, sports stars, state leaders and secret agents (pay attention the next time you watch *Quantum of Solace*), but increasingly it's also used by ordinary business professionals who want to save time. "In Europe there's the perception that this is only for billionaires," continues Williamson, "but if you hire a four-seater to a short haul destination, it'll cost €2000–€3000 per hour. That's not much more than a business-class seat but it gives you speed, convenience and access."

Why is this happening? Because the perks aren't just about saving time. You're the only passengers on the plane. You choose the crew. You control the schedule. You can even dictate when the thing takes off. "Catering and in-flight entertainment are bespoke," Williamson adds. "Want a pizza from a particular London restaurant? A certain bottle of wine? We'll do everything we can to make it happen."

And the exit is more seamless still. "When you land at Farnborough, a customs chap walks up the steps to check your passport, and a car drives to the ramp to whisk you off to your destination."

As well as running this site, TAG offers both aircraft charter and management. If you choose to former, you'll have access to Europe's largest fleet of aircraft. There's three options: call and fly (think pay as you go for private jets), TAG account (designed for frequent flyers who benefit from on-call account managers) and TAG lease (where you rent a jet and use of a crew for a set amount of time). Meanwhile, if you simply require management for your own jet, TAG can handle every aspect of your day-to-day needs, from providing a dedicated pilot to using its pooling power to negotiate deals on fuel, insurance and hangar space.

Williamson, though, puts it all more succinctly: “This is not about champagne and caviar. It’s about forming relationships with individuals and maximising the time of companies that generate jobs and wealth. Because if we don’t provide that ultimate level of service, the benefits are gone.

“We’re the custodians of Farnborough now.”

tagaviation.com