



HONG KONG SET TO BECOME ASIAN BASE FOR ONLINE AND MOBILE BOOKING SERVICE FOR CHARTERED PLANES

News / Business aviation



A London-based start-up described as the Uber for private jets is looking to open its regional headquarters in Hong Kong.

The service is an online and mobile booking system called Victor that aims to get more bums on seats of privately chartered planes.

Its target market is not for your average Joe Blow, but nor is it just for the super-rich, according to founder and chief executive Clive Jackson, 56.

"When the price points start to come down because you drive up usage, that makes it more affordable and accessible," the Hong Kong-born marketing executive says.

The service allows users to get instant quotes from operators of private jets and immediately book. Jackson says the service cuts out the need for a broker.

The platform, which has about 7,000 aircraft at 40,000 airports to choose from, offers "very competitive pricing", he says.

"Flying private isn't seen as a luxury for the people that use it, other than it's a luxury of time," he says, but the company is not looking to shake off the aura that private jet travel carries.

"We fit in the upper luxury premium segment as a brand," Jackson says, referring to their customers as "obviously very wealthy, invariably entrepreneurial and they know what good looks and tastes like".

So while you don't have to be super-rich to use Victor, it helps.

For example, a flight from Hong Kong to London can cost from 52,000 pounds (HK\$610,000) on an eight-seater jet, up to 154,000 pounds on a luxury jet for 19 people.

The idea came five years ago after two airlines stopped flying to Majorca near Spain, forcing Jackson to use low-cost carriers to reach his second home. "I thought the world of private aviation could be disrupted. The difference between Uber and Victor is our bits of metal fly, theirs drive around on the ground."

The company recently expanded to the United States and is now eyeing Asia.

"We're seriously considering Hong Kong," Jackson says. "Post 2009, the private aviation industry had a significant downturn but we're beginning to see that industry come back to life."

The private jet market on the mainland has slowed since 2012, a direct result of the clampdown on luxury consumption. With 65 staff across the globe, Jackson is bullish about Victor's future, saying revenues are forecast to rise from US\$28 million this year to US\$60 million next.

For Jackson, setting up in Hong Kong would be a bit of a homecoming. Born here to a Chinese mother and English father, he went to boarding school in Britain aged 10 and has returned only three times since 1988.

His first job in the UK was at British Airways, where he worked his way up. "So it's kind of weird coming back full-circle," he said.

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