

# Risk Management in Private Aviation:

## Top 10 Questions to Ask to Ensure You & Your Family Stay Safe

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### Key Points:

1. Safety of oneself and one's family is the chief concern when choosing a private aviation service.
2. Evaluating a company's safety begins with finding out if they have an independent safety program and who oversees it.
3. It's critical to know who operates the aircraft and how said operators are vetted.
4. Determine whether or not the company has a Safety Management System.
5. Learn what the company's standards are for pilots' experience.
6. Learn what the company's standards are for pilot *training*.
7. Ask how many pilots are required to be onboard each flight, and confirm their FAA qualifications (license).
8. Ask about the age of the aircraft as well as the safety technology and equipment.
9. Find out whether maintenance is done by the manufacturer or "in-house."
10. Determine what security measures are in place.

At the top of everyone's priority list when flying on an aircraft is the safety of oneself and one's family. Aviation providers spend a lot of time trying to enhance safety features and procedures, in order to decrease the risk of an equipment malfunction, mechanical failure, incident, or accident. Families are encouraged to research these companies and choose one the same way they do an advisor or investment option—based on which is the most trusted.

Flying private is about shortening your travel time and increasing your quality time together, and knowing you and your loved ones are in the safest possible hands gives you the total peace of mind to fully enjoy yourselves, worry-free.

Here are the top 10 questions to ask any private aviation firm before deciding to fly with them.

### **1. Who runs your safety program, and how much experience do they have?**

This is the first question on the list because safety starts with hiring the right people. You might be surprised to learn that many companies, including the vast majority of charter providers and brokers, don't have safety departments. When it comes to managing risk for your family, there's no substitute for the vital experience of veteran heads of safety who have worked in the industry for decades. Ideally, the EVP and Senior Director of the department are also seasoned pilots and flight department managers themselves.

### **2. Who operates your aircraft, and what's your vetting process for operators?**

Once you get the name of the operator, which may or may not be the provider, it's advisable to research their history. Determine which third-party audit verifications they've earned: Wyvern Wingman, Air Charter Safety Foundation, ARG/US Platinum, and IS-BAO Stage 3 are the most important. Have they consistently exceeded FAA requirements? What about when you have to fly off-fleet? You want total confidence in whichever operator conducts *those* flights, too.

Look for a private aviation company with an in-house flight desk team that finds aircraft from only the top operators—which have all been fully vetted by the company's *safety* team to ensure they meet the highest standards. There are only a couple of companies in the industry that actually perform *on-site* evaluations and inspections of every operator as part of the vetting and approval process. By contrast, conventional charter brokers often source aircraft from operators with inconsistent and less stringent safety protocols. The charter industry is actually very diverse in terms of regulations: there are about 2,000 operators in the US—and the top private aviation companies that lead the industry in safety have only approved about 75 of them to fly aircraft for their clients. You want to be sure you and your family are only flying with crews from that select group of operators.

### **3. Do you have a Safety Management System in place?**

A Safety Management System (SMS) is a means to identify hazards, mitigate risk, collect safety data, and use said data to take action that will improve the safety of the overall operation. The best private aviation companies have implemented their own SMS to monitor the safety performance of their operators—and a few of these firms also require all operators who fly the firms' members to have *their* own SMS.

### **4. What are the experience standards for the pilots of your aircraft?**

Ask the provider if all their pilots are captain-qualified, and find out if they're required to have an FAA Airline Transport Pilot certificate and First-Class Medical Certificate, which are the highest qualifications available. How many flight hours do they have under their belts? Over 5,000 is a good number that significantly exceeds FAA requirements and the experience of most pilots. You want to know that your pilots have significantly surpassed the minimum standards before you trust them to fly your family.

## 5. What are the training requirements for the pilots?

It's important to find out what types of training are mandated for pilots, as well as what the specific procedures are for each. The safest private aviation companies will require the following:

- *Basic indoctrination training* — a mix of computer-based and classroom instruction covering FAA regulations, standard operating procedures, security, international procedures, hazardous materials, first aid, emergency drills, and more
- *Aircraft ground and flight training* — instruction and exercises in advanced full-motion simulators over a period of 2 weeks or more, including an FAA check ride
- *Post-training standards evaluation* — involves flying with an experienced Standards Captain after completion of training, as well as the completion of assessments in numerous areas, including Flight Standards & Procedures and Operational Planning & Execution; Pilots-in-Command should receive an additional FAA check ride during or right after completing the standards evaluation
- *Recurrent training* — full-motion simulator training every year; select companies even administer this *twice* a year



## 6. How many pilots are on each flight?

Ask how many highly qualified pilots conduct each flight for the company; some firms only require one, but those that lead the industry in safety require *two* on every flight—both of whom are captain-qualified. An extra pilot with a great deal of experience and training equates to extra peace of mind for you and those you care about on every trip.

## **7. What's the average age of your aircraft?**

In the regular charter market, fliers are often placed on older aircraft that may not be completely reliable. Ask for the average age of the planes, and narrow your private aviation search to companies that have younger fleets and/or source younger charter aircraft. For the most part, you want planes with model years of 2000 or later, though aviation safety teams will make rare exceptions for the very best slightly older planes if they're extremely well maintained, which is perfectly fine.

## **8. What kind of safety technology is onboard the aircraft?**

A highly sophisticated avionics system for communications, navigation, display, and other functions is critical. The Rockwell-Collins Pro Line and Honeywell Primus systems are two of the very best on the market. Cutting-edge weather equipment, such as color radar with a range of over two hundred miles, is also crucial, enabling pilots to evaluate conditions far ahead and plan the best routing. Other important components include a Traffic Collision Avoidance System to identify other nearby aircraft and an Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning System to notify pilots if terrain must be avoided or if the rate of descent is too high.

## **9. Who performs the maintenance on the aircraft?**

Ideally, you want to fly with a company that uses the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) maintenance programs for their aircraft. Who knows the planes better than the people who made them? No one, which is why they are integral to maintaining the aircraft you and your family will be flying on. Manufacturers like Textron, the maker of the King Air 350i, Citation Excel/XLS, and Citation X, offer around-the-clock service and tech support whenever and wherever needed.

## **10. What security measures are in place for vetting passengers and checking bags before shared flights?**

Flying private affords you the convenience of skipping long security lines, but that doesn't mean security is ignored. Standard procedures for private aviation companies include the vetting of passengers against the TSA "No-Fly List" and other confidential protocols. Choose a private aviation program that requires all passengers to have valid (not expired) government-issued photo ID in their possession when boarding. All pilots should also be required to wear official photo ID that customers can ask to see.

**Nothing is more important than safety. By asking private aviation providers these 10 questions and considering the information in the text under each one, you'll be able to make the best decisions and keep yourself, your families, and any other fellow passengers safe in the skies.**

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