

Los Angeles International Airport launches private terminal for the ultra-wealthy

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The Los Angeles International Airport opened a private terminal Monday to protect the world's ultra-wealthy from the stresses of air travel. The terminal, named "The Private Suite," was first announced in November 2015 and has been operational since Monday.

The first of its kind in the US, the \$22 million facility resembles a heavily guarded fortress and provides members with a private, highly secured and paparazzi-free environment where a team of eight people caters to their every need.

While the vast majority of airline passengers are herded onto and off of their flights like cattle, subjected to invasive public security screenings, Private Suite members will be able to enjoy a completely different pre- and post-flight experience: for a \$7,500 annual membership and between \$2,700 and \$3,000 per flight (covering up to 4 people), they will not have to wait in lines or navigate their way through a crowded airport terminal. The 2,200 footsteps on average from car seat to airplane seat will be reduced to a mere 70 steps.

In one particularly revealing detail noted by the *Guardian* an iPad posted at the entrance shows video of travelers in the public terminal as they deal with the crowds and long lines. A note above the screen reads: "Here is a glimpse of what you're missing over at the main terminal right now."

The terminal's site describes the boarding process: "One [employee] gets members securely into our gated compound. Another escorts members to their suites. Two others manage any special service requests. Another escorts members through private TSA screening and into one of our runway-side BMW 7 Series sedans. Another drives members across the tarmac to their aircraft. Another serves as advance person waiting at the jet-bridge to escort members to

the aircraft door. An unseen eighth person deals with the luggage."

Members have access to private suites, each with their own bathroom, a pantry stocked with hors d'oeuvres, snacks and a full bar, a daybed, and a runway view of aircraft landing and taking off. Membership also includes pre-flight massages, in-suite manicure, hair, or make-up service and a concierge doctor to meet members in the suite upon arrival.

These elite travelers will be able to board either before or after common travelers via a private staircase straight from the tarmac, or, when possible, using a separate staircase connected to the public jet way.

The operator of this luxurious high-security experience is Gavin de Becker and Associates (GDBA), a "threat assessment security firm" that provides security for "the world's most influential people," as described in its web site.

Its founder, Gavin de Becker, has made a career out of assisting the CIA, FBI, Defense Intelligence Agency, US Marshals Service, police agencies, US Department of Justice and various members of US Congress and other politicians, including 3 Presidents and 14 Governors.

Celebrities like Madonna, John Travolta, Barbra Streisand and Arnold Schwarzenegger during his gubernatorial campaign have employed GDBA's services. The company is well known in top corporate circles for providing protection details for high-level executives.

GDBA's leadership has been drawn from the ranks of the US military as well as the CIA, FBI, Department of Homeland Security and police. Like other private security companies such as Academi (formerly Blackwater), GDBA's success is driven by the aggressive policies of imperialism and measures taken

by the financial elite to secure its profits by the most destructive and deadly means.

The opening of The Private Suite is an expression of the ever growing levels of social inequality in the US. There are few places where the immense class divide is so blatantly on display than at the nation's airports. The services and pampering offered to an ultra-wealthy minority are quite opposite to what common passengers experience, who are often treated no better than the luggage tossed into the cargo hold.

In recent years, in addition to long lines, additional fees for baggage or more comfortable seating assignments and the hefty price of water, beverages or airplane food, the effects of overbooking have forced thousands of passengers off of their flights forcing them to wait many hours, if not days for another flight.

A number of recent high profile incidents, including the beating of David Dao, a medical doctor who was violently removed from a United Airlines flight by security personnel, has disgusted and enraged hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Decades of deregulation and financialization of the airline industry have created conditions where anyone who stands in the way of profit is handled by security agents without any regard for basic democratic rights. Problems which arise because of decisions made by money mad executives are routinely blamed on the pilots, flight crew, baggage handlers and air traffic controllers.

Flying in the face of the fraudulent "war on terror" and the army of security personnel deployed in the aftermath of 9/11, the private terminal will be staffed by TSA officers only as needed, while rich Middle Eastern clients will be provided with prayer mats, a Koran and medjool dates, quite a different experience from the discriminatory and hostile security screenings to which Muslim airline passengers are routinely subjected.

While mainstream media coverage has sought to justify the new terminal as necessary for protecting Hollywood celebrities from paparazzi, company founder de Becker expects that only 10 percent of members will be sports and entertainment celebrities. The service is aimed primarily at providing security for shareholders and executives who fear an intensification of the class struggle. So far, 1,200 super-wealthy individuals have reportedly signed up for the service.

The number of facilities like The Private Suite is expected to grow worldwide. London's Windsor Suite at Heathrow Airport served as a model, providing security and a secluded environment to top politicians and the ultra-rich. In places like Munich, Zurich and Dubai, similar structures are designed to protect the wealthy. Negotiations are already under way for a second Private Suite at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.



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