

# The New York Times

WEALTH MATTERS

## *Taking the College Tour by Private Jet*

High school students heading back to class this fall have more on their minds than finding homeroom. Many juniors, sophomores and even freshmen are already turning their attention toward picking a college.

For most of them, a college tour will play a crucial part of the decision.

Most will travel with their parents by car to potential colleges, stringing together campuses on a road trip that can take a week or longer. But new luxury services offer to cut down that time by whisking families on a private jet outfitted with college regalia and staffed with a college admissions counselor.

The fees for these services can run up to nearly \$60,000, but for the families that choose this route, the benefits can outweigh the cost. Not only are the private trips more efficient than a typical college tour, they can also provide personalized help through the admissions process.

A lot of families find campus tours stressful, said Abby Siegel, a New York college entrance consultant. “As a neutral party, I can be extremely helpful,” she said. “If it comes out of my mouth, the children will listen, where they might not listen to their parents.”

College tours are a growing segment for a luxury travel industry that also caters to wealthy college alumni heading to big events.

An XOJet rival, Magellan Jets, offers a different cost structure. Its college tour package offers 10 hours of flight time, less than the usual increments of 25, 50 and 100 hours its customers must buy for general use. The cost is \$57,000, and Magellan works with Top Tier Admissions, a college advisory firm, which will provide an admissions expert for the trip at an additional fee.

“This gets them to two to three colleges in a day, and in three to four days, they can look at all these colleges around the country,” said Joshua Hebert, the chief executive of Magellan Jets.

En route, students will be given briefing books on each college, which include information like the name of the admissions representative covering their high school and tips on whom to meet and where to go on campus.

On their return to the plane, Magellan provides notebooks from each college so students can write down their thoughts. The company then binds their notes in a book at the end of the trip.

Traveling on private jets is costly, but it may be the most efficient way to tour colleges. It is worth it to people who have more money than free time and no desire to pack into the family car for an interminable drive, said Mr. Henderson.

“The college application process is stressful,” he said, “and we’re focused on helping them maximize their time and get from A to B as quickly as possible.”

But some experts think the extra coddling could be a detriment to the student applying to school.

Students need to present themselves as likable, said Brian Taylor, managing director of Ivy Coach, a New York consulting firm, and college hopping by private jet may not be the best strategy. He suggested that students spend the money instead on preparing early in high school and then honing their college applications.

Ms. Siegel said she offered the same services in the package program with XOJet and the Mandarin Oriental that she did to her other clients. She starts with a two-hour meeting to review the admissions process and to get to know the student.

Before the trip, she focuses on further understanding the student. Looking at the applicant's overall academic performance, she will also advise on which colleges might be more suitable.

"I don't want them to visit schools that won't be the right fit," she said.

Mimi Doe, a co-founder of Top Tier Admissions, which teams up with Magellan, said its objective was to streamline the college admissions process for the private jet clients, the same way it does for families who pay for its individual services, like its \$16,000 four-day college application boot camp.

"We're providing tips on how to make the most of your college visit," Ms. Doe said. More personalized services are available, including the counselors it offers through the partnership with Magellan.

The college tour services also provide ad hoc networking. Mr. Hebert of Magellan said that if a student was interested in a particular university, the company would make an introduction to one of its members who is an alumni.

"They're always happy to help," he said of the alumni. And a recommendation from alumni wealthy enough to fly privately certainly won't hurt a student's prospects.

"This seemed natural to us, since we already serve this demographic," Ms. Doe said. "Why not maximize the time they have? How do you make the most of that visit? Cut to the chase."

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