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24 hours in London

Giving You the Business

One man, twenty-four hours, two new strictly business-class airlines. Our reporter discovers that New York to London and back has never been sweeter

→ A few years ago, a twenty-four-hour business trip to London would have been considered either wildly extravagant (the Concorde) or mildly insane (sleepless journey, jet lag). But with the prevalence of today's business-class sleeper cabins, such a trip is no longer just for the gung ho or the superrich. I recently took advantage of two new all-business-class airlines to see what it's like to spend a day, and only a day, in London.

1.

New York to London

Eos Airlines | \$6,500 round-trip

• An Eos 757 feels like a cross between a private jet and a commercial airliner; Eos offers only sleeper service in a one-class cabin for \$2,000 to \$3,000 less than many business-class fares on competing airlines. With a maximum of forty-eight passengers, boarding at New York's Kennedy Airport is a breeze—no lines at all, in fact. The handful of passengers that were already

seated seemed to be outnumbered by the cabin staff, who immediately surrounded me and held forth an amenities kit, a tray of champagne, Bose noise-canceling headphones, and a menu. I declined the offer of a four-course dinner in favor of sleep. Within minutes of takeoff, my seat was transformed into a real bed complete with cotton sheets, a big down pillow, and a cozy blanket. I asked to be awakened a few minutes before landing to allow for two cups of strong coffee. I slept uninterrupted in my cocoon-like pod until I was woken up with a gentle touch on my shoulder to find, literally, two cups of coffee on a tray. (I appreciated the perhaps overzealous attention to detail.) We landed at Stansted Airport, until now the countryside airport for ultrabudget European airlines. I caught the comfortable and convenient Stansted Express train to London's Liverpool Street station, which had me in central London for lunch in less than an hour.

2.

Central London to Stansted Virgin Limobike | \$175

• With only a small carry-on bag, I chose to travel back to the airport by a chauffeur-driven motorbike. Virgin Limobike picked me up at 7:15 A.M. for the thirty-five-mile journey. The driver secured my bag on a rack and gave me a wind- and waterproof jacket to resist the cold and drizzly morning. Once seated on the back of the 1,300-cc Yamaha bike, I slipped on the helmet, equipped with an audio system that let me chat with the driver, listen to the radio, or make phone calls. My driver, who's also a racer, weaved through congested London streets as if no cars existed and delivered me to Stansted in forty-five minutes, still reasonably warm.

3.

London to New York

Maxjet Airways | from \$1,500 round-trip

• Although billed as an all-business-class airline, Maxjet operates with a different market in mind than Eos. Flying wide-body 767s outfitted with a hundred of what look like vintage first-class seats, the airline is going after the business customer who wants a comfortable ride but at a full-fare economy price. The seats don't morph into flat beds, but they do recline enough for a good sleep. Neither Eos nor Maxjet have in-seat entertainment units; both airlines provide each passenger with a hard-drive portable player preloaded with movies, TV shows, and music. I thought about using my laptop but discovered that, unlike Eos, Maxjet has no seatside power ports—a major drawback for anyone hoping to get work done. Arriving at JFK at midday means you avoid rush-hour traffic, so from gate through customs and to downtown Manhattan took me all of forty minutes. I was back home in time for a late lunch less than forty-eight hours after I'd left and with practically no jet lag. —HOOMAN MAJD

For a guide to London's hot Mayfair district, go to GQ.com.



(Illustration by NICK DEWAR)