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Clear for Take Off

How one entrepreneur is CHANGING THE WAY WE TRAVEL.

By Hillary Locke Mujica

TOM FILIPPINI is a travel connoisseur and a seasoned entrepreneur with a successful track record in private aviation and luxury travel. His entrepreneurial successes have held a consistent theme – they all have involved creating companies that introduce innovative and financially attainable ways for consumers to enjoy life’s greatest, most unique travel and private aviation experiences. >>>

PHOTO: CHAD CHISHOLM



PHOTOS: COURTESY TOM FILIPPINI

under-utilized assets to drive value for affluent consumers. From a rudimentary online “flight sharing message board” for aircraft owners, FlightLink has created an industry-defining aviation platform. “I felt there had to be a way to bridge the gap between private and commercial to allow travelers to share the costs of private aviation and book flights on their schedules,” shares Tom, “I was chatting with friends about how to travel safely (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) and one of my friends basically said, ‘I wish there was a platform where we could post our flight schedule and pool our resources to make it more affordable,’ and a light bulb went off—I could use this technology to pool the private travel economy.”

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has been devastating for the airline industry and the tourism industry, which will take years to recover. “If you look at AirBnB, you’ll notice the phrase ‘Go Near’ is front and center. I believe—at least for the next

“My lifelong travel journeys have undoubtedly had a major influence on my career. I’ve always been a ringleader of adventure and when I started my first travel venture—**Exclusive Resorts**—in my mid-20s, I was at crossroads in my career. I wanted to do something where I could really apply my travel passion forward while having a meaningful impact in creating something new.” It’s that go-getter spirit and big picture vision that has led Tom to be a pioneer in the travel industry, and he hasn’t been resting on his laurels, or his wings.

After creating Exclusive Resorts, the world’s largest luxury destination club, Tom set his sights on making private aviation more accessible to more people. “Being able to travel shouldn’t just be for the uber wealthy. Technology has had a huge impact on the ‘ground-based’ travel industry. Look at AirBnB, Uber, Lyft, and VRBO—they have completely revolutionized how consumers buy travel, and the aviation industry needs to use that same technology to evolve.”

Enter **StraightLine Private Air**, where member flights are operated by the preeminent aircraft operators with the most impeccable safety records in the world. By working with a select group of operators, Tom designed a unique supply solution, allowing travelers the broadest selection of aircraft at the lowest price to members. What that means—you get access to more planes and more airports without the billion-dollar bank account.



So it’s no surprise that people have been taking note, especially in the past year. “Private aviation has seen a massive surge and record growth since the beginning of COVID-19. Travelers that historically had difficulty justifying the incremental cost to fly private, now have a compelling reason to bite the bullet,” says Tom. Plus, with the ‘work leisure trend’ on the rise, private jets are not just for business travelers any more. More families are booking private planes to combine their work and personal time. “There’s a fundamental shift in how people work. Working remotely allows people to work hard so they can play hard and make the most of their time as a family.”

12-18 months—that consumers will continue to focus on backyard adventures instead of bucket list trips, but those trips can be just as memorable. There is value in any and all travel.”

For Filippini, traveling is all about entering the unknown and discovering the new. Despite his luxury travel career, he prefers “raw” destinations over those that have been developed and ‘westernized.’ His idea of a good trip is leaving behind the familiar and taking on a world of new things. “I’m always learning through my travels, with new cultures, friends, foods and languages to explore. What’s cool about travel for me is the excitement, that sometimes borders on fear.”



PHOTO: CHAD CHISHOLM

And if there’s one thing we’ve learned in the past year, it’s that life is short. Time with family and friends is more valuable than ever, and people are prioritizing that over everything right now. It’s that mindset that propelled Tom to look at how an invitation-only air pooling platform might work. The goal was to allow like-minded travelers to connect, make private flights more affordable, and travel more easily.

So he introduced **FlightLink**—a technology-enabled sharing economy focused on optimizing

As if that weren’t impressive enough, Tom recently became a pilot, and by the time this article comes out, he will have his instrument rating. “I feel as though I’m just beginning my career in aviation. Earning my license to fly my own plane ensures that I’m fully ingrained in the industry, without constraint. I’m never more inspired than I am when I’m flying above our beautiful Colorado mountains, and ideas occur to me each time I’m up there.” We can’t wait to see what his next high-flying act might be. flystraightline.com ✈