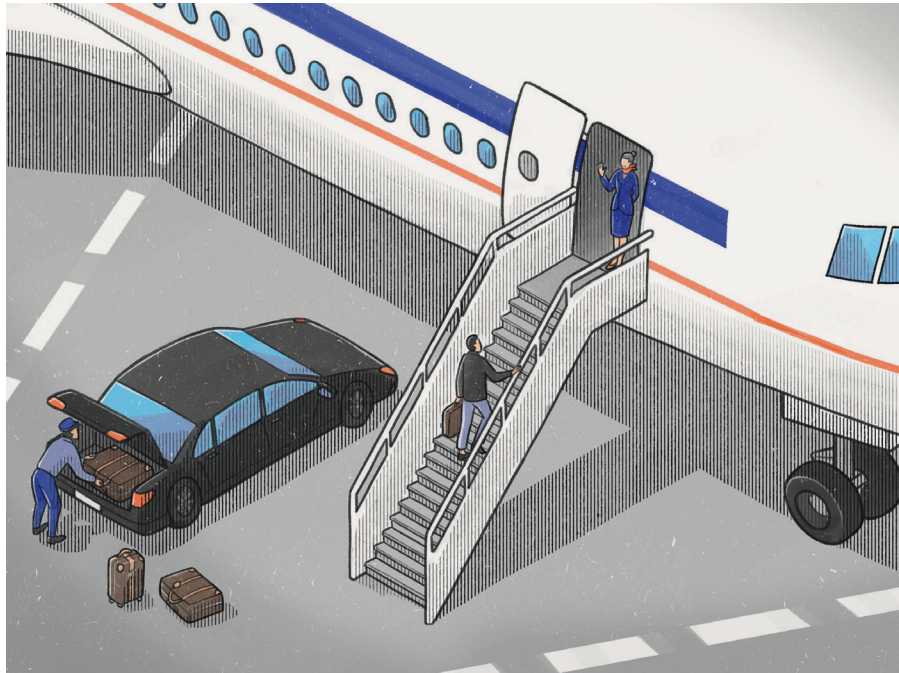


THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



PICKY NICKY'S FAVOURITE TRANSFERS

Raffles Hotel, Singapore

Guests are met at the aerobridge, driven to the CIP Terminal in an electric buggy, and escorted through a dedicated immigration counter. From S\$710 (£414), raffles.com

Sukhothai Hotel, Bangkok

A fast-track service from the plane gate to a waiting limousine avoids queues by using the immigration and customs Fast Lane. From THB5,671 (£146), sukhothai.com

Upper House, Hong Kong

A meet-and-greet and check-in service in one; once at the hotel you head straight to your room. From HKD2,100 (£212), upperhouse.com

Heathrow VIP

Access through a private entrance, security and immigration, your check-in and baggage taken care of, and a private transfer to your aircraft. From £3,300, heathrowvip.com

The Private Suite

Based in a dedicated terminal at LAX, with check-in, TSA screening, and customs and immigration all processed on site. A private transfer will take you to or from your aircraft. From \$4,000, theprivatesuite.com

01 Top flight

Elite airport transfers take the pain out of taking the plane

When I first stayed at the Ed Tuttle-designed Sukhothai Hotel in Bangkok, I had the hotel collect me at the airport: its staff meet you at arrivals and take you to a waiting car, where a white-gloved chauffeur offers you a lemongrass-scented chilled towel, a bottle of water and a newspaper. Minutes before arrival at the hotel, he discreetly calls ahead (it's more of a whisper really) so more staff are ready to greet you by name. When I passed through Hong Kong in 2010, The Upper House organised a similar service. It was the first time I was offered Wi-Fi in a car to catch up on post-flight emails. Better still, in Singapore, Raffles arranged someone to meet my party at the aerobridge, and take us by buggy to a dedicated arrivals hall, where we cleared immigration and customs on our own, were reunited with our luggage, and a driver was waiting to take us to the hotel. Asia excels in hospitality and many top hotels offer variations of these services.

Such treats help take the pain out of travel – and I have a low pain threshold. One airport I try to avoid is London Gatwick. It is just awful in every way. Even the Gatwick Express to get there from the city – it's a dedicated airport train but there is so little space for luggage that trolley cases often fill the aisles, and why is it called 'express' when its average speed is 76km/h?

For a recent trip to a hotel opening in Italy, however, I found a way to fly from Gatwick without actually entering the place at all. I was dropped off directly at the Signature Elite Class private terminal, where you are greeted and then seated in your own lounge and checked in by an airline representative (in my case, British Airways). When it's time to board, a car takes you to the plane (the journey took 66 seconds) and you are accompanied along the aerobridge. The team had asked if I preferred to board first or last. I said last, but my pet first-world problem (as you may recall from an earlier column, W*241) is finding that the overhead bin above Seat 1A has been filled by passengers from further down the cabin. Yvonne Bevan from British Airways rose to the challenge and spaces were kept for my cases. It's even better on the way back: you are met at the plane and taken directly to the suite, where you clear immigration and customs, your luggage is waiting – and Gatwick is avoided.

Arriving at Los Angeles' LAX is also pretty grim, thanks to endless queues at immigration. So next I am planning to try The Private Suite there, which promises 70 steps from plane to car, rather than the average 2,200. ★ *Signature Elite Class, from £660, signatureeliteclass.com*



02

Come back soon

Without any fancy add-on services, I can get through my favourite airport, Milan Linate, in less than ten minutes. It's set to reopen after repairs on 27 October.



03

Preferred carrier

This calf leather-trimmed tote, by Loro Piana, in water-repellent, stain-resistant cotton and linen, is usefully large yet folds completely flat. £1,380, loropiana.com