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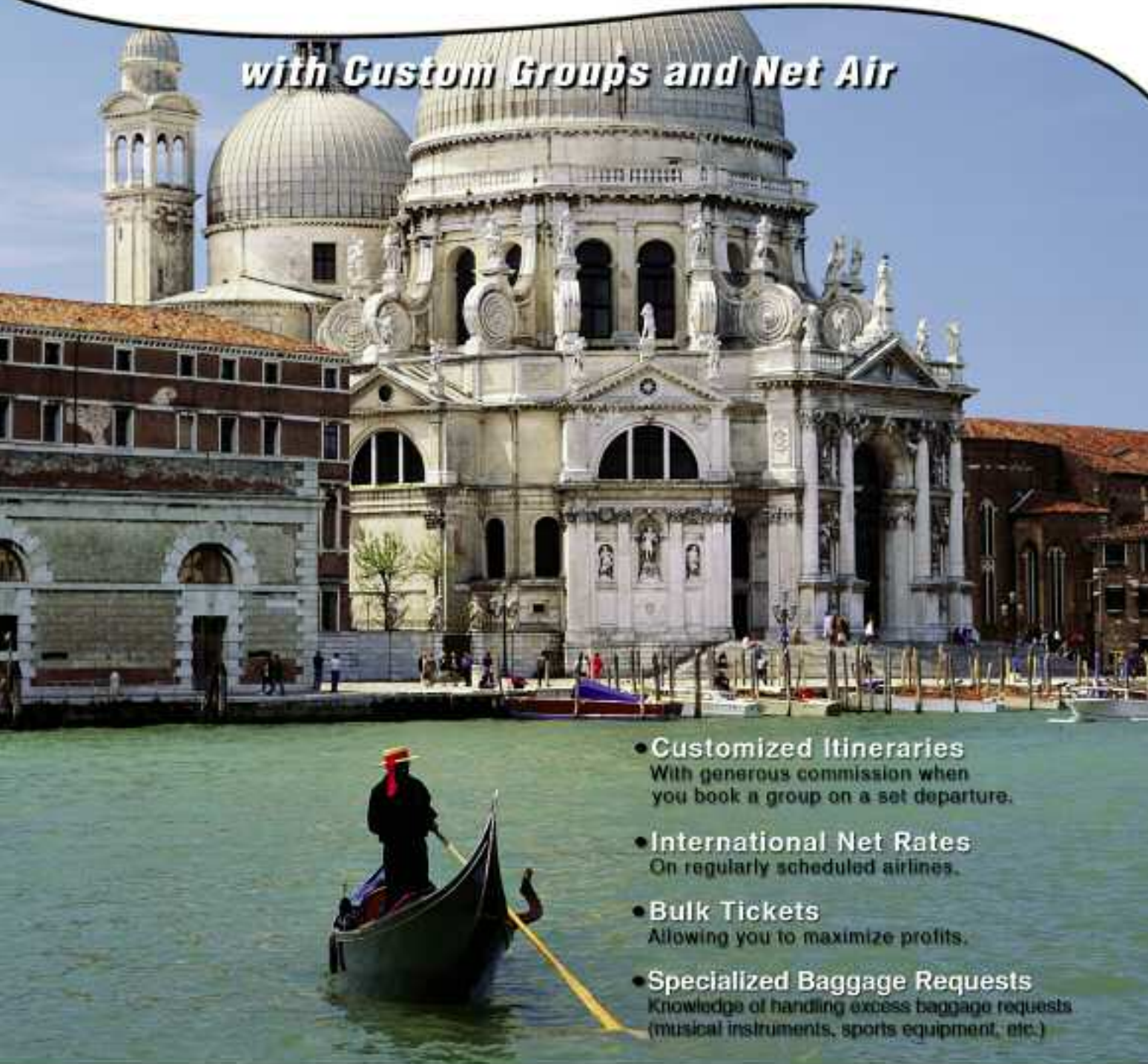
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Way Beyond The Bible Belt

It's just past sunrise and together with a hundred other tourists I'm perched on the crest of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. We've come to this panoramic point for the spectacular morning view that underscores why this small nation – which turns 60 in 2008 – draws religious travelers like none other. Buttery light illuminates the onion-shaped domes of the Russian Orthodox Church of...

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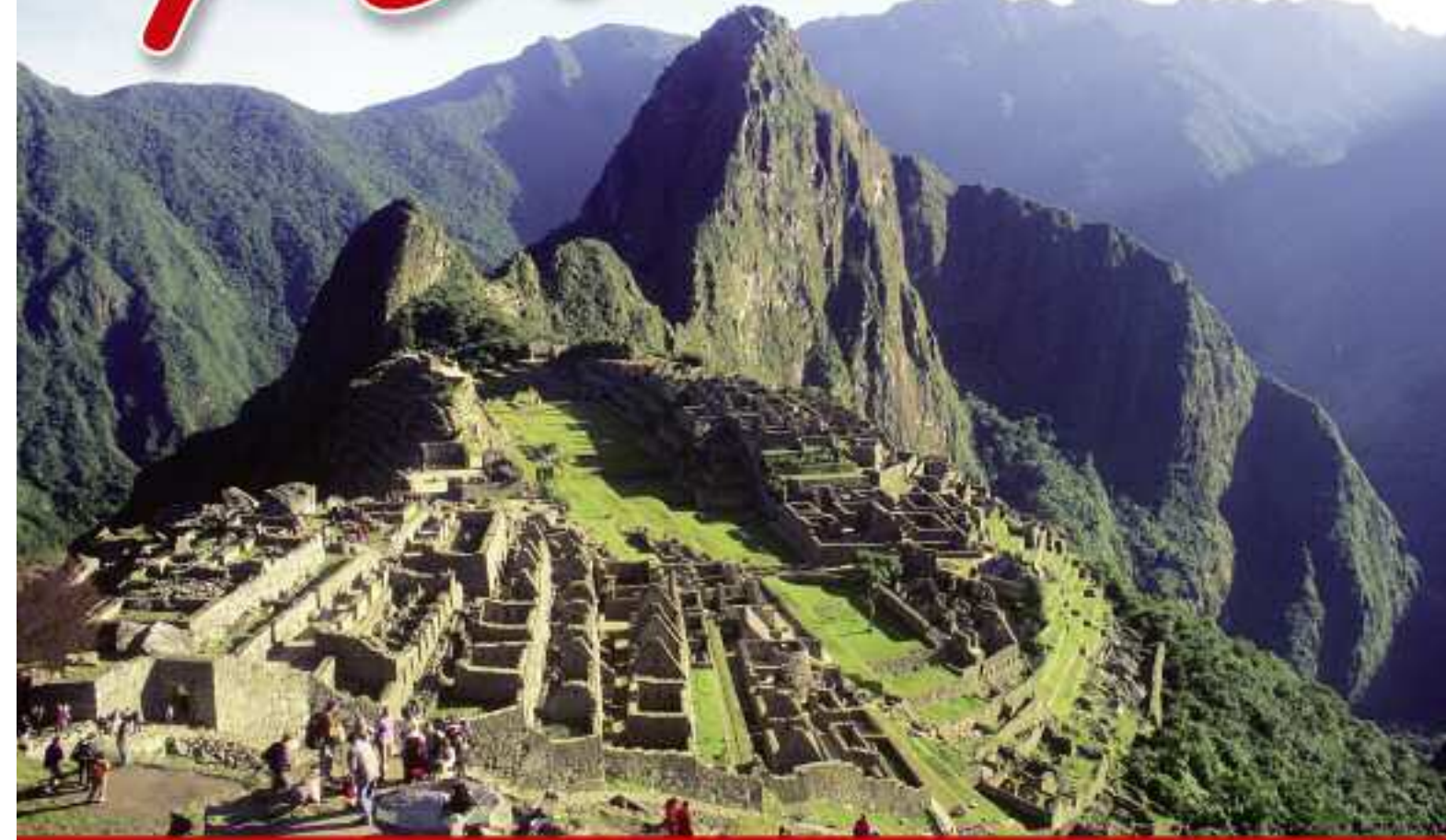
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Travel Week 2007 in Las Vegas

The week of December 2-6 was a busy one in Las Vegas with several industry events taking place. Whether you are a home-based agent, an agent selling luxury travel or an agent or supplier seeking educational opportunities, there was a conference or tradeshow that catered to your needs. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority rolled out the red carpet for this second annual travel industry show and as an official sponsor, hosted a variety of events and dinners throughout the week for travel professionals. In all it was estimated that over 10,000 travel professionals participated in Travel Week 2007.

The week started off with **NEST FEST 2007**, the annual conference of NEST (Network of Entrepreneurs Selling Travel). NEST, the first and only marketing group designed exclusively for home-based agents, supplied its 200+ delegates with 3 days of dynamic speakers, a preferred supplier trade show and fabulous nighttime events. With over half of their membership in attendance, the NEST team lived up to its promise of providing members with the marketing tools, educational opportunities and technology solutions today's home-based agent needs to be successful.

Next on the schedule of this busy week was the **Travel Institutes Annual Conference**. Now condensed into a half-day program, the Travel Institute delivered the exceptional lineup of motivational speakers for which their conferences have become known.

The backbone around which Travel Week 2007 was built, was the **9th Annual Luxury Travel Expo** and the **2nd Annual Home-Based Travel Agent Expo** that ran concurrently. These two shows, organized by

Questex Media Group, provided the thousands of attending agents with 3 full days of motivational speakers, destination and supplier presentations and two of the busiest tradeshow I have attended this year. Additionally, attending travel agents were offered a free ticket to their choice of one of Vegas's hottest shows and were hosted by the LVCVA to a "Wednesday Night Fever" party at Studio 54 in the MGM Grand.

Although not part of Travel Week, but taking place just prior to it in Ft. Lauderdale, **Travel Trade's Annual Leisure Travel Conference** drew almost 1000 industry attendees to the magazine's first show under the new ownership of Ian and Seth Gittlitz. In addition to a warm and touching tribute to former publishers Joel and Lenore Abels, attendees also were the final group of agents to be addressed by industry icon Bob Dickinson, who spoke on the his final day as President of Carnival Cruise Lines. Agents attending the LTC had the opportunity to participate in 16 ship inspections, attend various workshops and panel discussions and enjoy hosted dinner events each night of the conference culminating with "Las Vegas Night" at the Hard Rock Casino.

All of the above shows and conferences offered agents and suppliers exceptional networking and educational opportunities. If you didn't have the opportunity to attend any of these outstanding events, I would strongly suggest considering attendance at one or more in 2008. Each show organizer provides a comprehensive lineup of seminars and tradeshow exhibitors on their websites. Take time to view these sites and see which show or conference best suits your needs.

Doug Cooke, Publisher

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It's how you spin the news

One of the 750 participants at the U.S. Tour Operators Association Annual Conference and Marketplace were totally happy. Maybe that's because this year's conference delivered a mixture of good news and bad news, reflecting a prolonged descent of the dollar abroad, especially felt in otherwise strong and popular markets like Europe.

The good news is that travelers of all ages are learning more about the nature of pre-packaged tours, which is a credit to USTOA and its members which have been engaged educating the public on this point for the past 35 years.

In his keynote address, Nikos Tsakanikos, USTOA Chairman and President of Homeric Tours said, "With a weak dollar Americans will increasingly think about the savings, convenience and the economic power of buying packages and tours. That will be very good for our industry. In fact, 2008 may well be the year of

the tour operator."

According to surveys conducted for USTOA, both brand and destination loyalty play important roles in vacation decisions. More than half the subjects surveyed said they look at destinations before considering price. And nearly 20% said they travel where they want, regardless of price. "Our survey also found that over 50% of people like repeating the same destination," Tsakanikos added.

The number of Americans with passports -- as of May 31, the US State Department had issued more than 10 million passports, which represents a 33% increase over the same time in 2006 also presents more opportunities for bookers of travel. By the end of 2007, that number of new US passport holdwill add up to 17 million potential customers.

A new note: younger people, 18 to 34 year olds, are thinking about tours and vacation packages seeing the wisdom of visiting unfamiliar places (with experts), for convenience, to learn more about a place or a new skill like cooking or photography.

Maria Lisella, Editor



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Snapshots

THE MONTH IN REVIEW

ATS New Board of Directors and Strategic Plan

At the American Tourism Society 2007 Annual Meeting and Conference held in the Lower Silesia region of Poland the ATS Board at the recommendation of the Nominating Committee elected David Parry Chairman of the Board, and Phil Otterson as President. During the meeting, Phil Otterson discussed ATS's new Strategic Plan which features membership development, new partnerships, education, marketing and media relations.

Visit: www.americantourismsociety.org.



Pictured left to right Newly elected ATS Board of Directors from Left: Don Reynolds, Knut Haenschke, Jan Rudomina, David Parry, Stephen Barneby (Deputy Consul General, US Consulate, Krakow, Poland), Robert Whitley, Phil Otterson, David Spinelli. Missing Donna Flora and Helena Novak, Alex Harris, Michael Stolorowicz and H. E. Senator Akel Biltaji.



2007 USTOA Annual Conference

The Annual USTOA Conference & Marketplace was held on December 2-4, 2007 at the Gran Meliá Cancún, in Cancún Mexico. This annual conference brings together USTOA member tour operators with suppliers from across the globe for 3 days of meetings and social events. Next year's conference will be held in Palm Desert, CA. December 3-5.

Pictured standing from left are Kevin Eaken, Treasurer, President, Travel Connection and Bronwyn Wilson, Secretary, President, Australian Pacific Touring; seated (left to right) are John Stachnik, Vice-Chairperson, President, Mayflower Tours; Charlie Ball, Chairman, President, Princess Tours; Bob Whitley, President, USTOA.

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By Jad Davenport



ISRAEL: Way Beyond the Bible Belt

It's just past sunrise and together with a hundred other tourists I'm perched on the crest of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. We've come to this panoramic point for the spectacular morning view that underscores why this small nation – which turns 60 in 2008 – draws religious travelers like none other.

Buttery light illuminates the onion-shaped domes of the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Mary Magdalene in the foreground before melting through a Jewish cemetery below the Roman walls, and eventually creeping up the gilded Dome of the Rock—a Muslim shrine. Unlike most of the other tourists here, however, Jerusalem is just a sidebar on my visit. I'm only spending three days of my 10-day Israel journey on the classic holy pilgrimage that takes in the Golden City, the legendary lands of the Galilee and the mystical ramparts of Masada. Why? Because I've discovered something innovative travel agents already know. There's much more to Israel beyond the Bible Belt.

The Negev, Flower in the Desert

Heading south from Tel Aviv a few days later, it's obvious there's no escaping that this sliver of land wedged at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa is mostly desert. I'm bound for the Red Sea town of Eilat, about a four hour drive south, but first I must cross the Negev Desert (Hebrew for "parched"). Israel's largest desert, it occupies more than 60 percent of the country from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the north to the resort town of Eilat on the Red Sea in the South.

Beyond the dramatic landscape of Navajo-red stone towers and shaded canyons, the biggest draw are the Bedouin people. Beersheva, a Bedouin town of 200,000 just two hours south of Tel Aviv has colorful markets complete with camels and souvenir shopping opportunities. The markets, only held on Thursday mornings, offer a fascinating glimpse into this mysterious culture and a people who have long survived in a harsh land. There's no market today, so I hook up with Adam Sela, owner of **Challenging Experience** (www.adamsela.com), one of several dozen operators who offer Bedouin cultural tours.

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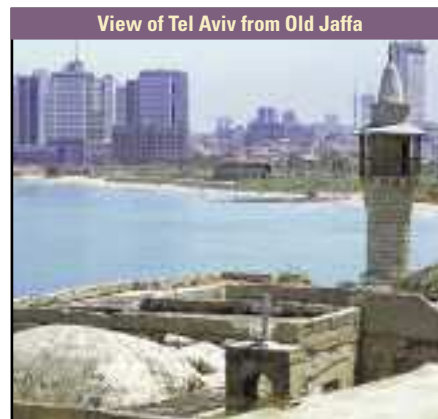
Sela shakes his head when I describe what I envision—robed men sipping tea in goat-hair tents, tasseled camels hitched to palm trees. “That’s Hollywood,” he laughs as we pull into a modern Bedouin commu-

nity. The tents are prefabricated homes, the camels have been swapped for Toyota Land Cruisers and the patriarch has traded his traditional black robe for jeans and a T-shirt. We sip coffee made from beans pounded in an old howitzer shell casing while our host shares stories of the Bedouin’s culture and history. For a more photogenic – and less genuine – experience, says Sela, visitors can seek out special tourist camps where the Bedouin wear costumes, live in tents and camels are abundant.

Around lunchtime we stop off at Sde Boker site of David Ben-Gurion’s home and grave, now a museum which charts the birth of the modern state of Israel, and drive down into Maktesh Ramon, a massive crater, where Sela takes me on a short geologic hike up a dry wadi. Far above, I can see tourists on an adventure day



Israel boasts coastlines along four seas.



View of Tel Aviv from Old Jaffa

tour rappelling down the sheer sides of the crater rim.

Sun, Salt, Sand and Seas

Eilat is a purpose-built resort town on Israel’s five-mile slice of coastline on the Red Sea. Israel technically

boasts coastlines along four seas – The Galilee, and the famous trio of the Dead, the Med (Mediterranean) and the Red. While the other three have their own charms, for a taste of tropical water and sandy beaches, none can match the Red Sea.

The hub of seaside tourism, the town of Eilat is a jumbled affair of high-rise Las Vegas-inspired hotels and shopping malls. The deluxe Dan Eilat Hotel, is a quiet oasis with its own private beach access. Doubles start at \$298. Call 800-223-7773; www.danhotels.com

While often overshadowed by the spectacular diving further south on the Sinai in Egypt, Israel’s diving in this section of the Red Sea – the Gulf of Aqaba – is mellow. There are virtually no currents and every dive is just a Frisbee toss from the beach. Safety standards at local

dive shops are also far more stringent here than across the border. Snorkelers and divers will find easy beach-access to almost all the dozen marked dive sites between Eilat and the Egyptian border crossing.

Together with **The Dolphin Reef Eilat** (www.dolphinreef.co.il) dive shop, I spend two days exploring small bommies covered with soft corals and clouded with schools of fairy basslets. We even dive the wreck of a Russian missile boat, one

of several accessible wrecks just offshore. Divers and nondivers alike will enjoy a visit to the **Underwater Observatory Marine Park** (www.coralworld.com), an aquarium which looks straight out into the Red Sea from a subaquatic tower.

Deep Diving

I dive even deeper at my next stop, the Dead Sea. At 1,300 feet below sea level, this is the lowest dry-land point on the planet. It also happens to be one of the country’s leading health retreats. Most of the resorts are gathered around Ein Bokek near the southern arm of the sea and are only a 30-minute drive from Masada (or an hour and a half from Jerusalem). Built on the ruins of an ancient Roman fortress between the rugged Judean Desert and the hazy blue of the Dead Sea, Ein Bokek has



Masada fortress

a pleasant resort atmosphere with palm-lined streets, shopping malls, and more than a dozen high-rise hotels many with prime sandy beachfront on the sea.

Locals and tourists flock to these waters for their reputed healing powers. The brine supposedly draws out impurities from the body and the high concentrations of bromine are supposed to ease anxiety and leave the bather with a feeling of deep relaxation. Even King Herod and

Cleopatra are said to have soaked in the warm water.

The Golden Tulip Inn an all-inclusive resort, is one of the nicer properties in the area and has prime beachfront. When I slip into the warm water, I’m surprised at how buoyant I am (the sea is 10 times saltier than the ocean), able to float easily on my back with my hands and feet out of the water.

Doubles start at \$198. Visit www.fattal-hotels-israel.com/golden_tulip.htm

Later that afternoon I head to the resort’s spa where Eastern European clinicians happily slather me up with dark chocolate mud and leave me to sweat out any impurities. The wrap is followed by a quick, chilly rinse and then another warm soak in the Dead Sea.

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 Dan Eilat
 Dan Accadia, Herdino-on-Sea
 Dan Caesarea
 Dan Panorama, Tel Aviv
 Dan Panorama, Haifa
 Dan Panorama, Jerusalem
 Dan Panorama, Eilat
 Dan Gardens, Ashdod
 Dan Gardens, Haifa
 Dan Gardens, Jerusalem

Dan Hotels Israel Dan where the welcome never stops.

so your clients will probably spend most of their time enjoying spa treatments or cooling off in the sea. For more intrepid travelers hotels can arrange jeep trips to the nearby Flour Cave (so called for the white dusting left on visitors).

The North Coast: Caesarea

Caesarea, a former Roman colony and Crusader port roughly halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa on the Mediterranean coast, has some of the finest – and least visited – archaeological ruins in the Middle East.

The only luxury hotel of note in the area is the **Dan Caesarea** it has the added benefit of an 18-hole golf course. Doubles start at \$226. Call **800-223-7773**; www.danhotels.com

I forego golf but spend a leisurely half day wandering the 13th-century Crusader city. Across a deep moat, through a stone gatehouse and behind massive fortress walls built by King Louis IX of France is a maze of narrow streets and markets punctuated by keeps and towers. The ancient lives that once played out here are brought to life for me later in the afternoon at the refurbished Time Tower on the main pier. There, in a museum, hologram characters detail their port's history as part of an interactive display.

Hidden beneath the glassy green water of the harbor are the ruins of Herod's ancient port which collapsed and



sank from repeated earthquakes. On my last morning there, I strap on a pair of fins, don a mask and pop a snorkel in my mouth and set off to visit this miniature Atlantis by following along shallow marked underwater trails leading to piles of collapsed Roman columns, half-buried cobbled breakwaters and even ancient Phoenician anchors.

That evening, I wander out along the breakwater where men are setting up their fishing poles. Through the dark water I can barely make out the jumbled Roman pillars of the ancient sunken port I snorkeled earlier in the day. Back toward shore a sweeping amphitheatre built by Herod the Great in 22 BC faces the sea. It's not quite the stunning panorama that greeted me from the Mount of Olives – but it's a glimpse of another side of Israel just as ancient and intriguing. And best of all, I have the view all to myself.

Getting There

Delta began nonstop daily flights from Atlanta last year and will operate new nonstop daily service from JFK in March, 2008. **El Al** has just announced a codeshare with **American Airlines**, **Continental** and **Israir**. For more information, contact the **Israel Ministry of Tourism**, 888-774-7723; www.goisrael.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Israel see page L20-L21 of the Listings Section.

ISRAEL NEWS

Skylink Holidays announces 2008 brochure

SKY LINK HOLIDAYS US is about to launch its new 2008 brochure, **GO ISRAEL USA**, featuring the Best of Israel—a variety of exciting vacations.

According to recent studies, one of the growing motivations to travel is faith, following roots of religion and Heritage. Israel, according to these studies, is one of the most desirable destinations world-wide.

In Israel, history lies near modern, vibrant cities. Skylink programs include a variety of tours with different interests. They have "Classical" tours introducing Israel to first timers. Other tours focus on new angles for return travelers. Israel- has it all. It is the source for three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity & Islam). Go Israel vacations can be based on different accommodations, offering luxurious five stars hotels, or beautiful, centrally located first-class accommodations. All hotels are included in the price, with Israeli breakfast daily, sight-seeing, touring by luxury coach, tour guide, airport transfers and services of a professional tour director. There are options to add on more destinations, such as Jordan, Egypt and Turkey.

Call **866-483-5702** or visit www.goisraelusa.com

U.S.-Israel Tourism Soars

"About 40% more Americans visited Israel in July 2007, and 60% more in August 2007, over the same months of 2006", says **Arie Sommer**, **Israel's Tourism Commissioner for North and South America**. "there is very real and solid progress in building tourism to Israel from the U.S.A." he adds.

"We project the number of Americans visiting Israel in 2007 to be 525,000," says Sommer.

This summer, the Ministry of Tourism started an \$11 million advertising campaign in the United States designed to tell Americans, "**You'll love Israel from the first 'Shalom'.**" www.goisrael.com

Skiing in Israel

At the very northern tip of Israel, its mild Mediterranean, desert and sub-tropical climates give way to Mount Hermon, with the snow coverage and the dry, cold conditions that make an ideal ski resort.

At 6,000 feet high Mount Hermon, has nearly 28 miles of ski runs. Ski package deals including lodging at bed-and-breakfast accommodations, passes and equipment rental. Visit www.skihermon.co.il



Offer Gat is a lucky man, a fact that is not lost on him. Recently named CEO of **EL AL** in North America, he realizes he has arrived at an opportune time.

"The past three years have been an exciting time for us - we have just accepted two new Boeing 777 aircraft into our fleet, and we entirely renovated our First and Platinum Business Class Lounges at JFK, we created a state-of-the-art business center in tandem with Bank Leumi there as well," he said.

At presstime, **EL AL** announced that it had applied to the Israeli Ministry of Transportation for authorization to begin a codesharing agreement with **American Airlines**, while American Airlines has simultaneously applied to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). **EL AL's** codeshare with **Delta** ended but the carrier maintains interline agreements with **United** and **Continental**.

Prior to the announcement, **EL AL** reported that its revenues had increased by a record 27% in the third quarter of 2007, totaling about \$567 million compared to \$447 million in the same quarter last year. Further the carrier reported its net profit rose to \$41.2 million this quarter, compared to a net profit of \$1.4 million in the third quarter of 2006.

Impact of Privatization

Back in 2003, **EL AL** ventured on the road to privatization, a move that was both controversial and necessary to compete in the global marketplace. On a strategic level, Gat explained, "It forced us to decide what kind of airline we really wanted to be and we concluded: we want to be a premium carrier like Singa-

EL AL's Premium Service

By Maria Lisella

pore Airlines, for example."

The decision affected other aspects of the carrier namely the level of service it would necessarily have to promise and deliver, the types of aircraft to acquire, the need for a superior call center and on board service such as the food and beverage department have all been upgraded. With a large investment going into training and retraining, Gat feels certain that privatization raised morale in a way that enabled its 3,000-plus employees to renew their pride in the carrier's image.

"We went from serviceable to extremely comfortable and the changes are not just in the front cabins –First and Business Classes, but includes the comfort of the passengers in the back of the plane as well."

Among the newest services is the door-to-door luggage and check-in service from travelers' homes to the terminal, a service that is currently only available in Israel; "We plan to extend this service in the U.S. as well," Gat said.

At this time, **EL AL** plans to retain its First Class cabin, although there is a trend among many carriers to retain two-class service.

Codeshare Advantages

Upon approval of the codesharing agreement **EL AL** and **American Airlines** passengers in North America will have many more options to fly to/from Israel, with added convenience and flexibility.

The codeshare is the most comprehensive and broadest agreement between **EL AL** and any other carrier and the move further signifies just how important the North American market is to the carrier and to the destination.

American and **EL AL** already have a frequent flyer program relationship. **American's** AAdvantage members may earn or redeem

AAdvantage miles on **EL AL** flights.

Under the proposed codeshare, **American** would place its AA designator code on **EL AL** flights to Tel Aviv from New York John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK), Los Angeles, Miami and Newark, as well as on **EL AL** flights to Tel Aviv from European gateways in London Heathrow, Paris, Madrid, Zurich and Rome.

In turn, **EL AL** would place its LY designator code on certain **American Airlines** domestic flights out of **EL AL's** North American gateways -- JFK, Miami, Los Angeles, Newark and Toronto. **El Al** would also codeshare on **American's** flights between the U.S. and London Heathrow, Paris, Madrid, Zurich and Rome.

Additional Cities

From North America, **EL AL** passengers can fly nonstop to Israel from five airports which are New York (JFK/Newark), Los Angeles, Miami and Toronto. With the new codesharing agreement, **EL AL** and **American Airlines** passengers will have the option to depart from 23 additional destinations throughout North America, making it much easier to connect to their nonstop **EL AL** flight to/from Israel. These additional codesharing cities include Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas/Ft Worth, Denver, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Memphis, Montreal, Orlando, Pittsburg, Portland (Oregon), Raleigh/Durham, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose (CA), Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa, Vancouver and Washington, D.C.

The codeshare will also enable **EL AL** passengers to fly to or from Israel nonstop, one way, and choose a stopover in one of the many **EL AL** European gateway cities in the other direction.

Call **800-223-6700**; www.elal.com



Morocco's Vision Blends Millions in Dollars & Visitors

by Beth D'Addono

Rachid Maaninou has his work cut out for him. The director of the **Morocco National Tourist Office (MNTTO)**, reopening (the office spent a few years in Florida) in New York this month, is concentrating his attention – and about 10 percent of a \$90 million budget – on wooing American tourists from the Northeast to Morocco. After seeing U.S. tourism plummet by half immediately following 9-11, from 120,000 to 60,000, the country's proactive tourism initiative is fighting back.

With less than three years left in the Vision 2010 tourism expansion program, new development is proceeding at a breakneck pace. The numbers tell the story – American visits to Morocco have increased to 100,000 as of 2006. And the MNTTO hopes to double that figure by 2010 as part of its "10 million tourists by 2010" campaign. **Royal Air Maroc** will increase its nonstop JFK-Casablanca service to 10 flights weekly, with plans to fly twice daily in 2008. Visitors can also fly through any major European hub.

"We're concentrating our energies on targeting the sophisticated traveler," said Maaninou. "We're not interested in the mass market, from Europe or the U.S." Although Western Europe is its primary audience, Morocco is also targeting untapped populations in Scandinavia, Russia, China and Japan. The efforts are paying off. Overall tourism numbers have risen from four million in 2002 to 6.6 million in 2006.

By the Sea, By the Sea

While cultural tourism has been Morocco's mainstay, drawing visitors to the ancient medinas and souks of Marrakech and Fez, the country's sizeable 2,200-mile coastline has remained undeveloped. That's changing, thanks to the MNTTO's Azur Plan, joint ventures with foreign developers that will deliver six full-scale seaside resorts, and 130,000 hotel and villa beds by 2010.

The first to open in early 2009 is the **Mediterrania Saidia**, with nine hotels, 30,000 beds, a 12-mile boardwalk, spas and three golf courses. Less than 40 minutes from the Angad Oujda airport, **Mediterrania Saidia** is a two-hour flight from most European capitals.

New highways and a proposed high-speed train between Tangier and Marrakech, will facilitate movement between Morocco's major cities and the sea-

side resorts. In all, some \$40 billion in investment is committed to Morocco over the next two decades.

Luxury Coming on Line

Also in the works are several resort complexes: Kerzner International, the force behind Atlantis in the Bahamas and Dubai, is working on the first phase of the Mazagan, an \$830 million project in El Jadida, 25 miles from Casablanca to open in 2009.

Located in the beach town of Essaouira, west of Marrakech, **Mogador Essaouira** will offer golf, a spa, 10 hotels and villas with 6,800 beds opening between 2009 and 2012.

Taghazout is a \$2 billion complex near Agadir that will include 18,000 beds, with the first hotel opening in July, 2009, and completion by 2016. Five-star brands include **Four Seasons**, **Raffles** and **Fairmont**.

Set in the Sahara dunes south of Agadir, **Plage Blanche** plans 19,500 beds in four and five star hotels, along with an 18-hole golf course, shopping, spa. The first hotel will open in 2012.

South of Tangiers in the city of Larache, **Lixus** is named for a Phoenician archaeological site. Virgin beaches, dunes and rolling hills set the stage for 12,000 upscale hotel rooms, a marina, an equestrian center, the first hotel will open in 2009.

Expanded Hotel Offerings

Additionally, **Four Seasons**, **Mandarin Oriental** and boutique **Fouquet's Barrière** will open in Marrakech by 2008. The first of eight planned resorts across Morocco by Cuban American Christian Rivadalla, **Octagone Terra Resort and Spa** features 52 luxury suites located in 20 villa complexes, 17 starting at about \$400 a night. Luxury Riads, like the newly opened **Riad Meriem** in Marrakech, owned by Manhattan designer, Thomas Hays, appeal to people looking for cultural authenticity.

More European than African, Morocco is historically one of the most diverse of Muslim nations. To most first time visitors, the cosmopolitan nature of the country will undoubtedly surprise.

For more information, contact the **Moroccan Tourist Office**, E-mail info@mnto-usa.org; www.visitmorocco.org

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Morocco see page L42 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

\$2399 MOROCCO Gutsy Women sells Magical Morocco. Participants explore Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Beni Mellal, Ouirgane, and Marrakesh. Participants visit the souks; artisans in leather tanning and carpet weaving shops; relax in hamman steam baths; dine at a gourmet restaurant run by a women's cooperative; participate in a henna ceremony. Air-inclusive program departs New York, Feb. 1, 2008 with three nights at the **Kenzi Farah** in Marrakesh; two nights each at the **La Tour Hassan Meridien** in Rabat and the **Royal Mirage** in Fez and one night at the **Chems Le Tazerkount** in Beni Mellal. Priced from \$2,399 per person double including land and air from New York. Call 866-464-8879; www.gutsywomentravel.com

\$4919 EGYPT An all-inclusive, 9-night "Legends of the Nile" tour package, offered by **AHI International Corporation**, hits all of the hot buttons. Included in the price of \$4,919 per person double departing from New York or Newark is round-trip airfare, round-trip motorcoach transfers between the airport and hotels. Included, too, are flights within Egypt. For details call 800-323-7373 or visit www.ahitravel.com

\$5480 SOUTH AFRICA Animals are the focus in **Grandtravel's** "Safari in South Africa" including three nights at Kapama Private Game Reserve, two nights at **Sabi Sands**, with day and night safaris, and visiting with native youngsters at the Thulumahasha Children's Home; deluxe accommodations with private bath, most meals, transportation, admission to all attractions and events, professional tour manager, a Grandtravel Activity Director. Rates are \$6,995 double for all, \$5,480 triple for children. Call 800-247-7651; www.grandtrvl.com

IN THE NEWS

Air Mauritius Expands Gateway Service

As of October 28, 2007 **Air Mauritius** operates sixteen weekly flights from Terminal 2F of Paris' Roissy Charles De Gaulle Airport. Nine flights are operated by Air Mauritius and seven by our code-share partner Air France. Air Mauritius has interline ticketing with United Airlines and Air Canada agreements to offer seamless and competitive connections from N. America through its various European gateways. Regional destinations include Nairobi, Seychelles, Antananarivo, Reunion, Rodrigues, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Dubai; in Asia: Melbourne, Sydney, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong; in India: New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. In Europe, non-stop service from Port Louis/Mauritius, include London, Paris, Geneva, Zurich, Munich, Frankfurt, Rome and Vienna. Madrid will be added in 2008. Call **Air Mauritius** at 800-537-1182 or **SITA World** at 212-279-6601; www.sita.com

Ramada Debuts in Dubai January, 2008

Malta-based **Corinthia Hotels International** signed a long-term management agreement with **Golden Sands Hotel Co. LLC** to operate the 371-all-suite **Ramada Hotel & Suites Jumeirah Beach** set to open this month. The complex features restaurants and retail outlets close proximity to Dubai Internet City, Dubai Media City and Emirates Golf Club. www.ramada.com

Biker Girls in South Africa

Camp Jabulani, the deluxe lodge near Kruger National Park has teamed with **Harley On Safari Rentals and Tours** to create the ultimate girlfriend getaway. Price, with a minimum of four persons, is \$5,062 pp double per night including Harley-Davidson rental, transfers, hotels and more. Visit www.campjabulani.com

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EGYPT
Egypt Tourist Authority

Anguilla's Winter Curtain Call

Whether seeking the exclusivity of the stars or an affordable retreat, Anguilla's stunning beaches, scrumptious food and laidback luxury provide the perfect getaway for winter travelers.

Save the Date for the 18th annual Moon splash Reggae Festival set for March 27-30, 2008, hosted by Anguilla's own musical ambassador Bankie Banx at his ultra-funky Dune Preserve beach club and concert venue on the shores of Rendezvous Bay. Reggae fans would be hard pressed to find a better combination of talented artists and unforgettable setting than this annual extravaganza, all under the glorious light of an Anguillan full moon. The extraordinary lineup will soon be announced.

Special Packages

"Sherotica" Package at the new **Luxury Boutique Villa Hotel, Sheriva** at Sheriton Estates. Special week for lovers includes: seven nights in a Grand Villa Pool Suite; Sensual Sherotica welcome basket, daily continental breakfast, afternoon cocktails and canapés; two champagne dinners for two; private picnic on a deserted beach; one-day car rental; a sunrise couples yoga or aquaerobics session; two sunset couples massages; Sheriva Lovers Collection CD; photo memento; government tax and service charge. Priced at \$7,200 per couple for the entire week. Call 011-264 498 9898; info@sheriva.com; www.sheriva.com

CuisinArt Resort & Spa's AAA Four Diamond Award Winning Santorini Restaurant launches a special "Chefs Table" for the winter season. Executive Chef Denise Carr will host a Chefs Table in their restaurant's Private Dining Room. The exclusive experience will feature a six course menu that incorporates the freshest of ingredients from the resort's own Hydroponic Farm and Organic gardens. All courses are paired with specially selected wines from the resort's cellar. \$145 p.p. every Monday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

Last Spring, Venus Spa was expanded at a cost of \$7 million with a 19,000 square-foot addition which tripled the facility. The new space includes an exclusively designed Thalasso Pool for hydrotherapy, sixteen peaceful treatment rooms, yoga and Pilates studios and state-of-the-art Techno-Gym equipment. Call 800-943-3210; reservations@cuisinart.ai; www.cuisinartresort.com

Kamique Little Harbour is offering introductory rates at its three villas where a personal concierge is on call to arrange for your clients' every need – catered dining on the beach; spa treatments on your private garden terrace; and activities. Introductory rates are being offered for the four and six-bedroom villas starting at under \$12,000 per week.



Call 264-497-8888; E-mail, info@kamique.com; www.kokoonvillas.com

New Luxury Accommodations

Topaz Villa overlooking Road Bay is now open for short and long-term guests. Inspired by the luxurious spa villas of Thailand, this 3 bedroom 3.5-bath property features an exclusive 3rd level spa/sun deck, spacious entertainment lounge that opens to deck and infinity edge pool with panoramic views. MBR suite includes whirlpool tub and outdoor shower. Tastefully appointed with authentic Thai furniture and decorations throughout, Topaz Villa is perfect for holidays, corporate retreats, or long-term stays. Visit www.topazvilla.com.

Sand Castle at Limestone Bay — A beachside 10,000 sq. ft. 4 bedroom villa on the north shore with magnificent views of the Atlantic Ocean. Grand Master bedroom with ensuite bathroom with a bathtub and private outdoor shower and a large balcony overlooking the beach, and an ensuite fitness centre. Master bedroom with ensuite bathroom and a large balcony overlooking the sea. There are large areas for outdoor entertaining around the infinity pool or the Gazebo with its BBQ and beach views, and a television room with computer area just off the Great Room. Nightly winter rates are \$1,900 - \$2,750. www.sandcastleanguilla.com.

Tequila Sunrise Villa at Dropsey Bay is a three-bedroom villa on a secluded bay on the southern shore of Anguilla, overlooking the Caribbean and the mountains of St. Martin. Each master bedroom suite has an over-sized full bathroom ensuite, king size bed, large HD TV, air conditioning, private patio, and many spectacular amenities. The ultra-modern kitchen, dining room, and 22' ceiling Great Room with 45" HD Plasma TV, are designed with luxury and entertainment in mind. The large infinity swimming pool is surrounded on three sides with lounging and relaxation areas, and on the fourth side by the beach and ocean with breathtaking views of St. Martin, St. Barths. Winter rates: \$1,450 - \$2,000. Visit www.tequilasunrisevilla.com.

Villa Astoria, a new 3500 sq. ft. immaculately appointed three-bedroom villa in the Little Harbour area with magnificent views of the Caribbean and St. Martin. Five minute walk to a secluded beach. A master suite with bathroom overlooking the beautifully landscaped pool area, and two bedrooms with kitchen. Rates range from \$700-\$1,500. Call 264-497-6049; villas@rickettsluxury.com; www.astoriavilla.com

Call the **Anguilla Tourist Board**, 877-4 ANGUILLA; www.anguilla-vacation.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Anguilla see page L24 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

\$3040 ANGUILLA

Cap Juluca, the luxurious award-winning hotel on Anguilla, is offering its four-night Quick Getaways for 2008. Beachfront accommodation range from \$3,040-\$7,375 per couple. Besides the beachfront accommodation, rates include four dinners for two at Pimms, Kemia or George's restaurant or from room service; transfers to and from the airport or ferry terminal in Anguilla; a half-day snorkeling trip (Tuesdays or Thursdays); welcome platter on arrival; 10% government tax and 10% service charge. From Jan. 4-March 31, 2008, Quick Getaway rates range from \$5,115-\$7,375 per couple, depending on type of accommodation; from April 1-30 and Nov. 16- Dec. 17, 2008, \$3,610-\$4,640; and from May 1-Nov. 15, 2008, \$3,040-\$3,995. Other plans offered for 2008 include and four golf options with play at the 18-hole, par 72 Greg Norman Temenos Golf Club, just minutes from Cap Juluca. Call 888-858-5822; info@capjuluca.com

\$5200 ANTIGUA

Hermitage Bay is a new resort located in Antigua and consists of 25 private, secluded and spacious Cottage Suites. The Four Night Roman-

tic Escape is priced at \$5,200 and is based on double occupancy and subject to tax and service charge. The package is valid from January 7 thru January 27, 2008. For stays from January 28 thru March 31, 2008 - there is a surcharge of \$150 per night plus tax and service charge. If available, this escape can also be upgraded to a Hillside Cottage Suite from January 7 thru March 31, 2008. The Hillside Cottage Suite features a private infinity edge plunge pool and sunbathing deck for an additional charge of \$150 per night. Call 268-562-5500; E-mail info@hermitagebay.com; www.hermitagebay.com

\$450 TOBAGO

The Palms Villa Resort offers guests a lavish oasis. Features include three oversized bedrooms, all with en-suite bathrooms and indoor/outdoor spaces including a dining area, living room and spacious kitchens. Set on a 10-acre estate, only minutes from palm-lined beaches and national parks. Rates begin at \$450 per night for up to four guests. Valid Jan. 4, 2008 – Dec. 18, 2008. Visit www.thepalmstobago.com

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* Daily flights from San Juan to Anguilla leave at 2:00 p.m. & 8:55 p.m. Returning flights depart Anguilla at 8:15 a.m. & 3:40 p.m. American Eagle features ATR 72 turbo-prop aircraft with a capacity for 64 passengers. Flight times are subject to variation. Anguilla offers no specific guarantee for departure or arrival times.

CARIBBEAN

the
anguilla
experience



Lovebird Strategies for Wedding Planning

With the advent of inexpensive air travel, and the ease with which the internet allows contact with a multitude of more exotic venues, agents can access many variations on traditional weddings. In many cases, arrangements may be more relaxed and less stressful for the couple, and because the weddings may of necessity be smaller, the wedding may also be less expensive. Usually the destination wedding location also becomes the honeymoon site, further enhancing the profit potential of the wedding destination, honeymoon markets.

As destination weddings and honeymoons continue to increase in popularity, hotels and resorts are embracing the trend by introducing packages, and in some cases, resorts invest in appointing full-time wedding planners to attend to details on site and further lay claim to their market share. Since so many resorts hire full time wedding organizers and planners, agents do not have to be specialists in this market and the Caribbean is positioned as a perennial source of profits for travel agents.

Traditional tropical honeymoons remain fashionable because picturesque beaches, swaying palm trees and painted sunsets never lose their panache. Keeping pace, though, with today's 'new' newlywed, honeymoons also come in all shapes, sizes and locations to meet this discriminating and diverse market. The giveaways and the deals are as startling as are the endless amenities such as the naming of a star for the couple in a constellation above, giving them another reason to remain starry eyed.

Following is a selection of wedding and honeymoon packages as well as enhancements help plan weddings at various resorts in the Caribbean.

The **Jolly Beach** 2008 Dream Wedding Package includes personal attention from the resort's wedding coordinator Beverly King and her staff, the marriage license and legal fees, round-trip transportation to the Ministry of Justice in St. John's to have the license issued, the services of a marriage officer and witnesses if needed. There's a bouquet for the bride and a buttonhole for the groom, wedding cake, a tray of hors d'oeuvres, fruit juice and a bottle of sparkling wine to toast the future. Dream Wedding couples can choose to have their ceremony at any location on the 40-acre property including two wedding gazebos — one on a mile-long Caribbean-kissed beach, the other overlooking the resort's fantasy pool with views of the Sea. With King, who has been planning weddings on Antigua for almost 20 years, and her support staff, a couple can rest assured that their wedding day will be hassle free.

"There is no residency requirement to be married in Antigua, but we require one working day prior to the ceremony to process the necessary documents. Couples need



to have: passports, birth certificates and/or a driver's license with photograph; if necessary, original Decree Absolute for parties who are divorced, Marriage and Death Certificates in the case of a widow or widower, or certificate of Deed Poll in the case of a name change. A notarized affidavit of consent signed by both parents is required for anyone under age 18," says King. The 2008 Dream Wedding Package starts at \$699. A \$10 fee for a wedding certificate is required by the Antiguan government, other restrictions apply. Wedding extras from digital photography or a DVD/video to a steel band can be arranged at additional cost. Couples can also reach Beverly King at the resort (268-462-0061, fax: 268-562-2302) or a fill out the "Wedding Information Request Form" on the Jolly Beach website. Call 866-905-6559; www.jollybeachresort.com or www.caribbean-weddings-honeymoons.com

Promising a Star
As **Almond Resorts** gets set to debut its latest property on Dec. 15 — the new 289-room Almond Casuarina Beach Resort set on Dover Beach on the south coast of the island, close to St. Lawrence Gap, after undergoing a \$30 million expansion and a complete refurbishing of the existing property, the resort group on Barbados and St. Lucia are literally promising the stars to wedding clients.

Through the International Star Registry, Almond Resorts will have a star in the firmament named after them to mark the start of their lives together. On their return home after the wedding, newlyweds will receive a deluxe certificate indicating the constellation and the exact location of their special star within it. For the rest of their lives, a clear night's sky will always evoke memories of that perfect, balmy Caribbean day and will know that there's one shining star out there, that will bear their names. Almond Resorts are now offering wedding arrangements totally free of cost for couples who book a stay of a week or more. At the same time, customized wedding packages are available at all hotels in the resort chain, Almond Beach Village, Almond Beach Club & Spa, Almond Morgan Bay, Almond Smugglers Cove and soon, at Almond Casuarina Beach Resort. Contact Naomi Lyttle, Almond Resorts' Wedding Director, and her team at weddingdirector@almondresorts.com Call 800-4ALMOND; www.almondresorts.com

Getting married at **Bolongo Bay Beach Resort** is easy and affordable with the resort's Paradise Wedding package features the services of a wedding coordinator and clergyman; the ceremony; decorated arch; services of a professional photographer; wedding album with 72 photographs (4 x 6) with negative ownership; bouquet and boutonniere; a bottle of premium champagne with flute glasses; and wit-

nesses (if needed) priced at \$1,399 per couple, which is added on to the cost of the room. Once "officially" hitched, newlyweds can honeymoon at the resort with the Island Bliss Package. Starting at \$3,725 per couple, this seven-night package includes beachfront accommodations with a view of the picturesque Caribbean Sea from the balcony; tropical flowers; chocolate-dipped fruit; a chilled bottle of champagne and two souvenir flutes in-room upon arrival; full breakfast, lunch and dinner, with all dining a la carte; unlimited drinks including premium brands and house wine; \$50 resort credit to be spent as the couple wishes; his and her half-hour massages; and a three-course dinner for two, wine included, at the Lobster Grille are among the options. Call 800-524-4746; E-mail reservations@bolongobay.com; www.bolongobay.com

nesses (if needed) priced at \$1,399 per couple, which is added on to the cost of the room.

Once "officially" hitched, newlyweds can honeymoon at the resort with the Island Bliss Package. Starting at \$3,725 per couple, this seven-night package includes beachfront accommodations with a view of the picturesque Caribbean Sea from the balcony; tropical flowers; chocolate-dipped fruit; a chilled bottle of champagne and two souvenir flutes in-room upon arrival; full breakfast, lunch and dinner, with all dining a la carte; unlimited drinks including premium brands and house wine; \$50 resort credit to be spent as the couple wishes; his and her half-hour massages; and a three-course dinner for two, wine included, at the Lobster Grille are among the options. Call 800-524-4746; E-mail reservations@bolongobay.com; www.bolongobay.com

Described as "Uncomplicated, Unencumbered, Unforgettable," the intimate 76-room, all-inclusive **Mango Bay Barbados** offers a host of romantic ingredients for the soon-to-be-betrothed. Starting at \$600 per couple, added on to the price of a room, Mango Bay's wedding package features the personalized services of a wedding coordinator; clergyman, administration and marriage license fees; roundtrip transfers to obtain the marriage license; decoration of a wedding arch; boutonniere for the groom and wedding bouquet for the bride; one bottle of champagne; and a one-tier, 12" light sponge cake with icing. Photography, steel band musicians, video and other features can be added for an extra cost. Call 800-44-UTELL; E-mail: reservations@mangobaybarbados.com; www.mangobaybarbados.com.

The ultra-elegant 64-suite **Spice Island Beach Resort** in Grenada set on Grand Anse Beach, re-defines storybook weddings. Priced at \$1,300 based on doubles, which is added on to the cost of a hotel stay, the package includes a tropically-decorated wedding arch located either on the beach or among the gardens; one-tier wedding cake and bottle of champagne; bridal bouquet, hair piece (for the bride) and boutonniere (for the groom); 36 color photos (including negatives); hors d'oeuvres platter for six people; room upgrade subject to availability; fruit basket in room

upon arrival; one manicure for the bride; one Couple's Massage for the bride and groom; sunset cruise the day following the wedding; Best Man, Maid of Honor and witness; fees for marriage license and priest or magistrate; Embassy signing fees; and roundtrip transfers for signing documents. Call 800-44-UTELL; E-mail spiceisl@spiceisle.com; www.spiceislandbeachresort.com

Paradisus Resorts are located in some of the most spectacular and sought-after beachfront destinations throughout the Caribbean and Mexico. The Chill-Out Chic - Designer Wedding and Reception Package, which is for up to 20 guests, features a symbolic ceremony with a non-denominational minister, a bouquet for the bride and boutonniere for the groom, up to 8 bottles of sparkling wine for toast, basic ceremony set-up, in-room bottle of red, white or sparkling wine on the night of the ceremony for the couple, 10% discount on spa services (not including products), late 4 p.m. check-out, romantic turn-down, 1/2 hour post-ceremony cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres and sparkling and still waters, buffet table, fruit juices spiked with vodka, coco rum or rum, (3 drinks per person), square, white wedding cake, adorned with chocolate pearls. Package price ranges from \$2,550-\$6,100, depending on destination. Additional guests pay from \$60 to \$150 per person.

Call 800-33MELIA; www.paradisusresorts.travel

IN THE NEWS

Lovebirds in the Air

Caribbean airline **Air Jamaica**, affectionately known as "The Lovebird," has pledged its troth to the **Barbados Tourism Authority** and its new site -- www.IDoBarbados.com -- which shows prospective brides and grooms how to satisfy their wedding or honeymoon needs. The new site makes planning and navigating a fun yet relaxing process. Air Jamaica is currently offering confirmed upgrades to its Executive Business cabin for the bride and groom when 20 or more of their wedding party guests travel to Barbados on Air Jamaica. www.idobarbados.com/deals_jamaica.php






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Traveling Mindfully in Ecuador

By Maria Lisella

The winds of change have caught fire in Ecuador. From taxi drivers to guides to *hacienderos* [hacienda owners] to *chagras* [cowboys] to the condors being rehabilitated at **Hacienda Zuleta**—there is a common knowledge that this is a special place that demands to be protected.

What makes Ecuador rich is its mix of indigenous and European cultures, its vestiges of feudal, colonial pasts juxtaposed with a passion and a commitment to preserve what is, in the face of what is to come.

Split by the Andean Mountain range, with a piece of coastline dotted with the dazzling Galapagos Islands and their peculiar population of sweet sea lions and tortoises traveling with their prehistoric homes on their backs, a colonial capital city that is three hours from a steamy landscape of snow-capped volcanoes and thermal pools such as the **Termas de Papallacta**, a week in Ecuador can enhance one's life.

As the dollar weakens in Europe, Latin America stands as an incredible alternative. Ecuador bears



SANTIAGO MARTINEZ

some familiarity — Spanish is the official language, English is widely spoken, the U.S. dollar is its currency. The dollar goes a long way here — long enough to take visitors to lunch of shrimp ceviche and pernil at the **Hotel Plaza Grande** for about \$10-\$15.

This year, Quito celebrates its 30th anniversary as the first World Heritage Site city. "Quito is the Latin American city that invests the most in its cultural heritage — \$40 million in 2006. With the dramatic changes for the better we've seen in our historic center — the largest in the Americas — tourism infrastructure has grown in leaps and bounds. There are great new boutique hotels, restaurants for every budget, restored churches, fascinating museums and intriguing street life, according to" Cristina Guerrero de Miranda, Executive Director of

the Quito Visitors' Bureau. Quito has been called "The Florence of Latin America."

A New Generation of Tour Operators

The spirit behind Ecuador's marketing line, *La Vita Pura* or Life at its Purest, has spawned a new generation of tour operators with a consciousness far beyond making a profit. **Gentian Trails** is among those operators that offer authentic visions of the culture by getting travelers as close to the life of an Ecuadorian as is possible during a week-long visit. Staying often at Haciendas — **Zuleta**, **Cusin** and **Pinsaqui** among the most well known — each of which plays a part in the Sustainable Tourism theater.

"For 2008, we are promoting art tours that include visits to the home and workshop of the best painter in Ecuador, Osvaldo Viteri; our clients love the place, as Viteri also owns one of the finest colonial art collections in Ecuador," said Santiago Martinez, president of Gentian, who along with Eleanora Ortiz are tourism veterans who decided to deliver their own vision of what is most important in Ecuador and for now, that includes more than the Galapagos.

Martinez's knowledge trickles down to the smallest detail as a recipe for quinoa soup or the differences among the potatoes at the Otavalo food market to the

myths of saints and sinners depicted in portraits at San Augustin to the rites of the Afro-Andean cultures to the joy of being a weekend *chagra*.

This year, Gentian will also add visits to the Workshop School of Quito, which is housed in the Old Maternity Hospital, where students between 16 to 23 years old learn traditional stone and wood carving (old colonial style), furniture making, artistic gardening, tailoring and embroidery.

On a recent visit, visitors rode horses to the Condor Huasi Project at **Hacienda Zuleta**. The riders included the descendant of no less than two former Presidents of Ecuador, against the backdrop of the *paramo*, high-altitude grasslands for a visit with semi-captive condors. A scuffle in the cage announced the arrival of five condors with six-foot wide wing spans lifted by the breezes below. Once nearly extinct, today there are about 75 Andean condors dipping and gliding in Ecuadorian skies.

Call the Ecuador Tourist Board at 800-328-2367 or visit www.ecuadortouristboard.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Ecuador see page L29 of the Listings Section



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The adventure begins in one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the western hemisphere. For the city of Cusco visit its major landmarks, the Cathedral, Santo Domingo Church and the Plaza de Armas, but also the nearby ruins of Kenko, Puca-pucara, Tambomachay and the Sacsayhuaman Fortress.

The program includes a train ride through the Sacred Valley of Urubamba to Aguas Calientes and the "Lost City" of the Incas, Machu Picchu. Visiting the most remote and less visited excursion sites in the Galapagos Islands, the tour concludes on board the M/C Anahi, with the comfort of a stable, spacious, luxurious and fast catamaran built for Galapagos travel.

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Sunny Land Tours' 7 Days/6 Nights "Peru Express" tour is undoubtedly the most economical tour offering to Peru in 2008. Including air from Miami and Economy hotels the tour visits Lima with a 2 nights' stay and Cusco with 4 nights hotel stay and provides all transfers; touring activities in Lima and Cusco; daily breakfast and optional excursions to Machu Picchu or Pisac Indian Market.

Hotel upgrades to first class and Luxury hotels are available. Daily departure from Miami and other gateways available with applicable airfare and seasonal supplements. New Peru 2008 brochure programs include: 8-Days "Taste Of Peru" visiting Lima, Cusco, Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu with several hotel categories; Also less traveled routes in Peru visiting Trujillo; Chan Chan; Chiclayo; Sipan with Cusco; Machu Picchu and Lima. Other tour programs feature the Bigham Luxury Hotels and Train; Nazca and Inca Lines as well as Eco Lodges in the Amazonian Basin of Peru. Call 800-783-7839 or visit www.PeruHotDeals.com to view tour dates and rates and to order brochures.

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\$735 MEXICO

NWA WorldVacations features a line-up of optional tours in Riviera Nayarit so exceptional that it may be considered the best destination for nature and adventure in all of Mexico and the Caribbean. Round-trip airfare and four nights of all-inclusive accommodations at **Samba Vallarta**, by Pueblo Bonito start at \$735. Or opt for another all-inclusive option at **Vallarta Palace** and enjoy their Palace Passport Promotion featuring select tours including horseback riding, Sunset Cruise, Sea Life Park, and a city tour of neighboring Puerto Vallarta. When staying seven nights, guests receive complimentary swim with the dolphins. Call 800-800-1504; www.NWAWorldVacations.com

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Tara Tours teams up to promote Barranquilla, S. Marta and Cartagena with an 8 days-7 nights per person/double package from \$961

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IN THE NEWS

Conrad Buenos Aires Debut in Argentina

Hilton Hotels Corporation, G&D Developers and Grupo Farallón signed on the Conrad Buenos Aires, the luxury brand's first management agreement in South America. Located in Puerto Madero, this will be the Hilton Family's second property in the expanding district and its fourth development in Argentina, and will include a hotel and residences. Construction is planned to begin at the end of 2008 and completion is scheduled for late 2010. The 196-guestroom **Conrad Buenos Aires** and 350-unit plus 5,411 residences at the Conrad Buenos Aires will be a mixed-use complex. Hilton Hotels Corporation will operate the hotel under the terms of a multi-year management agreement. Hilton Hotels Corporation currently manages the **Hilton Buenos Aires** in Puerto Madero. The company will manage the **Hilton Iguazu Resort** scheduled to open in Iguazu Falls in late 2008, and the **Hilton Ushuaia** in the southernmost city of the world, scheduled to open in 2009.

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Budapest Re-Emerges with Something to Celebrate

By Tom Bross

We all know that truly appealing, historic capital-city destinations are scattered across Continental Europe. In many or perhaps even most instances, our thoughts tend to veer westward—to Paris and Brussels, for instance, also Madrid and Lisbon. Or midway, on a Berlin and Viennese-Roman arc. Now, though, let's be timely by turning in an eastern direction, giving us an opportunity to focus on the attractions of big, bountiful Budapest.

Timely? Of course. Hungary's centuries-old metropolis has re-emerged from its four drab socialist decades in remarkably good shape—thanks in no small part to extensive refurbishment, new construction, capitalist investments and noticeable expansion of visitor amenities.

In town for last summer's celebrations marking yearly Hungarian National Day on August 20th, I eased into accommodations at the riverview **Four Seasons Gresham Palace** (www.fourseasons.com). A circa-1906 showpiece of fanciful Art Nouveau/Secessionist architecture and design, the war-damaged edifice underwent a four-year, \$130,000,000 restoration prior to reopening in 2004.

Winter Invasion

Coinciding with attention-getting patriotic holiday festivities (concerts, parades, flag-raising, fireworks above statue-festooned 460-ft. Gellert Hill, zooming Danube flyovers highlighted by an acrobatic air race between—and beneath—the Chain and Margaret bridges), travel



Hungarian National Theater.

vernacular) determines location—either in flat Pest's commercial, cultural and government districts on the east side or over in hilly west-side Buda, dominated by Hungary's Royal Castle and traversed by narrow streets laid out in the Middle Ages.

While strolling around, I watched for still-remaining pockmarks left by bullets fired during house-to-house combat—Dec. 29th '44-Feb. 13th '45—retreating German (and Hungarian) forces vs. the advancing Russian Red Army. Then, for 18 days in autumn '56, came the heroic Hungarian Revolution—Budapest's populace vs. Soviet troops and tanks.

If the super-posh Four Seasons proves too costly for their travel budgets, visitors with five-star tastes can pick centrally situated alternatives in Pest. A 218-room **Le Meridien** (www.lemeridien.com), splendidly converted from a limestone police headquarters, opened for business in 2003, followed two years later by the modernistic **Kempinski Corvinus** (www.kempinski-budapest.com).

A bit less central, in an upscale neighborhood that's walkably close to Hero's Square and vast City Park, the **Corinthia Grand Hotel** (www.corinthiahotels.com) dates from Hungary's 1896 Magyar Millennium and comes complete with luxurious spa amenities.

Buda's skyline has been dominated for the past 30 years by a lofty **Hilton** (www.budapest.hilton.com), looming directly adjacent to Castle Hill's much-photographed

officials announced a major tourism promotion called The Budapest Winter Invasion, which began December 1st and runs through March. The target: boosting the city's visitor total by 20,000 and increasing overnight stays by 80,000. (Length of stays have averaged 2.7 nights in recent years, prompting an aim for higher numbers).

Campaign organizers include the Hungarian National Tourist Office and national carrier **Malev Airlines**, plus some four dozen properties affiliated with the Hotel Association of Hungary. Involved, too, with tie-in advertising on view in its two expanded terminals: Budapest Ferihegy gateway airport. Visit www.budapestwinterinvasion.com

Tell clients about the promotion's key element, whereby participating hotels offer guests one additional free stay as a bonus for every three they book. As expected, this cosmopolitan city contains an ample range of accommodations in all rack-rate categories. In the mix are 14 five-star properties and 41 four-star choices. Overall, occupancy rates have increased at a 50% clip during recent years.

Danube Determines Location

The wide Danube (Duna in local

Fishermen's Bastion arcades.

By the Buda

For clients preferring Buda surroundings with much less touristic frenzy, you can confidently recommend such four-star riverfront properties as the **Novotel Blue Danube** (www.novotel-bud-danube.hu), the trendy-contemporary German-conceived art'otel **budapest** (www.artotel.de) and—for more traditional atmospherics along with memorable Danube vistas—the family-run, 27-room **Hotel Victoria** (www.victoria.hu).

For Budapest at its cultural showiest, nothing beats each year's two-week Spring Festival, with #27 in the annual series coming March 14-30. For ticket and schedule information, visit: www.festivalcity.hu. Crowds gather for art exhibitions, grand opera, ballet, National Philharmonic orchestral and choral performances, chamber-music concerts, theatrical productions, folkloric galas and jazz gigs in more than 50 citywide venues. Those include—on the Pest side of the river—the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, 1884's renowned Hungarian Opera House and the strikingly contemporary Palace of Arts.

Three UNESCO World Heritage Sites augment the capital's prestige. Dominating a Buda promontory, approached by an ornamental gateway, the castle complex includes the Hungarian National Gallery and evokes the old-time Austro-Hungarian empire's mightiness for sure-fire World Heritage recognition. Honored, too: spectacular Danube panoramics—wooded slopes, illuminated-at-night castle and bridges, the clustered cityscape and Pest's riverfront Parliament, a neo-Gothic behemoth completed in 1902.

To round out the UNESCO trio, continue elsewhere in Pest to

admire the one-mile stretch of thoroughly urbane Andrássy Avenue, lined with mansions and monumental public buildings, restored to their 19th-century opulence. Wrought-iron balustrades seen on this Parisian-style boulevard frame stairways leading down to stations on continental Europe's first subway line, operating since the millennium anniversary.

Getting There

Malev has suspended nonstop flights for the winter, in the meantime, its Oneworld partner **American Airlines** services Budapest from New York via Zurich, and to/from Chicago ORD and Los Angeles LAX. Check-in facilities used by both airlines are in JFK's Terminal 8. At the same time, **Delta** continues to fly nonstop four times/week during the winter.

Other carriers that touch down in Budapest via their own hubs include **Lufthansa**, **Austrian Airlines**, **Air France**, **British Airways**, **CSA Czech Airlines** and **KLM** and **Swiss** all have connections through their European hubs, flying from some 10 U.S. gateways. Budapest's gateway airport efficiently handles an average of 25,000 travelers daily.

Agents can rely on the www.gotohungary.com website's Budapest for an all-purpose travel-planning resource. Contents include sightseeing highlights, exchange rates, hotel rep listings, online hotel reservations and updated agents' fam trips (for arrangements, E-mail annew@famfacts.com).

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Spain Makes Beautiful Music and Modern History in 2008

This month Spain's annual tourism trade fair, the *Feria Internacional de Turismo*, or *FITUR* will take place January 30 to February 3, 2008 at the Madrid Fairgrounds. As *FITUR* celebrates its 28th annual expo, officials are expecting a huge turnout at the world's second most important trade expo in the tourism industry.

Last year's show attracted 170 country participants and 13,000 companies exhibiting. Nearly 250,000 attendees, including travel industry professionals and members of the public, learned about the latest developments in the country's 17 autonomous regions.

At presstime, Spain's officials were expecting 60 million visitors based on the first ten months of the year, when the country reported 52.7 million arrivals. American arrivals are up to 978,567, representing a 21.6 percent increase.

To ensure further growth, tourism officials in Spain have announced the development of *Plan del Turismo Horizonte 2020*, *Tourism Plan Horizon 2020*, a strategy to improve the quality of the country's tourism product by the year 2020 by developing business models that are environmentally, socially and culturally sustainable.

Classics in the Canaries

Got clients looking for Brahms with some balmy weather? Look toward Spain's Canaries this winter. Sonatas and symphonies will fill the air of eight of the Canary Islands from January 10 through March 1, 2008 when the **24th Annual Music Festival of the Canaries** – one of Europe's only classical music festivals in the winter – kicks off January 10.

The first concert will take place at the Alfredo Kraus Auditorium in **Las Palmas de Gran Canarias** with a program of Beethoven's Concert No. 3 for piano and orchestra, directed by Pedro Halffter and performed by the Gran Canaria Philharmonic Orchestra with the Children's Choir of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Gran Canaria (OFGC). The festival will end on March 1 with the final concert in **Santa Cruz de Tenerife** featuring the Orchestra of Cadaqués with Sir Neville Marriner conducting Mozart's Concerto No. 23 and his Symphony No. 38.

During the eight-week festival, there will be 65 performances – 21 each in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife – and 22 performances on the smaller islands of **Lanzarote**, **La Palma**, **Fuerteventura**, **La Gomera** and **El Hierro**. Even the tiny volcanic island of La Graciosa will host a concert, a performance of Beethoven's Quartets on January 12.

Italian mezzo soprano Cecilia Bartoli, a four-time Grammy winner, will

perform on January 31 and February 2, and the world-renowned Italian conductor Riccardo Muti will direct the London Philharmonia Orchestra in four performances, February 25-28. Led by Sir Neville Marriner, the Orchestra of Cadaqués will perform on February 27 and 29 with the Women's Choir of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Gran Canaria along with the well-known Spanish soprano Ainhoa Arteta. Top orchestras from several European countries – Hungary, Finland, the Netherlands – will perform.

About the Canaries

Year round sunny weather with average temperatures in the 70's has been drawing visitors to the Canary Islands since the 1960s. Lying just 62 miles off the African coast in the Atlantic, these volcanic islands offer beautiful beaches, and a variety of striking landscapes.

The chain's largest, **Tenerife** is crowned by the majestic dormant volcano of Mount Teide, Spain's highest peak at 12,195 feet. Santa Cruz boasts many historic buildings including a church dating from 1500, archaeological and fine arts museums and the bustling food market/bazaar Mercado de Nuestra Señora de África. In Puerto de la Cruz there is a wine museum, the Orotava Botanical Garden and Loro Parque, a subtropical garden with over 1,000 parrots and the world's largest penguin zoo.

Gran Canaria has one of the archi-

pelago's most beautiful stretches of beach – some five miles long. Tourists flock to the port of Las Palmas for the duty-free shopping and the atmospheric Barrio Vegueta, while hikers head for the rural interior with its steep highland reaching almost 6,500 feet. Least populated of the islands, **Fuerteventura** has endless strands of white sand, towering dunes and clear blue waters perfect for windsurfing. The futuristic landscape of **Lanzarote** with its hardened lava and dark dunes suggests a scene from a science fiction movie. The entire island is a UNESCO biosphere reserve and conservation and controlled development make it an attractive vacation choice. Called the "Green Island," **La Palma** attracts visitors with its lush foliage, black sand beaches and the huge crater national park in its interior. The capital, Santa Cruz is a preserved Spanish colonial city with 16th century buildings. **La Gomera's** rugged mountains – its forest was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site – attract hikers who want to get away from it all. The smallest and least visited, **El Hierro** also draws travelers of a solitary bent with deserted black sand beaches and a quiet pine forest. Streets and roads of unpaved sand mark **La Graciosa** – a tiny volcanic island about a mile north of Lanzarote.

Visit www.festivaldecanarias.com. To book tickets, which range from about \$18 to \$140, visit www.generaltickets.com/cajacanaria

Zaragoza Hosts World Expo in 2008

This forward-looking city in the Spanish region of Aragon will host the **2008 World Expo** under the theme: "Water and Sustainable Development." From June 14 through September 14, 2008, Spain's fifth largest city is expected to draw six million visitors, create 9,500 jobs and bring in over \$1.2 billion in tourism revenues. The Expo will be structured around three themed pavilions (the Bridge Pavilion, Water Tower and River Aquarium), six

parent Water Tower by Enrique de Teresa Trilla. A 296-acre Metropolitan Water Park will include Los Sotos National Park along the Ebro, a wetlands area and a Botanical Garden.

In keeping with the Expo's theme of sustainability, city officials intend to increase green spaces by 20 percent, expand renewable energy resources and create a larger network of bicycle lanes. The Zaragoza City Hall is planning several major infrastructure projects including the Third Millennium Bridge which will connect both banks of the Ebro, a suburban rail network and light railway. The Aragon Government will participate in infrastructure projects, such as the Goya Venue, metropolitan and urban transport and the construction of a Conference Centre. Plans are underway to reclaim the banks of rivers, adding gardens, landscaping and beach areas. Leisure and sports facilities will include a

white water channel, rowing lanes, a spa, an "open-air museum" with 25 works and art installations spread along nine miles of the Ebro, and the Rivers Aquarium – the largest in the world – taking visitors on a trip down some of the planet's great rivers: the Ebro, Nile, St. Lawrence, Amazon and Mekong. In fact, 80 percent of the Expo's structures will remain after September 2008.

Zaragoza still has vestiges of the Roman, Moorish, Jewish and Christian communities that once lived here. The city's Roman past can be seen in the Caesaraugusta Theatre Museum,

the city walls, the Forum and the Public Baths. Aljafería Palace is said to be the most important 11th century civil construction in the Islamic West with stunning patios and an impressive Throne Room. Along the Ebro River are three of the city's emblematic buildings including the grandiose Nuestra Señora del Pilar basilica, a Baroque gem completed in 1711. With its 11 brightly-colored tiled cupolas it stands out among the other impressive historic buildings off the Plaza del Pilar. La Lonja Palace is the region's most important example of 16th century civil architecture. Visitors will find medieval art mixing with Renaissance and Baroque styles at San Salvador Cathedral ("La Seo"), Aragon's most significant monument. The exterior of the Parroquieta Chapel, on one side of the Cathedral, represents the pinnacle of Zaragoza's Mudéjar architecture. The Museum of Zaragoza's collection ranges from archaeological finds from prehistory and fine art through the Moorish period. Fans of Francisco de Goya – who served his apprenticeship here – can head to either the 16th century Renaissance Palace de los Pardoos that now houses the Museo Ibercaja Camón Aznar, the Patio de la Infanta Museo or the basilica, to see some of his works. Visit www.expozaragoza2008.es/es/index

For further information, call the **Tourist Office of Spain** at 212-265-8822 in New York; 305-358-1992 in Miami; 312-642-1992 in Chicago; 323-658-7195 in Los Angeles or visit www.spain.info



themed squares (Thirst; Water and the City; Extreme Water; Oikos: Water and Energy; Shared Water, and Aquatic Inspirations) and eight large eco-geographical areas comprising the 65 participating countries. More are expected to sign up along with private companies and non-government organizations. Cirque du Soleil™ is lending its creative talents for "Archipelago of the Desert," the daily parade through the Expo's grounds.

Founded by the Romans at the confluence of three main rivers: the Ebro, Gállego and Huerva, Zaragoza looks down over a fertile flood plain marked by the course of the Ebro, Spain's longest river. The region of Aragon has consistently struggled against desertification and the capital is home to the first integral body of river management in the world, the Ebro Hydrographic Office.

With an eye to attracting visitors long after the world's fair ends, officials have plans to beautify Zaragoza by adding gardens, pools and waterfalls, increasing green spaces and creating leisure and sports areas on the river banks. Designed to evoke a drop of water, the exhibition's most emblematic feature will be the 196-foot trans-

New Access to Spain's North and South

This year, **American Airlines** will launch service from New York to Barcelona, Spain. Beginning April 24, 2008, American will inaugurate nonstop daily flights from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York and Barcelona International Airport (BCN). American Airlines also offers service to Madrid from Boston, Miami and Chicago. Call 800-433-7300; Visit www.aa.com

Delta Air Lines will inaugurate nonstop service to Málaga in the Andalusian region of southern Spain. Starting June 4, Delta will offer three flights a week on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York to the Pablo Picasso International Airport in Málaga (AGP.) Return flights from Málaga to JFK will depart on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Delta will increase service to five flights a week on July 8. Visit www.delta.com

The Quiet Jewels of Western Sicily

By Maria Lisella and Gil Fagiani

When Americans visit Sicily, landing and departing from Palermo or Catania, they usually follow the well-developed tourist tracks to the predictable yet never disappointing sights of Taormina, Siracusa, Agrigento, Piazza Armerina but miss delightful discoveries beyond the two gateways.

Often overlooked is the westernmost portion of this enigmatic and compelling island that takes visitors to the saltpans of Trapani, the heights of Erice and the coastline of Castellammare del Golfo. This summer, we opted to fly Eurofly's new nonstop service between New York and Palermo, but drove west rather than east for a taste of what this region has to offer.

Castellammare del Golfo was our base for three nights and we stayed at the **Affittacamere Francesca**, a bed and breakfast within a 10-minute walk of the beach. For those with more time, they may want to extend this itinerary further south and west to visit the Egadi Islands such as Favignana, but we stayed in the province of Castellammare positioned to visit Trapani, Erice, and Scopello. Driving just a bit south-east, as we ended our excursions to the west, we made time for a visit to the ancient ruins of Segesta where we also happened to find a wonderful agriturismo restaurant – Pocoroba, which literally means "little stuff" or whatever we have — with new, apartment-like accommodations suitable for families who prefer the stay-put concept. On Sundays and many other days, the restaurant serves Cucina Tipica Siciliana. Call 011-39-368-720-97-35; www.pocoroba.it

Castellammare del Golfo has often showed up in the eyes of America as the place where the world's Mafiosi have often been regaled and rewarded for their crimes. However, with the success of Giovanni

Falcone and Antonio Borsellino's anti-Mafia crusade known as the *mani puliti*, the power of the mob has been curtailed. Both men have been lionized for their courage

and integrity as you will see a pillar with their names along the Autostrada on the way to Palermo in the area of Capaci, where they were assassinated.

Tourists need not be frightened of Castellammare's reputation. It is a slightly gritty, hilly and energetic town built on the edge of Sicily's northern coast. The residents are sophisticated, earthy and friendly to tourists and its beaches are worth visiting.

Staying on the edge of Castellammare is a good bet for beachgoers as they can walk from their B&B, take the train for a daytrip into Palermo rather than drive (something to avoid at any cost) and take excursions to nearby places including Trapani, Erice and the magical Scopello.

Affittacamere Francesca is a B&B, costing about 65 Euros a night that boasts a wonderful local cook – Francesca herself will prepare full dinners for just 20 Euros a person. The rooms are spacious, some with balconies overlooking the sea. Call 011-39-0924-59-77-39; Cell 011-39-338-136-5080; E-mail info@affittamerefrancesca.it or pfkaa@libero.it

Gypsy Fishing Villages

Additionally, this zona, as the Italians call it, is home to a few old fishing villages as well as a phenomenal park reserve called Lo Zingaro or the Gypsy. Its trails are well maintained and well-marked, and are reasonably easy to trek on for average walkers. The trails are rocky in spots



SAL PREZIOSO

and hilly but not steep and every step of the way hikers are treated to panoramic views of marble and limestone cliffs that drop precipitously to the sea in grottoes and secluded coves of turquoise blue waters.

Do visit the two museums in the park, one is inside a cave like structure and is devoted to the manna tree, a tree that was once cultivated here until the mid 1960s, it is the source of a sweet substance something like brown sugar. The other museum is in a modern structure and gives an overview of the geography of this fascinating place.

The beaches are open to the public and rather than climb to San Vito, many visitors stop in to the museums in the park and head down the inclines to the beaches. Clients should expect to pay about 6 Euros to park their cars in the lot, gain access to the park and beaches, but they can drive away to Scopello for lunch and return for a dip with the same ticket.

Depending on one's point of reference, Scopello's population varies from 425 to 430. Scopello is among those rare little fishing villages, kissed by the influx of cash from tourism, but still maintaining traces of its rich heritage. Still, the town square is very small and at least three or four B&Bs face the square. To be honest, there

is very little to do in this town but it is worth taking a look at it and it is well positioned for short forays along the coast, hikes in Zingaro and is just a 40 minute drive to the airport in Palermo, going against traffic makes it a very easy drive.

If you are ready for a snack or pranzo, step into La Crapraria for a pae cunzatu, a sandwich that is more like an antipasto for two or three – filled with olive oil, eggplant, tomatoes, olives, anchovies and Sicilian delicacies in a special bread, for about 12 Euros.

The most notable of all is Pensione Tranchina, which is highly recommended in Karen Brown's guidebooks. Its proprietors are a cosmopolitan cultural mix of Chinese, Panamanian and Sicilian. Mr. Tranchina, a Scopello native, inherited his father's little fishing shack. Today, 30 years later, Pensione Tranchina boasts 10 rooms, marble floors, views over the Sea, the village, the park beyond and a chef. Its proprietors are a couple — Marisin was born in Panama of Chinese parents. After marrying, the couple lived in Chicago but he yearned for his hometown; they have been here ever since. Rooms cost 80 Euros a night, which might seem steep in this



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As we headed back east towards Cefalu, we stopped at the abandoned city of Segesta, well-known among Europeans but something of a secret to Americans. When purchasing your entrance ticket, do pay the extra few Euros for the bus trip to the amphitheater on Mount Barbara at about 1,200 feet up. From this height you can view the plains, the farms, the sea and the fabulous Doric temple below that stands quizzically alone on a hill below. The temple was never actually completed and archeologists still argue as to whether this was deliberate or it was just never finished in 420 B.C.

Once you travel down to the temple, do sit beneath its frame, alongside its columns and listen to the gazza or magpies, the same wind once heard by the ancients, and wonder why anyone would have left this enchanting place. Call **800-459-4980**; www.euroflyvacations.com

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IN THE NEWS

British Heritage Tours Partners with Discover Travel and Tours

Niche market specialist British Heritage Tours joined forces with the leading inbound tour operator Discover Travel and Tours. The move brings together two long established and highly respected companies who will trade as Discover Travel and Tours. The British Heritage Tours name will be retained as the brand name for an enlarged range of pre and post cruise products and special interest themed set departures for independent travellers and small groups.

Said British Heritage Tours' Paull Tickner "I am delighted to be joining Discover Travel and Tours. They began business in 1977 and I started British Heritage Tours in 1976. Between us we bring together over 60 years of hard earned knowledge, experience and a reputation for creative tour planning for brick and mortar and home based travel agents." "To our large portfolio of niche market tours, we will be able to add new products and services for independent travellers and the burgeoning family market." "Our daily Quest e-newsletter will continue, as will our 'Selling the Uniqueness of Britain' conferences in Stratford upon Avon with a day at the British Travel Trade Fair (7-12 March) and to Norwich in October."

"You will also see us at a number of 2008 trade shows as we fulfill our 100% commitment to helping travel agents to develop new sources of business." Said Andrew Grieve, MD of Worcester based Discover Travel and Tours "British Heritage Tours has a strong and growing client base of American travel agents which we look forward to serving with our broad product range of UK, Irish and European tours".

Call **800-964 2819**; E-mail paull@bhtours.co.uk

Holland's Art Cities

In 2009 and 2010, the four largest cities in Holland will participate in a large-scale art and cultural event called 'Holland Art Cities.' As part of this event, the top 10 museums in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht will join forces to create an unprecedented art spectacle. The Amsterdam museums – the Hermitage Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum – will also celebrate their opening (or reopening) during Holland Art Cities. The 10 participating museums guarantee a first-rate program for Holland Art Cities. In Amsterdam the museums include the Van Gogh Museum, Hermitage Amster-

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IN THE NEWS

dam, Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art. In The Hague, the Municipal Museum of The Hague and the Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, in Utrecht, the Museum Catharijneconvent and Centraal Museum and in Rotterdam the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Kunsthall.

During this time, three Amsterdam museums will re-open their doors after extensive renovations. Hermitage Amsterdam, with exhibitions from the extensive art collection of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, is scheduled to open its doors in the spring of 2009 in a location that is 10 times larger than its current premises. The Stedelijk Museum, offering by far the best collection of modern art in Amsterdam, will exhibit a selection of art not shown since renovations started in 2003. Finally, the Rijksmuseum is scheduled for the end of 2010 following an ambitious renovation so visitors can once again admire the largest museum of art and history in Holland, best known for its collection of 17th-century Dutch masters. Visit www.hollandartcities.com or www.holland.com

Abreu, Auto Europe, Spain/Portugal Co-op

It is no longer a secret that the tourist offices of Portugal and Spain – once rivals – now make up an unbeatable tourism partnership, but the first tour operator, has stepped up to cooperate with them. Abreu Tours, the oldest and largest Portuguese travel organization, will present its latest product line – Portugal? Spain? Both. – on a new online guide designed to help agents reach leisure consumers interested in traveling to both destinations. At presstime, Auto Europe had also joined the campaign.

"There's been a significant shift in how today's clients make their travel purchases," said Javier Piñanes,

Director of Tourist Office of Spain. "Now, they will be able to obtain the most comprehensive information on Portugal and Spain, and they'll have access to the best travel deals agents can sell them." Both tourist office heads expect their own partnership to be further buttressed with other tour operators expected to join the campaign in the next few months.

Portugalspainboth.com is the official US website for Spain and Portugal joint marketing campaigns to promote tourism, the site promotes and markets Iberia as one destination to leisure visitors, and works closely with strategic partners. Visit www.portugalspainboth.com

CIE Offers Prague, Vienna, Budapest...

CIE Tours International has launched the new Prague, Vienna and Budapest 11-day escorted tour, with an introductory rate for January-March departures of \$1,399 land-only or from \$2,072 from New York or Boston, or from \$2,153 from Chicago. Higher rates, from \$1,958 land-only, prevail from April 3rd onward. Departures are scheduled for selected Thursdays, January 17 through October 30.

The itinerary offers activities in Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The price includes hotel accommodations with private bath for nine nights; nine buffet breakfasts and three dinners; entertainment and sightseeing including admissions to Royal Castle of Hradcany, St. Vitus Cathedral, Hofburg Palace, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Kunsthistorische Museum, Fisherman's Bastion and Matthias Church; sightseeing by luxury motorcoach with professional tour director; all local taxes, hotel service charges and portage; deluxe flight bag, ticket wallet, luggage tags and strap.

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AIR UPDATE

AZORES EXPRESS and **SATA INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES** have announced a new Boston-Madeira service that makes the "Pearl of the Atlantic" closer to New England. The new flight leaves Boston with service to Funchal, Madeira (via Ponta Delgada) every Friday night, with a returning flight the following Friday. SATA also now offers a connecting service to the adjoining island of Porto Santo. The Boston-Funchal roundtrip is just \$574. Call 800-762-9995; www.Azores-Express.com.

EOS AIR will begin flights between New York's JFK and Paris, and Newark and London Stansted Airports in 2008. With a recent infusion of \$50 million in investment capital, Eos also announced it will secure its seventh and eighth Boeing 757 aircraft in order to introduce as many as four new routes in 2008. Eos will add flights between Newark International Airport and Stansted Airport in Spring 2008. This new route acknowledges that New Jersey-based premium travelers and corporations have been eager for Eos to add flights that depart from Newark, and will expand on Eos' schedule to 58 flights per week between the New York metropolitan area and London. Flights between New York and Paris are

expected to commence in Fall 2008. Call 800-598-2169; www.eosairlines.com

AER LINGUS launched nonstop flights between Dublin and San Francisco Airport Oct. 29 with four roundtrip flights per week. Introductory fares start at \$288 each way. On transatlantic flights, seating in Classic Economy Class features a two-four-two configuration, while all Premier Business Class passengers have either a window or aisle seat. Premier seats also feature universal laptop power ports and personal video on demand, with lie-flat versions being introduced via new aircraft and retrofits. www.aerlingus.com

CONTINENTAL announced plans to start twice-daily non-stop service to Heathrow from its Houston and Newark hubs March 29, while continuing to offer nonstop service to London's Gatwick Airport from both cities (as well as seasonal Gatwick service from Cleveland).

DELTA AIR LINES will inaugurate two-class, nonstop service to Malaga in the Andalusian region of southern Spain on June 4. Three flights a week will depart New York's Kennedy Airport Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays to the Pablo Picasso Airport. Return flights will depart Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Delta will increase the service to five flights a week July 8. The airline also offers daily flights to Madrid and Barcelona, Spain, from New York and Atlanta. Additionally, DELTA disclosed plans to enter the London Heathrow market from New York (Kennedy) and Atlanta, using slots acquired from alliance partner Air France. www.delta.com

SWISS took residence in Terminal 4 at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport last month to help ease traffic congestion at one of the world's busiest airports. SWISS First and SWISS Business, and Miles & More Senator passengers will be able to relax in a newly built and designed SWISS Lounge in Terminal 4. The new facility will offer comfortable private work spaces, and public areas amidst a relaxing environment. SWISS First customers traveling without baggage will be able to obtain their boarding card in the SWISS Lounge. Terminal 4 also offers a separate security checkpoint for SWISS Business and SWISS First travelers. SWISS flies to 71 worldwide destinations. Other North American gateways include: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, and Montreal. Call 877-FLY SWISS; www.swiss.com

UNITED AIRLINES will launch nonstop passenger and cargo service between Denver and London Heathrow on March 30, 2008. With this new service, United's Denver hub will now serve as a gateway to Europe and customers can now fly nonstop to London Heathrow from any of United's five hubs located across the U.S. www.united.com

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\$384 GERMANY Nordique Tours is offering a special package in Bavaria Germany this winter, highlighting the Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein Castles, beginning at \$384 per person, double occupancy.

The King Ludwig Winter Journey package includes two nights of accommodations in Hohenschwangau, which is near Fussen, daily buffet breakfast, a bottle of wine and two magnificent dinners—a Musiculinar-ia five course and Bavarian four course—served at the Schlosshotel Lisl and Jägerhaus Hotels. The rates are available through March 31, 2008.

Call 800-995-7997; www.nordiquetours.com

\$1100 GREENLAND Launched in May 2007, Air Greenland's non-stop service now travels every Thursday between Baltimore Washington International Airport (BWI) and Greenland's Kangerlussuaq Airport (SFJ). The quick five-hour trip and slight two-hour time difference makes this exotic destination entirely accessible. The non-stop air service between Baltimore and Kangerlussuaq will be available once again July 8-August.

Flights will operate every Thursday; depending on demand, additional flights may become available in the summer of 2008; prices start at \$1,100. Visit www.airgreenland.com. Recommended accommodations at Hotel Arctic, www.hotel-arctic.gl; Hotel Icefiord, www.hotelicefiord.gl.

\$1249 GREECE Now through January 31, 2008 save \$250 per couple when you book any **Homeric Tours** itinerary from their newly released 2008 Greece brochure!

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\$1124 ITALY Visit Italy Tours has launched a unique 8 day "Italy by Train" program that is well suited for the first time independent traveler to Italy. Offering daily departures the tour visits 3 of Italy's most popular cities, with 3 nights in Rome, 2 in Florence and 2 in Venice. Choice of 3 star tourist class hotel or 4 star first class hotels. Transfer by private car in from airport to hotel in Rome. Travel between cities is by high-speed rail. A sightseeing tour is included in each city, featuring many of the highlights. Breakfast is included daily. An excellent program designed to explore on your own, shop, visit museums or take other optional tours. Program can be modified to add additional nights or cities. Prices start at \$1,124 per person in double occupancy. Call 800-255-3537, fax 310-649-6880; E-mail info@VisitItalyTours.com, or visit www.VisitItalyTours.com

\$1239 SCOTLAND This holiday season saw the premier of Sony Pictures feature film "The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep," starring Scotland's legendary Loch Ness Monster. For intrigued viewers eager to validate the Scottish myth **Dooley Vacations** has developed a tour package to bring The Water Horse from the big screen to reality for optimistic Nessie-hunters. Available from through February 2008 and starting at \$1,239 per person double, the package includes roundtrip airfare, six-night bed and breakfast accommodation, a Historic Scotland pass (for entry to Urquhart Castle), rental car, a 3.5 hour tour aboard Jacobite Cruises and entry to the 3D Loch Ness Experience in Edinburgh. Call 877-331-9301; www.dooleyvacations.com

\$1364 LONDON USAIRWAYS will begin service between Philadelphia and London Heathrow March 29 on A330 aircraft. To celebrate this new service, United Vacations is offering a variety of feature vacation packages to London for travel in 2008. Sample packages include roundtrip flight, four-night hotel stay with breakfast: at the four-star Thistle Victoria, the price is \$1,279 per person double; at the 4.5-star Royal Lancaster Hotel, \$1,364 per person; and at the five-star Le Meridien Piccadilly \$1,674 per person. The VAX VacationAccess technology via Amadeus AgentNet, Sabre Vacations, and Vacation.com AgentNet. www.vaxvacationaccess.com

Macau Steps Gingerly Beyond Gaming

By Patricia Earnest

Macau is fast becoming one of Asia's hottest places to visit. Now under the control of China, as a Special Administration Region of the People's Republic of China, the former Portuguese colony is fast re-inventing itself and visitors are flocking in. Casinos are springing up like mushrooms, low-level seas around the islands are being filled in to create more real estate and travel to Macau has never been easier for the North American visitor.

Macau was once a sleepy set of three islands, less than an hour south by ferry from booming Hong Kong. The three islands of Macau are Macau, the largest and commercial center, connected by bridges to Taipa, which now connects with a reclaimed land bridge (Cotai) to Colonal. Off Taipa, to the east and connected with another bridge, is the new airport, also on reclaimed land.

Macau sits at the mouth of the Pearl River, downstream from the former Canton, now Guangzhou. The name comes from the words A Ma Gao in honor of A-Ma, the Goddess of Seafarers. The Portuguese kept this name which became modified to Macau. A statue to this goddess stands on Avenue Dr. Sun Yat Sen and her temple on Barra Square consists of four temples representing Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and folk beliefs.

Beyond Casino Culture

Certainly with 26 casinos and last year's revenues exceeding those of Las Vegas, Macau has earned this reputation for gaming, but there is much more to do.

Visitors can easily get over and back from Hong Kong in one day and many visitors do just this, but to see everything, to really get the feel of the place, a visit of three to four days would be advised. Visitors find in Macau a calmer experience, much like Hong Kong in the old days. The delightful mix of Cantonese Chinese and Portuguese offers restaurants, sights and accommodations reflecting this mix of cultures.

The mix of European and Asian cultures produced both temples and churches representing the diverse faiths of the former inhabitants. A must-see in addition to the A-Ma temple is the ruins of St. Paul's in the heart of the old city. St. Paul's are the ruins of the first Jesuit church and college in China. Steps in front of the façade lead down into the old city with fine antique, souvenir and boutique-type stores on narrow cobble-stoned and tiled streets.

Among the outstanding museums are the Maritime Museum on the Inner Harbor, which documents the links between Portugal and China; the Macau Museum showing early history and daily life; the Taipa Houses



Museum with five houses showcasing Macanese architectural styles; and the Pawnshop Museum in a restored 100-year-old house built to withstand "fire, flood and robbers" with granite walls and barred windows. Tired of being inside, then consider visiting the Macau Tower to get your adrenaline pumping. If you venture to the edge of the enclosed deck you walk on thick glass. Not for the faint-hearted is a walk around the outside of the tower on the Skywalk (approx. \$27.50 on weekdays, \$15 on weekends and holidays). Even more of a thrill is the jump—from the outer ring, with suitable gear of course.

Let the Games Continue

The newest addition to the gaming field is the just-opened, **Venetian** www.venetianmacao.com. In addition to the gaming areas, visitors can stroll down elegant halls, stay overnight in the Venetian Macao Resort Hotel, can watch the Clock Tower striking the hour and see the Bridge of Sighs.

The 600-room **Wynn Macau**, which opened two years ago, is a 20-story, curved building facing the water with views of Taipa and glistening fountains in its entryway. Visit www.wynnmacau.com

Touted as the tallest building on Taipa Island and first opened in 2007, the **Crown Macau** offers gaming tables and machines, a 38-story hotel with 256 rooms and restaurants. www.crown-macau.com

The **Rocks Hotel** is located minutes from the high speed ferry landing from Hong Kong and heliport. It's a luxury Victorian-style boutique hotel with 72 rooms and suites and all amenities, such as broadband Internet access, and business center. Room rates range \$235-\$832. Visit www.rockshotel.com.mo

From the U.S., visitors can take **Cathay Pacific Airlines**, **Singapore Airlines** or **Thai Airlines** from New York's and Los Angeles International to Hong Kong. From there, take the high speed ferry to Macau.

Call **Macau Government Tourist Office**, 310-545-3464; 646-227-0690; www.macaotourism.gov.mo

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Asia, see pages L31-L39 of the Listings Section.

\$1898 JAPAN

Travel Oriented Inc. is selling a seven-day Golden Route that follows the path of the old Tokaido Trail, traveling from the high tech metropolis of Tokyo to the serenity of Zen gardens in Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto with a stop in the Hakone National Park, Mt. Fuji 5th station and Bullet Train experience, the perfect introductory taste of Japan. Other tours include destinations such as Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Hakone, Mt Fuji, Hokkaido, Hiroshima, Kyushu, and Hokkaido. Call 800-241-3553; www.japandeluxetour.com

NEWS

Indus Flexible-Fams

Indus Travels has announced a special offer on fam trips to India, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Dubai, Jordan, Vietnam, Thailand and Peru. The flexi-fam offer gives agents the power to choose exactly when they take-off on a fam trip, instead of tying them down to specific schedules and iron-clad agendas. Going a step further, Indus Travels has made fam trips practically free. To avail this offer, agents need to put down a deposit for a group of 10 or more to the selected destinations. They can then pick their own dates for a fam trip, and will be repaid the fam costs upon group departure. Call 866-978-2997; www.industravels.ca

Macau as a Base to Asia

Air Macau has been playing a vital and significantly important role in the air transportation of passengers across the Taiwan Strait. Typical fares from Shanghai to Macau in business start at \$305 and in economy from \$245. Air Macau's fleet includes Airbus A321, A320, A319, A300-600R. Call 866-606-2228; E-mail yvr@airmacauna.com; www.airmacau.com.mo

BEST BUYS

\$3762 MALDIVES

The Beach House at Manafaru, the most exclusive sanctuary for savvy travelers celebrate its opening. The resort has announced significantly discounted rates: from \$3,762 per person double for a minimum of seven nights' accommodation in a Beach Villa category or an average of \$610 per night. The rate includes breakfast daily. Call 011-960-320705 or E-mail info@beachhousecollection.com; www.BeachHouseCollection.com

\$53 NEW ZEALAND

When we think of the little things we can do to shrink our carbon footprint, **Hotel SO** beats us all to the punch – from low energy fluorescent to an energy-saving system that turns lights and air conditioning off when not in use. With rates from \$53 per person, Hotel SO debuts its smart, modern digs in Christchurch this month – complete with ensuite, pod-style bathrooms, wireless Internet and flat-screen TVs. bookings@hotelso.co.nz

What happens when the 'Best' collaborates with the 'Best'?

India has emerged the number one travel destination in the Canada West Travel Magazine Readers' Travel Awards 2007, considered to be the Oscar awards of the tourism industry. The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India awarded us the Best Tour Operator to India in North America.

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Summer Olympics Drive Demand for Yangtze River Cruises

By Jonathan Siskin, cruise editor.

With the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing focusing the international spotlight on China, a record number of Americans are expected to travel here this year. Statistics compiled by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) reveal that the number of U.S. visitors to China has been rising at an annual rate of 12.5% from 1.6 million in 2005 to an estimated 2.5 million in 2009. Many clients planning China visits will want to include a Yangtze River cruise on their itineraries, and there are several quality river ships and tour packages featuring Yangtze cruises to choose from in 2008.

VICTORIA EXPANDS FLEET Since launching its first ship on the Yangtze in 1994, **Victoria Cruises** has gradually expanded its fleet to seven ships sailing on itineraries from four to nine days including its best selling "Three Gorges Highlights" "Three Gorges Explorer" and "Grand Yangtze Discovery" cruises.

Victoria recently announced it will be adding an eighth vessel, the *Victoria Jenna*, which will set sail on April 26, 2009. With a passenger capacity of 418, the *Jenna* will be the largest and most luxurious ship on the river with a total of 209 cabins—186 standard accommodations, 19 junior suites, two deluxe suites and two Shangra-la suites.

Each comes with private balcony, bathroom with shower/tub and television with CNN and HBO broadcasts. There are two dining rooms (a single main seating dining room and an a la carte restaurant) along with a fitness room, library/reading room and theatre style night club.

Victoria is currently offering a variety of winter specials with savings of over 40% off regular season rates on select sailings through mid March, 2008.

Winter specials include the "Three Gorges Highlights" itineraries: Chongqing-Yichang (four days/three nights downstream) and Yichang-Chongqing (five days/four nights upstream); and the roundtrip "Three Gorges Explorer" itinerary: Chongqing-Yichang-Chongqing (eight days/seven nights).

Highlights include sailing through the spectacular Three Gorges section of the river and a tour of the Three Gorges Dam site. There are also excursions to some of the oldest cities along the river as well as to new cities built to accommodate those people who had to relocate because of the rising Yangtze waters. Call 800-348-8084, 212-818-1680 or visit www.victoriacruises.com

VIKING RIVER CRUISES offers an annual series of Yangtze cruises aboard its deluxe sister ships *Viking Century Sun* and *Viking Century Sky*. Both five deck vessels consist of 153 staterooms with a maximum capacity of 306 passengers. Each has an observation bar & lounge, coffee bar, sun deck, sauna, gym, business center, internet station, beauty salon and massage services. Yangtze Cruises are included in the following Viking Cruise tours: Imperial Jewels of China (12 days); China's Cultural Delights (16 days); Roof of the World (16 days) and Silk Road Adventure (17 days). Call 877-688-4546 or visit www.vikingrivercruise.com

A & K LAUNCHES NEW SHIP **Abercrombie & Kent**, which pioneered upscale travel to China with the opening of its first office in Hong Kong in 1983, is bringing a new standard of luxury and comfort to Yangtze River cruising with the debut of the 124 pas-

senger "Yangtze Explorer" on April 20, 2008.

Guests can book one of the 24 spacious suites or 38 deluxe cabins, all with private balconies. Dining will be first rate with a selection of Chinese and Western dishes overseen by an onboard executive chef. There will also be shipboard programs and innovative shore excursions throughout the cruise that will educate passengers about China's "River of Heaven" and enhance their understanding of Chinese history and customs.

Amenities include a spa, fitness center and hairdresser while a business center will provide internet access throughout the cruise. The *Yangtze Explorer* will also adhere to the highest standard of sustainability with the most up-to-date sewage disposal systems and recycling facilities.

Four night upstream sailings on the *Yangtze Explorer* depart Yichang on Sundays and arrive in Chongqing on Thursdays while three night downstream sailings leave Chongqing on Thursday and arrive in Yichang on Sunday. Call 800-554-7094 or visit www.abercrombiekent.com

UNIWORLD and **PACIFIC DELIGHT** feature Yangtze River Cruises in various tour packages throughout the year. **Uniwold** partners with **Victoria Cruises** on its selection of 2008 Grand River China Cruises offering a choice of 10 itineraries from seven to 20 days.

Cruises begin the first week in February and continue through the Fall. Grand River Cruises include highlights of the Yangtze, the mysteries of Tibet, Mongolia and Siberia, the gardens of Suzhou and green mountains of Guilin.

Uniwold currently offers more than 30 itineraries on 12 rivers in 20 countries across four continents: China, Europe, Russia and Egypt. Call 800-733-7820 or visit www.uniworld.com

Pacific Delight Tours also partners with **Victoria Cruises** on 13 China tour packages in 2008 that feature three to six night Yangtze River Cruises. Packages also include tours and overnight stays of one to four nights in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an. Details of all China tours are available in Pacific Delight's new 116 page "China and Asia Tourbook".

Pacific Delight Tours, celebrating 38 years in the business in 2008, specializes in escorted and independent tours to China, the Orient and Southeast Asia and also offers packages to India, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Call 800-221-7179 or 212-818-1781 and visit www.PacificDelightTours.com

IN THE NEWS

FAM Trip by Elegant Cruises

Elegant Cruises & Tours, Inc. offers a 12 days/11 nights FAM trip from April 6 – 17, 2008. Price for qualified agents is \$1,650 p.p., based on double occupancy. Companions are welcome. Departing from Las Palmas to Valletta and visiting the Canary Islands, Morocco, Spain, Sicily & Malta agent can experience the rich history and cultural mix of the varied islands of the Mediterranean Sea aboard the 105-passenger, M/S. *Andrea*. This is a designated "President's Cruise" providing an excellent opportunity to learn about the ship, the ports and the company from the president and founder of Elegant Cruises, Captain Mato Stanovic. Rate includes, shipboard accommodations, all meals, wine with lunch and dinner plus shore excursions, as listed in the brochure. Rate does not include airfare, transfers, gratuities or items of a personal nature. Call **Elegant Cruises & Tours, Inc.**, 800-683-6767. or visit www.elegantcruises.com

Register for Cruise3Sixty 2008

One of the most popular industry events, **Cruise Lines International Association's (CLIA) cruise3sixty**, is expecting a record turnout for the 2008 event. With more than 1,100 travel professionals already registered for the March 7-9 conference and trade show to be held at the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center, seminars and ship inspections are filling at a rapid pace.

Registration rates will increase by \$50 on January 1, 2008. Those travel agents who have not yet registered are well advised to do so immediately in order to capitalize on its educational and networking opportunities.

"We are pleased that cruise3sixty has become the hottest ticket in town," said Terry L. Dale, CLIA's president and CEO. "The 2008 program will be our most ambitious, informative and interesting presentation to date."

The 2008 cruise3sixty conference is highlighted by a dynamic trade show representing cruise lines, ports and destinations, workshops, 12 CLIA training seminars, distinguished keynote speakers and special events, CLIA Institute Track training, a Technology Center for hands-on learning, and an "Executive Series" of training courses for agency owners.

For registration visit the cruise3sixty website at www.cruise3sixty.com or www.cruising.org.

Exploring San Francisco's Classic Charm

Whether agents are looking for group rates and availability in San Francisco's hotels, transportation services and sightseeing options for tours, or suggestions for cultural attractions and events, the Tourism Division of the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau is the Travel Professional's one-stop resource for the best San Francisco has to offer.

The SFCVB encourages travel agents to visit the city on familiarization programs so that agency staffs can experience the charm that is uniquely San Francisco. The Tourism division provides welcome packets designed specifically for travel professionals to become better acquainted with all that the city has to offer.

This Year's Big Events

Plans are afoot to mark the 75th anniversary of **Coit Tower**, the 210-foot-structure that dominates San Francisco's Telegraph Hill. While it has had its detractors — Gladys Hansen in her book, *San Francisco Almanac*, includes this quote from H.A. Haskell, M.D.: "I consider it (Coit Tower) a blemish, without the remotest artistic significance; a defacement of a natural formation that ever delighted the eye of those approaching the city by water." — it also has a legion of admirers and has been chosen in various SF Weekly reader polls as the city's "Best Place to Forget the Other 49 States."

Named for Lillie Hitchcock Coit, an honorary member of Knickerbocker Number Five Fire Company and a lifelong firefighting buff, the tower was built in 1933 using a \$125,000 bequest from Coit for the purpose of "adding to the beauty of the City which I have always loved." Coit Tower was designed by Henry Howard of the firm of Arthur Brown, Jr., whose credits also include San Francisco's City Hall and War Memorial Opera House. Frescoed murals by 26 different artists ringing the central section of the structure depict "Aspects of Life in California, 1934" and were funded by the Public Works of Art Project, 1933-34. Free tours of Coit Tower are offered by City Guides, every Saturday at 11 am; for details, visit www.sfcityguides.org. Anniversary plans will be announced at a later date.

Hotel News

Nick's Cove & Cottages Opens at Tomales Bay on Marin Coast. Lined with its beloved cabins and restaurant that have delighted Highway One travelers with funky quarters, BBQ oysters, and the freshest seafood hauled in by local fishermen until 1999, Nick's Cove & Cottages has been lovingly brought back to life by Pat Kuleto, in partnership with acclaimed chef Mark Franz.



Opened in May 2007, the new Nick's Cove & Cottages, 23240 Hwy. 1 in Marshall, feature luxury cottages located on or over the water, a 400-foot pier with docking for local fishermen, an artful array of antique boating memorabilia and the fully restored 130-seat, indoor/outdoor Nick's Cove restaurant with its spectacular views of Tomales Bay, long celebrated as one of the California coast's most

pristine settings. Call 866-63-NICKS (6-4257); www.nickscove.com

Classic San Francisco

When your clients want to see all of The City's world-famous sights, including the Golden Gate Bridge, Chinatown, Fisherman's Wharf, Mission Dolores and Golden Gate Park, you can't beat a regularly scheduled city tour.

A half-day motorcoach or van tour, an overview of neighborhoods by motorized cable car, or a self-guided tour by car following the 49-Mile Scenic Drive.

An up-close-and-personal look at San Francisco's unique architecture, colorful history and ethnic neighborhoods on a walking tour.

One of the most popular destinations in The City, your clients can stroll along Fisherman's Wharf and the waterfront area or take a pedicab tour.

The Wharf is also one of the places to begin a ride on a cable car, America's only moving national historic landmark. A free, self-guided tour of the Cable Car Museum shows visitors firsthand how the cable cars operate.

If your clients enjoy outdoor activities, Golden Gate Park is a terrific place to be. They can golf, jog, hike, lawn bowl, play tennis, hire paddle boats on Stow Lake, rent roller skates or bicycles and ride all the way to the beach. The main road through the park is closed to motor traffic on Sundays and holidays year-round. Or, a helicopter ride over The City or a kayak across the Bay might appeal to your clients.

Run in one of San Francisco's annual foot races: Hill Stride, The San Francisco Marathon or The City's most famous, the Bay to Breakers, which attracts more than 100,000 costumed runners every May.

Take a 15-minute ferry ride to Angel Island (departures from Fisherman's Wharf) and hike, bicycle or picnic along paths with views of The City and San Francisco Bay. Walk or cycle across the Golden Gate Bridge followed by a ferry ride back, the ultimate Only-in-San-Francisco adventure.

Visit www.sfcvb.org; clients may want to browse, www.onlyinsanfrancisco.com

BEST BUYS

\$130

HAWAII

Bike Volcano, on the Big Island, has added a Kilauea Volcano & Wine Tasting Tour. The downhill, summit-to-sea ride includes time exploring Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, followed by a visit to Volcano Winery. The tour includes all equipment, lunch, an interpretive guide and van support. The tour is commissionable at \$130 per cyclist and \$100 per van rider. Call 888-934-9199; www.bikevolcano.com.

Guests of **Four Seasons Resorts Maui at Wailea** can now stay an extra day to experience and explore the splendor of the newly renovated resort with a 6th Night Free promotion, valid through February 14, 2008, with nightly room rates beginning at \$620.

Complimentary night offers must be used in conjunction with initial stay of consecutive paid nights, advance reservations are required.

Call 800-332-3442; www.fourseasons.com/maui.

The legend lives on at **The Kahala Hotel & Resort** with The Kahala 2008 Legendary Days Promotion, offering additional options for three-and five-night stays through June 30, 2008. Book three nights or more in a courtyard category room or higher and receive a daily breakfast buffet for two (per room) at the Plumeria Beach House. Book a two-bedroom suite and receive a daily breakfast buffet for four. Get a fifth night free when booking a minimum of five nights in a mountain (no lanai) category room or higher and receive a daily breakfast buffet for two (per room) at the Plumeria Beach House. Book a two-bedroom suite and receive a daily breakfast buffet for four. Call 800-367-2525; www.kahalaresort.com

\$149

BOSTON

Whether it's for a fun weekend jaunt or for college-bound guests visiting Boston to scope out the numerous area universities, the new 471-room **Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel** is an ideal base. The 21-story sleek building is set on the South Boston Waterfront with outstanding water and city views, state-of-the-art technology including 37" high-definition flat panel TVs and plug-in and listen MP3 docks, a fitness center with lap pool, spa treatment rooms, as well as a restaurant under the direction of acclaimed chef and restaurateur Michael Schlow. The hotel is near the new Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston's Children Museum, Boston Design Center, New England Aquarium, Harpoons Brewery and Logan International Airport. The opening rate is available for Feb. 15- March 22, 2008.

www.renaissanceboston.com

IN THE NEWS

Inns & Villas Attract Agents with Slow Food, Wine, Commissions

Unique Inns includes approximately 40 member properties located in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California. Many of the innkeepers that are part of Unique Inns are involved with the global Slow Food movement, an organization of more than 80,000 individuals in 45 countries who are passionate about adding flavor to their lives. Slow Food, a non-profit, member-supported organization, was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life.

"Food is an integral part of the Unique Inns experience," said Rose Allen, executive director of Unique Inns. "Whether an innkeeper offers a gourmet breakfast, picnic lunch, or multi-course dinner, the meal is prepared with care and attention that has the ability to bond through the sharing and serving of good food. In accordance with Slow Food, we believe that in seeking a good life, it is important to consume food created from fresh, quality ingredients, produced in a manner that does not degrade species or resources," she added.

The **Lodge at Suttle Lake in Sisters, Ore.**, will have winter events (snowshoeing, cigars/cognac, etc.), throughout the winter months, the **Carter House** in Eureka, Calif., runs specials continuously, and the **Willows Inn** on Lummi Island in Washington offers a Winter Gourmet Special Thursdays and Sundays through May 1, 2008 when guests enjoy dinner for two, overnight accommodations in the main lodge for \$99. www.uniqueinns.com/innlight/specials.html

Tropical Villas Seek Agents

Maui-based **Tropical Villa Vacations**, specializes in luxury vacation rentals and personal concierge service, has introduced a new program to partner with travel agents that pays up to 15% commission and web-based support in selling to the luxury market. Established in 1995, Tropical Villa Vacations serves as professional property manager and/or rental agent for an extraordinary selection of luxury vacation homes and villas in Hawaii, with a few selected properties in Mexico and Canada, as well. The company represents about 60 hand-picked luxury properties, including beachfront estates, secluded retreats, romantic hideaways, and resort villas, ranging from \$3,500 to \$70,000 per week. Agencies interested in working with Tropical Villa Vacations can qualify to earn up to 15% commission. Call 888-875-2818 ext. 205; E-mail info@TropicalVillaVacations.com; www.TropicalVillaVacations.com

Pint-Sized Diners *Get Respect They Deserve*

Historically there was never any such thing as kids' food until marketing mavens created a need for salty, sweet and fatty snacks. It seems the food industry has finally been convinced that good food is just as profitable as junk food. Enter 11 big food companies, including McDonald's, Campbell Soup and PepsiCo, all of whom have agreed to stop advertising products that do not meet certain nutritional standards to children under 12. Some of the companies, like Coca-Cola, have already withdrawn all such commercials or are in the process of doing so. Others, like General Mills, said they would withdraw them over the next year or so, while a handful agreed to expand their self-imposed bans to radio, print and Internet advertising. The same impulse is showing up in hotel and resort kitchens where some chefs are taking another look at those chicken fingers and turning them into something even an adult might order.

Since keeping kids happy will inevitably make for a more enjoyable family dining experience, youngsters are now being offered more than fast-food dishes such as "chicken fingers or hamburgers" at some of the U.S. top resorts and vacation areas. As the number of children traveling with their parents on both business and leisure is increasing, service expectations are climbing for jetsetters of all ages.

Six.one.six, the signature restaurant in the new 337-room **JW Marriott Grand Rapids**, recently added a children's tasting menu, developed to educate and expand the palates and cultural horizons of young guests. Six.one.six is inspired by the theme "eat local, feel global." This new haven for fresh fare offers a unique combination of globally influenced tastes and regional favorites created from local, home-grown produce.

This six-course menu is designed for parents with a penchant for fine dining who want to share their sophisticated taste with their family while on the road, and expose kids to foods that are normally reserved for adults.

"The value of a children's menu should never be overlooked or treated as an afterthought," said John State, executive chef. "Kids can appreciate and enjoy sophisticated flavors just as much as their parents can; their taste shouldn't be underestimated."



ONE&ONLY OCEAN CLUB

Developed by State, the six-course menu, inclusive of a beverage (non-alcoholic, of course), is priced at \$21.00 and includes: crisp vegetable crudités with dipping sauces; demitasse of Today's Lovely Soup; silver dollar-sized flatbread with smoked salmon, lemon crème fraîche and sieved eggs; hearts of romaine lettuce with green goddess dressing, focaccia croutons, and aged parmesan; tempura-style fish and chips with tartar sauce and malt vinegar or grilled petite filet of beef with whipped potatoes, snap peas and sauce foyot; or rice cereal and marshmallow "sushi roll" with fruit wrapper and Swedish fish "nigir." Children still have the option to order chicken fingers if they like. www.ilovethejw.com

Exotic Locales

One&Only Reethi Rah, Maldives already has Kids' menus and Kids' Clubs but it has taken all of that one step further in the creation of a Culinary Curriculum for Child Chefs.

Offered three times a week in different locations throughout the resort, the new culinary curriculum is available to all KidsOnly participants aged between 4 and 11 at no charge. After each class the children, outfitted in mini chef hats and aprons, are awarded a certificate of participation signed by the chef, along with the recipes to take home and replicate. The cooking curriculum is a new addition to the activities already available for children through the KidsOnly program at both One&Only Reethi Rah and One&Only Ocean Club.

Among the specialties kids will be acquiring at One & Only are Sushi Rolling on Mondays, Moroccan Cuisine on Wednesdays and sweet tooth kids can be found in the Reethi pastry kitchen learning the secrets of the fine art behind cookies and cakes.

The KidsOnly clubhouse is open for 12 hours a day from 9am-9pm with its own dining area, playroom and playground, swimming pool, arts and crafts area, sporting facilities, stage area and access to the beach. Visit www.oneandonlyresorts.com

\$195 CALIFORNIA Redwood Parks Lodge Company

announced that its guided tours division, Redwood Adventure Tours, is now offering fresh water fishing, spawning observation and culinary instruction tour packages. Professional fishing guides lead visiting anglers out on one of several regional rivers to fish for Chinook (King) Salmon, Coho (Silver) Salmon, Steelhead trout and Cut-throat trout.

While anglers are required to have their own current fishing license and permits, the tour includes a professional fishing guide, boat and all the necessary tackle and bait for the day. Redwood Adventures Tours' fresh water fishing tours, spawning observation tours and culinary instruction (for visitors who want to learn the best ways to prepare local fish) start at \$195 per person for a full-day tour. Fishing tours are available year round and are \$250 per person per day. The best months for fresh water fishing are October-March. The spawn observation tour is available September-March. Tours can be scheduled for half or full day; start at \$125 per person. Call **866-733-9637**; www.redwoodadventures.com

\$293 NEW HAMPSHIRE Rosewood Country Inn's Stay and Ski

Packages include three nights' accommodations, a hearty country breakfast each morning, two full days of skiing at Mt. Sunapee and evening hors d'oeuvres valid through Feb. 18 to 22, 2008. Rates for all three nights start at \$293.50 per person with double occupancy. Built in 1850, The Rosewood Country Inn features 11 rooms with fireplaces, whirlpool tubs, sunlit porches and inviting common rooms, the Rosewood's country elegance is enjoyed in an atmosphere of warmth and relaxation. The Rosewood Country Inn occupies 12 hilltop acres in the town of Bradford in the Dartmouth/Lake Sunapee region of New Hampshire, about 90 minutes from Boston. Call **800-938-5273**; www.rosewoodcountryinn.com

\$309 BOSTON

Onyx Hotel's "Get Your Green On" package offers visiting Celtics fans a "no foul for traveling" experience designed to make them feel right at home as they cheer the hometown boys to victory and enjoy one of the most exciting sports teams in history. Basketball season is tipping-off and the Onyx Hotel is offering Celtics fans a Slam Dunk of a package. With Onyx's "Get Your Green On" package guests will enjoy their very own game-day kit complete with Celtics t-shirts, Sam Adams

BEST BUYS

Seasonal Ale and game day souvenirs. Onyx Hotel's "Get Your Green On" package includes: One night accommodation, green socks, green and white M&Ms at turn-down, Boston "Home Court" tour map designed by the hotel concierge, choice of one of the Big 3 cocktails at the Ruby Room, choice of Boston newspapers with Sports page on top plus a Celtics Game Day Kit: two Celtics t-shirts, poster, six-pack of Sam Adams Seasonal beer, and Celtics Game Day souvenirs to assist with cheering. Rates start at \$309 per night, based on double occupancy; valid through April 16, 2008. Call **866-906-9090**; ask for rate code **PGYG**

IN THE NEWS

Singles Sail High Seas in 2008

Singles Travel International announced two cruises in 2008 on the newest of the **Cunard** fleet, the elegant **Queen Victoria**. From May 20 through 27, Singles Travel International will depart from Southampton, England to cruise the Norwegian Fjords. Then, November 5 – 17, single travelers will discover Ancient Wonders of the Mediterranean including the ancient ruins of Ephesus in Turkey and the Great Pyramids.

The Queen Victoria features elegance and style throughout the ship, from its three-tier Grand Lobby to its White Star Service. Warmly reminiscent of a more gracious era, modern technology combines seamlessly with her classic yet contemporary interior. This ship was crafted to exude elegance with intricate mosaics, gleaming chandeliers and luxuriant marbles. Travelers will enjoy gourmet cuisine created by Celebrity Chef Daniel Boulud in the Britannia Dining Room or Todd English's Mediterranean Restaurant. The Cunard Royal Spa and Fitness Centre and ballroom dancing lessons keep passengers fit. The Royal Court Theater features brilliantly staged musical productions and theater performances by actors of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

The Norwegian Fjord Cruise departs Southampton, England on May 20 and cruises the North Sea to Norway, including stops in Bergen, Hellesylt, Geiranger, Aalesund, and Stavanger and returning to Southampton a week later, on May 27. Prices start at \$1,839.

The Ancient Wonders Mediterranean Cruise departs Rome, Italy on November 5 and sails to Naples, Messina (Sicily), Valletta (Malta), Alexandria (for Cairo/Giza), Port Said, Kusadasi (for Ephesus), Istanbul, Dikili, Volos and Athens for 13 days of cruising. Prices start at \$2,399. Call **877-765-6874**; www.singlestravelintl.com



Colorado: Ski, Board and Learn in January

Whether your clients have always wanted to learn to ski or ride, or just want to brush up on their downhill skill January in Colorado is Learn to Ski and Learn to Ride Month. Skiing and snowboarding are great exercise, a fantastic way to get outside during the winter months, and the mountains are nearly in your backyard. If clients have already tried skiing or boarding, take a lesson from a pro and get better quicker and then visit the other 99.9% of our terrain.

For safety tips, do visit www.coloradoski.com

With snow already falling in the high country, Colorado is gearing up for another great ski and snowboard season. To help your clients do the same, Colorado's 26 member resorts are offering seasonal deals from discounts on lift tickets and ski-and-stay packages to free skiing.

Colorado is a four-season destination offering world-class adventure and recreational pursuits, a thriving arts scene, a rich cultural heritage, flavorful cuisine, and 26 renowned ski resort areas. The state's breathtaking natural landscape boasts natural hot springs, thousands of lakes and rivers, 10 national parks and monuments, and 54 peaks that top 14,000 feet.

Home to several unusual recreational sports and experiences that can only be found in Colorado, the latest craze is "sledding," a sport that was imported from New Zealand and combines surfing, rafting and swimming in Aspen (www.aspensnobs.com). In Aspen/Snowmass (www.stayaspensnowmass.com), travelers can check out "zorbing," another recreational sport from New Zealand, which involves strapping oneself into a specially-designed, inflatable transparent ball and rolling down hills at speeds of up to 25 miles per hour.

In Durango, try Soaring (www.soaringtreetopadventures.com), where travelers can zip from platform to platform, high above aspens and ponderosa pines on stainless steel cables. The only place in the U.S. to experience

Soaring is Durango, and the only way to get to the attraction is the **Durango Silverton Narrow-Gauge Railroad** (www.durangotrain.com).

But for those families who want to schuss down the slopes together the following is a sampling of a few deals worth considering.

Kids Fly Free on **United Airlines** and **American Airlines**. Children ages 2-12 fly free through February 15, 2008 into Vail/Eagle County Regional Airport Airport with paid adults 18 years or older. Call 800-587-4560; www.snow.com/info/specials7.asp

Fly In, Ski Free at Beaver Creek. Beaver Creek's Fly In/Ski Free promotion offers travelers a free day of skiing when flying non-stop into Vail/Eagle County Regional Airport (EGE) starting November 16, 2007. Visitors who present a boarding pass and Beaver Creek lodging confirmation to any ticket window will receive a complimentary same-day lift ticket. Various airlines offer direct flights to EGE via Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas/ Ft. Worth and Denver.

Call 888-830-SNOW; www.beavercreek.com

Ski Free, Stay Free in **Breckenridge**. Breckenridge is offering its popular Ski Free, Stay Free promotion. Skiers and snowboarders that stay and ski or ride for three nights will receive a free fourth night of lodging and lift tickets. Guests can save up to 25 percent with packages starting as low as \$301 per person, based on double occupancy.

Call 800-GO-BRECK; www.breckenridge.com

Free Skiing at **Copper Mountain**. Skiers and riders who purchase lift tickets and three or more nights of lodging starting at \$76 per person, per night, quad occupancy will receive a fourth night free and a day of Beeline Lift Tickets. Kids 12 and younger ski for free. Call 866-841-2481; www.coppercolorado.com

Half-Price Skiing at Powderhorn. The **Inn at Wildewood**, located at the Powderhorn Resort, is offering a special rate all season long starting at just \$89 per night with no blackout periods. Guests will also receive half price lift tickets for each night's stay.

Call 970-268-5170; www.powderhorn.com

Early Season Deals in Durango. Ski and ride Purgatory at **Durango Mountain Resort** and take advantage of its early season deals. Call 800-982-6103; www.durangomountainresort.com

Lodging and Lifts Deal in Telluride. Telluride Mountain is offering a Lodging Plus Lift Ticket deal starting at \$99.50 per day per person double occupancy. Call 800-778-8581; www.tellurideskiresort.com

For more information on Colorado, call 800-COLORADO; www.COLORADO.com; for more deals visit www.ski.com

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Sceptre Tours at 800-221-0924 or visit www.SceptreTours.com

ITALY

Fare: \$99 for agent; \$199 for 1 companion. Travel must be completed by Mar 14, 2008. Maximum Stay: 14 days. Payment must be made by travel agency check with a copy of IATA list / card. Restrictions apply. Eurofly Vacations: 800-459-4980 or www.euroflyvacations.com

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One limited departure: Departs Jan 11, 2008, returns Jan 18, 2008. 8 Day FAM from \$1099* Air & Land (Companions Welcome).

Includes: Roundtrip Non-Stop Air JFK To Rome on Alitalia. All transfers throughout by group motorcoach. 1 night in Perugia at the Relais Dell'Olio, including breakfast and dinner. 1 night in Gubbio at the Relais Ducale, including breakfast. 1 night in Arezzo at the Badia Di Pomaio, including breakfast and dinner. 1 night in Chiusi at the Villa Il Patriarca, including breakfast. 2 nights in Rome at the Quirinale Hotel, including breakfast. Farewell Dinner in Rome. Wine Tasting in Arezzo. Rome City Tour. Motorcoach available for excursions and hotel inspections in Tuscany & Umbria (to be determined by group majority). Airline Fuel Surcharges.

Foreign Independent Tours Inc: 800-248-3487; www.fittours.com

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Departure: March 20 to April 1, 2008 from \$895. 13 days /11 nights, Land only. Land+air from JFK: \$1,395. Includes: All transfers per itinerary. First class hotel accommodations. Buffet breakfasts daily and 11 dinners. Sightseeing as specified in itinerary posted online. Service of an English speaking tour guide who is licensed by the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, and an expert in Turkey's history, art, and culture. Local transportation by deluxe A/C motor coach depending on group size. Baggage handling and portage per program itinerary. All admission fees and service charges. Travel documents kit.

WWW.JAXFAX.COM

IN THE NEWS

Winter Fantasies

Resort Property Management, offers a large selection of luxurious vacation homes available for rent in Big Sky's Meadow Village and on Lone Peak Mountain. Their 2008 Winter Fantasy Package includes world-class skiing at Big Sky or Moonlight Basin, a Dinner Sleigh Ride at Lone Mountain Ranch located nearby, and a SnoCoach Tour of Yellowstone National Park. Package is priced from \$540 per person for a 4-night stay, and includes lodging in any house or condo within Resort Property Management. www.rpmbigsky.com.

Sky Vacations' Indian Dream

Last spring, India travel specialist and consolidator, **Sky Bird Travel and Tours** launched **Sky Vacations** with an eight-night/nine-day tour from Delhi to Rajasthan, visiting Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra and Sikandra; seven-night/eight-day "Classical South India" tour from Chennai visiting Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram, Madurai, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, Kumarakom and Cochin; and six-night/seven-day "North India, Golden Triangle" tour from Delhi to Jaipur, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri.

JF interviewed **Arvin Shah**, Chairman, Sky Vacations to follow up on why his company entered the India land tour market.

JAX FAX: Any new trends you see among travelers?

SV: I see a renewed interest today with clients wanting to explore India as a Destination. The initial hesitation to travel to a long haul destination is fading away and US originating leisure travelers are venturing to check out new destinations world-wide. What was once considered off the beaten path is now just another exotic, if not ordinary trip.

JF: What made you decide to do land arrangements as well as air consolidation?

SV: Sky Bird Travel & Tours is known as one of the top quality driven consolidators in US Travel circles for over 30 years. We offer almost 70 Airline contracts to all markets of the world, facilitating travel both in business & coach for approximately 10,000 retailers across the US. Thanks to our success in the last few years with land operations in Europe, we decided to extend our operational

reach to the Indian sub-continent in addition to Africa and South America. Regarding India, Sky Vacations in-house team has extensive destination experience making our India programs a wonderful experience for potential travelers. This new product today helps our retailers offer added value to their existing client base, offering excellence in service with both our air and land products.

JF: Are you adding new hotels or options or new destinations to your tours for 2008-09?

SV: We are adding certain select programs for high-end clientele in our 2008-09 product-line. This will be announced shortly.

Sky Vacations is developing programs in a number of new markets and destinations. We do not launch a new destination unless we are comfortable with the quality of service and product we can offer our esteemed clientele. In addition to India and Europe, Sky Vacations will soon be announcing our new product offerings to South America and South Africa for 2008.

JF: Special interests: any new one we might not predict or know about-food and wine: art, etc.

SV: India is a treasure trove for clients looking for an exotic travel experience. India as a destination can offer multiple special interest options for clients be it a spiritual awakening, a travel through an ancient past, a taste of it's delectable cuisine or an Ayurveda Retreat.

JF: How are you expanding your clientele ...to attract new generations?

SV: We will be conducting a series of road shows in 2008. Sky



Vacations is working to attract 2nd and 3rd generations of Americans with Indian ethnicity to walk through time and experience their origins first hand. We plan to expand the awareness of India rich cultural heritage home to a cross section of American society through a variety of outlets in order to expand the market.

JF: What portion of your business comes via agents?

SV: Virtually 100% of our Sky Vacations business comes to us through our Travel Agent partners. It is through this strong relationship that we have continued to grow our business to where we are today. We look forward to that continuing that relationship in the future.

JF: Have you discovered any new avenues to raise your profile among new agents?

SV: Sky Bird Travel has continued to make our presence felt through Travel Media outlets such as JAX FAX as well as various Travel Shows, Seminars and Conferences. We have been active participants in a number of panel discussions as well.

JF: Is your company a member of any consortia?

SV: Sky Bird is participant in a number of Travel organizations including ASTA, CLIA, Vacation.com, PATA to name a few.

Call 877-666-3113; E-mail: India@skyvacations.net; www.skyvacations.net.

Youth Travel Pivots on Strong Educational Component

In years past, backpacking through Europe was a rite of passage for young people, but today, visiting Asia, Australia, Europe, and other foreign destinations is becoming an essential part of a student's education. According to the Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA), international travel is on the rise among students, contributing to a \$10 billion industry composed of 12-18 year old travelers.

A recent study by the Student and Youth Travel Research Institute (SYTR-I) at Michigan State University revealed that the most popular foreign destinations among student and youth travelers include: Europe (39.1%), Australia (26.1%), and Asia (14.5%).

Michael Palmer, SYTA's Executive Director observed, "With all of today's modern technology, students can reach out to their counterparts in other countries within seconds, so naturally the next step is going there. This generation of young people is no longer intimidated by going to places like Asia, Europe, or Central America."

For SYTA, whose active members are top tour operators in the U.S. and Canada, the growing, international "face" of youth travel is reflected in the increasing number of tour operators from around the world that are exploring membership opportunities in the association. These tour operators are coming to North America to participate in the association's annual conferences, where they gain greater insights into the issues and challenges of the student and youth travel industries.

Australia-based Odyssey Travel recently became an International Affiliate member at SYTA. "Cross cultural activities are important to educators who wish to broaden the outlook of their students," said Russell Windebank, business development manager for Odyssey Travel. "But as students travel farther from home and to less familiar environments, security also becomes an important issue. Our relationship with SYTA's North American members helps us ensure that we can challenge young people intellectually while also providing a safe and secure environment. Through SYTA, we seek to develop stronger student travel programs that meet the needs of an increasing-



ly sophisticated clientele."

Another Australian tour operator, Educational World Travel (EWT), has been a member of SYTA for two and a half years. The company is based in Melbourne, with offices in China and the United States. It has been sending Australian students into the United States for more than 16 years and recently began working with American schools to provide a similar exchange program for their students. EWT participates in the annual SYTA Summits and recent-

ly presented on a panel addressing international youth travel.

"The student travel market has been overlooked in general, but it is now coming to the fore as an important area of the industry," said Shannan Carter, international events manager for EWT. "It is part of Australia's cultural heritage for students to travel the world before taking any further and major steps in their 'life' directions. SYTA is essential to helping us expand our services and ensure our young clients gain maximum education benefits from their trips. We are now working with North American-based schools to provide comparable opportunities for their students overseas."

"Today's youth traveler is eager to visit countries that no longer seem so far away or out of reach for them. By the time they graduate, some are already seasoned international travelers," Palmer observed. "Recognizing this surge in interest, SYTA has stepped up its effort to expand its membership and branch out internationally."

The Student & Youth Travel Association is a non-profit, professional trade association formed in 1997. Members of SYTA include tour operators, attractions, convention & visitor bureaus, state/provincial offices of tourism, hotels/hostels, restaurants, theaters, transportation and other organizations involved in student and youth travel in North America. Current active tour operator members of SYTA accounted for almost \$1.55 billion US in student and youth travel, providing trips for over 2.2 million participants each year.

For more information, contact SYTA 800-509-7982 or visit them on-line at www.syta.org.

2008 Arrives with Agent Online Incentives

Agents in Alaska

Carolyn Helwig, travel consultant with **Odyssey Travel** in San Rafael, Calif. (415-455-0921 or www.odysseytv.com), and Elke Neumann with **Dimensions in Travel** in San Rafael, Calif. (415-897-1479 or www.dimensionsintravel.com), were the winners of the Alaska Certified Expert (ACE) contest held earlier this year. Helwig and Neumann won the contest by successfully completing the four modules and becoming an ACE by May 31. Helwig and Neumann visited Fairbanks, Denali, Talkeetna, Anchorage and Seward as part of their prize. Since its inception last fall, 268 travel agents have graduated from the program. The ACE program was designed to help travel agents become more familiar with all Alaska has to offer and to provide the resources and expertise to assist clients in creating the Alaska trip of their dreams.

"We had a great time in Alaska. Everyone was so nice and everything was perfect," said Helwig. "I found the ACE program very helpful in terms of learning logistics and I look forward to implementing this knowledge in booking Alaska vacations for my clients."

The web-based ACE training offers everything from product and region information to a certification quiz. It is designed to provide tips for selling Alaska and explain the logistics of travel to and within the state. Upon completion of this course, agents are given a special Alaska ACE logo to let clients know they specialize in Alaska. www.TravelAlaska.com/trade

Hapag-Lloyd's Cruise-Campus Online

Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, in conjunction with Cruise-Campus, an independent online training program is happy to announce the launch of Hapag-Lloyd Cruises' online travel agent training program. Hapag-Lloyd Cruises is proud to be the first partner to open the international version of the training program and to provide information in four educational courses revolving around general and specific knowledge of Hapag-Lloyd Cruises.

Sebastian Ahrens, Managing Director of Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, "With so many different cruise options in the market place, consulting is necessary to educate travel agents on the different products offered. Hapag-Lloyd Cruises offers a supreme product with even more need for consultation. This online course is an ideal way for travel agents to learn about Hapag-

Lloyd Cruises in a relaxing and stress-free environment. The best ambassador for our product is an educated travel agent."

Call **877-445-7447**; www.hl-cruises.com

Cruise-Campus is very easy to use and free of charge. Travel agents log onto www.cruise-campus.com, click on "New Registration," fill in the necessary contact information. Once a valid email address is provided, the access data information will be emailed and the registration is complete. When travel agents complete all four courses and score a minimum of 58 points (maximum 77 points) they will receive a certificate for their office accrediting them as a Hapag-Lloyd Cruise expert. If travel agents have any trouble accessing the courses, they can contact the help desk at service@cruise-campus.com

From Austria Airlines

Austrian Airlines has rolled out a new function on our website just for travel agents. AgentNet is for agents only and contains all the information you need to know, including: Agent Offers, Prepaid Ticket Information, Austrian News, Ticket Deadline Control, Services for You, CRS Entries, Your Austrian Contacts. Visit www.aua.com/us/eng/agentnet; Password 257.

U.S. Travel Reports Modest Gains

The U.S. travel industry is expected to post moderate gains in nearly all sectors again in 2008, according to the annual Travel Industry Association (TIA) forecast. Travel spending by domestic and international visitors in 2008 is forecast to increase 5.2 percent, to \$778.2 billion, up from projected full-year 2007 travel spending of \$740 billion, which would be a 5.7 percent increase over 2006.

Domestic leisure trips are expected to continue an upward trend of modest growth in 2008, climbing 2 percent to 1.6 billion trips. Domestic leisure trips are expected to finish 2007 up 2.5 percent over last year.

Travel for business in 2008 is expected to remain stable, increasing by 0.4 percent, registering nearly 502 million trips. This slight increase will offset a projected decline of 1.7 percent in business travel for 2007, compared with a year ago.

International travel (including visitors from Canada and Mexico) to the United States is expected to rise 3.7 percent in 2008 to 55.6 million visitors, following a projected 5.1 percent increase for 2007.

Vacation.com Welcomes Sita World Tours as New Preferred Supplier

Vacation.com, North America's leading travel services marketing organization, has added **SITA World Tours** as a new preferred supplier, providing member agents access to exclusive vacation packages and enhanced commissions to increase profitability. The new agreement is effective for travel beginning Jan. 1, 2008, with bookings currently being accepted.

"Vacation.com constantly seeks out relationships with the industry's top suppliers to expand offerings for our members," said **Steve Tracas**, president and CEO, Vacation.com. "The new agreement with SITA will provide a wide variety of travel products with enhanced commissions for member agents," he added.

"SITA sought out to partner with Vacation.com due to the consortium's well-known strength in both innovation and agency memberships," said **Laudie Hanou**, vice president, SITA World Tours. "We look forward to the season ahead," she added.

Through this agreement, Vacation.com member agents will have access to customized, programs for exotic destinations such as: Africa and the Middle East including Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Jordan, South

Africa; Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific; Asia, including China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indochina; India, Nepal and Bhutan; and South America including Brazil, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Argentina. European and Russian River cruises are also available.

SITA World Tours has been offering unparalleled quality service at the most competitive prices since 1933 for the deluxe and luxury market. Celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2008, SITA is one of the longest established tour operators within North America and is a proud member of the United States Tour Operator Association (USTOA). SITA was recently awarded 'Top Tour Operator to India from the Americas' by the Ministry of Tourism, India as well as named 'One Of Five Top Tour Operators to China' by National Geographic Traveler magazine, in their 20th anniversary edition.

Call SITA at **800-421-5643**, email sita-tours@sitatours.com or visit www.sitatours.com

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Trafalgar Appoints Wiseman as President

Trafalgar Tours announced the appointment of **Paul Wiseman as President**. With more than 20 years experience, Paul comes to us with a very impressive career across all sectors of the travel industry including retail, wholesale, and international and domestic airline operations.

Paul is leaving Australia where he has been Managing Director of that country's Trafalgar Tours. Prior

to Trafalgar Australia; he was General Manager for Contiki Holidays; and before that was Australian National Travel Agency Sales Manager for Avis rent-a-car. His entry into the industry was as a Leisure Travel Agent.

He holds a Masters Degree in Tourism Management from the University of Technology, Sydney, and recently graduated from the Senior Manager Development Program at the Australian Graduate School of Management.

Paul is married with one son, Sam, who is 15 years old. He and his wife Karen (who was born in Los Angeles) are keen travelers and together they have traveled extensively throughout Europe, Great Britain, North America, Asia and the Middle East.

Paul has expressed excitement at taking up this new challenge and looks forward to joining Trafalgar North America - a feeling shared by the team here. Visit www.trafalgar.com



Nigel Osborne Heads Sales and Marketing at Key Tours

Key Tours, a European and Mediterranean tour operator, appointed **Nigel Osborne** as executive vice president effective November 26.

Osborne is responsible for sales and marketing and the retail channel distribution for the company. Key Tours Koray Edemen said the company is well positioned as an FIT and group operator for partner travel agent growth in 2008. With

Osborne's experience in the retail channel, he said, Key Tours will be able to accelerate the product offerings along with the technology to help agents grow their profits and business.

Experience in International Tours

Osborne has served as executive vice president and chief business development officer for **Dynamic Leisure Group** since Oct. 1, 2005. Prior to joining Dynamic Leisure Corporation, he was president of Destination

Europe, the package division of Auto Europe.

Early Days

Previously, he was president of Insight Vacations, where he executed successful turnaround strategies that included tripling annual revenues, reducing expenses, and improving the bottom line by more than \$1 million over a four-year period. He started his career with Trafalgar Tours.

Visit www.keytours.com



Travel Bound Appoints Bray as Regional Rep

Travel Bound appointed **Debra Bray** as business development manager for Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. She joins Travel Bound's team of 13 other business development managers who provide agents with in-house product training and assistance.

With 15 years experience in the travel industry, Bray was most recently with **Continental Airlines**

Vacations/Certified Vacations where she was Regional Sales Manager for the Southwest.

Previously, she worked with **Carlson Wagonlit Travel Place**. Bray has also served as director of training for a large cruise-only agency, a marketing manager, and also an executive travel manager.

"Debra's extensive background in the travel industry will make her a great addition to our sales team and a valuable resource for agents," said Nico Zenner, General

Manager of Travel Bound.

Selling exclusively through travel agents, Travel Bound is a leading wholesale FIT and group tour operator, offering more than 90,000 hotel rooms every night in 110 countries worldwide. A member of GTA (Gullivers Travel Associates), Travel Bound maintains a global network of 31 offices. The company is an active member of ASTA TOP and USTOA consumer protection programs. Call **800-808-9541** or visit www.booktravel

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