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FEBRUARY 2008

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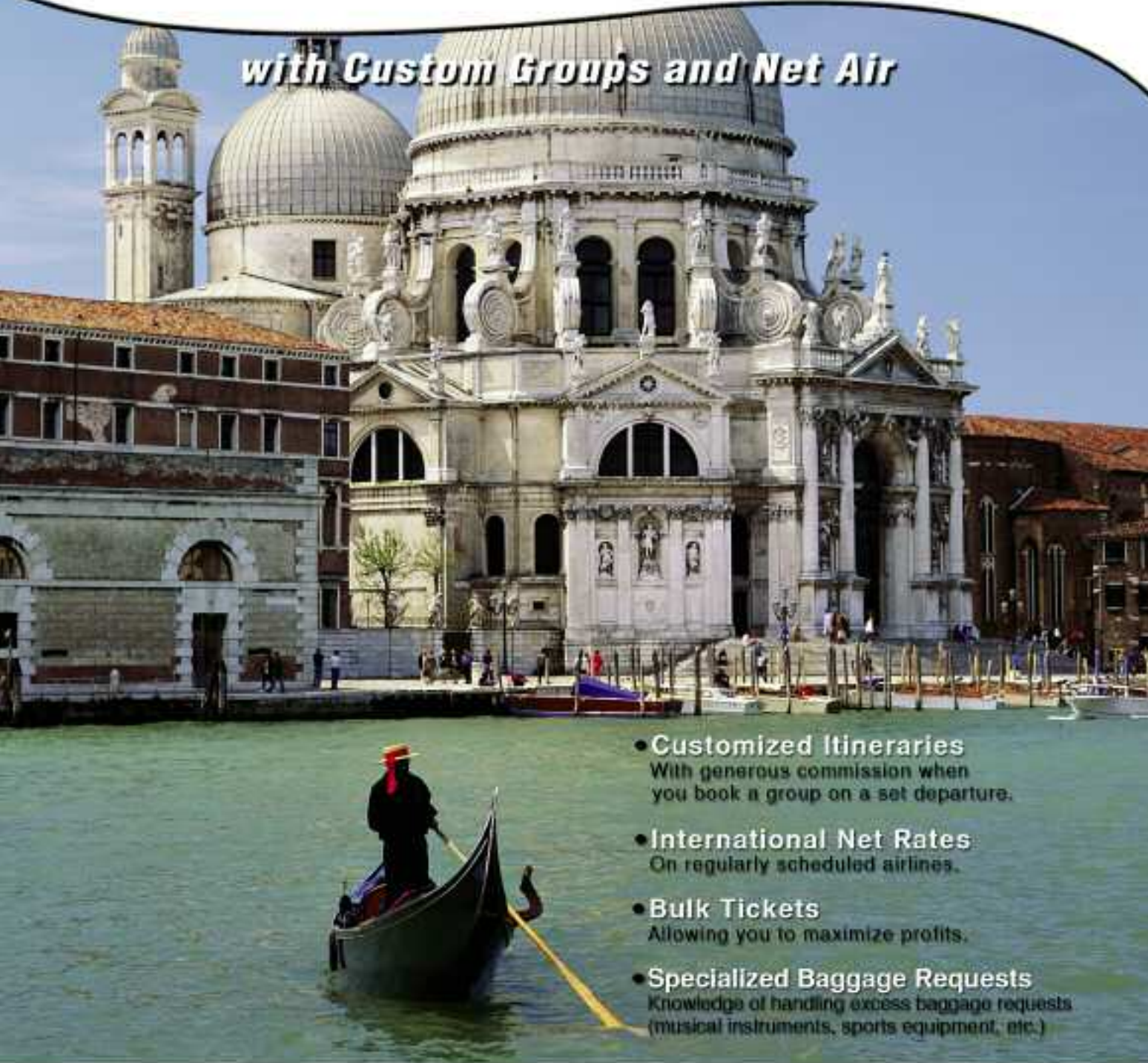
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Smile, You're on Fiji

Fiji

My first trip to Fiji almost 20 years ago was in the wake of a coup, and despite the lack of tourists, the Fijians greeted us with wide welcoming smiles. I recall a full orchestra playing for a handful of guests at the then Regent Hotel and a thunderous rainstorm pelting the rooftop of the old Grand Pacific in Suva, reminding me of Somerset Maugham's short story Rain. Today, a few coups later, the Fijians are...

PUBLISHER'S CORNER

EDITOR'S DESK

SNAPSHOTS

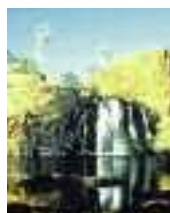
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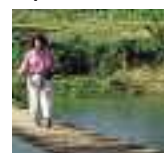
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FRONT COVER: Fiji delivers paradise. *Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau*

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Escaping Old Man Winter

As I write this page, the Northeast is getting hit with an ice storm following the eight inches of snow that fell earlier in the week. Having just returned from the Caribbean Hotel Association's Annual Marketplace in the Bahamas, I can assure you there are warm, sunny places your clients would love to migrate to, if just for a long weekend, this winter.

As I was enjoying the 80-degree temperatures and blue waters I realize that you really have to be there to understand how wonderful it was to read about the snow at home, rather than having to shovel it. This is the picture you need to paint for your clients as concretely as possible, making the Caribbean seem like the obvious option to dark, snowy days.

The good news for your clients (but bad for Caribbean hoteliers) is that there is still space available during the peak travel season. Even February vacation week, usually requiring advance booking, is unusually soft this season. As always, getting airfare at a reasonable price is a challenge. However, with low cost carriers Jetblue and Spirit expanding throughout the region, the cost of airfare to the Caribbean is increasingly competitivewith other warm weather destinations.

Speaking of which, don't dismiss a paradise just because it is a long haul destination. Fiji is this month's cover feature and it offers clients the allure of blue skies, warm water and some of the friendliest people in the world. While some

clients may perceive the South Pacific as being "too far" to travel, the prospect of a completely distinct culture combined with great weather and competitive pricing may be enough to sway their reluctance.

Continued Change and Expansion at JF

This issue of JAX FAX reflects a change back to our roots. The two-in-one magazine concept we initiated last year, while well received by many, was also as misunderstood by many hence the decision to go back to a more traditional format. We have combined our various directories into a "Marketplace" format bringing the information exclusive to JAX FAX readers in a reader friendly format designed to make it easy to locate.

JF's Tour Operator Weekly E-mail Update

Following on the heels of the success of our popular Consolidator Weekly Update introduced earlier this year, we have just launched this week our Tour Operator Weekly Update. Like Consolidator Weekly, Tour Operator Weekly is designed to bring you the very latest offerings from our tour operator partners.

If you are not receiving either of these new E-mail services and would like to, please send an E-mail request to: toursweekly@jafx.com and we will be happy to add you to our list.

Doug Cooke, Publisher

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Seeking: Exchanges with the Next Generation

Last month two trade organizations met to informally share information at a luncheon, and event characteristic of this industry. What may look like socializing or "schmoozing" are significant encounters peppered with information, new and old, innuendo, rumors and leads to ideas, stories or even products.

The North American Airlines Public Relations Association (NAAPRA), now in its 58th year, is comprised of public relations professionals of commercial airlines, established to offer a meeting ground for discussion of common industry situations and problems, and for the exchange of ideas while of course, dancing around any hints of collusion.

Also founded in 1946, is the New York Travel Writers Association (NYTWA), an organization that is comprised of working journalists with a few associate members who are public relations executives, and a short roster of retired, honorary and active out-of-town members.

Weber Shandwick, which represents Singapore Airlines, hosted a full house, and the two organizations reflect indus-

try-wide trends: they are smaller (most carriers have taken their public relations activities in-house or have gone out of business), NAAPRA went from about 80 members to 40; and the NYTWA has gone 85 active members to about 60, many of us now middle aged and older.

While there is nothing wrong with having reached an "experienced" age in an industry that still delights the mind, the soul and the pen, what disturbs many of us is that young reporters are not joining our ranks.

When I do meet younger trade reporters, they seem to feel that the industry began with their own arrival; just once I would love to hear a younger reporter ask a question about the history of the industry or act as if we have something in common.

Sven Lindblad once said, "When my father got into travel, it was a lifestyle, whereas now, it is primarily a business."

While I admire the new generation's obsession with their technological fluency, I would also like to see them sit beside experienced reporters to exchange ideas, keeping our minds and vistas opened to the future.

Maria Lisella, Editor

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Snapshots

THE MONTH IN REVIEW

Tourism Minister and Delegation at CHA Marketplace

At CHA Marketplace in Nassau, Bahamas, Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett hosted a special dinner and press conference at Sandals Royal Bahamas. Left to right: Lionel Reid, Hotelier and Jamaica Tourist Board, (JTB) Board member; Wayne Cummings, President; Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA);



Jamaica's Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett; Carrole Guntley, Director General, Ministry of Tourism; Basil Smith, Director of Tourism, JTB and John Lynch, Chairman, Jamaica Tourist Board.

PATA in New York

Shown at a recent New York Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) meeting held at Diwan Restaurant and hosted by India Tourism from left to right are: Narendra Kothiyal, India Tourism; Ram Chopra, Sans Incredible Vacations; Lisa Shroff, Travelsavers; Jack Maraffi, Chairman, NY PATA and Snar Lyne Khyriem, Director for India Tourism in New York.



Victoria and General Sail Together



Pictured onboard the ship (left to right) are Dick Carpenter, cruise director; Robert Drumm, president of General Tours; Captain Li Long Hai; and Sarah Dai, the ship's operations manager. The group explored

the majesty of the Yangtze River while sailing on the Victoria Anna, the largest, newest and most elaborate vessel in the Victoria Cruises fleet. General Tours works exclusively with Victoria Cruises on all of General Tours' programs that incorporate the Yangtze River. Based in New York, Victoria Cruises established new standards of excellence for sailing China's Yangtze River when its first ship edged out of port in 1994. Since that time, Victoria Cruises has introduced the majesty of the Yangtze River to travelers worldwide.

NY-CTO's Chapter hosted by Travelspan and Guyana

Cultural Association met in New York to celebrate the holidays. Standing from left to right: Abid Merchant, Colonial Travel; Julianna Szuchopa, Colonial Travel; Linda Boyce, L&B Travel; Elaine Henry, Mini-Travel. Seated from left to right, Julian and M. Derene Frazier, DJ Travel; Gloria and Horace Morancie, TATIC; and guest, Monica Sanchez.



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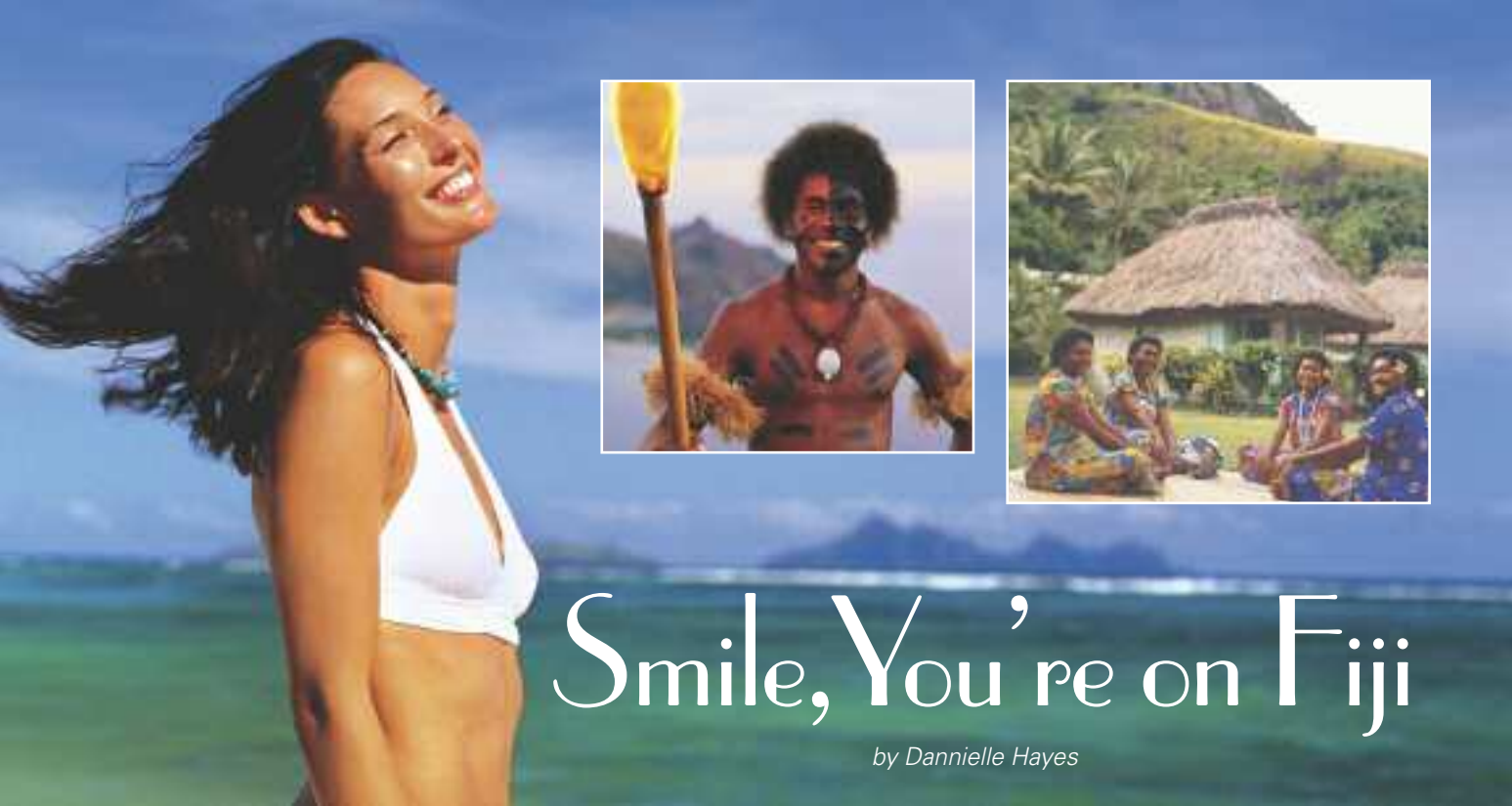
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Smile, You're on Fiji

by Danielle Hayes

My first trip to Fiji almost 20 years ago was in the wake of a coup, and despite the lack of tourists, the Fijians greeted us with wide welcoming smiles. I recall a full orchestra playing for a handful of guests at the then Regent Hotel and a thunderous rainstorm pelting the rooftop of the old Grand Pacific in Suva, reminding me of Somerset Maugham's short story Rain. Today, a few coups later, the Fijians are still smiling and rightly so. Fiji has grown from a traveler's stopover to Australia and New Zealand to a world-class destination, a paradise where anything is possible.

More than 300 islands make up this fabulous archipelago floating in the

South Pacific blue, though most of them are uninhabited. The largest island, Vitu Levu boasts much of the resort development like the Coral Coast, Pacific Harbor, and the Nadi area including Denarau Island. To the north, the second and third largest islands, Vanua Levu and Taveuni are known for their smaller more intimate resorts with spectacular diving reefs. The Kadavu Group, Fiji's fourth largest, lies about 60 miles south of Vitu Levu and is also great for divers. The Mamanuca and Yasawa Islands are peppered with backpacker resorts as well as a number of five-star properties. The outer islands including the Lau Group midway between Fiji and Tonga offer a back to nature experience only for the most adventurous.

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The heart of this adult-only luxury resort is a traditional Fijian canoe house which houses the Fijiana restaurant, lounge bar, private function room, guest lounge, wine cellar and wireless "hotspot" access. A gymnasium, day spa and infinity pool enhance the magic of Likuliku, which can be

CRUISE the Islands of FIJI

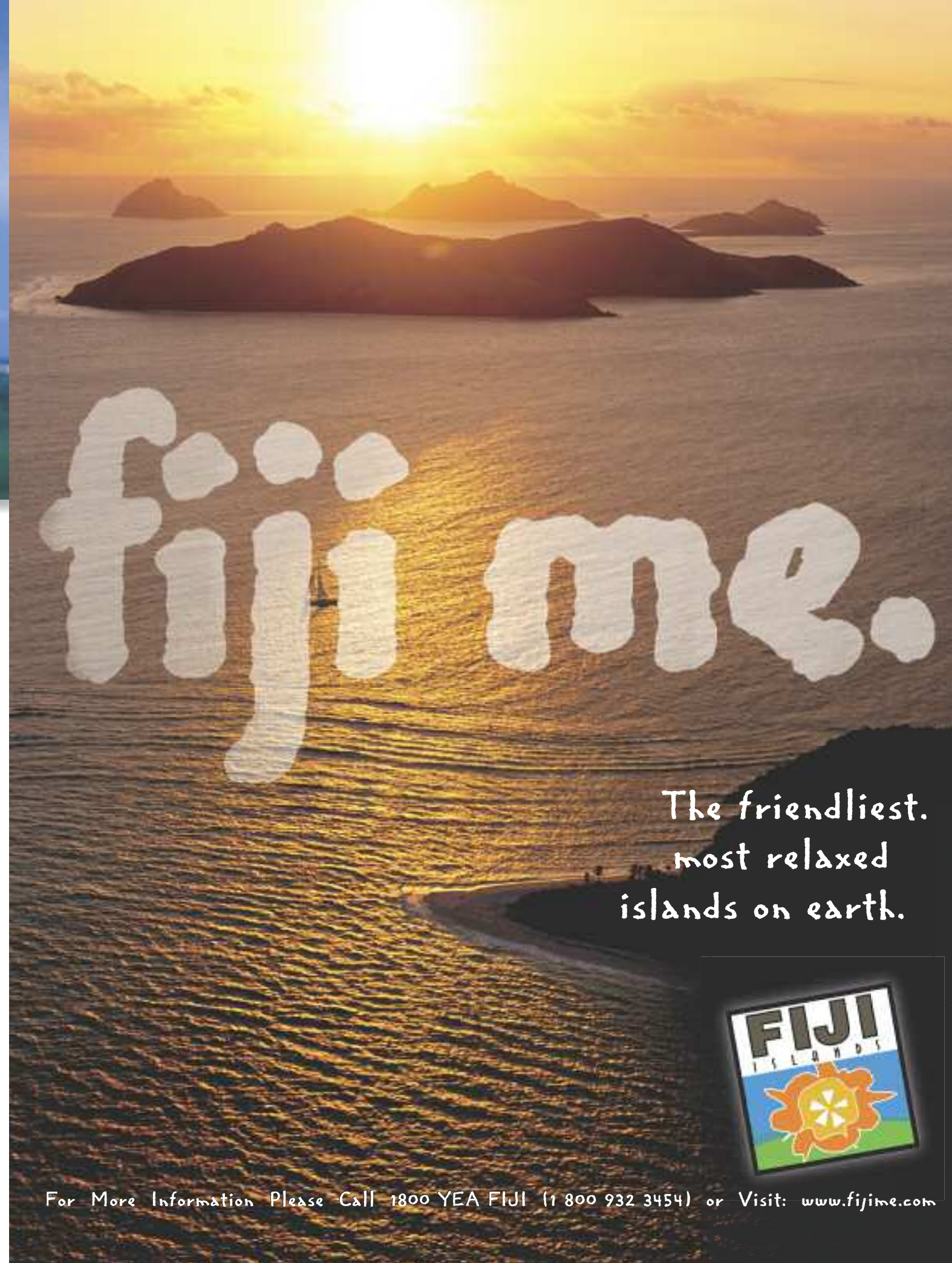
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For more family fun, **Tia's Treehouse** at Malolo Island Resort (**www.maloloisland.com**) is where it all happens for junior guests. Easily reached from Nadi International Airport by seaplane or fast catamaran, the intimate 4-star Malolo

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els, will announce in its January, 2008 issue the results of its 2008 Reader's Choice Awards. Avid readers awarded Fiji Second Place in the "Healthiest Marine Environment" category and "Top Five" in "Dive Destinations," "Top Marine Life," "Top Macro Life," "Top Beginner Diving," "Top Shore Diving," "Top Value," and "Top Underwater Photography." The Pacific island nation was also named to the magazine's "Top Ten" Advanced Dive Destinations.

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*Terms and Conditions: Prices are per person in U.S. based on double occupancy flying economy class on Air Pacific from Los Angeles. All other taxes and fees are available. Please visit "Fiji" and valid until June 30, 2009. Prices are subject to change at time of booking. Prices that change their price as a result of low inventory and/or fuel surcharges. Prices may differ when you travel and are not guaranteed and are provided as a service. Please call for our current prices, discounts, taxes and government fees of up to \$400, including September 11th Security Fee, for additional. Seats are limited and may not be available on every flight. Special packages may apply. Details subject to availability. Single prices available, call for details. Government penalties and other restrictions apply. ©2008 Jetabout Island Vacations.



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is one of the few resorts owned by a Fijian family. Comprised of just 49 bures, all with ocean views and steps from the sandy beach, the resort has three restaurants including a beach bar, a large buffet-style restaurant and Tree Tops for fine dining. There are two swimming pools, one for families, the other for adults only, as is the new Talei Lounge with internet connections. Tia's Treehouse is complimentary for children 4-12 years and their nature-based excursions aim to educate children in the Fijian way of life, including Fijian language lessons.

Along Vitu Levu's Coral Coast, there are a number of large hotel properties accommodating all ages. The **Shangri-La's Fijian Resort** (www.shangri-la.com) located on Yanuca Island but connected to the mainland by a concourse, is surrounded by white sand beaches, blue lagoons and swaying palms. The Fijian has 436 guest rooms with family facilities and suites, as well as six new beach bures for couples only that include private golf buggy and butler service. There is a wedding chapel, a new spa facility called Chi and no less than five restaurants and three bars to tempt guests' appetites.

Closer to Nadi International Airport on Denarau Island, is **Accor Asia Pacific's 296-room Sofitel Fiji Resort and Spa** (www.sofitelfiji.com.fj) features special family rooms, conference area for 720 guests, banquet facilities for 640 guests, a charming wedding chapel, and the Mandara Spa, one of Fiji's best. For the ultimate in privacy, **Sofitel's Vomo Island Resort** (www.vomofiji.com) is a 15-minute flight from Denarau Harbor and boasts 29 luxurious beachfront and hillside villas, perfect for honeymooners.

Cruise Voyages

For those who love to explore some of the lesser known Fijian islands, consider a voyage aboard **Blue Lagoon Cruises** or the Tui Tai. Blue Lagoon (www.bluelagooncruises.com) offers a wide variety of luxury boutique cruises ranging from a three-day/two-night Fiji Island Club Cruise to a seven-day Live Aboard Dive Cruise to a seven-day/six-night Historical and Cultural Dateline Cruise. The latter trip ventures off the beaten track to the international dateline and the northeast tip of the Fijian Islands, so guests experience three different cultures; Melanesian,



Micronesian and Polynesian. There are only three of these special cruises per year led by a professor of Pacific history. Blue Lagoon also offers combo packages in cooperation with Likuliku, Malolo and Navutu Stars Resorts and special romance packages for weddings, honeymoons and anniversaries.

In a more relaxed style, the **Tui Tai** (www.tuitai.com) is a 140-foot schooner ferry with a complete makeover using traditional furnishings and local hardwoods. Based in Savusavu on Vanua Levu, the Tui Tai has 12 spacious double staterooms, sundeck and indoor bars, dining area, spa, daybeds and delicious fresh cuisine. "Romancing the Stone" is their special 10-night honeymoon package.

Activities Beyond Romance

Fiji is famous for things to do and see. Visitors can snorkel over shallow reefs close to shore or scuba dive in some of the world's most spectacular underwater reserves with over 1000 species of fish and coral. How about a trek in the tropical rainforests or exploring limestone caves?

Swimming or rafting in crystal clear rivers is perfect on a hot day or maybe a safari into the highlands to visit remote villages to partake in a traditional kava ceremony with the local chief. From the Coral Coast and Nadi hotels, families or agents can book a day trip with **Adventures in Paradise** (www.adventuresinparadisefiji.com). This small Fiji-owned company offers two fantastic tours, one to visit a legendary waterfall and the other to visit the awesome Naihehe Caves. Both tours are excellent and include AC

hotel transfers, a visit to the village chief with kava ceremony, tour guides, lunch, beer, soft drinks and water. Children under five years are free and wholesale rates per adult from Nadi resorts are \$67 and from Coral Coast resorts rates are \$56.

There is also Suva, Fiji's capital city to explore with maybe some shopping for local crafts. But whatever your clients choose to do or wherever they choose to stay on this island paradise, I guarantee that they'll be greeted with a big Fijian "Bula" welcome and a wide pearly-white smile – what could be better for business.

Getting There

American travelers arrive to Nadi International Airport on Vitu Levu aboard either **Air Pacific**, (www.airpacific.com), which has four non-stop flights out of Los Angeles or **Air New Zealand**, (www.airnewzealand.com) which flies once weekly from Los Angeles. Flight time is ten hours from Los Angeles to Fiji, but once you arrive and relax into Fiji time you'll wonder why you hadn't explored these islands before. Romantic honeymoons, family fun vacations, golf, diving or surfing tours, island cruising, incentive travel, conferencing facilities Fiji has them all.

For more information, contact the Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau call 310-568-1616; fax 310-670-2318; E-mail: infodesk@bulafiji-americas.com; or visit www.fijime.com, www.bulafijinow.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Fiji see page 89 of the Listings Section



Interview with Ili Matatolu, Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau, Regional Director

The 333 islands that comprise Fiji

continue to have an elan because of its beauty, remoteness and image of the definitive "get away from it all" destination. Ili Matatolu advises agents on getting their clients to experience paradise on earth.

Why should travel agents send their clients to your destination?

This is a truly relaxing destination for all ages and experiences, a great value for money with one U.S. dollar buying FJD 1.55, a wide range of accommodations and vacation experiences, adventure travel options, and daily flights from LA...not to mention 300 islands from which to choose.

Are there any new attractions for travel agents to pitch to their clients?

Among the latest options and attractions are: whitewater rafting down Navua River with Rivers Fiji, Jet skiing in what we call our adventure capital – Pacific Harbour, kite surfing in Nananuira; surfing the Frigate's Passage, diving at the world's third largest reef ecosystem in the Great Astrolabe Reef in Kadavu, or visiting our cultured black pearl farm in Savusavu. Culturally, clients can spend a full day at the Arts Village in Pacific Harbour to discover more about Fijian culture and legends.

Any new accommodations?

We have brand new properties like the **Radisson Resort Fiji Denarau Island**, over-the-water bungalow **Likuliku Lagoon Resort** on Malolo Island in the Mamanucas, **Fiji Beach Resort and Spa** managed by Hilton; **Pure Fiji Spa** in the heart of Suva (Fiji's capital city) or the **Bebe Spa** at the **Outrigger Reef Fiji Resort and Spa**.

Any new air service to report on?

Daily service is available from Los Angeles with codeshare between Air Pacific and Air New Zealand

What do you consider your destination's best selling point?

It is the most relaxed destination with the friendliest people in the world



– and that is not an exaggeration.

How can travel agents learn more about your destination?

Agents can join our Destination Loyalty Program called the Fiji Matai Program where agents can gain in-depth knowledge on Fiji and boost their sales and revenue by registering for our program at <http://www.bulafijinow.com/mataiagent/testingcenter.asp>

Can you give us a description of clients that visit your country?

About 80% of our visitors are from the west coast while the numbers from the East coast are growing; only 9% of our visitors are families, but this segment is also growing. The majority of our arrivals are couples, 71% for rest and relaxation, 14% weddings and honeymoon with dive market providing 9% of U.S. traffic.

Tell us about some of your new marketing campaigns for 2008?

Consolidating our efforts to the west coast using the 80:20 principle, focusing on our key segments of weddings and honeymoon, dive, luxury/leisure market - our branding will be driven by our new FIJI ME brand positioning across our communications strategy.

We will also focus on public relations to assist our marketing goals - also

looking at Web 2.0 like podcasting to reach more consumers and make use of market trends in particular how consumers are accessing information

How many Americans visited in 2007 compared to 2006 and what are your goals for the next five years?

We had a target of 71,000 from North America - our provisional stats for 2007 are not yet available, but don't think we achieved that for several reasons including our budgets and resources and the overall slowing down of the economy. Our goal for 2008 is to maximize our opportunities from this market in line with our available resources - in particular, focusing on smart partnerships.

Any trends agents should watch?

We are seeing a wider range of luxury, adventure experiences and international award-winning resorts to open in Fiji like **Marriott**, **InterContinental**, and **Accor**.

What is the impression you would like visitors to take home?

That Fiji delivered and exceeded their expectations of a truly relaxing and life changing holiday experience and they will definitely return with family and friends as its so accessible from the west coast.

Visit www.FijiMe.com

Driving Business DownUnder



Do your clients like to plan ahead? If you have trained your clients well, they are savvy travelers who know they can save big on vacations with this year's trips available at this last year's prices in some cases. With the dollar fluctuating, and travel costs around the globe rising, it's still possible to secure a 2008 vacation to Australia or New Zealand at 2007 prices. And wouldn't your clients love you all the more if they can spend that savings on a night in a luxurious Outback resort rather than spend that extra money – sometimes an increase of 10% a year.

Australia is a vast and diversified country where visitors can tour vineyards set among dun-colored hills and drive cattle across a dusty trail. Your clients can dive over the legendary Great Barrier Reef or strap on skis to tackle a "beaut" slope in Tasmania.

"Travel costs are rising and global currencies are fluctuating, and this can mean higher prices for the average traveler," says John Parker, CEO Fresh Tracks Travel. "Rather than limiting the availability of packages offered for next year while new prices are configured, Fresh Tracks wants to encourage people to book ahead – and by offering some of next year's packages at this year's rates, we're giving the incentive to do so."

On applicable classic packages, the savings can be up to

\$1,000 a couple. The Australian Cities by Rail is a popular train vacation combining Australia's favorite cities (Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, and Melbourne) with landscapes and activities accessible only by train. Two people could save \$600 on their 2008 vacation.

High-end travelers interested in more luxurious packages can save even more by making the savvy decision to book sooner rather than later. The Red Center, Rainforest and Reef is an inclusive resort tour of the most scenic regions of the country from the Coast to the Outback, and couples will save more than \$1,200 without sacrificing comfort or style.

Even short city-breaks and add-on packages feature great savings, with special offers on mini-breaks to cities and beyond. A four-night adventure such as the Outback National Parks Safari costs \$2,543 today, but with typical inflation and currency changes it could rise to nearly \$2,800 for dates in 2009.

Visit www.freshtracks.com

Driving on their Own DownUnder

At Goway Travel, a leading North American wholesaler, self-drive programs are gaining popularity and as such have been expanded to more than 160 pre-planned itineraries for

2008. All travelers on Goway's pre-set self-drive itineraries also receive a special co-pilot backpack which includes their detailed itinerary, maps and guides

"A self-drive vacation is the perfect opportunity to really get to know the destination and of course the friendly Aussie and Kiwis", commented Emma Cottis, Product and Marketing Manager of Goway Travel. "We plan tours for all styles of travelers, from motel accommodation to a farm stay or bed & breakfast to upmarket boutique accommodations. Because everything is booked in advance, travelers can relax and enjoy the scenery and attractions enroute." One of Goway's most popular Australian self-drive itineraries is the Pacific Coast Explorer priced from \$1,815 per person double. Travelers can choose from 7, 9 or 14-day duration in economy or first class accommodations.

Also gaining popularity is the 5-day Sydney to Melbourne Coastal Drive. Incorporating sleepy fishing villages, spectacular coastal scenery and National Parks, this itinerary offers the opportunity to meet local Aussies and see some of Australia's picturesque landscapes and can be combined with other self drives or other destinations in Australia.

Call 800-387-8850; info@goway.com; www.goway.com

Railing Across Aussieland

Australia's signature trains cover the length and breadth of the country, offering a truly premium train experience. They are a satisfying way to explore this sprawling land, offering comfortable compartments, elegant dining cars and convivial lounge cars. Even their names conjure images of exciting adventures: "The Indian Pacific," "The Sunlander" and "The Ghan." Clients can try one or sample all three, with new packages available from Experience Australia, the newest travel

division of The Great Canadian Travel Company Ltd.

Travelers may choose point-to-point fares for single journeys or choose from a variety of passes ranging from a 15- to 22-day "all system" pass allowing unlimited travel throughout the network, to "route passes" valid for travel on a single east-coast route over a six-month period.

The Indian Pacific: spans Australia from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, from Sydney to Perth, covering 2,704 miles, including the longest stretch of straight track in the world—297 miles through the Nullarbor Plain. As it travels ocean-to-ocean, "The Indian Pacific" passes through the Blue Mountains, the rugged Outback and the historic town of Broken Hill. Prices range from Red Seat \$629 to Red Cabin \$1,219 and Gold Cabin \$1,649. The Sunlander runs between Brisbane and Cairns, this delightful two-day journey provides a leisurely passage to tropical Queensland. Relax as the train weaves its way north to Cairns, where rain forest meets the barrier reef. Prices range from Economy Seat \$199, First Class Berth \$379, The Queenslander \$689.

When the Ghan train first departed from Adelaide to Alice Springs, it was always intended that the rail line continue to the port city of Darwin. Now, some 70 years later, the journey takes travelers through the heart of the continent. Two nights are spent on board this twice-weekly train, with the option to stop over in Alice Springs for a few days and experience the true Australian Outback. Prices range from Red Seat at \$639 to Red Cabin \$1,279 or Gold Cabin \$1,769.

Call 800-661-3830; www.experience-australia.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Australia see page 87 of the Listings Section

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BEST BUYS

\$2085 FIJI Blue Lagoon's seven-day/six-night Gold Club standard cruises offer a very limited opportunity to join a team of international anthropologists visiting the largely uncharted reaches comprising Fiji's remote north-eastern tip. The area is the only place on earth where travelers can see all three of the Pacific Ocean's distinct cultural groupings - Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian - living together. Itinerary highlights include Kioa Island. The cruise will also visit the 4,000 Micronesian Banabans. Prices start from \$2,085 per person double inclusive all meals, all onboard entertainment, cultural activities and shore excursions, taxes, fuel surcharges. The Historical & Cultural Date-line Cruises' will depart the cruise company's home port in Lautoka, Fiji Islands on February 18, May 19, August 18 and November 17, 2008.

Blue Lagoon also offers, a "pay a three-night Gold Club Cruise and book a six-night Gold Club cruise". Booking code 6FOR3NA08 must be quoted at time of reservation. Prices begin at \$1,266 per person double when booked by Feb. 29, 2008, travel must be completed by March 31. Normal contract rates and conditions apply.

E-mail: reservations@blc.com.fj or marie@bluelagoon.com; or visit www.bluelagooncruises.com

\$10K ASIA This history-rich excursion from **Adventure Life Voyages** is a 25-day, multi-country trip with nine days spent at sea. Port stops in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Kobe and Jeju Island afford numerous opportunities to soak up the area museums and historical sites.

Nearly two full weeks are spent exploring the bustling cosmopolitan city of Ho Chi Minh, Tonle Sap Lake, Temples at Angkor, Phnom Penh and Hanoi. This is the ultimate Asia experience, with opportunities to explore battlegrounds of the Vietnam War, visit the History Museum and the former President's Palace in Hanoi, venture to the extraordinary Buddhist Nanputao Temple, visit the Biosphere Reserve at

Seogwipo, tour the Atomic Bomb Museum, Peace Park and Peace Memorial Museum, and meander the classical gardens of Suzhou in Shanghai. Prices cover taxes, port charges, fees and on-board services and vary from \$10,549-\$20,999, depending on cabin type. Departures are Nov. 10 and 18, 2008.

Call 800-344-6118; www.alvoyages.com

\$500 MALDIVES Located in North Male' Atoll and accessible by a 50-minute One&Only luxury yacht transfer, **One&Only Reethi Rah** is one of the largest resort islands in the Maldives, featuring 130 spacious villas, 40 swimming pools and 12 pristine beaches. In honor of St. Valentine's Day, One&Only Reethi Rah is offering couples one complimentary Anjara necklace per couple, after booking one of the resort's luxury Valentine's dining experiences on February 14, 2008. "The Night of Gastronomy" starts at \$500 per person, including eight courses of the finest gourmet dishes matched with premium wines. The sandbank dinner starts at \$2,700, including wines and champagnes.

Visit www.oneandonlyresorts.com

\$5999 NEW ZEALAND Active Downunder's "Southern Secrets and Seascapes" combines iconic South Island attractions with off-the-beaten-path excursions leading you deep into the stunning natural surroundings of New Zealand - spanning its towering peaks, golden beaches, pristine fiords, rivers and vineyards.

Starting in Dunedin, visitors can immerse themselves in the ongoing conservation efforts underway at Penguin Place and Royal Albatross, then spend a day on foot or bike exploring the historic Otago Central Rail Trail. Participants can hop aboard a pontoon boat for a relaxing cruise down the Clutha River with commentary from a guide about 1860s mining history as visitors meander through the Roxburgh Gorge. Southern Secrets and Seascapes' packages start at \$5,999 per person double, including interna-



tional airfare from California, and include: 14 nights' accommodation; 14 days' car rental; daily breakfasts and four dinners.

Call 800-425-9036; or visit www.active-downunder.com

\$3500 SOUTHEAST ASIA Tour East Holidays, Canada's largest provider of Asian vacations takes you to Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand, all in 5-star comfort, on a 13-day, five-Star Indochina excursion that reveals all the wonders of that emerging part of Asia for \$3,500. Visitors crawl in the same tunnels where Vietcong warriors hid out from American forces. The Cu Chi tunnel network just outside Ho Chi Minh City has become a major tourist attraction and amazes visitors with their cramped size and intricate design. While in Ho Chi Minh City visitors will experience the world-famous Cai-Be floating market for a taste of everyday Vietnamese life. In Cambodia, participants trek to the remote temples of Angkor Wat.

Visit www.toutheastholidays.com

\$695 AUSTRALIA Springboard is among the fastest growing travel companies to Australia and the South Pacific. Springboard Vacations is selling a seven-day package to the land Down Under starting from \$695 per person double. Daydream Island plus Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane includes four nights on Daydream Island Resort & Spa, Great Barrier Reef cruise and two nights wither Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane. The price includes breakfast daily, a Great Barrier Reef Adventure Cruise, transfers, two nights' accommodation in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane, and 24-hour emergency contact service; the package valid for travel through March 31, 2008.

Call 866-447-7746; E-mail info@springboardvacations.com; www.springboardvacations.com

IN THE NEWS

Celebrate Lenten Season in the Philippines

In conjunction with **Regina Tours**, the nation's largest Catholic tour operator, the **Philippine Department of Tourism** (PDOT) is pleased to announce the country's inaugural religious pilgrimage highlighting the adaptation of Christ's life in religious re-enactments from sunrise to sundown, starting on Palm Sunday and culminating on Easter Sunday-March 15 - 24, 2008.

The program highlights two important events: the Lenten Rites and the three-hour 'Vigil of the Resurrection' theatrical stage presentation in Angono, Rizal. Participants will begin the journey with a Palm Sunday Mass at the Chapel of the Last Supper in Cebu, the cradle of Christianity and the oldest city in the Philippines. Travelers will visit the treasured relic featuring a life-sized carving of the Lord Jesus and his 12 apostles dating back to 1601, and explore Cebu's rich history and sacred churches. On the return trip to Manila, the tour stops at the Angono Petroglyphs, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating back 5,000 years.

Rates start at \$2,825 per person, based on double occupancy accommodations and 10-14 tour participants traveling from Los Angeles or San Francisco. Airport taxes/ Fee not included. All major gateways are available, with rates ranging from \$2,919 per person to \$3,219 per person. Single rooms are available for a single supplement charge of \$495.

Call Regina Tours at 800-465-9276, or Pacific Asia Leisure 212-661-3270 or Asian Pacific Travel 201-501-8388.

For information on the Philippines, visit www.experiencephilippines.ph or call 212-575-7915

Virgin's Nonstop to Mauritius

Virgin Atlantic Airways launched its first non-stop service between London Heathrow and Mauritius. The services will be operated by an Airbus A340-300 with 240 seats onboard - 34 Upper Class, 35 Premium Economy and 171 Economy. Services between London Heathrow and Mauritius will operate twice a week on Fridays and Sundays from Heathrow and Saturdays and Mondays from Mauritius.

Visit www.virginatlantic.com

Incheon Wins Accolades

For the second year in a row, **Korea's Incheon International Airport** has been named "Best Airport Worldwide" by the Airports Council International (ACI) at their recent Airport Service Quality Awards presentation. ACI reported that frequent flyers want a swift, hassle-free airport experience.

Visit www.airport.or.kr/eng/airport/

Aussie Adventures Offers Free Air

To celebrate the March opening of Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island, Australia's first "Super Lodge," Australian wholesaler **Aussie Adventures** is offering free airfare from Adelaide to Kingscote for stays of three or more nights representing more than \$500 in savings. This offer is in addition to the Three-Night Bonus Offer that includes a bottle of Champagne upon arrival, a full day private island wildlife tour (a \$1,400 value) and a \$100 per person Spa voucher.

The offer applies to bookings confirmed & deposited between Feb. 1-March 31, 2008; travel must be completed between March 28 and May 31; rates start from \$1,700 per night with gourmet breakfast, light lunch, a four-course dinner with daily menu, selected alcoholic and all non alcoholic beverages, island airport transfers and exceptional guided adventures and experiences.

Call 866-828-7743; www.aussie-adventures.com

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

India has emerged the number one travel destination in the Conde Nast Traveler magazine's 2007 Travel Awards 2007, confirmed 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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Great Canadian Rail Journeys

It's been said that the most spectacular North American Rail Journeys are in Canada. And it's true. The excitement of traveling across Canada by train is matched only by the spectacular scenery that highlights the routes.

Exclusively Canada Ltd has created a portfolio of over 100 rail vacation packages for Independent Travelers seeking the romance of the great trains. Fully commissionable to agents, the itineraries feature VIA Rail, Rocky Mountaineer and the historic Royal Canadian Pacific on itineraries ranging from 3 to 28 days in length.

VIA Rail from Coast to Coast.

Operating year round from the Atlantic to the Pacific, **VIA Rail** brings back the romance of the historic **Canadian Pacific Railroad**, built over 150 years ago to guarantee the confederation of Canada. Agents can earn up to 12% commissions on rail packages that start in Halifax and wind their way across the Canadian mosaic with stops in Quebec City Montreal, Toronto and Jasper before finally reaching Vancouver and the Pacific Ocean (Canadian Cities by Rail-Coast to Coast-14 days or A Tale of Two Trains –See Canada in a week). The world famous Canadian provides superb Silver & Blue class service complete with fine dining, private bedrooms and spectacular dome car viewing. Shorter itineraries start in Toronto and include Niagara Falls and several days in the majestic Canadian Rockies before arriving in Vancouver. Great adventure rail packages start in Winnipeg and travel north to Churchill Manitoba for the Polar Bear and Beluga whale viewing (Polar Bears of Churchill with VIA Rail – 7 days).

New: Rail and Cruise Vacations

Exclusively Canada has recently launched a series of Rail and Cruise itineraries that combine the leisurely pace of a relaxing cruise with the romantic excitement of a rail journey. Atlantic Canada Rail & Cruise Sojourn is a 13-day itinerary that combines a spectacular 7-day cruise along the

shores of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland with a romantic rail journey to Toronto. Other packages combine VIA Rail and 3-7 day cruises on the mighty St. Lawrence River.

"We are delighted to be the first company to introduce this wonderful mix of rail and cruise products" said Shannon Wilkinson, Vice President of Marketing for Exclusively Canada. "This will give Travel Agents a unique new product to sell to discerning clients and be well rewarded for their professional travel expertise."

The Canadian Rockies

For the third consecutive year, Rocky Mountaineer Vacations has been presented the prestigious "Worlds Leading Travel Experience" award. Utilizing the four spectacular routes of the Rocky Mountaineer, Exclusively Canada has created a delightful series of itineraries which include the two day journeys between Vancouver and Jasper or Banff and Vancouver, Whistler and Jasper. Each vacation package offers a variety of included destinations, features and accommodation categories in the Canadian Rockies as well as the choice of either RedLeaf or GoldLeaf service on the Rocky Mountaineer.

In 2008, new series of Rail and Cruise itineraries including the 14-day Canadian Rail Panorama and Alaska Cruise have been created. Alaska cruise options include Cruise West, Holland America, Regent Seven Seas, and the private yachts of American Safari Cruises.

Ultimate of "Luxury on the Rails"

Exclusively Canada is a proud to feature Luxury vacation packages incorporating the majestic Royal Canadian Pacific train. Available to only 32 pampered guests per departure, the train is often recognized as the Canadian "Orient Express". Itineraries are as unique as they are they are select and feature on and off-board activities like Gourmet Cooking, Wine Tasting, Fly-Fishing and Golf while traveling through the spec-



tacular Canadian Rockies (Royal Club-house Golf Excursion-Royal Canadian Pacific Train -6 days).

Combination Train Tours

For those who truly love trains, Exclusively Canada has created a series of combination vacation packages which combine two or more of Canada's great trains. Travel across Canada on VIA Rail and relive the fun and romance of overnight train travel. Then, see the Canadian Rockies by day on the Rocky Mountaineer (Trains of Canada Rail Adventure – 12 days). Exceptional onboard service combined with unsurpassed viewing opportunities make any journey on Rocky Mountaineer Vacations an experience to remember for ever. Combination packages range from 8 to 22 days.

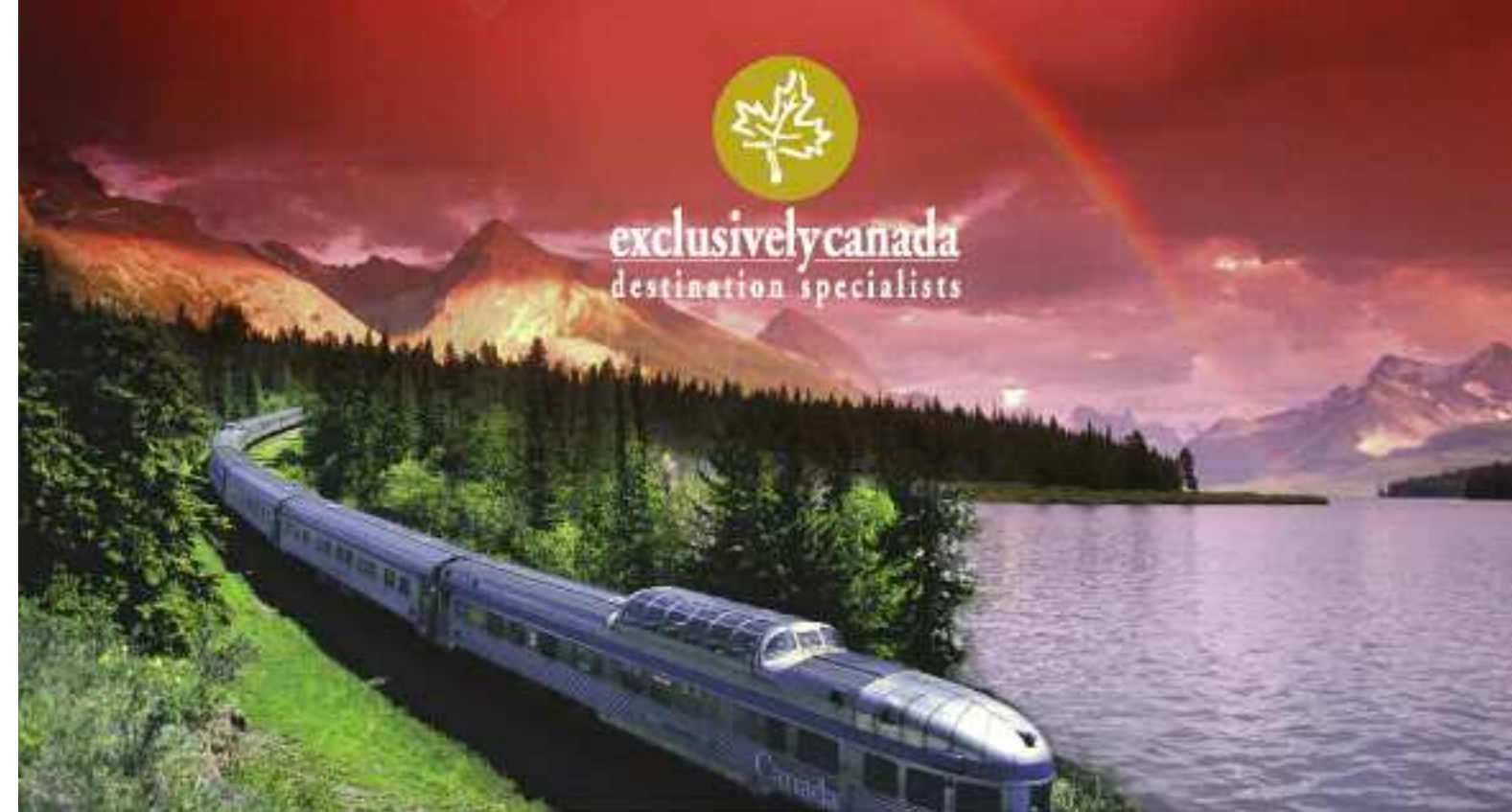
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\$395 COLORADO Spend five nights nestled among two of Colorado's Fourteeners at the **Dunton Hot Springs**. Delight in a welcome bottle of wine, two full days of guided activity adventures, three spa treatments, three meals daily including a private dinner served in cabin and endless use of the Denton Hot Springs. The package rate is \$6,800 per couple.

Call 970-882-4800; www.duntonhotsprings.com

Reconnect at the **Chipeta Sun Lodge & Spa** with the "Colorado Winter Romance Package" which includes two nights in a romantic deluxe room, where couples can unwind in a hot tub on a private balcony with breathtaking views of the San Juan Mountains. Enjoy a soothing couple's massage at the Chipeta Spa (with plush spa robes to keep), two passes to the Orvis Hot Springs and dinner at Ashe Restaurant, where guests will receive gourmet truffles, a bottle of Colorado wine from Grand View winery and a bouquet of fresh flowers. The package rate is \$725, double.

Call 800-633-5838; www.chipeta.com

Add some adrenaline to your relationship with the White-water Wine-N-Dine package from **Echo Canyon River Expeditions** and **Four Corners Rafting**. This package includes a full day raft trip, one night accommodations at a Victorian bed and breakfast, and dinner at a delightful French restaurant. The package rate is \$395 per couple, available April 15-September 15, 2008.

Call 800-748-2953; www.raftecho.com

\$259 NEW YORK The **Milford Plaza** hotel is selling a winter package for stranded New York City travelers. The "Beat the Blizzard" package, available any night six or more inches of snow accumulates in New York City, will provide guests with an affordably snug escape from the weather. Priced from \$259, the package includes accommodations and a coupon for a medium hot chocolate at the Chock Full o'Nuts Coffee Kiosk in the hotel's lobby.

Call 800-221-2690; E-mail reservations@milfordplaza.com; www.milfordplaza.com

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Indian tour operator SANS Incredible Vacations announces comprehensive fam tours for travel agents beginning in March 2008. Fam tours will be priced from \$1599 including round-trip air on major carriers from US & Canadian gateways. Two one-week options are offered: The Gold Fam includes Delhi-Agra-Ranthambore-Jaipur and the Green Fam covers Mumbai-Kochi-Periyar-Kumarakom. Combinations and extensions available. SANS Incredible Vacations: 212-695-1005 sans@sansincrediblevacations.com

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

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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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WORLDWIDE CRUISES

Antarctica, Cruise in Style to the White Continent

by Jonathan Siskin

A cruise to Antarctica is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that sails to the world's last great wilderness. Much of the White Continent has never been explored, and clients who cruise here will be among a select group of travelers since only 200,000 people have ever visited this distant, otherworldly place of breathtaking beauty and incomparable wildlife. One of the finest upscale expedition vessels currently sailing to Antarctica is the **MS Bremen**, a member of the four ship fleet of **Hapag-Lloyd Cruises** that offers itineraries to the White Continent every year from mid November to early February, the only time of year when it's possible to cruise here. Equipped with an ice-hardened hull and carrying a maximum of 164 passengers, the Bremen has a long track record of successfully navigating the world's most remote regions from Antarctica to the Arctic Circle to the Canadian Arctic and West Greenland.

I was a passenger aboard the Bremen this past November on a 17 day Antarctica cruise departing out of Buenos Aires Argentina and concluding in Ushuaia, Argentina. En route to Antarctica the ship called at ports on the coast of Argentina and Chile and sailed through the Beagle Channel named after the ship that Charles Darwin was aboard during his explorations of South America in 1832. The Bremen also cruised through the Magellan Strait, the narrow passageway connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans discovered in 1520 by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan during his attempt to be the first to circumnavigate the globe. Our last land sighting was Cape Horn before we set sail across the Drake Passage named after Sir Francis Drake that has a well deserved reputation for turbulent seas with waves that can reach 30 to 40 feet high. Fortunately our crossing was not as rough as expected, and two days later we spotted the first icebergs signaling our arrival in Antarctica.

Everything about Antarctica is gigantic, and a few facts reveal the vast dimensions of the White Continent which is 1.5 times the size of North America. It encompasses an area of 13 million square kilometers of compressed snow and ice that has accumulated over millions of years and in some places is almost three miles thick. It also contains 90% of the earth's ice and 70% of its fresh water.

The highlights of an Antarctica cruise are daily excursions off the ship in Zodiacs, rugged inflatable rafts developed by Jacques Cousteau that take you within touching distance of icebergs the size of cathedrals and alongside the steep walls of mammoth glaciers. The Bremen's itineraries are carefully planned to maximize the expedition experience as Zodiacs make landings at beaches and other remote sections of coastline where colonies of penguins—some as large as 300,000—await along with other populations of wildlife including elephant seals, fur seals, sea lions, alba-



ross, and petrels. Penguins are unruffled by contact with humans as they waddle by and pose for photographs. While the summer months are reasonably mild—during my cruise it occasionally warmed up to more than 40 degrees during the day—penguins must survive the world's most inhospitable winters during which the sun never rises and fierce storms send temperatures plummeting as low as 50 degrees below zero.

Besides landing onshore, there are also zodiac excursions that transport guests amidst icebergs and up close to glaciers while looking for orcas and other species of whales that spend their summers here. One of the most memorable excursions is in magnificent Paradise Bay where you drift past icebergs of every shape and size and often encounter penguins and seals floating by on chunks of ice.

Creature Comforts onboard the Bremen

While en route to Antarctica and back, guests cruise in style and comfort aboard a four star ship known for its deluxe amenities and high level of service. Spacious 194 square foot staterooms (exceptionally large for an expedition ship) are furnished with twin beds (convertible to a double bed), a seating area with small sofa, armchair and table, sideboard with dressing table and hairdryer, safe, flat screen video monitor, spacious closet and panoramic windows. There is also a mini bar stocked with each guest's choice of complimentary fruit juices and sodas.

While at sea guests can relax in the Panorama Lounge on deck seven offering spectacular views through floor to ceiling windows. Buffet breakfast and lunch is served every day in the Bremen Club as well as afternoon tea and before and after dinner drinks and cocktails. There is also a gym, sauna, massage room and sun deck, and some days during my cruise were warm enough for sunbathing.

Dinners are especially memorable in the main restaurant as guests select from a menu that may feature mousse of smoked salmon, veal carpaccio or sun dried tomatoes and goat cheese for starters, grilled rack of lamb, whole roasted beef tenderloin, and lobster ragout for the main course and a choice of mango-yogurt parfait and hazelnut soufflé with egg nog sauce and warm chocolate cake with whipped cream.

Call 877-445-7447; visit www.hapag-lloyd.com

Discover the Heart of Europe in France Rhône-Alpes

by Chantal Guillou-Brennan

Once capital of Gaul, Lyon has for the past 2000 years been a strategic city in the heart of Europe. In the past, the meeting of the Saône and Rhône rivers in Lyon made it a desired city hub for the silk trade. Today, the modern infrastructure allows Lyon and the Rhône-Alpes region to be a strong player in world economy and tourism.

The Rhône Valley is famous for having the largest ski area in the world, with resorts such as Chamonix and Val d'Isère. The region is also renowned for its nature parks, which are home to a rich flora and fauna and three major lakes: Lake Geneva (also known as Lac Léman), Lake Bourget and Lake Annecy.

Location is everything

The Lyon-Saint Exupéry Airport is one of Europe's leading hubs and the railway links Lyon to Paris in just 2 hours via high-speed TGV rail service from Paris' Charles De Gaulle airport (Lille/Lyon with a stop in Roissy, CDG Aerogare). If you have opted to begin your trip to France with a stay in Paris, the TGV runs from Paris Gare de Lyon to Lyon, Part-Dieu in 90 minutes and trains run hourly.

Transportation in Lyon is as modern as it is diversified. Top choices are the bus and metro systems: fast, efficient and reliable. A funicular can get you up the hill to visit the Fourvière basilic and a unique reproduction of the last level of the Eiffel Tower, both offering a panoramic view of the city.

The **Velo'v** are a network of individual bicycles centrally located throughout the city which can be picked up and dropped off at many locations throughout town (using a simple credit card). Following Lyon's initiative, this unique ecologically-sound, individual public transportation model was adopted this past summer by the city of Paris.

For a similar touring experience without the physical effort are the **CycloPolitain** (electrically assisted tri-cycles) which can be rented with driver. They are an excellent option to take pictures at your own pace. www.CycloPolitain.com

Not to be Missed

Known as the second largest city in France, the area of the Vieux Lyon (Old Lyon) was declared in 1998 a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. From the top of the Hill Fourvière in the Old Lyon one can see the vestige of the Roman Empire. The Fourvière Gallo-Roman Museum, located in the very centre of the archaeological area, accommodates rich collections from Gallo-Roman times. From the 12th century onwards, and especially in the 17th century, religious congregations arrived on the hill and its slopes. The Basilica of Fourvière, built by Pierre Bossan in 1896, is a magnificent icon from anywhere in the city. Farther down the Hill, the Presqu'île, between the two rivers, was further embellished. The City Hall: built by the city's architect Simon Maupin in 1646, was restored in 1674 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart who

also built the Château de Versailles.

The narrow streets of the Vieux-Lyon district and "traboules" (320 covered passageways which found new purpose during the WWII resistance) form a sharp contrast with the wide avenues opened up during the era of Napoleon III.

Located between the river Rhône and the Parc de la Tête d'Or, the Cité Internationale (international center) was designed in the 1990's, by architect Renzo Piano with cinemas, restaurants, hotels, the Modern Art Museum, a casino and the imposing Convention Centre with its 3,000 seat amphitheater. During the same period, Calatrava designed the high-speed rail station at the Saint-Exupéry airport.

A stop at the Lyon Tourism Office to pick up the "Lyon City Card" can help you save on museum entries. The \$26 card allows for free public transport, Tourist Office guided tours, pleasure cruises (April - October), shows (in April 2008: the International Puppet Festival by the Compagnie des Zonzons); and free entries to many of the 21 Lyon museums. Of particular interest is the Institut Lumière—a cinematographic museum inside the Lumière family's villa near which in 1895, the Lumière brothers filmed "Leaving the Lumière factory" which credited the Lyon brothers' for the invention of cinema. The Tourist Office is located on Place Bellecour. www.lyon-france.com.

Famous for its gourmet cuisine, Lyon boasts over 1500 restaurants, 14 of which have been given stars in the

Michelin Guide, including three star's **Paul Bocuse's** five Brasseries, (East, West, North, South, L'Argenson, having each their own theme and flavor; www.bocuse.fr). **Nicolas Le Bec**, two star: **Auberge de l'Île**, **Léon de Lyon** and **La Rotonde** (Hotel de la Rotonde).

Mix art deco and fine cuisine for an evening of fun at La Brasserie des Brotteaux across the majestic Gare des Brotteaux. www.brasserie-des-brotteaux.com

To tantalize your taste buds further make a stop at the **Halles de Lyon-Paul Bocuse** in the Part-Dieu (train station) neighborhood; or take a walk through the Croix Rousse food market—a real village inside the city offering a wide range of products. Both open every day except Mondays.

One cannot visit Lyon without a taste of the world famous Beaujolais wines. In certain "bouchons" or taverns in Lyon, sample the traditional "mâchon"—delicatessen meats complemented by a local Beaujolais wine.

Daytripping in Wine Country

Just a short ride from Lyon are the **Georges Dubœuf** (Hameau du Vin) wine and train museums in



Romaneche-Thorins. www.into-wine.com/duboeuf.html

On your way to a wine tasting afternoon, worthy of attention is the restaurant **Les Platanes de Chenas** for an unforgettable meal in a country setting. (011- 03-8536-7980)

Tasting all four types of Beaujolais wine can be enjoyed at the "**Domaine Du Cret du Ris**" in Salles in the company of third generation vintner Gerard Texier. www.cret-du-ris.com

In the heart of the Beaujolais region, and seventeen miles from Lyon is the 13th century **Château de Bagnols**, regarded as one of the finest château hotels in the world and one of France's major historic monuments with its dramatic drawbridge entrance. Magnificently and faithfully restored to its 18th century condition the Château has twenty one uniquely decorated bed-

rooms and suites. Rates range from \$684 in the Traditional Room to \$3,453 for an apartment. The castle is open to visitors who can enjoy traditional cuisine in the Michelin starred restaurant of the Salles des Gardes, which boasts France's largest Gothic fireplace. www.chateaubagnols.fr

For information on the Rhône Alpes, E-mail Martine.Bridier@rhonealpes-tourisme.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to France see page 62 of the Listings Section

ASTA's 2008 IDE

ASTA's 2008 International Destination Expo (IDE) will take place April 12-16 in Lyon, France at the Lyon Convention Center. Exhibitors from France, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Turkey, Belgium, Romania and the U.S. are among those already registered to attend. ASTA has reserved rooms at various hotels for a discount to IDE attendees to help provide every type of experience possible.

For information on where to stay, see Part One of this article on page 28 of JAXFAX December 2007 issue.

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Louis Cruise Lines' New Flagship, a Winner

By Clif Cooke

Wow! What a vacation! These words accurately describe a seven-day visit to Greece and Turkey featuring a four-day Jewels of the Aegean cruise on the *Cristal*, the new flagship of **Louis Cruise Lines**, a 70-year old family travel company specializing in cruises in the Mediterranean.

Aboard the *Cristal* on this particular sailing was **George Stathopoulos**, CEO of Louis Cruise Lines.

Before joining Louis, George had built his career in executive positions with several major cruise lines serving the U.S. market.

Stathopoulos said, "Our continuing goal is to be responsive to those features and services Americans want when they cruise the Mediterranean. Our 14 ships range from small to midsize; we are not in the mega cruiseship business! With about 900 passengers, the *Cristal* is an ideal ship for this market since we are able to enter all ports and moor alongside the pier in most cases. The megaships with 2,000-3,000 passengers usually anchor in the harbor and ferry their passengers ashore in tenders."

The *Cristal* spent its recent years under the **Royal Caribbean** flag but joined the Louis fleet in August, 2007 after a \$10 million dollar refurbishing. It's an ideal ship for Aegean and Eastern Med cruising since its size (25,000 tons) and passenger capacity (about 1,000) allows it to enter and dock alongside virtually all of the popular Greek islands, except Santorini, which has no cruise ship dock.

All the *Cristal*'s staterooms and public spaces were total-



Cruising the Aegean on the Cristal

ly upgraded, including the two large dining rooms and two buffets, all bars and lounges. The ship also features stabilizers and bow/stern thrusters to provide smooth sailing at sea and efficient maneuvering in the harbors and at the docks.

One Day to See the Classics

During our one-day stopover in Athens we stayed at the **Metropolitan Hotel**, a modern full serv-

ice property conveniently located between downtown Athens and the port of Piraeus from which all cruise ships depart and return.

Our Athens stopover, arranged by Louis, included a half-day tour of the highlights of this classic city as well as a climb to the top of the Acropolis, which is a must for all able bodied travelers to Greece.

The *Cristal*'s itinerary called at six ports — the five Greek islands of Mykonos, Patmos, Rhodes, Crete and Santorini plus Kusadasi in Turkey, from which we made a half day excursion to the ancient city of Ephesus, another must on a cruise in the Aegean.

We found that each one of the five Greek islands has its own characteristics, making each memorable for visitors interested in the cultural, historic and scenic points of view. Efficient disembarking and organization of tour buses permitted enough time at our ports of call to visit the major attractions plus wander through the shops and bazaars or just take a break at sidewalk cafes.

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boarding, each passenger was photographed and issued a personal ID card with bar codes linked to a computer. This also helped expedite going ashore or returning to the Cristal at all ports. This system plus the comfortable size of the ship lessened any congestion departing the ship for shore excursions, an important factor when visiting six ports in four days. This card is also used as a charge card aboard ship.

On Tap for 2008

Next season, 2008, the Cristal is scheduled for a seven-day package which includes a four day Greek island voyage plus three days visiting Turkey. This package includes an overnight in Istanbul, one of Louis Cruises most popular destinations.

Louis Cruise Lines also operates Eastern and Western Mediterranean cruise itineraries ranging from five to 10 days from Genoa, Venice, Nice and Cyprus. Louis does not sell directly to the American consumer but markets all of their cruise itineraries through some 20 U.S. tour wholesalers, making it convenient for all American retail travel agents to work with their preferred wholesale tour operator.

One of the highlights of our large stateroom (with a bedroom and sitting room) was a balcony. The Cristal is the only non mega-ship cruising the Aegean with balcony accommodations, a definite plus.

Louis is upgrading its fleet to provide the highest standards of any cruiseline serving all areas of the Mediterranean. They are extending their seasons in several areas to operate from mid-March to early December. There is an increasing demand for at sea conferences, company meetings and specialized travel groups as well as family group travel. Louis is catering to all of those markets.

I must also salute Louis for the quality and variety of their comprehensive land programs. We went ashore in every port and urge all agents to book the shore excursions in order to fully appreciate the history and cultural diversity of the islands. Local guides were knowledgeable and carefully selected for their ability to relate to and entertain Americans.

The ship's food and entertainment rated high. The large tastefully decorated dining rooms offered two seatings each evening. The staff, representing a variety of nationalities, have been well trained and seem genuinely eager to please. Continental food is featured. In addition there are enough bars, lounges and nightclubs, (including a disco) to satisfy the preferences of all passengers.

The Cristal also features a small but complete casino for those who seek that diversion. Louis operates their cruises from early April to late November, depending on the area.

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For consolidator airfares and tour packages to France see page 63-64 of the Listings Section

IN THE NEWS

AMTA Partnership with Lufthansa Key to Expanded Service to Poland in 2008

Lufthansa German Airlines organized a study tour last fall that would prove to further consolidate the carrier's commitment to expanded service to Poland this year. American Travel Abroad's (AMTA) president and CEO, Zbigniew Wegiel, worked with Lufthansa on the fam trip and played an important role in convincing the international carrier to increase the capacity to Poland.

"Now that Poland is a full-fledged member of the European Community and the last frontier barriers between Germany and Poland have been removed, we are counting on getting more visitors from the United States than ever before," said Wegiel of AMTA, for more than 60 years the leading operator of tour programs to Poland.

Reflecting on Poland's lengthy history with Roman Catholicism and Judaism, American Travel Abroad offers tours that highlight important sights and attractions of both religions. In addition, the agency can design tours that stress festivals, events and attractions of particular interest to religious pilgrims. Another area of increasing growth is independent travel throughout Poland, either by train or in a rental car. Some prescribed itineraries are available. However, the agency's Poland department can create itineraries to suit the traveler's needs and requirements. While still a novelty among travelers from the United States, the agency has noted considerable interest in spa vacations.

For AMTA's 2008 all-Poland travel planner or its Europe brochures call 800-800-228-0877; fax 212-581-7925; E-mail amtainfor@amta.com

Cruise Tour Greece with Cloud

Astoria, New York-based Cloud Tours Inc, has created a new tour that cruises the Greek Islands and leaves enough land time to actually relax on one of those islands. Additionally, the programs are air-inclusive of taxes and fuel surcharges thereby relieving clients of hidden charges.

For clients who want to see as much as possible, but would also like to relax on one of the islands for a few days, "Zorba's Envy" is made to order. This 13-day tour departs on Tuesdays and returns on Sundays. With rates beginning at \$2,049 per person double, clients prepay international and Greek domestic airfares, two nights in Athens with a city tour, a four day Greek

Island and Cruise, three nights in Mykonos, three nights in Santorini, daily breakfast, all meals on board the cruise, hotel services fees and taxes and all transfers. The four-day cruise visits the Greek ports of Mykonos, Patmos, Rhodes, Crete and Santorini and the Turkish port of Kusadasi to visit Ephesus. Add port dues of \$90 per person and air taxes of about \$160. For those who can't get away for 13 days, Cloud Tours' 10-day "Santorini Escapade" or the 11-day "Mykonian Escapade" combine a four-day cruise with a stay at one of these stunning white and blue isles. Rates for the Santorini Escapade begin at \$1,839 and for the Mykonian Escapade begin at \$1,809 per person, double; with international and Greek domestic air fare, two nights in Athens with a city tour, a four day Greek Island Cruise, three nights in Santorini, daily breakfast, all meals on board the cruise, hotel services fees and taxes and all transfers. Add port dues of \$90 per person and air taxes of approximately \$160 and \$120 respectively.

Call 800-223-7880 E-mail info@cloudtours.com; www.cloudtours.com

Andalucia and Navarra Celebrate in U.S.

February in New York is just as closely associated with St. Valentine's as it is with the percussive sound of Flamenco as Spain's most celebrated stars arrive at City Center for the 8th Annual Flamenco Festival under the auspices of the Andalucia Tourist Board, the Tourist Office of Spain. The event promotes the region as a tourism destination, with special deals featuring Delta Air Lines' new exclusive nonstop flights between New York (JFK) and Malaga (starting June 2008). Also being promoted is the new (Dec. 2007) AVE bullet train between Madrid and Malaga starting in April. Visit www.andaluciaflamenco.com

Additionally, for 10 days, Feb. 1-10, The Kingdom of Navarra, Spain will visit Miami and New York for a gastronomic celebration that will feature Navarra's unique dishes and local wines. The region of Navarra in the north of Spain borders the Basque Country, La Rioja, Aragon, and the Pyrenees and is perhaps best known for its festivals such as the famous San Fermin in Pamplona bull running each July that was immortalized by Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*. www.Navarragastronomy.com

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Visit Italy Visits Switzerland in 2008

JAXFAX interviewed Barbara Crawford, Executive Vice president of Visit Italy based in Los Angeles, California. After 15 years, the company has added Switzerland to its latest portfolio.

JF: What made you decide to launch Visit Switzerland?

Visit Switzerland (VS): Switzerland is a beautiful country to visit throughout the year. There are as many winter motives and events as well as spring and summer. It also attracts the younger generation because of its campaign of "All Natural" and for sports enthusiasts. But Switzerland has more museums per capita than any other European country so there are many cultural aspects to the country as well.

JF: Is the Swiss currency as strong as the euro these days or will American clients find a better deal than they expect in this tiny country?

VS: The Swiss Franc tends to be a more constant currency than the Euro; right now, the U.S. dollar goes much farther in Switzerland than it does in the countries using the Euro.

I think Americans will also receive a higher quality of product (trains, hotels, restaurants) than they will in Italy. What one pays for a simple pizza dinner with wine in Rome can buy you a good quality three-course meal in Switzerland.

JF: It looks as though much of the new product line is aimed at independent travelers as are your Italy programs, but you also have a couple of escorted programs, how has the reaction been so far to the various products within this new portfolio?

VS: Requests from agents for both Italy and Switzerland brochures has been strong. The majority of our clientele have always been the more savvy traveler such as the baby boomers with more money to spend on holidays. We find those travelers prefer to visit countries at their own speed, creating their own itineraries and with the Swiss rail system transportation it is easy to accomplish.

We provide Swiss rail passes in either 1st class or 2nd class and travelers are provided with unlimited train rides, public bus rides, many of the public boat rides as well as discounts into museums and special exhibits. Combining these elements with hotel accommodations and some basic city walking tours, we

hope to appeal to the same traveler who has enjoyed Italy with us before.

The few escorted tours are intended to appeal to the senior crowd or anyone who may need some further assistance in transferring between cities as opposed to independent train travel.

JF: Any trends to look out for?

VS: Euro 2008 (European Union Football association) will be taking place throughout Switzerland June 7-29th and I expect it will get some good coverage here in the States.

The Swiss Government Tourist Board is geared up and ready to show Switzerland in a good light internationally. This should affect tourism to the region in a positive way and may set new trends.

JF: With agent commission at 10%, what role do agents play for VS?

VS: We maintain an active database of agents who have had repeat bookings with us over the past three years. We review it regularly to keep it as current as possible; right now we have about 7,000 active agent partners. I could not say how many of those agents consider us a preferred supplier. We are not part of any consortium that requires agents to book with their corresponding preferred suppliers. An agent would consider us a preferred supplier if we provide the product they are looking for, if their clients have been happy with the tour programs they've selected; that's when the agent becomes a repeat customer and for us, that is the real meaning of a preferred supplier.

JF: Will you be considering other products within the Swiss product line or will you be looking at other destinations in 2008 in preparation for 2009?

VS: I am always looking for new and interesting places to visit. I will plan at least one trip to Switzerland myself this year to expand the product for 2009. In addition we will be opening up new divisions within the company in 2008 for more global expansion in 2009. The current Swiss brochure, which was printed in September 2007 is valid through December 2008.

Call 800-255-3535; or visit www.VisitSwitzerlandTours.com



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USA

Explore Switzerland's Cultural Landscape in Lavaux

By Barbara Radcliffe Rogers

In September 2007, UNESCO named Switzerland's Lavaux region, on the sunny north shore of Lake Geneva, a World Heritage Site for its "cultural landscape" of vineyards and farms. Only five other wine-growing regions have achieved this UNESCO status.

The citation noted the authenticity of the land, divided into small plots and held in place by stone terraces, some dating from the Middle Ages. Along with its rich wine-growing heritage (the first vines were planted by the Romans 2000 years ago) the region has the country's highest concentration of Michelin stars.

While your clients may expect sweeping views of snow-covered Alps and sumptuous Belle Epoch hotels overlooking the lake, they may be surprised to find mile after mile of hillsides neatly striped in grapevines. In this small area, six wine regions include 28 controlled appellations (DOC), and although rarely found outside Switzerland, the wines consistently win world competitions.

Lavaux's Gastronomic Terrace Trails

A series of tourist routes has been created to showcase the scenery and the food and wine experience. To help you advise clients interested in exploring these and finding other authentic experiences, the Lake Geneva Region has several new (and free) publications, including the full-color "Gourmet Worlds," filled with food and wine destinations.

Several food trails are mapped in great detail on the website (www.lake-geneva-region.ch). Posted with food and wine signage, the 18-mile Discover the Lavaux Terraces Trail is easily broken into shorter walks reached by the Swiss Rail network.

The route begins at Château de Chillon, among Europe's most beautiful medieval castles, and follows the lake shore through Montreux before climbing into vineyards to follow terraces to Lausanne. The shorter Vully Vineyard Footpath also passes winegrowers, craftsmen and food shops where travelers sample products.

The six-mile circular Coeur de La Côte vineyards walk combines splendid views with stops at country inns, winegrowers and village cellars. Advise a stop in Bougy-Villars to visit artisanal chocolatier, Tristan.

Steer dedicated foodies to vineyards and villages of the Vaud's "breadbasket," where the Bread Museum fills a 17th-century farm in Echallens. At Vieux Leysin Cheese Dairy they can watch cheesemakers work, and sample the product.

Walking is not the only way to enjoy the Lavaux. The Beau-Rivage Palace provides meals on board the Belle-Epoque paddle-wheeler Montreux July-Sept, where cuisine has strong competition from the scenery. The Train-Resto Gros-de-Vaud and BAM Saveur are gastronomic trains with vintage cars where local foods and wines are served. The Train des Vignes travels through the vineyards from Vevey. Advise clients to spend some time in this lakeside city's Alimentarium, a museum of food filled with engaging interactive exhibits. Summer Saturday mornings, a farmers market fills the main square. For clients who prefer to maximize their time by engaging a guide, suggest Fabienne d'Allevés-Ostersetzer, an excellent choice for her knowledge of regional history, art, wines and cuisines.

Call 011-41 21 943 1318; E-mail: fabienne.dalleves@hispeed.ch

Sampling the Local Treasures

Clients will certainly want to sample the traditional and fine dining options. At Philippe Rochat's Hotel de Ville in Crissy, one of only two restaurants in Switzerland awarded three Michelin stars, each course is a work of art (011-41 21 634 0505; www.philippe-rochat.ch). In vertiginous Saint-Saphorin, L'Onde is a well-loved auberge where the chef makes richly flavored pates and terrines (011-41 21 925 4900; www.aubergedelonde.ch).

The Swiss Riviera has been the playground of generations of rich and famous, whose every whim is graciously catered to at grand hotels lining the Montreux and



Lausanne lakefronts. I was treated with the same attention during my recent stay at Lausanne's Beau-Rivage Palace (www.brp.ch), now celebrating its 150th birthday. The interior is sumptuous in frescoes, paneling and original art. Commis-sionable rates for two-night packages with spa treatments and lunch begin at \$985.

Less grand, but sparkling from recent renovations, Hotel City (www.fass-bind-hotels.com) offers doubles from \$200. Picasso Tours (www.picassotours.com) offers this three-star hotel as its lower-priced option for three-night packages starting just over \$300, a bargain with breakfasts, excursions and entrance to Chillon Castle.

Getting There and Getting Around

Star Alliance partner Swiss International (www.swiss.com) flies direct to Geneva daily from JFK's Terminal 4, where First and Business passengers relax in the new Swiss Lounge. Flights from Boston, Chicago and Miami connect through Zurich. OnePass partner Continental (www.continental.com) flies to Geneva from Newark five times weekly.

Good news for agents: save clients as much as 15% – and earn a 5% commission – with advance-purchase Swiss Passes through Rail Europe (<http://agent.raileurope.com>, 888-382-7245). Along with free travel on trains, buses and lake steamers, Swiss Passes offer free admission to 400-plus museums, and free travel for children under 16.

Another value-added is the free Riviera Card offered by hotels, for free travel on local buses and 50% discount on train and boat excursions and museum admissions.

Contact Switzerland Tourism, 800-794-7795; www.MySwitzerland.com or www.lake-geneva-region.ch www.montreux-vevey.com for special packages.

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Switzerland see page 70-71 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

\$1719 POLAND With air-inclusive prices starting at \$1,719 per person double from New York (add \$100 per person on Chicago departures), American Travel Abroad is maintaining several affordable programs. Its two 'basic Poland' programs are highly recommended for first time visitors to Poland. "Gems of Northern Poland" takes travelers to Warsaw, the country's dynamic capital, and the tri-city complex of Gdansk, renowned as the birthplace of Solidarity and Lech Walesa, while "The Magic of Poland" covers Warsaw, Krakow and Zakopane in southern Poland; three- and four-day extensions to Prague, Vienna or Budapest are optional. Other tours range from 10 to 15 days. Seven tours are all-inclusive with guaranteed departures, with round trip airfare between the U.S. and Poland on LOT Polish Airlines, first-class accommodations, transfers, two meals daily, a comprehensive sightseeing program by motor coach, the services of an English-speaking guide, as well as all hotel charges and taxes.

Call 800-800-228-0877; fax 212-581-7925; E-mail amtainfor@amta.com

\$6499 CROATIA Adriatic Luxury Journeys (ALJ) launched its 15-day luxury escorted journey, "Art, History and Charm of Croatia and the Adriatic," recently at the entry price of \$6,499 per person when booked by Feb. 15 (the price is \$6,799 per person after that date). The itinerary is filled with days reserved for meeting renowned Croatian painters and sculptors. And also chatting with well-known Croatian-American actors, plus sampling scrumptious delicacies prepared by award-winning chefs. The highlight of this small-group tour is a private concert in Dubrovnik, performed by opera star Tihana Herceg. Croatian mezzo-soprano Herceg has performed to great acclaim throughout the United States and her native Croatia. This tour has departures on June 11 and September 3, 2008, but is limited to 24 participants per tour. Call 800-9006-7108; www.adriaticluxury.com

\$320 FRANCE Shopping in the City of Light can work up quite an appetite, and Hilton Hotels in Paris are helping travelers satisfy their hunger and fashion cravings with the new Chic Shopper package, which offers guests staying at Hilton hotels a 10% discount at Fauchon, one of France's best loved gourmet food companies. Travelers can explore Paris' historical shopping district while they experience Fauchon's fine assortment of teas, coffees, chocolates and sweets.

The Chic Shopper package is available now through March 30, 2008 at Hilton Arc de Triomphe Paris, Hilton Paris, and Hilton Paris La Defense. The package includes deluxe accommodations, a Hilton breakfast, a glass of champagne, and 10% discount in Fauchon. Nightly rates for the Chic Shopper package start at about \$320 at Hilton Paris La Défense, about \$340 at Hilton Paris, and about \$430 U.S. at Hilton Arc de Triomphe Paris.

Call 800 HILTONS; www.hilton.com

IN THE NEWS

\$170 AUSTRIA For under \$200, clients can admire the largest Klimt collection in the world with its famous golden paintings "The Kiss" and "Judith" at the splendid Baroque Belvedere Palace. This package can be booked from 116 euros or about \$170 per person double for two overnight stays in a renowned Viennese four-star hotel, buffet breakfast, entrance fees for the Belvedere (for the fabulous Klimt exhibit) and the Vienna Card, which guarantees 72 hours' free rides on the underground, streetcars, and buses as well as numerous discounts for sightseeing and shopping. Bookings at Wien-Hotels & Information for a listing of other participating properties at similarly affordable price range.

Call 011-43-1-24 555; www.vienna.info-Team

\$92 EUROPE Among the special offers on Travel Bound's new website are a series of "Hot deals" on either hotels or apartments/villas. At press time, lowest prices on a hotel in Rome started at \$95, London \$92.50, Barcelona \$103. All Travel Bound hotel rates are per room (not per person) per night and include all service and local taxes, and in Europe, most hotel prices include breakfast.

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Belize Stakes Claim in Heritage Group

In an effort to promote responsible tourism and protect its precious natural resources, the **Belize Tourism Board** has joined the **World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism** (WHA) as one of the organization's newest associate partners. The WHA is an industry-leading initiative founded by Expedia, Inc. and the United Nations Foundation, to support UNESCO's goal of promoting and protecting the 851 World Heritage sites around the world.

"We are excited about the future prospects of this new partnership with the World Heritage Alliance. Belize has always maintained its commitment to the preservation and conservation of the country's natural resources and this newest collaboration assures our continued efforts in the development of sustainable tourism and the industry's success," said Tourism Director, Tracy Pantón.

In moving forward, the Belize Tourism Board pledges to work



closely with the World Heritage Alliance to further strengthen Belize's tourism development goals both locally and within the international sustainable tourism community.

Belize will also implement the World Heritage Alliance principles, which includes participating in staff training programs, educating the traveling public about World Heritage, supporting community development around World Heritage sites, engaging employees to support the local community and supporting the United Nations in its efforts to encourage sustainable tourism.

In addition to the Belize Tourism Board, the WHA also welcomed the Belize Tourism Industry Association, an organization comprised of Belize tourism members

and stakeholders, and three Belize hotels: **The Lodge at Chaa Creek, the Black Orchid Resort and Whipay Caye Lodge.**

"We're pleased to have the five Belize tourism entities joining the partnership," said Erika Harms, executive director of the World Heritage Alliance. "Together we have the power to reach millions of people around the world and help both preserve and protect some of the world's most beautiful and significant sites." Snuggled between Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south, relaxed, English-speaking Belize is only a two-hour plane ride from the continental United States. Belize's Barrier Reef, which was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996 is the second largest barrier reef in the world – the largest in the western hemisphere – full of exotic marine and wildlife. Visitors to Belize can venture into a land rich in natural beauty that is steeped in the magic of its Mayan past, journey into lush unspoiled landscapes and enjoy superb diving.

Birds and Monkeys...

The **Lazy Iguana B&B** in Caye Caulker is a bed and breakfast nestled in a quiet part of the Caye. The property provides a 360-degree view of the island and the Caribbean Sea. The beach on Caye Caulker is less than a mile from the Belize Barrier Reef. Accommodations consist of four guest rooms with amenities including private bathrooms, air conditioning, ceiling fans, and more. To pamper guests, the resort uses only rainwater. Adventure trips can be arranged from the Lazy Iguana where you travel inland and return here for a serene sunset in the hammocks. Relax with spa massages on site. Expect nightly rates to run about \$80 with breakfast.

Call 714-494-0056; E-mail: LazyIguanaBB@aol.com; www.lazyiguana.net

The **Lodge at Chaa Creek** is snuggled in the rainforested foothills of the Maya Mountains in the Macal River Valley. This 365-private acre reserve reverberates with the sounds of a tropical forest concerto daily. Squadrons of brilliant parrots, Blue-crowned Mot-Mots and the perfume of Frangipani blossoms surround the property. During the nesting months,

Chaa Creek is offering a five-night guided expedition ideal for casual bird watchers as well as experts to view toucans, humming birds and numerous fledglings at this time of year. The program costs \$1,880 per person, a program guaranteed to run with a minimum of two persons. The program runs April-May 31, 2008. Taxes, fees and service charges are included in the rates.

Call 501-824-2037; E-mail reservations@chaacreek.com; www.chaacreek.com

Many people come to Belize and only see its beautiful reefs but insiders say that without experiencing inland Belize they are missing the whole enchilada. **Howler Monkey Lodge** has a way to correct that vision with an affordable three-night extension package for agents to sell to clients who already going to Belize and booked for reef diving or similar experiences. Add Belize's ancient ruins, rainforest and caves with this package that includes accommodations in a riverside jungle view, air conditioned cabins, visits to Altun Ha, a Mayan ruin, nature tours, cave tubing, crocodile adventure, Belize zoo, and optional zipline canopy tours. This package retails for \$499 per person double or \$349 per person net.

Ask for Booking Code JF 2008; (011) 501-220-2158; E-mail: mel@howlermonkeylodge.com



Busy in Belize-an Insider's Advice

Pack your bags, but keep it light! While Belize offers more than enough to keep you on the move (even if it is to just roll over on the beach) you will never have to move far thanks to its diverse and convenient geography.

The following is just a small sample of what awaits you in your travels of Belize.

Hike or canoe under the shade of the rainforest canopy in the company of over 500

species of birds. Observe stalactites and stalagmites in caves that contain pottery and ceremonial remnants of the ancient Maya. Island hop by kayak between the cayes or around one of Belize's three atolls.

Witness a sunset from atop a Mayan temple. Snorkel with the kids and learn about the biology of the barrier reef. Take a refreshing dip beneath one of the many waterfalls. Exchange vows with the Caribbean Sea lapping at your feet. Swap stories back at the resort after a day of wrestling with permit, tarpon and bonefish.

Treasures of the Sea

Known for its marine environment, Belize is well publicized for possessing the second longest barrier reef in the world, as well as three major offshore atolls. In addition to the aforemen-

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- Trip Advisor Member, June 2007

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SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

tioned, Belize possesses numerous mangrove systems both offshore and along the coast, thus creating a tremendous wetlands environment in which birds, fish, mammals, and reptiles can propagate. With such a significant marine ecosystem, scuba divers, marine biologists, and sport fishermen have long recognized the importance of Belize, and it has become a favorite destination for them.

Maya Mystique

Belize is blessed with an outstanding archaeological heritage of Maya temples and palaces. It is known that the Maya occupation began as early as 1500 BC, and although it began its decline in 900 AD, some Maya cultural centers continued to be occupied until contact with the Spanish in the 1500's. During the Classic Period (250 AD to 900 AD), the population of Belize exceeded over one million people, and it is believed that Belize was the heart of the Maya civilization at that time. Although large Maya cultural centers no longer exist, there is still a significant Maya population residing within many small villages.

Fast Facts: Belize

Currency: The Belize Dollar (BZ\$) has a fixed rate of exchange of BZ \$2 to US \$1. Most hotels, resorts, restaurants, and tour operators will accept U.S. currency, traveler's checks, or credit cards. When using your credit cards in Belize, most establishments will add a 5% service charge to your bill. Always make sure that you understand which dollar rate is being quoted.

Electricity: Although most of the electricity is provided by Diesel/Generator Sets, the power is stable at 110 Volts A.C., which is the same voltage as in the United States.

Health services: There is a well staffed hospital and several private doctors in Belize City. Also the district towns and larger villages have hospitals or clinics.

Time Zone: Time observed year round is GMT-6, the same as United States Central Standard Time.



Getting There

Most visitors travel to Belize by air, but you can also get here by road or boat. A listing of the various airlines, access points, and necessary documents is provided below according to the mode of transportation.

International flights to Belize are via Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston, Miami or Los Angeles. The major airlines servicing Belize are: American, Continental, Delta Air Lines, Grupo TACA, US Airways.

Local airlines provide flights daily to Belize from Flores (Tikal), Guatemala such as Maya Island Air, 800-521-1247; www.mayaislandair.com; Tropic Air, 800-422-3435; or visit www.tropicair.com; and Caribbean Holidays, now agents for Tikal Jets, 501-227-2583.

Driving to Belize can be a challenge. Depending on the route taken, the trip to Belize through Mexico can be anywhere from 1,350-2,000 miles. A sturdy car, protective insurance, and positive determination will be huge assets in assuring one's arrival. In order for visitors to drive into Belize from Guatemala or Mexico, a temporary importation permit must be secured at the point of entry. Permits are valid for one month but can be extended by applying to the Customs Department. Small, regularly scheduled water taxis travel between Punta Gorda, in the southern district of Toledo, and Puerto Barrios in Eastern Guatemala.

Maritime ports of entry are Belize City, Corozal, Dangriga, Big Creek, San Pedro, and Punta Gorda. You are required to report your entry to the police or immigration authorities as soon as possible after entering Belizean territory.

For more information, contact the Belize Tourism Board at 800-624-0686; www.travelbelize.org

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Belize see page 72-73 of the Listings Section

Maruba Resort Jungle Spa Belize

maruba@btl.net • www.get-junglized.com



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Cedar Cabins Lodge

Cedar Cabins nature lodge sits on a 235 acres Private Botanical Reserve & Bird Sanctuary in the geographical center of Belize. Luxury cabins, camping, full service restaurant & bar, swimming pool, tennis courts, Butterfly Farm, over 200 species of birds and nature trails are available on site. Mayan Temples, cave and zip-line less than an hour drive away!

For information & online reservations visit www.cedarcabinsbelize.com

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Email: cedarcabs@btl.net

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IN THE NEWS

Costa Rica Kids' Collection

Did you ever wonder that the place you've recommended for your clients annual family vacation is something the children will remember and enjoy or perhaps not and make Mom and Dad miserable? How can you be sure, that is, unless you have the help of kid hotel inspector's? Sunny Land Tours has the assistance of a team of 2 undercover kid inspectors that have visited and critiqued many of the most popular hotels in Costa Rica. The company has introduced the "The Costa Rica Kids Collection" which brings together hotels throughout the country that received high marks by kids under 10 and they explain why.

Call 800-783-7839; www.costaricahotdeals.com

GP to Open 10 New Properties in 2008

Grupo Posadas, a leading hotel operator in Mexico and Latin America expanded its current portfolio of 98 properties with the openings of eight new hotels by the end of 2007. This year, however, GP will outdistance its own performance with the opening of 10 more properties in Mexico. Among them are Fiesta Inn Chetumal, Fiesta Inn Cuernavaca, Fiesta Inn Durango, Fiesta Inn Insurgentes, Fiesta Inn Morelia,

Fiesta Inn Tepic, Fiesta Inn Toluca, One Acapulco, One Aguascalientes and One Culiacán. Under the GP umbrella are eight brands—AQUA, Caesar Business, Caesar Park, Fiesta Americana Grand, Fiesta Americana, Lat 19°, Fiesta Inn and One Hotels, which range from expansive, lavish resorts to cozy and casual boutique properties.

Visit www.posadas.com

Wyndham Raises Banner in Panama

The Wyndham Hotels and Resorts brand will fly its first flag in Panama with the conversion of the five-star, 301-room Veneto Hotel & Casino in Panama City to the Veneto, A Wyndham® Grand Hotel. The Veneto, A Wyndham Grand Hotel, is located on Via Veneto in Panama City's financial and business district between Via Eusebio A. Morales and Via Espana, 20 minutes from Panama's Tocumen International Airport.

The hotel offers four restaurants, a full-service spa and fitness center, rooftop pool, business center, 15,000 square feet of meeting space and a Las Vegas-style casino with more than 40,000 square feet of gaming area, making it one of the largest casinos in Latin America.

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BEST BUYS

\$458 ARGENTINA To satisfy a growing demand, the **Iguazú Grand Hotel, Resort and Casino** has created a new Honeymoon Package ideal for those seeking a five-star romantic getaway paired with an over-the-top adventure - at a fraction of the regular price. The Honeymoon Package includes: two nights in a Junior Suite, Champagne and exotic fruit platter upon arrival, candlelit dinner at El Jardin restaurant with complimentary bottle of wine, two 20 Match Play coupons for Casino Iguazú, complimentary access to Spa del Paraíso's full circuit (dry and wet sauna, Jacuzzi, Scottish shower, and relax lounge), a one-hour couples massage and daily breakfast in bed. Priced at \$458 per person double. Call 800-223 6800; www.lhw.com

\$925 COSTA RICA **Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge** offers excursions in search of elusive Osa Peninsula-Golfo Dulce fauna, such as crocodiles, poison dart frogs, eyelash pit vipers, bats, kinkajous, mapaches, peccaries and more. The Osa Peninsula - Golfo Dulce region contains 13 major ecosystems, up to 50% of the biodiversity of Costa Rica, and approximately 2.5% of the biodiversity of the entire world. The Bats, Snakes & Frogs package includes: four nights' accommodations and all meals; three tracking excursions (one in morning, evening and nighttime; waterfall hike and jungle river tour priced at \$ 925 per person double. Call 866-504-8116; www.nicuesalodge.com

\$199 COSTA RICA Hilton's three properties in Costa Rica - the first full-service Hilton family hotels in the country - are enticing travelers with special rates starting from \$199. Rates at the **Doubletree Cariari by Hilton San Jose** start at \$199 per night single or double occupancy. Located in Costa Rica's capital city, the hotel is just ten minutes from the city center. The hotel features 174 guestrooms and 48 suites and such amenities as a casino, fitness center, two swimming pools, a signature restaurant and pool bar. Nearby attractions include the Plaza Real Cariari shopping center and Finca de Mariposas (butterfly farm). Doubletree Cariari by Hilton San Jose's recent renovations include upgrades to guestrooms, public areas, meeting facilities, and more. After an extensive makeover, the **Fiesta Resort in Puntarenas** will be renamed the **Doubletree Resort by Hilton Puntarenas**. All-inclusive rates start at \$199 per person per night based on double occupancy. The 410-room all-inclusive resort offers four dining outlets, seven bars, pool, beach, fitness center, tennis courts, kid's club, non-motorized water sports, casino, nightly entertainment, and easy access to nearby national parks and biological reserves, rainforests, volcanoes and beaches.

The **Hilton Papagayo Resort** opened its doors with all-inclusive rates starting at \$539 per night based on double occupancy. Previously known as the Premier Fiesta Resort and Spa, the all-inclusive resort is located on a secluded

beach on the Bay of Papagayo in Guanacaste, nestled between the mountains. With 202 renovated rooms, including 71 private bungalows, the resort offers a brand new lobby, two outdoor swimming pools with a new pool area, non-motorized water sports, a brand new spa and fitness center, tennis courts, a new kid's club, three restaurants, two bars, a casino, and nightly entertainment.

Visit www.doubletree.com; www.hilton.com.

\$999 PERU **Sunny Land Tours'** one-week, air-inclusive "Peru Express" tour priced from \$999 from Miami covers a two-night stay in Lima, four nights in Cusco, all transfers; sightseeing; with daily breakfast and optional excursions to Machu Picchu or Pisac Indian Market. Optional hotel upgrades to first class and Luxury hotels is available. This tour operates daily with departure from Miami and other gateways at applicable air fare and seasonal supplements. Other upscale programs offered in the new Peru 2008 Brochure include: 8-Days "Taste Of Peru" with visits to Lima; Cusco; Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu and is offered across several hotel categories. New Programs offered include less traveled routes in Peru visiting Trujillo; Chan Chan; Chiclayo; Sipan with Cusco; Machu Piccu and Lima.

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Hot Jamaica Sets its Sights on Cool Green

While a hotel boom may be at the heart of a strong foundation for exponential growth and optimism for 2008 visitor arrivals, the island nation is also paying close attention to preserving its culture and historic heritage to enhance the travel experience beyond luxury and all-inclusive hotel stays.

The Hon. Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism for Jamaica, said that in the past year, 41 attractions in Jamaica have benefited from tax breaks or other incentives as the

island seeks to diversify the tourism product by complementing its natural assets with the addition of first-class man-made attractions.

Recent additions have included water parks such as **Kool Runnings** in Negril, and expansion by **Chukka Caribbean** to include an underwater sea trek and canopy tours. There has been expansion also of facilities for swimming with dolphins and other water sports.

New Attractions

Mystic Mountain, an attraction set in the Drax Hall area of Ocho Rios, expects to be completed by May 2008, when visitors will be able to experience rainforest terrain from 700 feet above sea level. Mystic Mountain will feature a bobsled coaster ride, an aerial tramway canopy tour, a Jamaican athletic heritage museum, and a water park.

At **Coyaba Gardens**, located just outside the resort town, a new promenade has been constructed with a viewing pavilion, to be named Ysassi's Lookout, after the Spanish governor who spent his last days at Shaw Park. While observing the natural and quiet beauty of Jamaica's flora and fauna, visitors can make the trek along the cedar walkway leading to the edge of the 80 foot cliff from which one can appreciate the waterfall on one side and a view of the Ocho Rios Bay on the other.

Outameni, located about two miles from Falmouth, the capital of Trelawny in the Montego Bay region, brings the nation's rich cultural history alive with a journey through time covering periods of Spanish occupation, colonization, slavery, Emancipation and the arrival of indentured laborers. Officially opened last Sept., the virtual journey is brought to life by talented performers who sing, act and dance while interacting with visitors.

Jamspeed Rally Experience, the first full-blown performance driving school in the region is located at Spot Valley Entertainment Complex in the Rose Hall area, with its main attraction being the Co-Drivers Experience. Visitors will be treated to an on-the-limit drive around one of the country's best dirt circuits from the left seat. In use are a Peugeot 206 GTI/SW, Mitsubishi Evolution III or Subaru Impreza STI V5. These competitive vehicles allow visitors to experience






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Jamaica is in the midst of a development boom right now throughout the island, a process that is creating a strong foundation for exponential growth in tourist arrivals in 2008. Wayne Cummings, President of the **Jamaica Hotel Tourist Association (JHTA)** said, "Plans are already being implemented to increase the room stock by the thousands, ranging from high-end luxury properties such as **Goldeneye, Palmyra** and **Harmony Cove**, as well as Spanish chains such as **Iberostar, Riu** and **Bahia Principe**."

Like the rest of the world, the JHTA members are facing soaring energy costs and have instituted a \$10 per room, per night energy surcharge (some properties refuse to implement the fee, however). "We have been experiencing increases in the price of a barrel of approximately 53 percent since January '07 alone," Cummings noted. He recommended that removal of the surcharge be addressed in the event that oil prices come down again.

Cultural and Environmental Links

Round Hill Hotel & Villas in Montego Bay, which was recently awarded the Green Globe certification of excellence in sustainable tourism for the fifth consecutive year, has long been at the forefront of the conservation movement in its daily activities. Managing director, Josef Forstmayr appointed an environmental manager, Cleveland Wright, to head up the resort's "Green Team" that receives on-going training.

The property was also recently recognized for its World's Leading Villas for the sixth consecutive year by the prestigious World Travel Awards. Forstmayr, accepted the award, saying: "Everyone who works at Round Hill is dedicated to making the villa experience there wonderful. We are especially honored because our travel partners were the ones who voted for us and they have many, many choices."

The property wins kudos for its role as a cultural center as well as it hosts exhibitions such as the upcoming *A Passion for Jamaica*, Photographs, Images and Poetry by three local artists: Robin Farquharson, Louisa Calio and Volney A. Fray. The exhibit will be on view from March 26-April 2, 2008.

Kingston, Jamaica also hosts the Annual Calabash International Literary Festival, May, 2008. The only international literary festival in the English-speaking Caribbean, Calabash was founded in 2001 by novelist Colin Channer. Over 30 authors feature at the festival and, together with musicians from around the world, they fill the festival agenda with readings, discussions and musical events.

Call 876-965-3000; E-mail calabashfestival@hotmail.com; www.calabashfestival.org

For more information, contact the Jamaica Tourist Board, 800-526-2422; www.visitjamaica.com



IN THE NEWS

Iberostar's Expansion Plans in Jamaica

Continuing their expansion into the Caribbean, **Iberostar Hotels & Resorts** announced the grand opening of **Iberostar Rose Hall Beach**, the first of three planned Jamaican resorts. Located in Rose Hall Beach, and just 20 minutes from the international airport, the Iberostar Rose Hall Beach offers an upscale, European elegance.

"The continued growth of Iberostar Hotels & Resorts worldwide includes a significant expansion throughout the Caribbean," stated John Long, vice president of sales and marketing. "Jamaica is a destination rich in culture, history, beautiful beaches, outstanding scenery and eco-adventure – all factors that are perfectly in line with the Iberostar product. We are thrilled to add a Jamaica property to our portfolio."

Iberostar Rose Hall Beach features an expansive ocean-front layout with exterior and interior design details executed by local Jamaican artisans. The hotel boasts 234 garden and pool view rooms, 100 ocean view rooms and 32 spacious junior suites. Each room has a balcony or terrace, air conditioning and ceiling fan, complimentary mini-bar, color satellite TV, iron with ironing board, coffeemaker, direct-dial telephone and built-in safe.

The hotel's location in the Rose Hall Beach resort area, a destination in and of itself, also offers guests proximity to several world-class golf courses, including the White Witch of Rose Hall Golf Course and the Cinnamon Hill Golf Course. Guests will also find abundant shopping and vibrant nightlife at the resort.

Call 888-923-2722 or visit www.iberostar.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Jamaica see page 79 of the Listings Section

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Volleyball	100%
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*Not all activities at all resorts.

From screaming across the ocean on a windsurfer to a romantic stroll under the stars, to scaling a mini-mountain, from sipping a frozen margarita to ice skating in the middle of the tropics, if it's fun, it's here. And it's all included. Luxurious rooms and suites. An incredible array of land and water sports. Unlimited premium brand drinks. All meals in a variety of dining options. All entertainment. And all on the best beaches anywhere, everywhere. Jamaica. The Bahamas. Curaçao. And Brazil.



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IN THE NEWS

Caribbean Airlift

In spite of the high cost of fuel, and the financial morass the airline industry usually finds itself in, clients looking for a winter respite in the Caribbean, will also find it is a buyer's market and may actually pay less for their tickets than they have in recent years.

Below are just a few highlights of new service to the Caribbean Islands.

Trinidad & Tobago: Just in time for winter travel and the annual Carnival festival are two new non-stop Delta flights: weekly non-stop service from the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta to Crown Point International Airport in Tobago and twice weekly non-stop service from New York's JFK to Piarco International Airport in Trinidad.

Bonaire: As of February 9, 2008 Delta Air Lines, the world's second largest airline, will launch a weekly non-stop flight from its Atlanta hub to/from Bonaire.

Delta Air Lines flight #371 will depart Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. arriving into Bonaire's Flamingo International Airport at 3:10 p.m. The return flight #370 will depart Bonaire Saturdays at 4:15 p.m. arriving into Atlanta at 7:55 p.m. Visit www.delta.com

Caribbean Airlines has added four new flights between New York and Port of Spain, capital of Trinidad & Tobago and one additional flight from Port-of-Spain to Toronto. The airline has also launched a morning and evening flight linking Georgetown, Guyana and Bridgetown, Barbados to Port-of-Spain three times a week.

Visit www.caribbean-airlines.com

Puerto Rico: Discount carrier Spirit Airlines will launch a new daily service from Orlando to Puerto Rico in February. Intended to complement Spirit's existing nonstop service from Fort Lauderdale to Aguadilla, the new flight will operate alongside the current daily one-stop flight from Orlando to Puerto Rico.

Bahamas: Spirit Airlines announces daily non-stop jet service between Fort Lauderdale and Freeport, beginning December 13, 2007. Service is via Freeport International Airport. Freeport is Spirit's 23rd destination in the Bahamas, Caribbean and Latin American regions.

In addition to non-stop service from Fort Lauderdale, Spirit will also offer connecting service to Freeport from its domestic network. Spirit serves all routes with a fleet of Airbus aircraft, the youngest in the Americas.

St. Maarten: Commissioner of Tourism for St. Maarten, Roy Marlin recently reached an agreement with JetBlue Airways to operate new air service from New York beginning on January 17, 2008.

The start of JetBlue's service to St. Maarten coincides with the launch of its new marketing initiative, "St. Maarten. Bring Your Appetite For Life."

Spirit Airlines added three weekly year-round direct flights from Fort Lauderdale to St. Maarten.

Visit www.jetblue.com • Visit www.spiritair.com



Grand Case Courts Agents with Special Rate

The Grand Case Beach Club, St. Martin, is offering travel agents a 40 per cent discount, space available, from April 13 - December 20. The discount applies to rack rates, which include continental breakfast, for a maximum of three nights. Reservations can only be confirmed seven days before arrival. The Grand Case Beach Club requires that agents request reservations on agency letterhead with a copy of the ARC list. A business card or letter from the agency will be required on check in. The Grand Case Beach Club is located on the ocean adjacent to the picturesque village of Grand Case, and about a ten minute drive from Marigot, the capital. Reservations can be confirmed by contacting the resort.

Call 800-344-3016; fax 011-590-59-087-5993; E-mail info@gcbc.com

Sol Melia to Open First Property in Aruba

A joint venture by the Spanish development company, Grupo Trusam, and Spanish hotel chain, Sol Meliá, will develop a luxury resort that will include a Meliá hotel, a casino, a spa, a beach club, several restaurants and other luxury services on the land occupied by the old Hotel Bushiri, which will become the new center of Oranjestad, the capital of Aruba. This will be the first hotel for the two companies in Aruba, a Caribbean location which receives more than 800,000 visitors each year seeking exclusivity, luxury and superior service. It will be incorporated into an area known as the "Longest Linear Park in the Caribbean," one of the most prestigious infrastructures of the government of Aruba, and along Boulevard Smith, the main street in Oranjestad.

Call 888-33-MELIA; e-mail: msm-usacan@sol-group.com; www.solmelia.com

Paradise Island's New Atlantis

Kerzner International will conclude its \$1 billion Phase III development with the opening of the new Reef Atlantis. The new 497-key tower will offer guests home-like accommodations with rates starting from \$340 per night.

The 22-story, 497-room tower consists of 307 studios, 188 one-bedrooms, two penthouses and the option of creating a two-bedroom accommodation by combining a one-bedroom suite with a studio. With living space ranging from 519 square feet to 3,102 square feet, The Reef offers a residential experience complete with 24-hour room service, daily maid service, wireless internet and a variety of exclusive family-centered services and experiences. Rates range from \$340 per night for a studio terrace accommodation to \$1,750 for a deluxe ocean two-bedroom suite.

Visit www.kerzner.com

BEST BUYS

\$298 PUERTO RICO Overlooking the picturesque waterfront of San Juan Bay, the Sheraton Old San Juan Hotel lies in the heart of the seven-square-block historic district of the 16th century city of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Just a few cobblestones away are fascinating museums and art galleries, historical landmarks, ethnic eateries and a multitude of world-class shopping plazas. The Sheraton boasts two new restaurants and an expanded casino - the only one in Old San Juan.

Explore Old San Juan is a package that remains valid through April 30, 2008 starting at \$298 per couple (children under 12 eat and stay free), a two-night minimum is required. The package includes Passport booklet w/discounts to merchants, museums, retailers and restaurants, deluxe accommodations, complimentary daily use of the fitness center, daily buffet breakfast for two at Palio (including gratuity), exploration backpack with two water bottles, two-hour use of an electric Fun Car for exploring the old city, and casino match bet coupon.

Call 866-653-7577; www.sheratonoldsanjuan.com

\$173 ANTIGUA The 464-room Jolly Beach is an exceptional Caribbean experience. Located on Antigua's best beach the resort offers great year-round value and is popular for destination weddings, honeymooners and families. All-inclusive rates include accommodations, all taxes, all meals, snacks and afternoon tea, house brand beverages, non-motorized watersports, activities and entertainment. All rooms are air-conditioned and face the ocean; each has a patio or balcony, direct-dial phone, cable TV, hair-dryer and rentable safe.

Rates start at \$190 per person, per night based on double occupancy December 21, 2007 through April 15, 2008 and \$173 from April 16 through December 20, 2008 for a Standard room. Children 3-11 years sharing a room with two adults pay \$54 per child, per night, and kids under three years old stay free.

Travel agents can request information about the Jolly Beach Resort Loyalty Program by calling 866-905-6559; www.jollybeachresort.com

\$900 NEVIS Montpelier Plantation Inn has "unwrapped" its brand new Villa Suite that will enhance the accommodations options available to discerning travelers. The Villa Suite is a newly constructed cottage set discreetly on the fringe of the property, providing a greater sense of seclusion in which to unwind and reconnect with the peaceful natural surroundings. Tastefully decorated in a chic plantation style, the Villa Suite features high, beamed ceilings and elegant wood flooring throughout. Nightly rates for the Villa Suite begin at \$900 nightly based on double occupancy. Room rates inclusive of breakfast and afternoon tea start at \$280 per room, per night.

Call 869-469-3462; E-mail info@montpeliernevis.com; www.montpeliernevis.com



\$805 GRENADA Spice Island Beach Resort features 64 suites, the full-service Janissa's Spa, a Cybex fitness center, Oliver's beachside gourmet restaurant, the Sea & Surf Terrace for refreshing cocktails throughout the day, a central swimming pool with swim-up whirlpool, an Omnicourt tennis court, the Nutmeg Pod children's activity center, the Gatsby Boutique and more. Fully-inclusive rates cover accommodations; meals; afternoon tea; beverages including house wine at dinner; non-motorized watersports; golf greens fees at the nine-hole Grenada Golf Club; and concierge and room service. Rates start at \$805 per room, per night, based on doubles in an Oleander Garden room through April 30, 2008.

Call 473-444-4258; E-mail to spiceisl@spiceisle.com; www.spiceislandbeachresort.com

\$1150 DOMINICA Clients will save money with Castle Comfort Lodge's "Seven-Night Dive Adventure Package," which includes seven nights accommodations, seven breakfasts, welcome drink, roundtrip airport transfers, five days of two tank morning boat dives, unlimited shore diving, use of sea kayaks, a whale watching trip, a land adventure trip. Available through April 1, 2008, prices start at \$1,150 per person double.

Call 767-448-2188, E-mail dive@cwdom.dm; www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com

\$999 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC Maxim Bungalows, the Dominican Republic's newest luxury resort, is offering a three-night package for couples looking to escape to paradise this winter. The new resort, which opened its doors last month, is offering a package that remains valid through March 31, 2008 and includes: roundtrip VIP airport transportation; three nights' accommodation in a Bungalow; a \$150 gift certificate good towards Kerstin Florian treatments and services at the new 17,000 square foot Spa and Maxim Barbershop. Priced at \$999 per couple; valid through March 31, 2008. Other options include a four-night escape priced from \$1,299 per couple; and an adventure package starting from \$1,699 per couple.

Call 866-970-3364; www.maximbungalows.com

\$750 TOBAGO Situated on a gently sloped hillside overlooking the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean Sea, The Villas at Stonehaven feature 14 luxurious homes with panoramic views of the Tobago coastline, providing everything needed for the quintessential Caribbean vacation. Guestrooms boast private balconies; villas have a private infinity pool, computer ports, mahogany and granite kitchens with a wine chiller and ice maker, a sitting room with VCR, CD player and cable TV as well as verandas and pool decks. Rates start at \$750 per villa, per night for a maximum of four guests through April 30, 2008.

Visit www.stonehavenvillas.com



Reporting 13.9% tourism growth that has seen 8.4 million foreign travelers in 2006, South Africa's star continues to ascend as it moves toward 2009, the year it hosts **ASTA's International Destination Expo (IDE)**, March 8-12, 2009. The main sponsors for the event are **South African Tourism, South African Airways and Dragonfly**, which will cooperate to provide a four-day workshop at Sun City a Sun International Property to hopefully more than 1,000 agents; South African Airways will offer special industry fares for IDE participants.

"We are honored that ASTA has chosen to recognize South Africa by allowing us to host the 2009 International Destination Expo," said Sthu Zungu, U.S. President of South African Tourism. "Hosting the nation's most powerful travel organization means that the upper echelon of American travel professionals will be exposed to both South Africa and our national carrier, South African Airways. We are confident they will see first-hand all that South Africa has to offer as a travel experience unlike any other."

"South African Airways has always understood the importance of travel agents and believes that there is no more important travel industry group than ASTA," said Marc Cavaliere, Executive Vice President of South African Airways in North America. "We know that agents traveling to IDE will be impressed with both the country and the level of service they will be afforded flying SAA. Furthermore, we sincerely hope to continue our good relationship with all of the travel

agents that are members of ASTA and work with them to help bring more visitors to South Africa every year."

"Every year we choose a new and notable destination to host IDE," said Cheryl Hudak, CTC, ASTA President & CEO. "It was only fitting that we choose to highlight a country as experiential and dynamic as South Africa in 2009, just one year away from the FIFA World Cup in 2010. All eyes are on South Africa now, and we think our members will be excited to learn more about selling this exciting destination."

South African Airways features the only nonstop service from the U.S. to South Africa with daily departures from Washington, D.C., and daily direct service from New York that offer travel convenience and award-winning service. Customers in premium class enjoy 180° flat-bed seats with individual entertainment systems, and customers in economy class enjoy the most legroom versus competitors and individual on-demand entertainment systems. SAA's unrivaled network, featuring connections to more than 20 destinations within South Africa, and more than 20 cities across the rest of the continent, make the airline the savvy traveler's "gateway to Africa." As a member of **Star Alliance**, South African Airways has access to 855 destinations in 155 countries and more than 16,000 flights daily, including convenient connections from more than 25 cities in the U.S. through code share service with partner **United Airlines**. Members of United's Mileage Plus, **US Airways'** Dividend Miles and **Air Canada's** Aeroplan programs are able to earn

and redeem miles on all SAA flights.

Call 800-722-9675 or visit www.flysaa.com; for ASTA, visit www.asta.org

Accommodating the Environment

Besides the explosion in growth of accommodations, air service and tourism amenities, tourism developers are increasingly cognizant of protecting the environment and working alongside local communities to encourage sustainable tourism.

Sun International Hotels & Resorts is Africa's largest tourism and leisure group. The company operates resorts and luxury hotels in South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, and Swaziland. The group's distinctive properties include the award-winning Table Bay Hotel in Cape Town; The Royal Livingstone on the precipice of Victoria Falls; Zimbali Lodge; and The Palace of the Lost City at Sun City, among others.

Sun City draws thousands of visitors each year to its four hotels and recreational facilities including two world-class golf courses, the magical Lost City water-park, and The Valley of Waves. Only a two-hour drive from Johannesburg, the resort, situated in the bushveld of South Africa's North West Province, is surrounded by the imposing mountains. The adjacent malaria-free Pilanesberg National Game Park is home to South Africa's Big 5 – Elephant, Rhino, Lion, Leopard and Buffalo.

The Resort has been awarded a Gold classification from the Heritage Programme for its commitment to the principles of sustainable and responsible environmental practice. Sun City Resort was also awarded the 2007 Overall Imvelo Responsible Tourism Award in South Africa. Imvelo, meaning Nguni "nature," forms part of an ongoing hospitality industry campaign to encourage industry members to accept guidelines by promoting responsible tourism.

Visit www.suninternational.com

And, on the Eastern Cape Province, the **Shamwari Game Reserve** was named the World's Leading Safari and Game Reserve and the World's Leading Conservation Company at the recent World Travel Awards for the 10th consecutive year. Shamwari was founded by Adrian Gardiner, who believed that peace and understanding between man and animals and the land could be achieved in the Eastern Cape, a land that had been devastated after it was once one of the richest wildlife

zones in Africa. With the creation of Shamwari, the first major reserve in the area, he developed new jobs, rejuvenated the region, and helped increase the flow of foreign currency through tourism.

Gardiner established a Conservation Department, which includes a veterinary surgeon, an ecologist, an environment manager, and 38 in staff. A highly trained anti-poaching unit, including an airplane and pilot, provides security for all the fauna and flora at the Reserve and a recycling system is in place for waste disposal as well as a water-recycling program. A Breeding Centre, with a Wildlife Manager, on 2,500 hectares enables certain species to breed in the absence of predators. Also, at Shamwari, the Born Free Foundation Animal Rescue and Education Center has a special area to provide long term humane care for rescued African Cats who cannot be returned to the wild.

Once Shamwari was established, Adrian established the Mantis Collection, which recently signed an agreement between the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Shamwari to support one another on conservation projects.

E-mail reservations@mantiscollection.com; or visit www.mantiscollection.com

Last year, CC Africa and community leaders from the Makhasa and Mngobokazi clans signed an agreement that would restore ownership of the land to the local communities.

CC Africa's CEO, Steve Fitzgerald, decided that although it was imperative for CC Africa to own the business to ensure ongoing profitable ecotourism at Phinda, it was not necessarily crucial to own the land. CC Africa received \$37 million in compensation for 28,417 acres of Phinda. A 72-year-lease was agreed to in which CC Africa will lease the land back from the communities. CC Africa retains full ownership of the business and all the animals on the land. As part of the settlement, CC Africa will pay both communities an upfront amount of \$1.24 million in order to facilitate future joint ventures with CC Africa.

Visit www.ccafrica

For more information, contact South African Tourism 800-593-1318; fax: 212-764-1980; E-mail info.us@southafrica.net; www.southafrica.net

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to South Africa see page 84-85 of the Listings Section

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Jordan's Royal Vision

Jordan's tourism executives are planning to double the tourism economy by 2010. That plan involves developing sustainable tourism entities through a partnership of government, the private sector, and the local population to expand employment, entrepreneurial opportunities, and to educate the general population about the social benefits of the industry. Stateside, Jordan is becoming a top seller among tour operators who specialize in the Mideast.

Among their strategies to introduce this fascinating country to the travel trade, the **Jordan Tourism Board** is sponsoring **The Jordan Travel Mart** (Feb. 10-12), which will take place at the King Hussein Bin Talal Convention Center at the Dead Sea in Jordan to provide opportunities for travel professionals from the USA, Canada, and Latin America to learn about all the wonders Jordan has to offer and experience the diversity of this unique destination.

The official carrier for the event is Royal Jordanian airline and participating properties include **Kempinski Hotel Ishtar**, the **Moevenpick Dead Sea Hotel** and the **Marriott Jordan Valley Dead Sea Resort & Spa**.

Participating travel professionals will have the opportunity to meet with Jordanian suppliers (tour operators, hotels, etc) and start and/or enhance valuable business relationships.

Organized by W. H. Coleman, the event includes pre and post tours that include Petra as well as religious, history and culture programs and eco adventure itineraries.

Call 800-874-2324 x 8025; E Mail: sales@whcoleman.com

Be a Jordan Specialist

Search for "Jordan Travel Specialist," online and no less than 1,210 sites pop up—that's all there are in the entire world. By becoming a Jordan travel specialist, agents will join a select group of experts that are in high demand year round. Agents who cannot make it to the trade show may want to avail themselves of this opportunity. The course is featured on the Jordan Tourism Board's website, and is linked with ASTA's educational portal. "With its rich historical and archeological treasures and the creativity and energy of its people, Jordan is poised to become a major tourism destination for travelers who value great service,

fine food, and enriching travel experiences," writes William J. Shaw, President and COO, **Marriott International, Inc.**



Jordan is Top Seller at Sunnyland

Sunnyland Tour's eight-Day Royal Tour Of Jordan continues to lead in sales all other programs to the Hashemite Kingdom Of Jordan. Sunnyland guarantees group departures on this eight-day tour with weekly Saturday departures from JFK on **Royal Jordanian Airlines**. Geared to meet every budget in hotel category selections, the tour covers all the major historical and Biblical sites. Participants stay four nights in Amman and two in the "Once Lost Nabatean City" of Petra. Sightseeing includes: Amman, the Dead Sea, Bethany, Jerash, Ajlun, Kerak, Mt. Nebo, Petra and Wadi Rum.

Tour Extensions are available for individual and group participants who would like to extend their visit to include nearby Israel, Egypt, Syria or another combination choice.

Call 800-783-7839; www.JordanHotDeal.com

Ya'lla's Ultimate Jordan

Ultimate Jordan, priced from \$1,995 per person double, is **Ya'lla Tours USA's** most extensive escorted program to Jordan. Passengers stay in Amman the first two nights and visit the Roman city of Jerash. Heading south to Petra with stops at the biblical sites of Mt. Nebo and Madaba, the tour visits Petra at a leisurely pace.

From Petra, travelers set out by 4X4 vehicles into the spectacular desert scenery of Wadi Rum with a visit to Bethany. Travelers then have three nights at a Dead Sea hotel spa. The \$1,995 price is available through March 20, 2008; June 1-Aug. 31, 2008; and Nov. 16-Dec. 23, 2008. Prices include seven nights' accommodation, daily breakfast, private transfers, five days of escorted touring, entrance fees, one dinner, five lunches, and taxes.

Call 800-644-1595; www.yallatours.com

For information, call the Jordan Tourism Board 877-733-5673; 703-243-7404; info@seejordan.org; www.seejordan.org

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Jordan see page 82 of the Listings Section

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BEST BUYS

\$4395 BOTSWANA

Travelers can now choose from three levels of luxury —Cheetah, Lion or Leopard — on **African Travel Inc.'s** 11-day Botswana program. Prices for "The Last Refuge" itinerary - available for small group or individual departures - ranging from \$4,395 per person at the Cheetah level through March, to \$10,795 per person for Leopard level, June through November, 2008.

Guests spend six days in camps and lodges in the bush, beginning and ending with a hotel overnight in Johannesburg. All levels visit three different destinations, including luxury camps in the Okavango Delta and Chobe while Cheetah and Lion levels visit the Moremi Reserve, while those on the Leopard level stay at the Kwedi Reserve.

Game drives, transfers between camps by bush plane - complete with aerial game viewing, accommodations and 20 meals are included in the price. Roundtrip airfare from New York to Johannesburg to Maun, Botswana ranges from \$1,995 economy class, to \$7,975 business class.

Call 800-421-8907; E-mail ati@africantravelinc.com; www.africantravelinc.com

\$1070 SOUTH AFRICA

The **Steenberg Hotel & Winery** has introduced three new Heritage Suites that are a tribute to three distinct historic periods of South Africa. The Steenberg's original Manor House was built in 1682 and parts of the building have been declared a National Monument, an attribute reflected in these suites. Each is a contemporary interpretation, combining the sense of history with five-star accommodation epitomizing luxury, elegance and comfort.

The hotel's management mandated that these suites were to incorporate the very latest in technology and luxury. All suites enjoy butler service, in-room complimentary refreshment bar/laundry service/wi-fi and internet service. The bathrooms hold a walk-in shower, large separate tub, mini TV, and an audio entertainment system. Rates for the Heritage Suites start at \$1,070 per suite per night and include accommodation, breakfast and tax.

Call 011-27-21-713-22-22; E-mail info@steenberghotel.com; www.steenberghotel.com

\$2575 ISRAEL

EL AL is partnering with the **Israel Bike Experience** to offer weeklong bicycle packages for riders of all abilities. Travelers can bring their bicycles on board the EL AL flight to Israel at no extra charge, and choose between seven-day bicycle tours on either a Northern Central route or a Southern Central route. On the Northern Central itinerary, cyclists begin a circular route through the Galilee, the Beit Keshet Forest to the city of Nazareth, on to Jerusalem ending at the Dead Sea.

On the Southern Central route, participants ride through the Negev Desert gorge, to the Dead Sea and Masada, and on to Jerusalem. Riders are offered the option of off-road route for intermediate/advanced cyclists, and an on-road route for beginners. Packages start at \$2,575 per person double with roundtrip airfare on EL AL from New York (JFK/Newark), seven nights' accommodations, daily touring and full board.

Call 800-EL-AL-SUN; www.elal.co.il

IN THE NEWS

A New Dan on the Way

"Something wonderful is about to happen that will completely change the hotel scene in Jerusalem" says Rafi Baeri, VP Marketing at **Dan Hotels**, referring to the new hotel in Jerusalem.

Located on Hebron Road, opposite Mount Zion and the Old City walls, the 126-room hotel is designed to suit business and leisure travelers as all rooms are equipped with wireless Internet, computer hook-up and iPod connections, all rooms have a 26-inch LCD television, a safe and a mini fridge.

At the same time, Dan Hotels is selling the "Ultimate Luxury Package" through 2008, which includes a red carpet welcome and free entry Voucher to the Dan Lounges at Ben Gurion Airport, complimentary transfers from airport to hotel for guests staying in the following hotels: Dan Tel Aviv, Dan Carmel Haifa, King David Jerusalem.

When making reservations, travel agents must mention "Ultimate Luxury Package."

Call 800-223-7773; www.danhotels.co.il

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Last-Minute Sweet Valentine Deals

Italy: Set atop Rome's Spanish Steps and featuring a panoramic view of the entire city, the **Hassler Roma** has been Rome's five-star lodging of choice for the world's elite for over a century. Combining classic style and elegance with the finest in service and amenities, each of the 82 rooms and 13 suites are individually designed and adorned with authentic Italian accents to produce an atmosphere that transports guests to an era filled with romance and elegance.

This Valentine's Day the Hassler is offering a special Roman Skyline Package that will whisk guests around the city via helicopter. Guests can circle over the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica, the Colosseum, the Pantheon and afterwards return to their five-star amenities. The Hassler Roma's super-luxe Roman Skyline Package, based on double occupancy, about \$9,500 for three nights also comes with private limo transfers, daily breakfast, a tasting menu dinner and a bottle of Prosecco upon arrival. Valid through February 28, 2008.

Call 800-223-6800; E-mail: booking@hotelhassler.it; or visit www.hotelhassler.com

Virginia: Closer to home, **The Homestead's** Valentine's Day/All-American Weekend – February 14-18, 2008 – offers great value on a holiday weekend getaway with a third night free for two nights booked. Guests can spend their days on the slopes, enjoying some of the finest downhill skiing in the South, or retreat to the warmth of The Homestead's historic halls for an art class or wine tasting. The resort's talented pastry chef, Michel Finel, will lead a seminar and Chocolate Demo ideal for couples seeking a sweet Valentine's treat. And Sunday night fireworks will bring the weekend to an appropriately grand finale. Room rates begin at \$300 per night, based on double occupancy. A modified American meal plan, including breakfast and dinner, is available for an additional \$90 per person for adults and \$32 for children 6-12. After a day of non-stop fun in the snow, guests can retreat to the natural healing springs and pampering treatments of The Homestead's world-class spa.

Call 800-838-1766; or visit www.thehomestead.com

Florida: Hyatt Regency Bonaventure Conference Center & Spa is bringing out the bubbly for couples looking to celebrate romance during the entire month of February. The hotel is now offering two Valentine's Day packages valid through February 29. The Cupid's Deluxe Romance Package includes deluxe accommodations, bottle of Champagne and chocolate covered strawberries, dinner for two at Ireland's Steakhouse – the hotel's fine dining restaurant – buffet breakfast or room service, and a 50-minute signature couple's massage at Red Door Lifestyle Spa, Elizabeth Arden, as well as a 2 p.m. late checkout. Rates start at \$779 per night based on two sharing a room, of course.

The Amour Package is a trimmed down version of the Deluxe Package but includes buffet breakfast or room serv-

ice, and a 2 p.m. late checkout. Rates start at \$229 per night per couple.

Call 800-233-1234; or visit www.bonaventure.hyatt.com

Montserrat, West Indies: With a population of only 4,500, this Caribbean isle is perfectly suited for a cozy retreat with that special someone and offers the intimacy of a private island. Lovebirds can check-in to **Tropical Mansion Suites**, an inviting and quaint hideaway in Montserrat for a dreamy Valentine's Day stay. Canoodle in the Honeymoon Suite for \$222 per night and enjoy a quiet getaway from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Make a toast to your beloved and sip on a glass of complimentary champagne while enjoying the fragrance of a fresh bouquet of flowers and a fruit basket as a welcome gift.

www.tropicalmansionsuites.com

New Zealand: Whether as a Valentine's Day splurge or a dream honeymoon, **Down Under Endeavors'** "Romantic Honeymoon Adventure" offers a 10-night escapade crossing the South Island. Beginning in Queenstown for four nights in this alpine town, ranging from a heli-picnic on a remote peak to cruising Doubtful Sounds in search of seals, dolphins and penguins. Then head to the West Coast's Lake Moeraki for exciting fishing and canoeing experiences in a landscape of dramatic vistas – before taking to the skies once again for a heli-hike at Fox Glacier. Ride the rails on the TranzAlpine, traversing the Southern Alps to Christchurch, for a gondola ride to lofty overlooks followed by a thrilling mountain bike rush from the peak's summit to base. "Romantic Honeymoon Adventure" packages start at \$2,850 per person (double occupancy), land only, and include: 10 nights accommodation; heli-picnic lunch in Queenstown; heli-hike in Fox Glacier; gondola ride and mountain biking in Christchurch; TranzAlpine train journey; and three days car rental.

Call 888-229-0082; www.DownUnderEndeavours.com

Scotland: Uber cool, Edinburgh city center hotel, The Scotsman, has teamed up with famous Scots photographer, Trevor Yerbury, to provide a 'Dare to Bare Valentines Package' exclusively for guests at **The Scotsman** through-February 17. Guests are entitled to a personal photographic studio shoot with Trevor for the perfect gift for your loved one – a glossy book of 12-nude or semi-nude images, beautifully created in a handmade album. Packages lead in at \$2,474 per room for one night for two staying in a guest Suite; a chilled bottle of champagne; chocolates; scattered fresh rose petals at turndown; a champagne Scottish breakfast; 'Horny Cow Seductive Bath & Massage Oil', from The Scotsman's 'Cowshed' Spa; full use of its 'Escape' Health Club; a two-hour photographic shoot with Trevor Yerbury including professional hair & makeup the day of the shoot.

Call 011-441-31-556-5565; E-mail reservations@thescotsmanhotel.co.uk; www.thescotsmanhotel.co.uk

Welcome Back to the Slopes, Baby Boomers!

Baby boomers who have shied away from the slopes during their child-raising years may be anxious about hitting the slopes again because they feel out of practice and out of shape but ski.com's new initiative with the North American Ski Training Center may change their outlook.

The new partnership allows Ski.com agents the opportunity to book one- to 12-day, total-immersion performance ski school clinics led by PSIA Demonstration Team members and AMGA Ski Guides at premier mountain destinations in both international and domestic venues.

By making one phone call to Ski.com, agents can plan and book their ski-faring clients into discounted lodging, reserve their airfares and ground transport and can now, through this partnership with NASTC, also arrange for all conditions/all terrain specialized ski instruction, backcountry, snowcat and helicopter powder skiing academies, avalanche training, women's clinics and kids' and family camps.

The Truckee, Calif.-based North American Ski Training Center offers multi-day camps around the globe for intermediate through expert skiers who want more than a "quick fix" and truly get to the next level. Members of the prestigious PSIA Demonstration Teams lead the clinics at the best mountains in the world: from Squaw Valley, Aspen and Whistler to Portillo, Targhee and Chamonix.

"This new partnership with NASTC adds to Ski.com's extensive list of existing products and services for traveling skiers of all abilities," said Kris McKinnon, Ski.com vice president of marketing and business development. "By partnering with NASTC, we are now able to book for our clients a unique way to better their skiing abilities while also participating in an extraordinary on-mountain experience." "Ski.com is known throughout the industry for the services they provide to their clients and we are proud to be partnering with such an exceptional team," said Jenny Fellows, co-owner of NASTC. "Our goal is to introduce Ski.com clients to a one-of-a-kind experience that will make them better skiers and more comfortable doing what they love on any mountain."

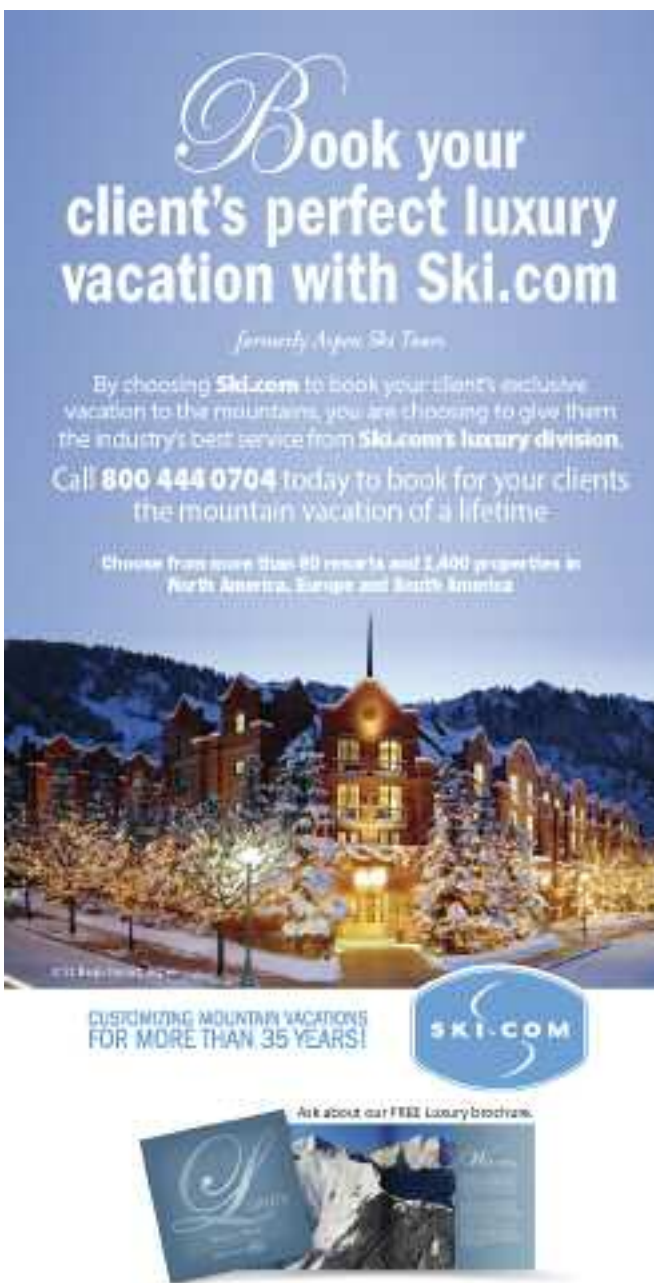
Headquartered in Aspen, **Ski.com** has been customizing mountain vacations for more than 35 years. Ski.com is known for the personalized service given by their experienced Mountain Vacation Specialists and serves as a one-stop shop for everything needed at more than 80 of the



most popular resorts and 1,400 properties in the United States, Canada, Europe and South America. Founded in 1971 as Aspen Ski Tours, the company operated under that name until purchasing the Ski.com domain name in 2000.

Tahoe, Calif.-based NASTC runs more than 25 ski clinics at 18 mountain resorts worldwide. A sampling of NASTC courses available through Ski.com follow: Luna Chix Women of NASTC – Feb. 23-25, 2008 (Northstar, Calif.); and All Conditions/All Terrain – Feb. 26-29, 2008 (Squaw Valley, Calif.).

Call 800-916-9463; www.ski.com/land/nastc.aspx.



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Slope Discovery: Croatia

Gorski Kotar is relatively unknown region of Croatia just 30-minute drive from the Northern Adriatic Coast. Its rich wooded areas make it an affordable alternative to coastal vacations. Ski-lovers can enjoy any of its many ski resorts, like Platak or Bjelolasica. Other year-round activities in the region include hiking or biking.

Visit www.gorskikotar.com

BEST BUYS

\$568 MEXICO Situated in Nuevo Vallarta along the Riviera Nayarit, **Villa del Palmar Flamingos Beach Resort & Spa** is one of the newest properties on this stretch of unspoiled beach. The upscale, family-friendly resort features 275 ocean view suites overlooking the bay and the Pacific beyond. Villa suites offer kitchenettes, while spacious one-, two- and three-bedroom suites all feature a whirlpool tub in the master bathroom, separate dining area, complete kitchen and private ocean view balcony or ground floor terrace with wet bar. Villa del Palmar Flamingos' 2008 Golf Package covers three-night accommodations in a one-bedroom suite, daily breakfast buffet, welcome fruit basket with truffles, daily 18-hole round of golf for two, roundtrip transfers to the course and taxes for \$651 through April 15; \$568 April 16 –October 31; \$692 November 1 – December 20. Call 877-845-5247; www.VillaGroupResorts.com

\$595 FLORIDA **WaterColor**, Northwest Florida's only AAA Four Diamond resort, is offering a special "Quick Getaway" package to beat the winter blues with a trip to the Emerald Coast. Leave behind icy storms for snow-white beaches and sunny skies with this two-night package, offering reduced rates on accommodations. WaterColor's two-night "Quick Getaway" vacation package starts at \$595 valid until February 13, 2008. It includes dinner for two at the AAA Four Diamond Fish Out of Water restaurant, one round of golf at the Tom Fazio-designed Camp Creek Golf Course or unlimited tennis at the resort's Tennis Center. Among the amenities offered are tennis, golf; a Bike Barn and Boat House offering complimentary kayak, canoe, fishing gear and bicycle rentals; a full-service spa; upscale shopping at the TownCenter, fine dining at Fish Out of Water, and the Camp WaterColor kids program. Call 866-426-2656; www.watercolorinn.com

\$469 WISCONSIN Plan to break out of that cabin fever as you quite literally swing into spring to the retro sound of big bands. No need to worry about judges. In fact, you be the judge as you dance with your own "star" after a professional dance lesson or two. Gliding gracefully around a ballroom is part of the fun and excitement of "Big Band Gala," a late-winter two-night getaway package (March 14-16, 2008) to the historic **Osthoff Resort**, a AAA Four Diamond rated property on the shores of Elkhart Lake in southeast Wisconsin. Priced at \$469 per couple for two nights' accommodations in a suite, a Friday evening welcome reception followed by dancing to the Howard Schneider Big Band, dance instruction on Saturday led by instructor Beverly Projansky, who offers guests beginning and intermediate techniques. An optional session (\$25 per couple) will offer instruction in rumba and swing. Space is limited and early reservations are suggested. Call 800-876-3399; www.osthoff.com

\$3995 CANADA **Sacred Rides Mountain Bike Holidays** has just announced the details of a new 'deluxe' mountain bike adventure, set to debut in British Columbia in 2008. The Five-Star Singletrack holiday will feature 11 days of incredible British Columbia riding, with accommodation at deluxe backcountry lodges such as world-renowned Island Lake Lodge.

The trip includes gourmet meals and additional activities such as floatplane trips, hot springs and sweat lodge ceremonies. The five-star Singletrack holiday is from September 5 – 16, 2008 and is \$3,995 per person, excluding airfare. In addition to their Five-Star trip, Sacred Rides also offers affordable alternatives in British Columbia, Peru and Chile. Call 888-423-7849; www.sacredrides.com

\$21,000 ELABORATE SKI WEEK CMH Offers Elaborate Ski Week for Nomads. \$21,000 for a week of skiing. Per Person. No, it's not a typo. With the introduction of its Nomads Week in 2008, Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) - reportedly the largest Heli-Skiing company in the world - has formulated what may be the most expensive ski trip ever offered. Consisting of only eight skiers, accompanied by three guides, the group will span two mountain ranges in British Columbia and five separate Heli-Skiing areas - an expanse that amounts to half the size of Switzerland. Much like a chauffeur-driven limousine, a private helicopter will be at the beck and call of this exclusive group to shuttle them to the very best - far-flung, yet exceptional - skiing among a vast amount of spectacular, and un-skied, terrain.

Trips will be available through March 15, 2008 and cost \$168,000 for eight skiers (or \$21,000 per person). 17 hours of flying time is included - extra hours of flying will be charged at a rate of \$4,054/flying hour. If groups use less than 17 hours of flying, they will be refunded at a rate of \$5,000/flying hour. Call 800-661-0252; www.canadianmountainholidays.com

\$247 COLORADO The **Lodge & Spa at Cordillera, A RockResort**, is offering The Men's Spa Boot Camp package for men who want to experience the most extreme, adventurous sports in the Rockies - followed by some serious pampering. Available through March 23, it includes the following: two nights' accommodations, one full day ice climbing lesson or one full day of snowmobile rental, one Mountain Man spa treatment per person. Rates start at \$247 per person per night based on minimum of two nights.

Guests can also opt to enjoy a rush of adrenaline, spectacular views of the Rocky Mountains, and lots of snow as they cruise through the Rockies on their very own snowmobiles or climb the icy rock surfaces. Call 866-650-ROCK (7625); www.ROCKRESORTS.com



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

One-Stop Shopping at Fare Buzz Promises Profits and Ease in Building Earnings

Many readers may not realize that **Fare Buzz** began its operations in 1994 as a two-person office and gradually grew to 40 in-house office staffers. Travel agents have been their partners through the vicissitudes of changing trends, economic dips and technological challenges that just keep coming. The firm's staff has the combined experience of over 80 years in the travel industry. **Arnold Walter**, CEO of Fare Buzz talks about new products and the promise of even more streamlined service in the coming year.

JF: Fare Buzz (FB) boasts about its product diversity, can you give us a short rundown on the most current products for agents - both Home-Based and traditional who are new to FB?

FB: Our product line includes: Low consolidator rates, exclusive Business/First-Class rates, last-minute travel deals for domestic travel, round the world fares and circle trips, select rates globally for hotels and car rentals, net rates for travel originating from overseas destinations, trip insurance and group rates.

JF: How many agents work with Fare Buzz and do you have a preferred agent or agency structure in which agents can earn more on their bookings with Fare Buzz?

FB: We have over 25,000 agencies signed up, which equates to over 70,000 agents. All of our fares are NET and the agent has the ability to set their own uncapped markup.

JF: What is Fare Buzz's definition of a "bona fide" travel agent?

FB: An agent that is an owner/employee of an industry identified organization - ARC, IATAN, CLIA, OSSN, NACTA, etc, or has a business license for a reseller of travel or travel related products

JF: What is your criteria for working with or how do you qualify home-based and independent agents?

FB: They must be a member of one of the above organizations, a host agency or have a business license for a reseller of travel or travel related products.

JF: I understand last year you made a move to

level the playing field for home-based agents, can you speak to that?

FB: Since the Home-Based market is the largest growing segment of the travel industry, our business model seems to be tailor made to suit their requirements: Home-Based Agents don't need access to GDS since our booking system offers published as well as non published fares;

Online Booking capabilities 24/7; One stop shop for Air, Hotels and Cars - they don't have to turn away their clients anymore; Ability to add mark ups; Commission disbursement within a week - now thru ACH; Phone Reservations and Live Customer Support 7 days a week; Now HB agents can compete with the Expedia's and Travelocity's since we can power their websites with our fares and booking engine (for those with websites); Online Reports.

JF: What, if any new technology have you introduced in the past year or plan to introduce in 2008?

FB: We are introducing a number of tools that will further enhance our service to travel agents: New Account Activity Reports including commission check information; Date and Time changes to reservations online; Credit Card Auto Correction online; Auto ticketing -faster ticketing and commission disbursement; and Flight Matrix that displays multiple carriers and their lowest fare available. Stay tuned for more new technology and product releases.

JF: From what I understand FB specializes only in air products, is this true? If so, what is the commission structure on tickets for the various classes, in other words how can agents maximize their profits with Fare Buzz?

FB: Fare Buzz does specialize in air - First, Business & Economy but we also offer Hotels and Car Rentals worldwide to provide a one stop shopping location for the agents.

Fare Buzz offers private, exclusive and published fares to the Travel Agent community and they maximize their profits by adding their own markup to all fares.

JF: Does Fare Buzz plan to sell a land product as many consolidators do and plan to do? If so, can



you tell us the mechanism behind the programs - who organizes them, a private label deal or do you have a direct contract with ground operators, if so where?

FB: We are currently looking at our options for future expansion.

JF: Fare Buzz is also a preferred supplier for large host agencies and consortiums, can you name a few?

FB: Fare Buzz is a Preferred supplier for approximately 48 Host Agencies and 6 Consortiums - EtravCo, Cruise Shopoes, ITGroup Network, WESTA, NEST and Agent24

JF: Finally, for new young agents and more experienced agents, what are some of the reasons FB is head and shoulders above its competition...the reasons agents should favor Fare Buzz?

FB: Agents no longer have to search multiple sites to find the best fares; FB offers price and availability in one search; offers a Price Meet or Beat Policy; Access to over 15 million fares to worldwide destinations; Uncapped Air Markups - Agents are free to add their mark up and retain 100%.

We also offer three booking methods: by phone, online or by E-mail. And we offer enormous Product Diversity and we are agents' reliable One Stop Shop providing the lowest fares and highest service. Additionally, FB furnishes performance reports via our password protected website which provides data on: Account activity, top city pairs booked, class of service sold, commission earned, etc. This feature is available free and downloadable 24/7.

Call 888-808-4123 and speak with Josanne Swain at ext. 150 or Don Newton at ext. 127; E-mail ratdesk@farebuzz.com; or visit www.farebuzz.com



Jean-Philippe Perol Elected Newest ETC Chairman

Jean-Philippe Perol has been named chairman of the European Travel Commission for a one-year term through November 2008. A seasoned professional, he has nearly 35 years of experience in tourism in both public and private sectors. Currently director for the Americas at Maison de la France, the official French tourism office based in New

York, he has spent more than 12 years with the organization.

Joining as marketing director in 1988, he has headed operations as director in Latin America and Germany. From 1998 to 2003, he was CEO for the entire Maison de la France organization, based in Paris. He has held the New York post since 2003.

During Perol's tenure at Maison de la France the membership network of tourism companies increased 60%. He

played an important role in creating the MDLF's International Advisory Board, tour operators from around the world recognized for their contribution to developing French tourism, and also ensured the smooth transition of marketing into the online arena. Perol holds a degree from the Institut d Etudes Politiques de Paris, a degree in history from the Sorbonne and a PHD in Business administration from Dauphine.

Visit www.visiteurope.com.



Gehris Heads Up Travel Insured International

Jon Gehris has been named the new President of Travel Insured International by the company's Board of Directors. He becomes the company's second President, succeeding Travel Insured's founder Peter Gehris, who continues as Chairman and CEO.

William Scully III has been appointed as Travel Insured's Vice President of Operations, a new position. Scully joins the company from Hartford Life Insurance Co., where he served as Assistant Vice President for Investment Products Technology.

Gehris, who remains Travel Insured's COO while adding his duties as Presi-

dent, joined the company in 1994. He has risen through the organization directing company growth in operations, operating systems, sales and customer support areas.

"My father has been, and continues to be, an amazing mentor," Jon Gehris said. "I have learned a tremendous amount about successfully running a business and creating a winning environment within Travel Insured."

Most recently Gehris served as Executive Vice President and COO, overseeing Travel Insured's day-to-day operations. He established new performance standards for superior customer service, and supervised Travel Insured's recent upgrade of company Web and GDS Trav-

el Distribution technology. Travel Insured has embarked on the strongest growth cycle in its history with 2008 projected to well surpass the record sales results of this year.

Scully worked with Travel Insured International Founder and CEO Peter Gehris as Director of Operations and Treasurer at Travelers Equities Sales Inc., a subsidiary of Travelers Insurance, in the mid and late 1980s.

During a 30-year career at Travelers, Scully served as Director of the Health Division, the Finance Division and Annuity Services. His last position at Travelers was 2nd Vice President of Information Technology at Harford.

Visit www.travelinsured.com



Kathy Bunbury to Market TRAVELSAVERS

TRAVELSAVERS announced today that it is expanding the group's marketing team with the appointment of an additional manager.

Effective immediately, Kathy Bunbury has come on board as Marketing Manager in the U.S. She is responsible for maintaining one-on-one contact with TRAVERSAVERS' preferred suppliers, and works with the rest of the team to create and implement marketing vehicles for both agent and consumer initiatives.

With 15 years of experience in the travel industry, Bunbury has held various sales and marketing positions with leading suppliers. Most recently, she was Manager of National Accounts at International Lifestyles (SuperClubs); and served in flight dispatch and operations at BWIA International.

"We're so pleased to welcome Kathy to our team," said Nicole Mazza, Chief Marketing Officer at TRAVELSAVERS. "With her expertise and input, we will further expand our portfolio of marketing initiatives, both online and offline. Each of

our marketing initiatives helps our agencies to build strong customer relationships and increase sales. And, working hand-in-hand with our suppliers, we collectively move market share in their favor."

TRAVELSAVERS (www.travelsavers.com) is an international marketing organization with a retail chain of more than 3,000 independently owned full-service travel agencies in 14 countries that generates more than \$18 billion in annual travel industry sales.

Visit www.travelsavers.com

USATravelSpace Launches New Social Networking Website

Rutherford, New Jersey-based USATravelSpace.com launched what it claims to be the first social networking site offering the travel industry an opportunity to network with suppliers and buyers. **USATravelSpace** has been designed with custom industry specific algorithms to classify users in categories to better facilitate the distribution and marketing of travel products and information.

The site is geared to assist the sellers of travel to promote destinations, products or services through a search and link criteria that automatically links buyers and sellers through their user profiles. Sellers of travel will be given their own "TravelSpace" in which they can blog, video stream and showcase their product or services in a unique all encompassing location on the web. "The biggest challenge for anyone selling or traveling to the USA is locating information and more importantly the suppliers of services, especially with the magnitude of informa-

tion that is presently on the internet today," said Eric Paul Thomas, President of USATravelSpace.com.

Thomas, an international travel industry expert, who founded the Web-based service company, has been involved in travel industry sales and marketing for international visitors to the USA for 25 years. Based on a comparative linking model, USATravelSpace.com is uniquely designed to make it fast and easy to locate and network with travel suppliers of all kinds.

Giving users a unique tool to match sellers of travel with the entire spectrum of users through a selection process based upon the buyers needs and the sellers offering. A virtual network of service providers linked by search criteria to the end user that will facilitate the decision-making process such as trip, event and incentive planning, reserving restaurants, sightseeing, transportation, attractions and obviously hotels.

Call 201-939-2135 or visit USATravelSpace.com

Hainan Airlines Appoints New GSA

Hainan Airlines, China's fourth largest carrier (airline code: HU), recently appointed AirWorld Inc. as its general sales agent for North America. The company kicks off its enterprise on a stage increasingly filled with competition and unprecedented business alliances between China and North America. The airline also launched its new toll-free North American reservation and information number - 1-888-688-8813 - which will connect travelers to both native English and Chinese speakers to assist them with their travel needs.

AirWorld will provide reservations, sales and ticketing from six convenient North American offices - New York City, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Toronto and Vancouver, B.C. - to best serve passengers and travel agents alike.

Hainan Airlines has applied to the U.S. Department of Transportation to launch the only non-stop service between Seattle and Beijing, beginning on June 9, 2008. The non-stop flight would operate four times weekly - on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays - once the airline receives U.S. regulatory approval. Initially, the route will be flown by new Airbus A330 aircraft in a two-class configuration: business and economy. Hainan Airlines currently is the fourth largest carrier in China and is known for its award-winning customer service, impeccable safety record and on-time performance. Hainan Airlines currently flies to more than 130 cities.

For more information, contact Hainan Airlines throughout the United States and Canada at 888-688-8813.

Eurofly Expands Service to Italy

While most carriers take Italy-bound passengers to the well-worn gateways of Rome and Milan, Eurofly has made it easier to explore the off-the-beaten track Italy by operating flights beyond the big cities. Last year, Eurofly launched affordable nonstop service to Rome, Bologna, Palermo, and Naples as well as direct service to Lamezia Terme, Pescara and year-round service to Rome will add service to Bari, Puglia via Bologna in the Emilia Romagna region in 2008. Agents will continue to earn 8% commission on the fare

portions. Special deals from the Eurofly include a \$999 per person Economy fare or \$1,499 per person Business Class fare including fuel surcharges when two passengers travel together; when travel is completed by March 14, 2008.

Call 800-459-4980; E-mail info@euroflyvacations.com; www.euroflyvacations.com

Las Vegas Enhances Agent Program

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) recently announced that it will launch an enhanced version of its online certification program for U.S.-based, licensed travel agents. The Las Vegas Travel Trade Certification, or "Vegas Certified" program, is a series of 10 test modules designed to educate travel agents about the destination in order to become "experts" on selling Las Vegas. Upon completion, "Vegas Certified" agents are entitled to a variety of benefits and incentives.

Travel agents who correctly answer and submit all questions in each test module will automatically be entered into monthly drawings for the chance to win \$500 gift certificates redeemable at GiftCertificates.com. Additionally, "Vegas Certified" agents will be entitled to free show tickets for select shows when they visit Las Vegas, as well as a special discount card, including half-off and 2-for-1 offers. The new program will also go paperless.

Visit www.lvcva.com/traveltrade

Netherlands to Rep Eurail Group in U.S.

The Eurail Group recently appointed the **Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC)** in New York as its official public relations representative in the U.S.

The Eurail Pass allows unlimited train travel in Europe for non-European visitors worldwide, the key market being North America with a 54% market share. The Eurail Group consists of 27 independent companies in addition to several partners. The NBTC already represents Eurail for public relations activities in Asia through its offices in Japan and China, as well as through its partners in South Korea and India.

Visit www.EurailGroup.com



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