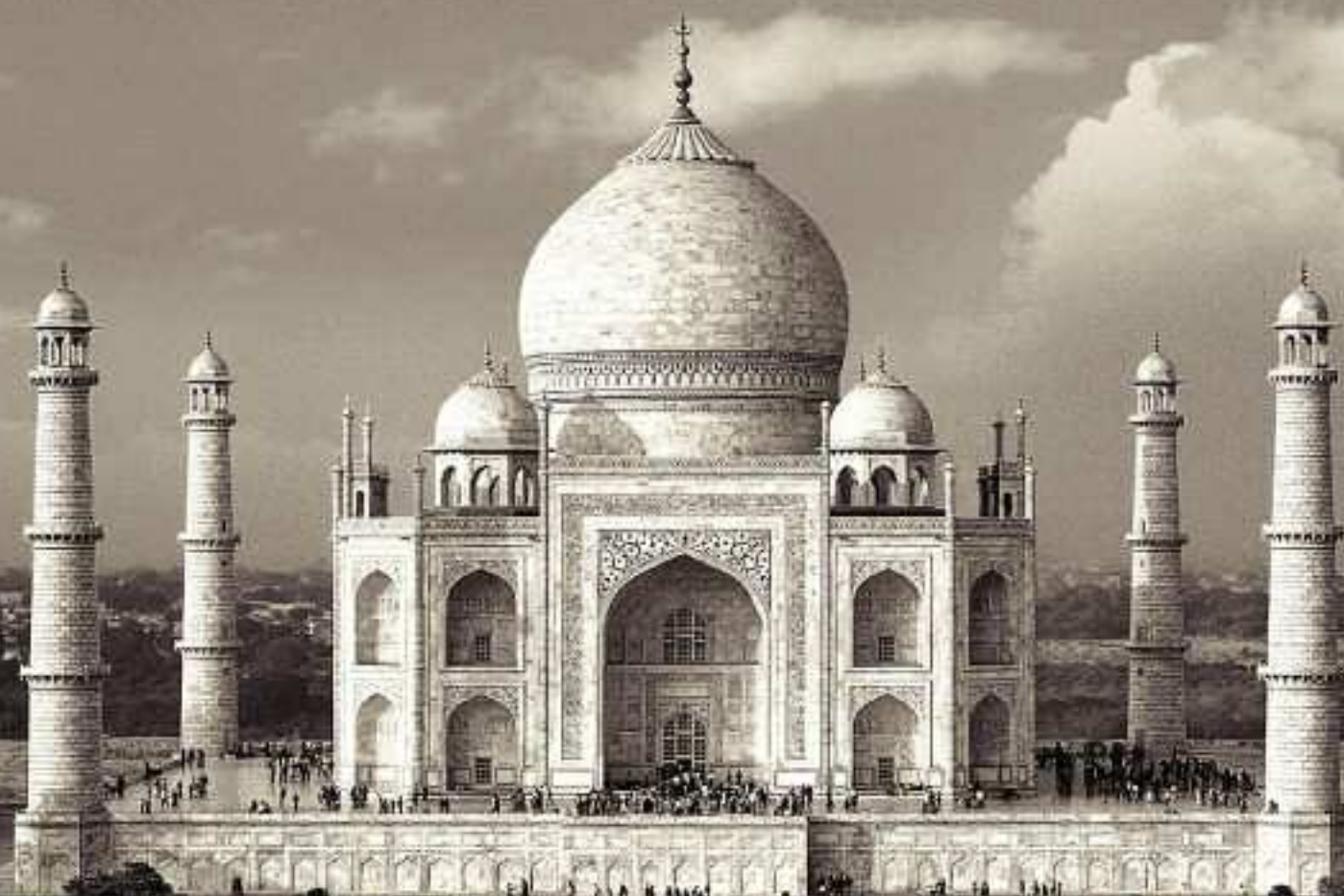


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And to think these days men get away
with giving flowers and chocolates to
their wives.



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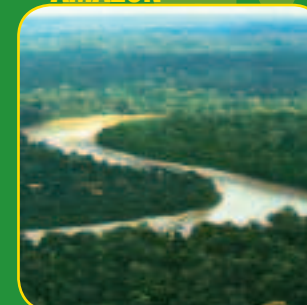
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And the Survey Says.....

Over the past several weeks a number of surveys have come across my desk, some of which are relevant to travel agents. Rather than bore you by printing pages of survey results, I will use my space this month to summarize the most pertinent details.

Economic Stimulus Checks to be used on travel purchases

According to a quarterly survey done by the TIA and Y Partnership, 16% of those Americans expecting a tax rebate check as part of Congress's economic stimulus package plan to use it on a travel related expense. This translates into almost 12.1 billion dollars to be spent on travel and further confirms that vacations are still a non-negotiable part of life, even in challenging times. This survey goes on further to state that 60% of Americans that have planned a road trip this summer will not be dissuaded by higher gas costs. Of the other 40%, a majority still plan to take the trip, but will alter it to take into account the higher fuel costs.

Travel Agents are making a comeback!

Another survey done by Y Partnership – The National Leisure Travel Monitor indicates that the traditional travel agent is making a comeback. It shows that leisure travelers are more likely to have used a travel agent for trip planning this year than last year. Approximately 30% of leisure travelers used a traditional travel agent this year, up from 25% in the previous year. Another item of interest in this survey is the increased emphasis consumers are placing on travel agents' credentials and certifications when seeking a professional to book their travel. This finding is reinforced in a biennial survey recently completed by CLIA where 70% of people who have taken a cruise indicated that professional designations such as CLIA's ACC or MCC would influence their choice in selecting a travel agent to plan and book their vacation. Additionally, 42% of the respondents indicated that travel agents provide the best service and 93% were

satisfied with their experience with a travel agent.

Cruise Clients Are Your Best Clients

CLIA's findings show that 74% of all cruises are still booked by travel agents. More importantly, CLIA's study determined that 78% of cruisers use travel agents for all types of travel planning compared to just 44% of non-cruisers. These clients travel 39% more per year than non-cruise vacationers, taking three annual leisure trips and spending 50% more annually on vacation travel than non-cruisers. Further good news for cruise destinations is that 80% of cruisers agreed a cruise is a great way to sample destinations that they may wish to visit on a future land-based vacation. So agents would do well to follow up with land package ideas upon their cruise clients' return home. Also highlighted in this study was, when it comes to total vacation satisfaction, all-inclusive resorts had a 46% highest satisfaction rating while cruises enjoyed a 44% similar rating.

Despite the current economic woes, the outlook is bright for travel agents. Consumers are increasingly returning to travel agents after experiencing trouble or dissatisfaction with online bookings. This would account for the finding that consumers are increasingly seeking travel agents with advanced training and certifications. I would suggest taking a closer look at the various certification programs available to travel agents (CTC, ACC, Destination Specialists) and once you have earned it, flaunt it.

Further good news is that two of the most profitable travel products for agents - all-inclusive resorts and cruises - also provide the highest customer satisfaction rates leading to a higher likelihood of having that client return to book their next vacation with you, maybe a closer look at that cruise call in Europe.

For more information on the above referenced surveys contact: T.I.A at www.tia.org or Y Partnership at www.ypartnership.com. For CLIA visit www.cruising.org

Doug Cooke, Publisher

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If You Weren't Home, How and Where Would You Go?

Weekends are still being observed, people are taking vacations no matter what because they are stretched to the limit in terms of tension, anxiety over the economy, so everyone needs a vacation more than ever. The questions remain how and where will they take those vacations?

Airlines are among the components that are hardest hit in this economic climate: cutting flights, going out of business, but the world knows we cannot stay on the ground for too long. People will travel interstate for sure as commerce depends on mobility even with teleconferencing. And as for TransAtlantic and TransPacific, cashing in mileage points is one of the many options. When my husband and I have tried to do this, we had to tap the talents of a maverick travel agent (Jay Eisen) who knows how to untangle that web of maddening conditions in order to qualify for a free flight.

The weak dollar has certainly boosted travel to cities on this side of the Atlantic and Pacific making the U.S. experi-

ence take center stage. Abroad, emerging destinations stand to attract dollars especially in Latin and Central America – Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru – to name a few. One wonders why Canada is not out there pursuing a market that is looking east, west, and south rather than north.

For those who anchor themselves to their plans, and find themselves in Europe, they may take the trains that crisscross the European Continent. Recently, Christian Lacroix, one of the most famous and influential fashion designers, admitted he had not boarded a plane for six years. And when he does leave Paris, he hops Le Train Bleu at the Gare de Lyon, declaring it "The most beautiful restaurant in town." Magical and romantic are two words he uses to describe rail rides.

Planes get us everywhere much too quickly – in hours you land in Paris, London, Madrid – whereas the train takes time to roll past towns, villages, mountains, rivers – giving us a sense of the journey, a sense of what it is to arrive in a place.

Maria Lisella, Editor

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Snapshots

THE MONTH IN REVIEW

Opening Party at New Hilton Papagayo Resort, Costa Rica

The event took place at the resort's brand new spa. Pictured from left to right at the opening party for the new Hilton Papagayo Resort Costa Rica are: Alan Flores, director of Costa Rica Tourism Institute; Olivier Maumaire, general manager, Hilton Papagayo Resort Costa Rica; Danny Hughes, area vice president, Caribbean, Central America & Cancun, Hilton Hotels Corporation; Ruben Pacheco, president, Enjoy Group.



NY PATA's China Night

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) hosted an evening about Yangtze River cruising with tour operator guests. From left to right are: James Pi, Victoria Cruises; Jack Marafi, Chairman, New York PATA; Jerry Pi, Victoria Cruises and Ady Gelber, CEO Isramworld.



Victoria Cruises, is assisting humanitarian relief efforts following the earthquake in Wenchuan, China by donating excess inventory and supplies, including much-needed clothing, towels and drinking water.

Ireland's Wonderful Wild West

From Shannon to Kerry to the Northwest, as far west at Galway City and County and Ireland's West coast dotted with islands of all shapes and sizes as well as a selection of Christian Heritage sites, Ireland's Wonderful Wild West brought a sample of its vast tourism offers to New York last month.



Pictured are the Bunratty Castle Singers and Musicians joined Tourism Ireland in their exquisite pitch for visiting Ireland's West Country, from left to right: Charles Whittaker, Colette Davis, music director of the Bunratty Castle Singers and Musicians, Joe Byrne, Executive Vice President — North America and Canada for Tourism Ireland in New York and Noel Murphy.

Quito Hosts Latin America Travel Mart on 30th Anniversary



As Quito celebrates its 30th anniversary as a UNESCO site, the Quito Visitors Bureau or the Quito Convention and Incentive Bureau recently hosted the Latin America Travel Mart (organized by William H. Coleman). The city has spent upwards of \$200 million in preservation projects and by 2010, Quito will boast a new international airport. Visit www.quito.com.ec

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Story by Denise Mattia

They splash along with feet in warm water, cool breeze blowing and sunlight falling yellow through palm trees. Romance. Adventure. It's perfect. It's Antigua and Barbuda. It's where they pledged "I do."

Recently, Antigua won more acclaim as one of the world's premier wedding and honeymoon locations. *Caribbean World Magazine*, at the 11th and 12th International Caribbean World Awards, named Antigua "Best Wedding Island of the Year" and the American Express travel publication listed the island among the top ten wedding destinations. In addition to the amazing pink-and-white beaches (there are 365 of them) and natural beauty above and beneath the sea, the factors that



JBR NICOLE MOUCK

Antigua Rings Wedding Bells

attract betrothed couples and newlyweds to Antigua are the variety of resorts that accommodate their needs and budget and its accessibility from the United States.

Of the 60 properties in Antigua, which vary from trendy boutique hotels to large all-inclusives, many offer ceremony or honeymoon packages and have on-site coordinators to expedite all the arrangements. Couples have the option of choosing anything from an intimate exchange of vows to an extravagant gathering of family and friends.

JAXFAX found a number of exclusive and premier accommodations that cater the event. Prices for the marriage license and wedding officer's fees generally include extras (see individual sites), and range upwards from \$600.

Exclusively Your Wedding

In the exclusive category is the five-star Galley Bay Resort & Spa, which has secured a place on the prestigious TripAdvisor.com's Traveler's "Best Luxury-World" top 100 list.

A member of the **Elite Island Resorts**, the **Galley Bay Resort & Spa** has been certified green in accordance with the highest international standards. Along with the resort's complimentary destination wedding program (an \$899 value, which includes registrar costs, round-trip transportation to the Ministry of Legal Affairs in St. John's, ceremony charges, taxes and gratuities), effective through November

2008, couples booking a seven-night all-inclusive premium accommodation stay at the resort can fly free from major East Coast gateways on **Delta Air Lines** or **American Airlines** (www.GalleyBayResort.com). So whether your clients are looking for a chance to experience one of the world's most luxurious and romantic resorts (according to TripAdvisor.com readers) or to plan an unforgettable destination wedding, free airfare to Antigua can help keep it affordable during this recessionary time.

Each resort has a distinct character and requirements. The **Rosewood Resort, Jumby Bay**, off Antigua on Long Island, caters to small weddings in its private villas and estate houses. Visit www.jumbybayresort.com.

Blue Waters Beach Hotel (www.bluewaters.net) limits the number of weddings that take place on its grounds, making the exchange or renewal of vows an exclusive affair. The Coconut Beach Club caters to small parties of 20 or fewer people (www.coconutbeachclub.com), while a wedding weekend (a minimum of three nights) is required at Curtain Bluff. Visit www.curtainbluff.com

Sandals' Grande Antigua Resort & Spa has been voted the World's Leading Honeymoon Resort for seven years



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Tying the knot at Jolly Beach Resort.



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in a row at the World Travel Awards. With the addition of the new Mediterranean Village, which features 180 spacious suites in six room categories, all boasting spectacular ocean views and a Mediterranean flair, betrothed couples and their guests can enjoy unprecedented services. Butch Stewart, chairman and founder of Sandals Resorts, says, "We think couples enjoy having two different, yet complementary luxury resort experiences, plus more dining options, and a sixth pool – the largest in the Eastern Caribbean."

Preston Bailey, an internationally celebrated event designer and wedding planner, partnered with Sandals Resorts to create the Preston Bailey Signature WeddingMoons®, a selection of four exceptional wedding packages available exclusively at Sandals and Beaches Resorts through the **WeddingMoons® program**.

Each of the four packages – The Floral Elegance Collection (\$1,700), The Water Lily Collection (\$2,600), The Seascape Collection (\$3,600) and The Crystal Collection (\$5,000) – includes beautifully designed wedding settings and décor. Specialty wedding cakes designed by Sylvia Weinstock comple-



Cooling off in Jolly Beach Resort's pool.

JEREMY MOUNCK

ment the exceptional designs and the stunning surroundings.

Triple Eights

In March 2008, the 8/8/08 Caribbean Sunset package was introduced at **Sandals Resorts**. Priced at \$4,888, the package includes exclusive services and amenities such as a personal wedding consultant and a Preston Bailey Caribbean Sunset Collection décor for the ceremony and reception for the bride, groom and two guests. A private eight-course dinner, with a wedding cake designed by Sylvia Weinstock, and a reception for the couple and eight guests is an option as well. A professional photographer and a videogra-

pher provide eight 8x10" color photographs in a commemorative album and a DVD of the ceremony and reception. Sandals Resorts and Preston Bailey are developing lavish wedding experiences, which include a private jet, a once-in-a-lifetime musical performance and more for the ultimate in luxury.

Throughout their wedding vacation, honeymooners and their guests can take advantage of the Eight Steps of Love package, which is priced at \$888. Included among other amenities are breakfast in bed, a morning sail, a couples massage, a photo session and a candlelight dinner. And for anniversary couples, Sandals Resorts offers the Everlasting Honeymoon. Couples are rewarded with one free night – their anniversary night – for the rest of their lives together when they stay at any one of the Caribbean resort company's 12 locations. Visit www.sandals.com

"There is no residency requirement, making Antigua very popular for destination weddings," says P. Hillary Modeste, Director of Marketing Worldwide for Jolly Beach Resort & Spa. "And the combination of our superb wedding coordinator, Antiguan born Beverly King and her staff, with our picture-postcard beach



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makes Jolly Beach a top choice for bridal couples,” he added.

The resort offers a Silver Ribbon Dream Wedding Package for \$699, and the new Gold Ribbon Dream Wedding Package, which includes a reception for a minimum of four hours for between 26 and 40 people in the specially decorated Hibiscus Room or the Hammock Lounge. A DJ provides entertainment, and dinner is served buffet style. The bridal couple will also enjoy special services at the Palms Wellness Center Spa.

When family and friends – even kids – come along and occupy five rooms for seven nights, the Silver Ribbon Dream Wedding Package is upgraded to the resort’s Gold Ribbon Dream Wedding Package (normally \$2,044 but reduced by \$699 for a total cost of \$1,345). “It [the Gold Ribbon Dream Wedding Package] is more affordable than ever for everyone and is available exclusively to brides and grooms staying at the all-inclusive Jolly Beach Resort & Spa,” adds Modeste. Visit www.jollybeachresort.com

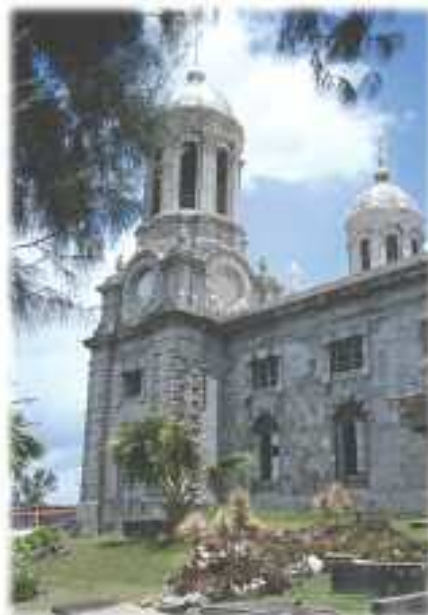
Whether the wedding being planned is toes-in-the-sand casual or white-gloved elegance in a romantic gazebo, the wedding package (an \$899 value) at the **St. James’s Club & Villas** is complimentary when a seven-night all-inclusive luxury-category honeymoon is booked. A member of the Elite Island Resorts, the St. James’s Club & Villas has received its green certification from the independent organization Green Hotels. Visit www.StJamesClubAntigua.com

Similar wedding packages are available at the island’s three Rex Resorts locations: the **Hawksbill Beach Resort**, the **Rex Blue Heron** and, for those who prefer a smoke-free environment, the **Rex Halcyon Cove**, a non-smoking hotel (where all restaurants, areas serving food, covered bars and lounges are non-smoking as well).

Visit www.eliteislandresorts.com

Adventures in Paradise

Because of the many coves and protected harbors, Antigua is a popular haven for sailors. Indeed on the southern coast in English Harbour linger the spirits of dashing 18th century officers like Prince William Henry, Duke of Clarence and the legendary Admiral Horatio Nelson who in 1784 sailed in aboard HMS Boreas to establish Great Britain’s most important Caribbean base.



St. John’s Cathedral 18th c baroque towers

Barbuda, 25 miles north of Antigua, with around 1,200 people, has a magnificent wide white beach, considered one of the best in the Caribbean. Barbuda is also a diver’s paradise with colorful reefs and many old ship wrecks to explore.

The **Antigua Rainforest Canopy Tour** is the newest adventure offered to those who want to experience the island’s lush rainforest from a bird’s eye point of view, while local guides at Tropical Adventures (www.tropicalad.com) treat guests to a land expedition through Antigua’s rainforest. Dotting the landscape are 95 stone windmills that were built in the early 1700s using mortar made from crushed and burnt conch shells. The towers were used to process sugar during the days when the island was covered with sugarcane, which was planted and harvested by slaves. Visitors can follow a self-guided mill tour route by car. Visit www.antiguarainforest.com

There are plenty of healthful sports in Antigua and Barbuda, with scuba facilities and experienced PADI- and NAUI-certified dive operators available on or near most resorts. Most diving in Antigua and Barbuda takes place around the southern and western coasts and in the English Harbour area, minutes away by boat, just beyond the shallow waters surrounding the coastline. Jolly Dive (www.jollydive.com) is located on the beach of the Jolly Beach Resort.

The St. James’s Club & Villas celebrated the debut of its new on-site Mamora Bay Divers PADI scuba center with a five-night all-inclusive Antigua Divers package. Available through December 20, 2008, the package is

priced from \$1,615 per person for three days of two-tank dives, including equipment and instruction, accommodations, all meals, top-shelf beverages, taxes and service charges.

Antigua’s British roots run deep. Antigua’s government is based on Britain’s Parliamentary system, proper teas are served in many hotels in late afternoon and the sport of cricket is huge. Antigua has historic towns like St. John’s, the busy capital on the northwestern tip of the island, in the 1700s a major trading center.

And it has sites like the 18th century Baroque St. John’s Cathedral (pictured), and Parham, the first British settlement and the site of St. Peter’s Church, an 1840s octagonal building. Add to this the rich culture derived from its African roots and you have a destination with much to discover and savor.

Getting There

Delta Air Lines now has direct service from Atlanta, Georgia on Saturdays and Wednesdays and non-stop service from New York City (JFK) on Thursdays and Saturdays. Non-stop flights to Antigua are also available when flying Continental Airlines from Newark (EWR) or US Airways from Charlotte, NC. American Airlines flies directly to Antigua from Miami. The U.S. Department of State requires all U.S. citizens traveling via air or sea to present a valid passport for travel and re-entry into the United States. Major carriers offer service into the V.C. Bird International Airport (that is its official name), which is an important hub for the entire Caribbean.

Rental cars are available from major car companies including **Budget Rent A Car** (268-462-3009; www.Budget.com), **Hertz Rent A Car** (268-481-4440; www.hertz.com), **National Car Rental** (268-462-2113; www.NationalCar.com) and **Dollar Rent A Car** (268-462-0362; www.dollar.com). Cost is about \$40 to \$50 a day. Travelers need to bring their driver’s license and they’ll have to obtain a temporary license (about \$20), but that is easily obtained upon arrival at the rental car counter.

For more information, call the Antigua and Barbuda U.S. Tourist Office, 888-268-4227; visit www.antigua-barbuda.org for information and legal requirements for wedding couples.

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Antigua see page 78 of the Listings Section

INTERVIEW — By Maria Lisella

A-B Outdistances Itself in a Strained Economy

Jax Fax spoke with Derede Samuel Whitlock (right), Director USA for Antigua and Barbuda (A-B). Agents who are familiar with this destination need not revisit the fast facts (a Leeward island, 365 sugar white beaches). Travel agents remain a pivotal element in A-B’s outreach to the U.S. Whitlock and her team have created a number of far reaching and innovative incentives to further expand its reach in the agent community. Further, the A-B dollar is linked to the U.S. dollar

JF: Let’s cover first how A-B is doing in 2008 vs. 2007.

Whitlock: Due to very aggressive marketing campaigns launched by two of the newest properties – Sandals Grande Antigua Resort and Spa, which operated mega fams from several gateways and the Elite Island Resorts’ Verandah Resort and Spa that debuted with great introductory offers – we can report a 9 percent increase during our first quarter compared to the same period in 2007. At worst we could be flat in the 2nd quarter but I expect to see at least a modest increase.

JF: According to CLIA, the Caribbean still ranks first as a cruise destination with 50% of the market, yet some say there has been a softening in demand and 2008 might be the first year where there will be a decrease in Caribbean capacity. Is this true for A-B?

Whitlock: Clearly A-B is receiving fewer calls this year, but on average, cruise passengers do not spend as much as stay-over visitors, which points to an area I think we need to improve.

Cruise passengers’ habits are similar to those of all-inclusive clients; you have to create an incentive for them to purchase experiences beyond their pre-paid packages. The town of Antigua could be merchandised more effectively by adding more cafes, restaurants to capture their interest. We should be marketing things they cannot find on board or on property such as heritage tours to Nelson’s Dockyard or Betty’s Hope Sugar Mill, but no one is going to jump ship to dine on a burger they can have on board.

JF: A-B has become synonymous with the wedding market, what about other niche markets?

Whitlock: We have discussed heritage tours (which already exist) and soft adventure tours, both of which are worth developing, but for the latter, we, as a government would have to build a framework for quality control, certification accreditation and insurance.

JF: Are new visitor trends emerging?

Whitlock: Our greatest attraction is for couples, and that remains the source of our greatest profit potential. We are seeing younger couples rather than exclusively 40+ couples. Families are also a growing source of income for us.

Apart from this, A-B has two medical schools and 2,000 med students (A-B population is 80,000) and this population has become a catalyst for new nightlife options.

JF: According to one A-B executive, destination weddings have increased by 300% during the past five years...how does A-B keep its competitive edge on this valuable market?

Whitlock: That figure sounds huge but then properties like Sandals and Jolly Beach count 400+ rooms and both companies have been very aggressive in pursuing this market year ‘round. One edge we have is the short processing period to file for a wedding ceremony (there is no residency requirement) as opposed to the 8-10 days it takes in other destinations, so this also makes second weddings very ‘doable.’

JF: What role do agents play in boosting arrivals to A-B?

Whitlock: Travel agents are absolutely critical to A-B. People talk about displacement due to online bookings, but you are always going to have top producers and what I like about agents most is that they provide customer service that you will never get online. If people are going to spend over \$10,000 on a family vacation they are going to an agency, not to a computer; online bookings are great for short and cheaper trips, not a family vacation where they may want to add tours and other amenities.

Just to highlight how interdependent we are with agents, we had a problem in A-B regarding long lines at the airport; and no one could pinpoint the problem. We called members of our



inner circle of agents and located the problem. Flights were arriving at the moment the ground crew was changing shifts, which resulted in delays. We were then able to intercept that problem early...we could not have done it that quickly without agents.

JF: How does A-B actively pursue the travel agent community?

Whitlock: We conduct nine weeks of continuous fams back to back in May and June annually. Throughout the year we bring a taste of A-B to wherever agents are.

For instance, rather than place them in front of a video over a two hour dinner in the ballroom of the same hotel they just left after a seminar for another destination, we take them on a limo bus with an A-B author conducting a tour as if they were actually in A-B as they visit four vineyards on Long Island. So rather than just battling with a cold prime rib on their plates in a faceless big-city hotel for two hours, we have spent maybe five hours with them. We will be conducting High Teas in Conn., NJ and Long Island in September for small groups to give them a pinkies up view of A-B in an atypical way. At press time, A-B was hosting two weddings to take place at Madison Square Garden along with a basketball game and a reception.

JF: Any plans that will affect your relationship to agents?

Whitlock: We are designing an online training program that will eventually lead to having a qualified list of agents to whom we can refer consumers. And we hope to have a Destination Conference in A-B that will include meetings with the Minister of Tourism, so that he can also hear from decision makers, suppliers and agents about what is needed and that would include tourism interests island wide.

Visit www.antigua-barbuda.org, 212-541-4117

Cultivating Daytrip and Dining Palettes in St. Maarten/St. Martin

Who said a Caribbean vacation has to mean you lay around in the sun getting bronzed or burned? With its numerous dive/snorkeling sites, miles of sunswept beaches, unparalleled shopping and dining, over a dozen action-packed casinos, visitors expect to find a bit more to do in to St. Maarten/St. Martin even if they are anchoring for hours. Here, visitors to this English-speaking country will never be disappointed.



12-Metre Challenge: Test your sea legs and race like you're part of the America's Cup in the 12-Metre Challenge. This action-packed sea adventure pits first-time sailors and salty skippers alike in a race modeled exactly like the real America's Cup. Be part of the crew and sail famous 36-foot boats, such as the Stars and Stripes and True North I, that were custom-made and used in the actual race. Visit www.12metre.com

Harleys in Paradise: Imagine a warm tropical breeze flowing through your hair as you cruise the meandering coastline of St. Maarten/St. Martin with its azure blue waters on one side and lush tropical vegetation on the other. Take this one step further and imagine straddling a power-packed Harley-Davidson motorcycle from **Super Bikes St. Martin**. Visit www.h-dstmartin.com

Tall Ship Adventure: Set sail with Lord Sheffield Tall Ship Adventures on a traditionally rigged, 72 foot tall ship, armed with three black powder cannons just like you'd find on a true pirate ship. Once aboard, the course is set for Little Bay where guests can enjoy snorkeling amongst historic wrecks, lost cannons from past battles in the island's 350-year history, and abundant aquatic life. Next, the anchor will be weighed and the sails set as the tall ship sails towards Simpson's Bay. Visit www.Lordsheffield.com

Butterfly Farm: No trip to St. Maarten/St. Martin is complete without a visit to the Butterfly Farm where visitors wander through the "Butterfly Sphere" complete with waterfalls, coy ponds, and foliage vital to butterfly development. Guides identify species, point out courtship and mating displays. Guests can witness the stages of the butterfly's life cycle, from butterflies laying their eggs to caterpillars hatching, growing and forming their chrysalis. Visit www.thebutterflyfarm.com

Mountain Bike Adventure: When was the last time your client biked across two countries in one day? How about biking from sea level to the top of St. Maarten/St. Martin's highest mountain and back in time for a great dinner at a fine restaurant on the coast? **TriSports'** guests can do just that. This heart-pounding tour begins at the waterfront, extends along the island's coastline, tops the island's tallest peak and passes through quaint villages steeped in history. Visit www.trisportsxm.com

SNUBA & Snorkel Adventure: Guests of **Aqua Mania Watersports** explore the hidden depths of St. Maarten/St. Martin at three locations: The first is a sunken submarine that sits 20 feet

below the surface; the second stop is "Shipwreck Cove" where guests explore shipwrecks that detail three centuries of the island's past; and, the third is the breathtaking coral reef where guests interact with the most "colorful" locals – its tropical marine life. Visit www.aquamaniawatersports.com

St. Maarten Park: Visitors of this distinctive zoological, botanical and floral garden will gain a new-found understanding of plants and animals that are indigenous to the Caribbean and the American tropics. Discover more than 80 species of animals, including the largest display of exotic parrots in the Caribbean. Take a stroll through the reptile house, get up-close and personal with tropical birds in the walk-through aviary and the Park's botanical gardens. Visit www.stmaartenpark.com

Culinary Adventures

The island of St. Maarten/St. Martin, known as "the culinary capital of the Caribbean," offers visitors more than 400 restaurants that serve some of the finest international cuisine created from local produce from the bustling open-air markets. The island's numerous restaurants and cafes include French, Italian, Spanish, Continental, Caribbean, Indian, and American. Dining in St. Maarten/St. Martin is compared to traveling to a foreign country.

Dutch St. Maarten

Moulin Fou is an exceptional upscale dining establishment known throughout the island for offering guests an extraordinary meal that is paired with a unique ambience. Offering sensational meats and pastas, and mouth-watering seafood, Chef J. Bonnel, brings an eclectic approach to the restaurant, as most of his food is influenced by his travels and spices collected from around the world. Visit www.moulinfou.com

Dare to be Rare Steakhouse: Chef Dino Jagtiani's Dare to be Rare Steakhouse, located in the Atlantis Casino Courtyard, is commonly known as the first Caribbean restaurant to offer guests Prime dry-aged Certified Angus Beef. Serving top-quality steaks that go through a remarkable aging process, as well as delectable appetizers and sides, these gastronomic delights are sure to please even the most seasoned of steak connoisseurs. Visit www.dare-to-be-rare.com

French St. Martin

L'Auberge Gourmande: Known throughout the island for its romantic ambience and excellent cuisine, this lovingly renovated, yet historic restaurant was voted among the best restaurants in the Caribbean by *Caribbean Travel & Life*. Executive Chef Didier Rochat features savory dishes that include roasted duck breast, sea bass and rack of lamb, to name just a few. Visit www.laubergegourmande.com

Mario's Bistro: Located in the village of Sandy Ground on the Marigot channel, Mario's Bistro features an informal yet elegant décor that is combined with tranquil ambience and waterside dining that offers a hint of romance. Known as a culinary artist, Executive Chef Mario Tardif's dishes include baked mahi-mahi with macadamia nut crust, half rack of lamb with roasted with goat cheese and pesto and sautéed veal scaloppini with lemon & caper butter sauce, to name just a few. Visit www.mariosbistro.com

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— CITE REPORT — Caymans Reach Upmarket

by Merrie L. Murray



The Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman, Seven Mile Beach

MERRIE MURRAY

As I floated in the clear azure water of Grand Cayman's famed Seven Mile Beach after a busy day of site inspections I thought why not test the product that boasts swimming, snorkeling, kayaking and jet skiing at this year's **Cayman Islands Tourism Exchange (CITE)**.

After all, the lure of the beach, world-class diving and water-sports of all kinds, relaxation and fun are what the islands are all about (financial services aside) and the dozen or more properties that set up booths at the tourism trade show sit shoulder to shoulder along the seemingly endless white sand shore.

The Cayman Islands Tourism Exchange welcomed close to forty wholesalers and media at the Royal Ballroom of the **Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman** April 30 through May 2, 2008 to do business with representatives from tour products from Grand Cayman and the sister islands of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman including hotels, condos/villas, dive companies, car rental agencies, local tour companies and banks.

Tourism arrivals climb steadily while high-end condominiums/villas continue to blossom along Seven Mile Beach, and a new Town Centre, part of the 300-acre Camana Bay project, partially opened late last year.

Sponsored by the **Cayman Islands Tourism Association, (CITA)**, CITE speakers gave delegates a tourism update, summary of the many products and pluses of the islands, and suggestions for selling the Caymans based on current industry trends. Americans love the Caymans and comprise approximately 80 percent of the tourism arrivals.

At the opening session, **Stephen Broadside, president, CITE**, addressed the groundswell of interest in sustainable tourism, which, he said, is now "beyond hot air and talk." Everyone should ask, "What can I do?" Since the total room count for the Caymans is now almost evenly divided between hotels and the condo/villa market, wholesalers were encouraged to build relationships with this rapidly growing tourism sector.

Shomari Scott, Deputy Director, Cayman Island Department of Tourism, introduced three upcoming events: a Cayman Cookout scheduled for January 16-19, 2009 with host Eric Ripert, chef and co-owner of one of New York's top restaurants; "Cayman Knockout: Championship Boxing" between 2004 Olympic Gold Medalist Andre Ward and former Olympian Jerson Ravelo to be broadcast live on Showtime from Grand Cayman June 20, 2008; and Nickelodeon's Diego will join up with Sir Turtle and other Cayman Islands Sea School characters for a summer of learning and fun. Check out the Cayman Summer Splash promotion online geared for families through Sept. 1, 2008 with special discounts and add-ons. Favorite island celebrations include Cayman Carnival Batabano, now in its 25th year, and Pirates Week Festival scheduled for November 6-16, 2008.

A new seven-day Nickelodeon cruise on **Royal Caribbean Freedom of the Seas** featuring Diego, Sponge Bob and Dora the Explorer will call at Grand Cayman in August 2008.

According to studies by Mintel Research, destination weddings grew by 318% from 2001 to 2006 suggesting that travel profes-

sionals take clients' personal passions into consideration regarding packages that promise upgrades and value add-ons; tap into the dive travel market and and pitch the weather and beach...it's summer year 'round with bougainvillea always in bloom.

Red Sail Sports, in operation since 1987, took delegates on a sunset cruise to Rum Point on the island's North Side for dinner and dancing. The company supplies water toys and boating options at several hotels along Seven Mile Beach. (www.redsailcayman.com).

The Caymans aren't just for divers, sailors and sunbathers. Visitors can feed a sting ray at Sting Ray City, pick up a turtle at Boatswain's Beach /Cayman Turtle Farm (www.boatswainsbeach.ky), see a Caymanian sand garden at the Queen Elizabeth 11 Botanic Garden (www.botanic-park.ky) or watch the interactive program at Pedro St. James where democracy was born in the Cayman Islands (www.PedroStJames.ky). The Cayman Islands National Trust runs a recovery program for blue iguanas on the grounds of the Botanic Garden.

Years in the making, the Camana Bay project, developed by Dart Realty (Cayman) LTD connects Seven Mile Beach to the calm North Sound, affords views of both sunrise and sunset, and maximizes ocean breezes. In the new Town Centre visitors can watch a movie, shop, dine, or relax in one of the courtyards. Future plans call for canals, marina, more restaurants, boutique hotel and homes (www.camanabay.com).

To enhance the visitor experience, everyone working in Cayman Islands tourism must enroll in the PRIDE program an eight hour course in delivering great service.

Accommodations

Cayman Islands' accommodations range from small guest houses, to properties catering to divers, to the mid range family hotels to the luxury **Ritz-Carlton** and condominiums/villas. In 2009, Grand Cayman will add the **Mandarin Oriental** to its list of hotel properties. The **Caribbean Club**, a residence hotel came on board in August 2007 where condos are selling for \$1-\$2 million. Call 800-941-1126; www.caribclub.com

According to William Powers, acting GM/Director of Sales, the 53-room **Grand Cayman Beach Suites**, formerly the **Hyatt Regency Beach Suites**, hosted up to three and four weddings a week, lots of banquets and business meetings. It features a new European spa, a new restaurant – Hemingways By-The-Sea and a Jack Nicholas-designed Golf Course across the street. Summer rates start at \$310; winter rates from \$750 typically with a fourth or fifth night free.

Call 345-949-1234; www.grand-cayman-beach-suites.com
JAX FAX stayed at the independently-owned **Sunshine Suites Resort**. The former **Wyndham Hotel** was gutted and redone in a Caribbean décor in 2005 and now serves a hot complimentary breakfast in its poolside restaurant. The three-story, 127-all suite, mid-priced property is a 200 yard walk to Seven Mile Beach and great for families. Summer rack rates from

approximately \$173, winter from \$268.

Call 877 786-1110; www.sunshinesuites.com

A most gracious host for CITE, the 365-room **Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman** boasts five restaurants, including Blue by Eric Ripert, a nine hole Greg Norman-designed golf course, La Prairie at the Ritz Carlton Caribbean Spa and a tennis center designed by Nick Bollettieri. Kids will love the Ambassadors of the Environment by Jean-Michel Cousteau nature program. Summer rack rates from approximately \$399, winter rates from \$569.

Call 800-241-3333, 345 943-9000; www.ritzcarlton.com

Other choices include the 307-room **Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort** with its new La Mer spa (800-228-9290 www.MarriottGrandCayman.com); 343-room **Westin Casuarina Resort & Spa** with its lush poolside garden and the **Hibiscus Spa** on Seven Mile Beach (800-937-8461, www.westin.com); and the casual and friendly mid-priced **Comfort Suites & Resort** (800-517-4000, www.caymancomfort.com).

Getting There

Visitors can get to the Cayman Islands easily with non-stop flights from a dozen US cities on Cayman Airways, US Airways, American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Northwest, Delta Air Lines, and Spirit Airlines. Travelers love being on the beach by mid-afternoon. A taxi ride from Owen Roberts International Airport to Seven Mile Beach costs approximately \$ 20-25. Remind clients to pack their passports and drive on the left hand side of the road.

For further information, contact the **Cayman Islands Dept. of Tourism**, 877-422-9626 or, in New York, 212-889-9009; www.caymanislands.ky; www.divecayman.ky

July Debuts with Fabulous Deals

Jamaica: The best deal in Negril swings open its doors on July 15, with the premiere of **ROOMS** on the beach, Negril. The 57-room Continental Plan (CP) hotel faces the Caribbean right on Negril's seven-mile beach, famed for its powdery white sand and spectacular sunsets. SuperClubs bought the three-acre site of the former Negril Inn last year, shuttering its doors for a year of upgrades and improvements to the tune of \$4 million. "ROOMS in Negril is SuperClubs' 10th property in Jamaica, and our second CP hotel," said John Issa, executive chairman of SuperClubs Resorts. "And with nightly rates starting at \$100 per room, visitors will be hard-pressed to find a better deal in Jamaica." SuperClubs launched ROOMS on the beach of Ocho Rios in January 2005. Call 800-467-8737; www.breezes.com

Turks & Caicos: Also making its debut this month is **Seven Stars Resort** on Providenciales in the Turks & Caicos Islands, which is offering deals valid through Oct. 31. The five-night Scuba & Spa Getaway for two includes accommodations; a bottle of Champagne on arrival; a half-day scuba diving trip for two, including transfers to/from the dive boat; a picnic lunch with soft drinks and guided underwater excursions; equipment; a one-hour couples massage; one 50-minute sports massage. Rates for two are \$3,110 or \$4,280. Call 866-570-7777; www.sevenstarsresort.com

BEST BUYS

\$3360 BAHAMAS
Kamalame Cay is offering an all-inclusive summer 2008 "Best of Kamalame Cay" package available through September 30. Agents booking a four-night stay for their clients may receive two of the following: a complimentary upgrade, and a choice of either a complimentary spa treatment, private picnic on a remote cay, snorkeling excursion or an excursion to visit to the mysterious Blue Holes. Guests booking a seven-night stay will receive a complimentary upgrade and a choice of four of the following: complimentary spa treatment, private picnic on a remote cay, snorkeling excursion, scuba diving trip or the discover Andros excursion. Rates, based on double occupancy, are from \$3,360 for four-nights and \$5,880 for seven nights. Rates include all meals, afternoon tea and snacks, unlimited wines and spirits, use of all the resort facilities including sea kayaks, windsurfer, snorkel equipment and tennis court and equipment. Call 800-790-7971; www.kamalame.com

\$475 BVI (VIRGIN GORDA)
Designed with both couples and families in mind, **Rosewood Little Dix Bay** on Virgin Gorda is offering a specially priced getaway through December 19, 2008 with savings of up to 30% off regular prices. Inclusive of full American Breakfast buffet for two, the "Rosewood Escapes" special is priced at \$475 per night for accommodations in a Premium Ocean View room, or \$525 per night in an Ocean Cottage, based on single or double occupancy. Taxes and gratuities are additional. Set on its own half-mile crescent beach, the five-star resort founded by visionary philanthropist Laurance S. Rockefeller recently introduced the Sense Spa™ at Little Dix Bay offering longer spa treatments, a breadth of wellness and relaxation therapies with local botanicals and other ingredients, and kids' Move 'n Groove and Yoga classes. Exciting culinary offerings from new chef Marcel Driessen are featured at the resort's three restaurants and in private beach dinners. Guests can now arrive to the resort via air taxi from St. Thomas or by boat from Tortola. Little Dix Bay's activities desk can arrange sailing, diving and sightseeing. Call 888-767-3966; www.littledixbay.com

\$290 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Off-season rates begin at \$290 per room, per night now through the summer at the 55-suite **Sivory Punta Cana**. Spacious rooms feature stocked wine-coolers, extravagant baths with oversized soaking tubs and decadent showers. Daily complimentary breakfast is delivered ensuite. Sivory is situated on Punta Cana's gold coast on its own private beach. Many suites have oceanfront views, private plunge pools, two meeting rooms accommodating up to 150; the hotel has a wellness center, spa, three gourmet restaurants, reflecting pool and two casual dining bars, cigar bar, an extensive wine cellar featuring the finest vintages from around the world. Services and amenities include butler service, pool and beach valet, parking valet, business center and Wi-Fi. Call 809-333-0500; E-mail reservations@sivorypuntacana.com; www.sivorypuntacana.com

St. Petersburg's White Nights of Summer

By Herb Silverman and Betty Rolston

Tourism and business travel to St. Petersburg have gotten a dramatic boost from an unexpected but totally logical source, a leading vodka producer, Russian Standard. No accident since Chairman Roustam Tariko, the founder, was born in St. Petersburg.

The company has donated a major gift to the city by making a multi-million dollar contribution to the construction of a scenographic lighting installment that illuminates the Imperial capital's 305-meter TV tower adorned with 6,000 stroboscopic flash lights programmed for a spectacular light show.

"As part of our 'Shining City' project, there are many unique lighting installments being constructed in St. Petersburg," said St. Petersburg Governor Valentina I. Matvienko. "More and more private companies are taking it upon themselves to help us realize our goal of lighting the city's unique buildings and structures."

The \$60-million **Russian Standard Vodka Distillery**, designed by famed architect Willem Brouwer, occupies a prominent position on the main road leading from St. Petersburg to the Pulkovo International Airport. In addition, the distillery is building a highly sophisticated Visitors' Center scheduled to open in 2009. There, tourists will learn about the city and taste its native tippie along with "zakuski" (hors d'oeuvres).

Comprised of several islands, St. Petersburg was founded by Peter the Great three centuries ago on a swamp. It's Russia's second-largest city and Europe's third largest metropolis (after London). Its total area makes it two times larger than New York City and 13 times bigger than Paris. Its population is approximately five million people.

From 1712 up to 1922 St. Petersburg was the capital of the flourishing Russian Empire. Now, the city is the industrial cen-

ter of Russia, as well as its cultural capital regaining much of its glamour lost under the Soviets when it was known as Leningrad.

Knowing the Facts

Among the major hotels is the five-star **Grand Hotel Europe** managed by the **Kempinski Group**. Located in the historic central shopping and business district of St. Petersburg, it is close to several must-see sites including the Russian Arts Museum, Kazansky Cathedral and Saviour of the Blood Cathedral. Amenities include: satellite TV, air conditioning, mini-bar along with a pool and saunas, currency exchange, business center, fitness center, dry cleaning, hairdresser's, and cafes. Available are meeting and conference rooms, offices, shops, restaurants, bars, nightclub and a bank. Visit www.kempinski.com

The **Hotel Astoria** dates from 1912 but was restored in 2001, is located in the city center opposite Saint Isaac Cathedral, the Mariinsky Palace and the statue of Nicholas I, near the Senate and Synod, the Admiralty, as well as the offices of major companies and banks. Facilities are similar to the Grand including a pool and a casino. Both properties average \$400 a night.

Visit www.thehotelastoria.com

Dining Options

If past memories of Russian food in St. Petersburg are colorless, today's visitors will be surprised, not only by the quality and number of restaurants, but also by their diversity.

Food from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, with its mix of Slavic, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean flavors, is especially popular. One of the most affordable is the family-run Khinkalnaya-Khachapurnaya whose specialty is shashlik

(lamb on a skewer) and eggplant with walnuts or khachapuri, a Georgian national dish that's akin to a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich. The staff speaks very little English, but keeps a single English menu handy.

Na Zdorovie Restaurant could be a museum of Russian history: the interior contains Soviet relics mixed with traditional Russian crafts. The menus are both in Russian and English.

The **Idiot Cafe and Bar** is a cozy cafe, located in the cellar of a canal-side house featuring a warm 50s style interior, wooden furniture, antique lamps, slightly muted jazz music, and very friendly waiters. There are five different vaulted rooms including an art gallery and a library with English language books and magazines that one can read, while having a drink. The restaurant serves only Russian and vegetarian food, coffee and specialty teas. Dinner goes for around 300 roubles (\$10) with free vodka. The staff speaks English, the menu is both in Russian and English.

Shinok is considered to be the best Ukrainian restaurant in St. Petersburg. The food is quite tasty and the portions are hearty. Another advantage is that the restaurant is open 24 hours a day. The interior is traditional with rustic tables and chairs and waiters wearing national costumes. The specialties are worth ordering: vareniki (cutlets made of cottage cheese), pancakes, various garnishes, salads, and Gorilka (Ukrainian home-made vodka).

Taking the well-below-grade subway is a thrill for a traveler oriented to the aseptic American version. The antique trains depart from terminals adorned with enough sculptures and art to be public galleries. Travelers can exit at the Petrogradskaya stop and head for the Peter and Paul Fortress, the oldest section in town, it is lined with museums and the gorgeous, not to mention slightly eerie, Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul.

Peterhof is the 18th-century complex of palaces and gardens west of the city center. The estate is famous for its fountains, which operate through October accessible by hydrofoil from a berth on the Neva River.

The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, a winner of the Pritzker Prize for architecture, has been chosen to redesign the art displays in the already incredible Hermitage Museum. The museum will soon begin this six-year project by establishing a master plan for a new way of displaying its some three million treasures in the museum's roughly 2,000 rooms. Plans are to alter the displays in the Islamic and Chinese rooms and transform a section of the imperial general staff building into a space for contemporary art.

A major summer attraction is "White Nights" (Beliye Nochi) when the sun never sets on lovers who promenade the canals and river banks.

Where to stay

Taking advantage of the "romantic" connection, the **Corinthia Nevskij Palace Hotel** on Nevskij Prospekt has created a five-star wedding package, which includes the privacy of a banquet room, a sumptuous feast, and a wedding cake. One night accommodation in an Executive Suite for the bride and groom (and arrangements for guests), floral decorations, a fruit basket, a "sweet surprise" and a bottle

of Russian sparkling wine in the room plus breakfast delivered to the door. Rates for two per night through July are \$1,036 per night; \$840 from Sept. through Oct. 16; and \$643 from Oct. 17, 2008 through Dec. 31, 2008.

Visit www.corinthiahotels.com

Situated on the banks of the Moika River and overlooking the treasure-filled Hermitage Museum and seum and Palace Square, the **Kempinski Hotel Moika 22** is the ideal spot for access to St. Petersburg's most exciting cultural destinations.

A three-night stay in a Superior Room with a deluxe Russian breakfast buffet each morning, entrance to one of the world's most impressive collections, the State Hermitage Museum, (located just across the bridge from the hotel's lobby); and come evening, guests can see St. Petersburg in style with tickets to one of the city's renowned opera and ballet houses, which include the famed Mariinsky Theatre (home of the Kirov Opera, Ballet and Orchestra). Priced from \$2,170 for two; and is valid July 1 to Oct. 31, 2008. Visit www.kempinski-st-petersburg.com

For more information, contact the Russian National Group, which represents the National Tourist Office in North America., 877-221-7120; www.russia-travel.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Russia see page 68 of the Listings Section

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EUROPE

Belgian Hotels to Match Clients' Tastes

By Jerry Soverinsky

ience. Call (011) 32-2-278-0100; www.leplaza-brussels.be

For those needing easy access to downtown Brussels yet in search of a more sedate living experience than the capital city can offer, the newly opened (2007) **La Hulpe Hotel, Resort, and Conference Center** is the perfect solution.

It's hard to believe that wooded parks, beach volleyball, and grass tennis courts could all be associated with a Brussels visit, but such is the case at La Hulpe. The massive complex occupies a former IBM training campus, a 14-building expanse totaling over 450,000 square feet of living and working space, all nestled peacefully in the forest of Soignes, just 9 miles from Brussels.

La Hulpe's four-star guest rooms, which include 181 standard rooms, 70 executive guest rooms, 12 conference suites, and a grand Segoya Suite, all present tasteful views of the Soignes Forest or the resort's Feng Shui Garden. The upscale, contemporary rooms offer full amenities, including air conditioning, flat screen television, free WiFi, work desk, VOIP telephone, safe, and mini-bar. La Hulpe's fitness center offers a full-featured spa and fitness center, suitable for the most discriminating leisure traveler. Two capable restaurants add a professional culinary element that rounds out a visitor's experience. L'Argan is the less formal, whose space doubles as a 320-seat group eating and breakfast room. Tre-O is a sleek, intimate space for 54 diners. Call (011) 322-290-9800; www.lahulpe.dolce.com

Brussels

Every discussion of Belgium must begin with its capital city, Brussels. And one of the city's best hotels is **Hotel Le Plaza**. Conveniently located along Boulevard Adolphe Maxlaan and within walking distance of Brussels Grand-Place, this 1930's 5-star hotel is one of Brussels' most venerable luxury properties. With a rich history that includes hosting some of the world's most renowned celebrities and politicians, its well-appointed, meticulously maintained facilities no doubt retain much of the hotel's original charm, a look patterned after Paris' George V Hotel.

Traditional rooms (137 total) combine a warm, blend of pleasing colors, perfect to soothe the most weary leisure or business traveler. There's a generous assortment of more than 50 suites, including five Executive Suites that include separate meeting areas, perfect for those high-profile business negotiations; and one Plaza Suite, a sumptuous penthouse space of 750 square feet, complete with salon, private balcony, and every imaginable high-tech conven-

September 2006.

Today, the manor bursts with luxury and elegance at every step. Its warm, lush lobby opens to reveal meticulously kept gardens and an expansive terrace, the Ardennes hills unfolding gently in the distance.

Inside, 16 lavish rooms and suites integrate harmoniously into the property's regal personality, with bold, rich tones and materials that are striking in their clean lines and elegance. No room is like another; each has been meticulously crafted to take advantage of the individual layout of each space. The Suite Royale is the hotel's top room, a decadent 750-square foot space located within the manor's alcove.

All rooms offer overflowing elegance that leaves visitors feeling pampered if not privileged. Whether it's soaking in a soothing, tower room bath, enjoying an in-room breakfast at a perfectly carved out nook overlooking the Ardennes, or reading a book by a crackling in-room fireplace, each room rewards its guests with sumptuous decadence. Standard amenities include air conditioning, flat screen television, DVD and CD players, and Wi-Fi.

No mention of the manor would be complete without equal emphasis of its world-class cuisine. Chef Olivier Tucki, an acclaimed European chef, is a master at preparing fresh, local ingredients that arouse the senses in full gastronomic vigor. Preparations favor light, healthy cuisine with sophisticated presentation; menus are seasonal and constantly changing. Call +32-49-87-79-1900; www.manoirdelebioles.com

The Belgian Countryside

Less than four miles from Spa lies an extraordinary hotel and its accompanying restaurant, **Manoir des Lebioles**.

Constructed in the early 20th century on a hill above the town as a summer palace for royalty, the manor has long been known by locals as the "Versailles of the Ardennes." It was neglected and fell into disrepair at the end of the 20th century, before undergoing substantial renovation and reopening to the public in

Sizzling Summer Specials

Thon Hotels: Rooms from 55 Euros or about \$85 per night at the five Brussels-area Thon hotels. Offer available July 4-August 31. Visit www.thonhotels.be

Hilton Hotels: Rooms from 89 Euros or about \$140 at Hilton's Conrad Brussels, Hilton Brussels, and Hilton Brussels City properties. Valid July-August. Visit www.hiltons.com

Plaza Hotel (see main piece): Summer

Continued on page 29

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Portugal, the Closest Corner of Europe

Portugal is the closest destination in Europe to the U.S., easy to get to and to navigate, and it serves as a gateway to the rest of the continent. Blessed with a mild climate year-round, an excellent range of sports awaits the active traveler. Every corner of the country is rich with historical attractions. It is a destination of timeless appeal – as inviting, complex, and enjoyable as a glass of Port wine. As one senior travel editor recently put it... “Lisbon is it. It is the capital of cool in Europe.”

Even with today's exchange rate, Portugal is one of Europe's best values – a place where the dollar goes farther. Portugal reported a 20 percent increase in American visitors in 2007, despite the exchange rate.

Travelers who have returned to Portugal time and time again have recognized the value for their dollar that this European nation offers. Even as the Euro reaches new heights, luxury can be affordable in some of Portugal's 5-star hotels, inns and resorts, especially when compared to similar properties elsewhere in Europe.

Luxury is affordable in Portugal especially in the scenic plains of the Alentejo region, in the hills of the Douro River Valley, in the northern city of Porto, and off the coast in the Azores, a relatively undiscovered destination.

Off the Coast of Portugal

Azores Express pays a six percent commission on all its flights from Boston, Providence, RI, and Oakland, CA to the Azores and to Lisbon. Azores Express has connected New England with the Azores and mainland Portugal for more than 20 years. Today it offers direct flights on wide-body



TOM BROSS

A310 aircraft to São Miguel, the main island in the Azores archipelago. Connecting flights from São Miguel to Lisbon, Porto and/or the island of Madeira are available. The company is part of the SATA Group.

Call 800-762-9995; www.Azores-Express.com

About midway between the east coast of the United States and mainland Portugal sits the Azores, a collection of nine islands scattered over several hundred nautical miles. The closest point to Europe from the United States, the Azores were once the one-and-only stopping-off point for ocean voyagers traveling between the two continents. Today, the Azores islands are an autonomous region of Portugal, even though they are more than 800 miles west of Portugal's mainland. A direct flight from Boston to the Azores takes about four hours – shorter than a flight to Las Vegas or Aruba.

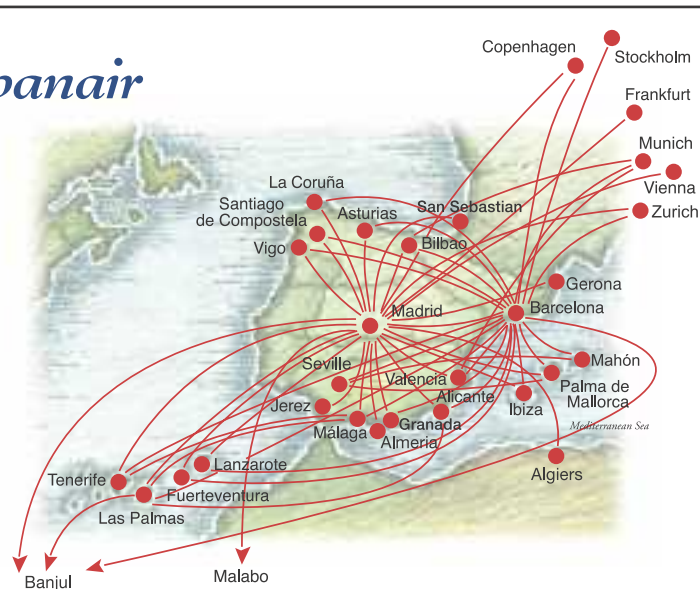
Because these once uninhabited, remote islands were settled sporadically over a span of two centuries, their culture, dialect, cuisine and traditions vary considerably from island to island. Farming and fishing are key industries that support the Azorean economy. These traditional trades give the Azores an unspoiled, historic and authentically European feel that is becoming harder to find in other nearby locations. Only 240,000 Azoreans live within the archipelago's 868 square miles. Visitors find plenty to see and do here, with

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Photos shown: Torre de Belém - Lisboa, La Sagrada Família - Barcelona, Palácio da Pena - Sintra, Palácio Real - Madrid, Casa da Música - Porto, Museo Guggenheim - Bilbao.

EUROPE

upscale lodging and restaurants blending well with the tiny, rural towns and the sometimes wild and lush landscapes that make up the islands.

The Azores are, without question, some of the most beautiful islands in the world, yet they remain a closely-guarded secret by tourists in the know. Visitors are still discovering the Azores. Although the Azoreans speak Portuguese, travelers can always find someone who speaks English and residents are patient and willing to get through your high school Spanish, Italian and French until you both hit upon a single word that may sound similar in all Romance languages.

Accommodations

Ultimately, agents need to know the nuts and bolts of selling vacations to Portugal. Following are among some of the best deals in Portugal that will only get better as the peak season wanes. Members of the Portuguese Trade and Tourism Office compiled the following list of commission-paying options.

ARTEH® – Hotels and Resorts: Offers special rates to both travel agents and tour operators. Special packages and deals are offered on the group's website, with the best possible rate and fee always offered to the travel trade. Arteh offers a CRS (Central Reservation System) on the website, where more than 50 percent of reservations come from North America. Because it is a marketing group, commission varies from property to property, but all the fees come direct to the agent from ARTEH, so be sure to ask when you are looking for a client. Arteh properties are an exclusive collection of luxury and charming boutique hotels and resorts, rich in history and natural beauty. Properties throughout Portugal include city, beach, country or mountain locations, in former manor homes, convents, palaces or castles.

Call + 351 21 780 34 70; E-mail: info@arteh-hotels.com; or www.arteh-hotels.com

Pousadas de Portugal: Is perhaps the most well-known of Portuguese hotel options. The group offers a 10 percent commission to travel agents and a 15 percent commission to tour operators.

The Best Available Rate (BAR) on the Pousada website is commissionable if booked in advance by a travel agent. Pousadas de Portugal, are part of a network of more than 40

establishments, from the green and rustic valleys of the Minho region to the Trás-os-Montes Mountains. Visitors can also find these historic lodgings in the golden plains of the Alentejo region and on the Algarve coast.

Since 2007, Pousadas de Portugal have been strengthening their position with an ongoing commitment to growth, the opening of new units, such as **Pousada de Braga** – São Vicente, the former Quinta de Infias in Braga, and upgrades of the pousadas in Gerês, Setúbal, São Brás, Vila Nova de Cerveira, Manteigas and Óbidos.

This year, **The Palacio de Estoi** in the Algarve region will transform from an abandoned palace to a grand pousada welcoming guests by the end of 2008 (or beginning of 2009). When complete (the renovations began in September) the Pousada will have 49 rooms, a swimming pool with its own bar, a spa, a leisure area equipped with Renaissance-style furniture, a new dining room, rest areas, a small shop and facilities for meetings and events.

Visit www.pousadas.pt

Solares de Portugal: Is a network of 96 Casas Antigas (Manor Houses), Quintas e Herdades (Estates) and Casas Rusticas (Country Houses) that offers an unique lodging option throughout Portugal. Anyone with a sense of history and a desire to discover the real Portugal will enjoy the Solares de Portugal. Staying in one of them is an experience in ecotourism, as your clients might be on a working farm, or within a nature preserve. All the Solares have been individually inspected to ensure the highest standard of quality and hospitality and many of them have played host to same family for hundreds of years and often date back to the 17th and 18th Centuries. Prices start at 65 euros or about \$105 per double room per night; Solares de Portugal pays agents and tour operators a 15 percent commission on bookings made through the reservation center.

Visit www.solaresdeportugal.pt

For more information, contact the Portuguese Trade and Tourism Office, 800-767-8842; E-mail: tourism@portugal.org; or visit www.visitportugal.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Portugal see page 67 of the Listings Section

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IN THE NEWS

Malev in the Clouds Again

Malév, the Hungarian national airline, restarted daily scheduled flights from Budapest to New York on May 24.

During the summer, Malév's New York route operates with an average load factor of 90%. Transit passengers are assisted by the efficient timetabling on this flight.

An additional advantage for Malév passengers is that Malév codes were recently added to 12 domestic flights of oneworld founder airline American Airlines, thus allowing Malév passengers to fly for instance from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Washington, Cleveland, Chicago and Dallas to Budapest, with just one connection with no change of terminals. This means that Malév passengers can book seats on North American routes directly, with seamless connections to the direct Malév New York-Budapest service.

New Onboard Dining Options

At the same time, Malév unveiled its new in-flight menu selection that enables travelers to select from new catering choices comprising Hungarian and international cuisines. The most important feature of the onboard menus was to ensure that Malév customers receive the benefit of the latest nutritional guidelines and modern cooking techniques in the preparation of dishes reflecting today's dining expectations, the focus is on easily digestible, lighter meals.

Visit www.malev.com

BELGIUM

Continued from page 24

rates from 140 Euros or about \$220 per night, including breakfast; July 4- Aug. 31.

Dolce La Hulpe (see main piece): One night with breakfast from 99 Euros or about \$155 per night, through August 31. Visit www.lahulpe.dolce.com

Getting There: The 111-minute London to Brussels Eurostar journey just got more comfortable. **Rail Europe** is currently offering up to 50% off regular priced one-way full-fare tickets, on all routes of the high-speed Thalys trains, connecting cities in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Thalys tickets can be booked on the agent website below now through September 17, 2008 for travel through September 30, 2008. Rail Europe's one-way Summer Special fares* from Paris to Brussels start at \$109 (1st) and \$70 (2nd). Call 888-382-7245; <http://agent.raileurope.com>

For information, contact the Belgian Tourist Office at 212-758-8130 or visit www.visitbelgium.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Belgium see page 59 of the Listings Section

Swift Spanish Rail Ride to Expo 2008

The **Eurail Group** has partnered with the organizers of **Expo 2008** to offer a special discount on the entrance fee to Eurail Pass holders.

This year's **International Exposition** takes place in Zaragoza, Spain this summer until September 14 and is expected to attract 4.5 million visitors from all over the world. The theme is "Water and Sustainable Development", an especially relevant topic given today's increasing focus on environmental awareness worldwide.

Clients can access this exposition by one of the most eco-friendly forms of transportation - the train. The Expo venue is within walking distance (less than half a mile) of the new, ultra-modern Zaragoza Delicias station. Visitors can also take a shuttle bus or enjoy an aerial view of the site by riding the Cable Car linked to the Expo's Water Tower Gate. Rail connections to Zaragoza are excellent; direct high-speed AVE trains from the country's capital, Madrid, transport passengers in just under 1 hour, 30 minutes and Barcelona is less than 2 hours away. During the Expo, additional trains will be added to these routes to facilitate an expected increase in passengers. Eurail Pass holders are entitled to a 12% discount on the entrance fee, provided their rail pass is valid in Spain. Visit www.EurailGroup.com

Tickets can be purchased at local Expo booths. Visit www.expozaragoza2008.es

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EUROPE

Berlin's "Boulevard of the Stars"

While the greats of cinema are immortalized in Hollywood on the "Walk of Fame," the stars of German film and television will soon be honored on a "Promenade of Light" in Berlin. In February, the Berlin State Senate approved financing for the project that is estimated to cost one million euros. Construction for the ground lighting installation designed by the renowned London architect Zaha Hadid is scheduled to begin this year. The names of the stars are to be engraved on elliptical elements made from terrazzo mortar with glass fibers imbedded. Visit www.visitberlin.de

No Free Forum

Rome's Imperial Forum - the political, commercial and religious center of ancient Rome - is no longer free to enter. Those who want to explore the historic ruins must purchase a combined ticket (costing 11 euros or \$16) including admission to the Colosseum, Palatine Hill and the Forum.

Through September 14, 2008, the ticket also covers entrance to the special exhibit, "Roman Victories," displaying reliefs, paintings, sculptures and coins in the Colosseum's upper gallery.

Roman officials say the proceeds from tickets sales will pay for increased security and further restoration of ancient sites. Visitors will no longer be able to enter the Forum from Capitoline Hill. The most convenient entrance is now from Via dei Fori Imperiali on the northern side of the site.

Visit www.italiantourism.com

Trafalgar's Value Season Starts Now

Anaheim, Calif.-based **Trafalgar Tours** unveiled a new marketing program called Value Season, which represents the lower, more cost-effective autumn, winter and spring seasons for travel to Europe.

The Value Season lasts from November 2008 to April 2009 but to spur interest, Trafalgar is offering a complimentary pre- or post-night for passengers booked and deposited by July 31. The land-only prices for Trafalgar European vacations during the Value Season will be less than \$135 per person, per day, including transportation, accommodations, most meals and sightseeing. Looking towards 2009, Wise-

man said it looks like prices to Europe will be up at least another 5% on top of 2008 prices.

Visit www.trafalgar.com

Tie the Knot or Renew Vows with Cloud

Cloud Tours is offering Tying the Knot and Renewal of Vows packages in Greece – Santorini, Mykonos, Crete or on the sea. The Greek Islands offer a memorable destination wedding site for your clients. In Santorini, the wedding can be performed at one of the many cliffside properties offering stunning views of the sea and sky.

In Mykonos, weddings can take place by the turquoise sea or at one of the deluxe Myconian Collection Hotels on the beach. In Crete, Cloud has partnered with the exquisite Elounda hotels: Elounda Mare, Porto Elounda and the Peninsula for an unforgettable wedding. Cloud Tours will assist you with the handling of the necessary paper work in the USA as well as handle the formalities needed in Greece to ensure accuracy. The basic services for a Civil Ceremony begin at \$1,250 and include bride's bouquet, and groom's boutonniere, a bottle of Champagne, the filing of documents in Greece to obtain a marriage license and a wedding cake. Renewal of the vows begins at \$880 with similar inclusions.

Is your client celebrating a wedding anniversary? They can renew their vows at sea with the fabulous Greek Isles as the background! The Master or Senior Officer will perform a romantic ceremony on the Bridge for only \$330. This rate includes a wedding bouquet, cake, commemorative photograph, chilled bottle of champagne an announcement in the vessel's daily program, an anniversary certificate, a table for two reserved on the Gala night and a chilled bottle of champagne served with freshly squeezed orange juice served in the cabin. Once in Greece, Cloud Tours Inc. can arrange stays at hotels in Mykonos and Santorini ranging from standard to super deluxe. Special accommodations include suites with private swimming pools or Jacuzzis with seaviews. Cloud offers extra values such as complimentary upgrades, dinners and SPA treatments at no additional cost to your clients. There are many other islands that can be included in an island-hopping honeymoon. Crete, Rhodes, Paros, Skiathos, and Corfu are only a few.

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



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Includes roundtrip airfare from BOS/JFK/EWR to Malta via British Airways/Virgin Air, 5 nights in Classic sea-view rooms, either at the First Class Hotel Victoria in Sliema or the Deluxe Westin Dragonara in St. Julians (from \$2199 Air/Land), Buffet Breakfast and Dinner daily, private car transfers, arrival and departure transfers and choice of one full-day sightseeing excursion with lunch

For reservations or more information please call toll-free 800-225-6290 (617-375-9400 for local calls).
800-225-6290 www.donnafranca.com
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BEST BUYS

\$1474 SWITZERLAND Visit Italy's newest division, **Visit Switzerland** is featuring the eight-day Highlights of Central Switzerland, an independent tour. This very popular tour visits some of Switzerland delightful destinations including Lucerne, Interlaken, Lugano and the charming town of St. Gallen, a metropolis of Eastern Switzerland with a proud and prestigious past. Discover the many charming areas, the lively squares where you can sit and enjoy a coffee in one of the many inviting street cafés. Prices start from \$1,474 per person double for land arrangements only.

Call 800 255-3537; E-mail info@VisitSwitzerlandTours.com; www.VisitSwitzerlandTours.com

\$2650 SWEDEN In its next wave of developments, **Grand Hôtel Stockholm** has added SeaLounge to its extensive in-house meeting and incentive offerings. A luxury experience, with all the facilities congruent with the grandeur of the hotel itself, SeaLounge is a 61-foot motor yacht with a capacity of 44 passengers, available for day and night excursions. Guests can enjoy fine dining and cocktail parties under the clear skies or a barbeque can be organized for a more casual affair. Business excursions here take on a new level of indulgence, be it sam-

pling the extensive bar menu, wine tasting with one of The Grand's sommeliers or reclining in the outdoor Jacuzzi and sauna. Rental fees for SeaLounge vary according to the number of guests, time of departure and length of tour. Conferences start from \$2,650.

E-mail conference@grandhotel.se

\$1965 RUSSIA Discover the beauty of Northern Capital of Russia - St. Petersburg with **Russian National Group** on the "Venice of the North" Tour, an eight-day fully escorted vacation that covers the prime sightseeing highlights of St. Petersburg, priced from \$1,965 for land only, or from \$2,978 from New York. Departures are weekly on Saturdays now through November 29.

This package includes six nights' hotel accommodations. Hotels are well located all with private facilities; round trip airport transfers by first-class motorcoach, breakfast daily; services of private English-Speaking guides; all transportation; sightseeing; hotel taxes and service charges. Sightseeing includes all major historic sights. All services are commissionable at 10%.

Call 877-221-7120; E-mail info@rnato.org; www.russia-travel.com

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EUROPE

BEST BUYS

\$1109 EUROPE Auto Europe offers great savings on early bookings to Italy, including free car class upgrades, savings up to 15% and air and hotel specials. Travelers can receive up to 15% off any car rental and a free one-week cellular phone rental. If you're renting a villa, the Peugeot Buy Back program is an excellent value. Rates begin at \$39 a day and drop the longer clients keep the car. Rates are also tax inclusive with non-deductible fully comprehensive insurance.

Auto Europe also offers peak season airfare to Rome beginning at \$1109 including fuel surcharge, plus hotel accommodations at \$120 per night, 10% less if combined with airfare. Air and hotel packages to Rome start at \$1277 per person including two nights at a three star hotel, or air and car rental packages to Rome from \$1189 per person including airfare and a three-day economy car rental. Airfare and packages all include fuel surcharges and are valid for travel through August 31.

Visit www.autoeurope.com

\$2299 MONACO Monaco and "budget" don't normally go hand in hand, but one euro buys a one-way trip on Monaco's local bus system as well as on the "boat bus," an electrical-

ly powered covered boat ferrying across Monaco's Mediterranean waterway to the Casino's back door. Consider this affordable splurge: three nights for two at the **Monte-Carlo Beach Hotel**, helicopter transfer to/from Nice Airport, membership in Le Club Diamant Rouge plus SBM Gold Card privileges. Retail value: \$3,199, the starting bid: \$2,299.

Visit www.MonacoAuction.com

\$1299 HUNGARY Tatra Travel also known as **Czech Vacations**, has a honey of a Hungary summer special: eight days/six nights to Budapest from \$1,299, including roundtrip air from JFK New York with transfers, six nights in the Hotel Fiesta in the historic downtown, daily breakfast and a half-day sightseeing tour with an English-speaking guide.

Connecting flights from major US cities are available, and if you time it right you could be there for the Sziget Festival August 12-18.

Shipyard Island in the Danube River hosts international and Hungarian music stars every summer, and this year's headliners include R.E.M., Sex Pistols and Alanis Morissette, to name a few. The 11th Jewish Summer Festival (Aug 30-September 8) is another cultural high spot, showcasing events in such venues as the famous synagogue on Dohany Street, with a two-day klezmer marathon and an international cantorial concert.

Visit www.tatratravel.com

\$3495 RUSSIA Russia expert and longtime **Mountain Travel Sobek** trip leader Rob Smurr will lead this unique eight-day, off-the-beaten-path trek among the Caucasus's highest peaks, with distant views of Mount Kazbek, the spectacular mountain on which Prometheus met his fate. The 14-day program is priced from \$3,795 per person double; departs Sept. 2. Adventurers looking for a greater challenge can tackle an ascent of Mount Elbrus (18,510'), the highest mountain in Europe and one of the famous "seven summits"—the highest peaks on each of the seven continents could find their nirvana with this program. The route followed on this climb is not technically difficult and doesn't require glacier travel, but does require the use of crampons and an ice axe in steep, snowy terrain. It is 10 days, priced from \$3,495; departing Aug. 16, 2008.

Call 888- 687-6235; visit www.mtsobek.com

\$240 FRANCE The Cannes Tourist Board has partnered with nearly 30 notable hotels with guaranteed dollar rates exclusively for U.S. travelers. Room rates start at \$240 in a two-star hotel for a minimum three nights and include breakfast. Enjoy Cannes' sandy beaches, stroll the palm-tree lined waterfront La Croisette, with its luxury resorts, hip cafés and designer boutiques, and groove all night at any of its nightclubs, for the classic Côte d'Azur experience.

Visit www.cannes-dollarate.com

BEST BUYS

\$1049 HOLLAND Amsterdam hosts two great music festivals this summer, the North Sea Jazz Festival July 11-13, featuring top jazz musicians as well as blues, soul, R & B and world-music artists, and the Canal Festival, Aug 16-24, free classical concerts around the city's canals. **Go-today.com** has a cool four-night air/hotel package for this cool capital ranging from \$1,049 to \$2,089, departing JFK New York or Newark. Departures through August 3.

Visit www.go-today.com

\$2995 AUSTRIA Like Austria, **Herzerl Tours** is starting its preparations for the upcoming Haydn year in 2009. "One can never have enough Papa Haydn so Herzerl Tours gives travelers a preview of what's to come during the Haydn year 2009!!" says Susanne Servin, owner of Herzerl Tours. Participants begin in the Baroque jewel, the city of Salzburg, with a visit to the Mozart family home and attend a candle-light dinner and performance. The tour travels east along the Danube and ends in Imperial Vienna - "the music capital of the world." Concert or opera performances by composers such as Mozart, Schubert or Strauss, listen to the glorious voices of the Vienna Boy's Choir, houses where the composers lived and worked will give the participants a taste

of this musical Vienna. The tour runs October 5-13, 2008 priced at \$ 2,995 per person double, land only; Included are accommodations in four-star hotels in Salzburg and Vienna; two meals per day; privately guided sightseeing tours; some concerts (others are optional); all entrance fees, all transfers and excursions by luxury coach, and Salzburg & Vienna (discount) Cards.

Call 800-684-8488; E-mail sms@herzerltours.com; www.herzerltours.com

\$460 SWITZERLAND The **Beau-Rivage Palace** is selling the Discovery Package, priced from approximately \$555 per night based on double including accommodations in a garden view room (other rates apply for a lake view or suite); welcome glass of Champagne on arrival; full buffet breakfast in the Salon Grammont or room service; seasonal "Jubilee Menu" dinner in one-star Michelin restaurant La Rotonde; tasting of select and regional Swiss wines in Le Bar; and complimentary use of fitness center and tennis courts. The rate reflects a savings of over 25% off the normally published double room rate of about \$460, plus charges for breakfast, Chef's menu dinner and wine tasting. Valid through December 31, 2008.

Call 800-223-6800; www.brp.ch

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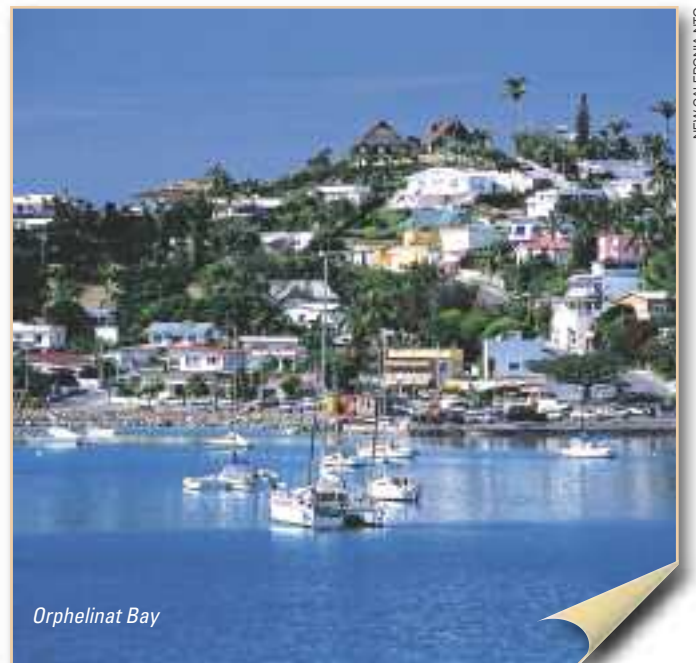
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New Caledonia: Whose Secret Is It Anyway?

Located almost directly between Australia and Fiji, New Caledonia might well be France's best-kept secret. The mainland, which is where most people live, is divided lengthwise by a range of mountains (Chaîne Centrale), the highest points of which are "Mount Panié" in the north (5,344 feet) and "Mount Humboldt" in the south (5,308 feet). Various species of trees can be found in these mountains.

This unusual relief, very much like a backbone, divides the Mainland into two very different areas:



Orphelinat Bay

NEW CALEDONIA NTO

The East Coast, humid and open to the trade winds is a fertile, exotic land with lush tropical vegetation, green valleys, beautiful waterfalls, rivers and authentic Melanesian huts along the roads.

The West Coast is a drier, temperate zone. There are fewer coconut trees but "niaouli" trees grow by the thousands and the endemic wildlife is rich. It is "cattle country," shaped by people who live at the pace of their cattle. There is an abundance of beautiful beaches too.

Unlike its volcanic neighbors, New Caledonia is a fragment of an ancient continent, which drifted away some 250 million years ago. Its flora and fauna evolved in isolation, and are now quite unique: 3,500 recorded species of plants, three quarters of which occur only here; 4,300 species of land animals, 1,000 species of fish, 6,500 species of marine invertebrates.

Eight hundred miles long, and 80 miles wide, New Caledonia offers an endless variety of landscapes, from some of the best white sand beaches in the Pacific to spectacular mountain retreats.

Surrounded by a 1,000-mile long coral reef, New Caledonia also boasts the largest lagoon in the world. The reef can be as close as a few miles from the coast in some places and as far as 40 miles in others - with an average depth of 25 miles.

The Territory of New Caledonia consists of the Mainland, the Isle of Pines to the south of the Mainland, the Loyalty Islands to the east of the Mainland (Maré, Lifou, Tiga and Ouvéa), the Belep Archipelago in the north west and numerous islands and islets: Huon & Surprise, Chesterfield, Walpole, Beautemps-Beaupré, Astrolabe, and the Bellona reef, ... a total surface of 11,875 square miles (10,232 square

miles for the Mainland alone, which is 250 miles long).

Getting There

Carriers that operate service to New Caledonia are **Aircalin**, **Air France**, **Air New Zealand**, **Air Vanuatu** and **Qantas**.

From Osaka to Nouméa: three flights a week depart from Osaka: Thursday, Saturday and Monday. Arrives in Nouméa: Thursday, Saturday and Monday. With possible connection with Air France flight arriving from Paris and KLM flight arriving from Amsterdam. Visit www.airfrance.com

From Tokyo to Nouméa: five flights a week depart from Tokyo: Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Arrives in Nouméa the day after for possible connection with Air France flights arriving from Paris.

From Sydney to Nouméa: seven daily flights weekly with

BEST BUYS

\$1054 NEW ZEALAND The **Farm at Cape Kidnappers** is now open, bringing a five-star experience to New Zealand's Hawke's Bay wine region. Owned by Americans Julian & Josie Robertson, it is the "sister property" to their internationally acclaimed Northland property, Kauri Cliffs Lodge & Golf Course. Set on a 6,000 acre sheep and cattle farm the property boasts breathtaking views over the Pacific in Hawke's Bay, one of New Zealand's foremost wine regions. The "Farm" offers 24 suites and rooms plus a four-bedroom Owner's Cottage. Room rates start from \$527 per person per night in a Hilltop Suite to \$664 per night per person per night in a Lodge or Ridge Suite (shoulder season- until December 14, 2008) or \$617 per person per night in a Hilltop Suite to \$775 per person per night in a Lodge or Ridge Suite (high season- December 15, 2008-March 31, 2009). Owner's Cottage rates are from \$3,900 per night for a two-bedroom suite (shoulder season) to \$10,000 per night for a four-bedroom suite (high season); low season rates apply May 1-Sept 30, 2008. All rates include accommodation, pre-dinner drinks, dinner and breakfast, and use of all Lodge activities. Call 011-646-875-1900; E-mail reservations@capekidnappers.com; www.capekidnappers.com

\$2270 NEW ZEALAND The renowned Art Deco town of Napier is the starting point of **Swain Tours'** 10-night "Boutique New Zealand" package, which links the three largest wine producing regions of New Zealand via a 236-mile scenic driving route. Connoisseurs of fine food and wine will delight in the region's stunning reds, vibrant farmer's market and self-drive food trail. Next stop: white wine country, of course! Sip Marlborough's fruity sauvignon blancs, perfectly paired with a bounty of fresh seafood, including local mussels and crayfish. Boutique New Zealand" packages start at \$2,270 per person (double occupancy), land only, and include: 10 nights accommodation; 11 days' car rental; internal New Zealand flights; and Inter-Islander ferry tickets.

Call 800-22 SWAIN; www.swaintours.com

direct flights taking just three hours. (Aircalin and Qantas flights). Visit www.aircalin.com

From Brisbane to Nouméa: three flights per week depart Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. (Aircalin and Qantas flights).

From Auckland to Nouméa: four flights weekly depart from Auckland: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Direct flights take about 2.5 hours. (Aircalin and Qantas flights).

From Papeete to Nouméa: one flight a week departs from Papeete: Sunday. Arrives in Nouméa: the same Sunday.

Visit www.newcaledoniaturism-south.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to The South Pacific see page 86 of the Listings Section

Incredible Fam of Incredible India

The ambitious project of **Incredible Vacations India** to bring 1,000 American Travel Agents on FAM Tours to India, took wing with the first group of 12 main stream Travel Agents visiting India from March 6th 2008. The itinerary covered the ever celebrated Golden Triangle and the Green Triangle of Kerala. The Taj Mahal, Wildlife sanctuaries of Ranthambore and Periyar, history and culture in the cities of Jaipur and Kochi, shopping sensations of Mumbai and Delhi were integrated into the itinerary.

The FAM Project is the brainchild of Mr. Nalin Kapadia – Chairman of Incredible Vacations India in Mumbai and supported by Mr. Ram Chopra COO, Sans Incredible Vacations LLC in New York. The tours are scheduled to be held in the lean months of travel from April to September and are expected to cover the desired group of agents over a period of two years.

"It was truly a Travel Experience" – said Ms. Lorrie Filler of Travel Experience, "our experience on this trip to India far exceeded our highest expectations" said Marilyn Lane of Carlson Wagonlit Spears, "the sites, sounds, food, culture, people, hotel accommodations etc. were beyond our expectations" said Bob and Penny of Devinco Travel, "The fam was incredible indeed, I found India very interesting" said Ms. Batia Grin Blat of Carlson Wagonlit Travel; "I cant tell you how much I enjoyed the experience of visiting India. The hotel properties we inspected and stayed in were impressive," said Joanne Kelley of Travel with Ease Service. These were the comments of some of the participants of the FAM Tour.

The tours are leaving every Thursday and are filled up until August this year and now the bookings are being accepted for the month of September 2008 onwards.

Call 212 695-1005 or 888-9C INDIA or email Ramchopra@incrediblevacationsindia.com; or visit www.sansincrediblevacations.com



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Agents collect 5% commission on all Aircalin published fares when ticketed on Aircalin stock - 100% ticketing available.

Announcing new service twice a week from Nouméa to Seoul, South Korea.

www.aircalinusa.com
1-800-254-7251
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Melbourne's Tame and Tender Wild Side

Victoria's newest marine attraction, the Nobbies Centre in Phillip Island Nature Park in Melbourne has opened after a \$6.1 million redevelopment. In a first for Australian tourism, hi-tech cameras allow visitors close-up viewing of the world's second largest Australian Fur Seal colony at Seal Rock (numbering 20,000) as they frolic in Bass Strait. Dolphins and sharks can also be spotted, as well as the rich bird life nesting in the cliffs. Entry to the centre is free.



Fur Seal

AUSTRALIAN TO

Tour, where guests are escorted to a secluded beach where they use night-vision goggles to watch as the Little Penguins pass by, mere inches away. Today, visitors can commemorate their experience by "Adopting a Penguin," which provides an adoption certificate, personalized thank you card with photo and free Penguin Parade entry voucher, as well as regular updates on what it's eating, where it's swimming, if it's in love (penguins mate for life) or is nurturing new offspring. The \$75 donation supports the Penguin Foundation and builds a Little Penguin nesting box to enhance the safety of a "penguin couple" and improve its long-term prospects for successful breeding. www.penguinfoundation.org.au

Also at Phillip Island is the Koala Conservation Centre, which brings visitors face-to-face with Australia's iconic marsupials. A series of treetop boardwalks allows guests to view the beguiling creatures in their natural environment. The Koala Conservation Centre has Australia's highest eco-tourism rating and has played an important role in saving Phillip Island's koala population. The centre also boasts a woodland walk through natural bush where wallabies, possums, echidnas, and snakes are regularly spotted.

An easy way to see Phillip Island Nature Park is with **Qantas Vacation's** four-day "Melbourne Discovery" package. After being met on arrival and transferred to a hotel of choice, a day of leisure awaits with ample time to explore Melbourne's fabulous alfresco eateries or wander and shop in the city's famed laneways. Day two features a guided morning tour of Melbourne's "old meets new" architecture, the Yarra River, Captain Cook's Cottage, the Queen Victoria Market, Fitzroy Gardens and Albert Park – home to the Formula One Grand Prix. After seeing the historic Shrine of Remembrance and strolling along Southbank's waterfront, the afternoon is free for self-exploration. In the evening, dine aboard a beautifully restored 1927 Colonial tramcar as it

trundles through the streets of Melbourne.

An afternoon guided tour on day three starts with a stop at a local winery to sample some Aussie vino and enjoy a home-made afternoon tea. At Phillip Island, guests first visit the Koala Conservation Centre, then the new Nobbies Centre.

As the sun sets the Penguin Parade begins, with thousands of Little Penguins arriving onshore from their ocean feeding grounds, "walking and talking" loudly as they work their way back to their burrow nests. The evening concludes with a local fish and chips dinner and overnight in Melbourne.

Per person prices for **Qantas Vacations'** four-night "Melbourne Discovery" package start at \$699 per person

through March 31, 2009, and include three nights in Melbourne, half-day Melbourne city sights tour, Phillip Island luxury tour, roundtrip private car transfers, Colonial Tramcar and fish and chips dinners. Call **Qantas Vacations, 866-934-4359; www.qantasvacations.com**

For more information on Phillip Island, visit www.visitphillipisland.com; for information on Melbourne, visit Tourism Victoria's website at www.visitmelbourne.com

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

Penguins on Parade

Each night at sunset visitors flock to Phillip Island's Summerland Beach to observe the world's largest colony of Little Penguins as they waddle ashore to their sand dune burrows after a long day of fishing. Among numerous ways to enjoy the spectacle, the newest is the exclusive Penguin Sky Box, which accommodates just five people per night. Visitors can also get closer to the action with a Private Penguin Parade, complete with personalized ranger commentary. Ideal for those seeking an even more intimate eco encounter is the Ultimate Penguin

IN THE NEWS

Virgin's Aussie Connection

One of the most expensive air routes may soon become a tad more competitive. Richard Branson recently released details for his newest airline venture, V Australia, setting Dec. 15 as the inaugural date for the airline's Sydney-Los Angeles service, which will operate daily. **V Australia** plans to have a codeshare relationship with Northwest for connecting passengers in Los Angeles. The new carrier, which received U.S. route rights in February, will take advantage of the new U.S.-Australia open-skies agreement, which removes previous caps on the number of airlines and number of flights that could be operated in the market. V Australia, a unit of the Virgin Blue Group, will operate 777-300 ER aircraft in a three-class configuration. V Australia Airlines has ordered seven new Boeing 777-300ER aircraft to operate trans-Pacific flights. The aircraft is one of the most popular in the world and V Australia Airlines will be the first and only airline to operate the aircraft type between Australia and the U.S. V Australia Airlines will shortly announce its launch routes, first fares and product details. Visit www.vaustralia.com

Air Tahiti Nui's Round the World Fare

Globetrotters and culture hounds can now explore the world at their own pace at an astonishingly low price with **Air Tahiti Nui's** new Around the World fare. Travel from Los Angeles or New York to world-class destinations including Paris, Dubai, Bangkok, Singapore, Beijing, Shanghai, Osaka, Tokyo, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Auckland, and of course, Tahiti. Allowing up to six free stopovers over the course of one year, Air Tahiti Nui's Around the World fare starts at \$3,600 for economy class including fuel surcharges. Business class Around the World fares start at \$6,450, and First class fares start at \$10,050. Itineraries must be booked in a continuous Eastbound or Westbound global direction.

Air Tahiti Nui provides nonstop service five days a week between Paris' Charles de Gaulle International Airport and Los Angeles with additional service during peak seasons. To Papeete, Tahiti there are twice-weekly direct flights from New York with added nonstop service during the summer, in addition to daily nonstop flights from Los Angeles. Nonstop flights from Tokyo to Tahiti depart three times a week with a connection in Osaka once a week. From Tahiti, connections onto Sydney and Auckland are available four times a week.

Call 877-824-4846; www.airtahitinui-usa.com/world-fare/world-fare.asp

Road Trip: Victoria's Great Ocean Road

Travelers to Australia owe it to themselves to drive Victoria's Great Ocean Road, one of the world's most magnificent scenic routes. A breathtaking stretch of astonishing seascapes, landscapes and seaside towns, the road unfolds spectacular surf beaches, sophisticated resorts and quiet fishing villages. It's a trip back in nature and time, leading to colossal rock sculptures on the southern coast and white-washed cottages of seafaring towns like Port Fairy. **Goway Travel** has developed a comfortable, well-planned self-drive along the Great Southern Touring Route linking Victoria's key destinations of Melbourne, the Great Ocean Road, the Grampians and Ballarat – all just three hours' drive from each other.

Each journey along the Great Southern Touring Route naturally begins and ends in Melbourne - the arts, restaurant and sports capital of Australia. Here, participants can enjoy the latest exhibit at the National Gallery of Victoria, stroll through the Queen Victoria Market. With bellies full from an Australian farm-style breakfast, the return east to Melbourne is an historical adventure via Ballarat. Built with the wealth of the gold rush, much of the opulence of the era is still on display in the city's grand public buildings, hotels and historic streetscapes.

Ballarat was the site of the world's largest deposit of alluvial gold and is showcased in Sovereign Hill – a re-creation of life in the 1850's where panning for gold or riding a horse-drawn carriage in a town of over 200 volunteers dressed in period costumes is the norm. Perhaps the strongest draw to the area is the evening "Blood on the Southern Cross" light and sound show depicting the Eureka Rebellion of miners against government forces. Spend the night in a studio at the Oscars Hotel Ballarat after the evening's performance before the morning's short drive back to Melbourne.

Prices for Goway Travel's five-day "Shipwreck Coast Explorer" package start at \$824 per person (based on double occupancy) through March 31, 2009 and includes four nights accommodation, a co-pilot pack (detailed itinerary, backpack, discount coupons), five day mid-size automatic Hertz car rental, and a dinner and "Blood on the Southern Cross" show. Call 800-387-8850; www.goway.com

For more information on the Great Southern Touring Route, visit www.greatsoutherntouring.com.au

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COSTA RICA'S Green Pot of Gold

Unquestionably, 2007 was a year of growth for Costa Rica's national tourism industry and the beginning of 2008 confirms consistency. January of 2008 marked a good start in tourist air arrivals according to the preliminary data gathered by the Costa Rica Tourist Board (ICT). Despite economic worries in the main North American markets, the first month of 2008 shows optimism. International tourism arrivals registered at the Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) and Daniel Oduber Quirós (LIR) have showed a steady growth. According to the ICT, 127,647 international visitors arrived by plane in January of 2008, marking a 13.7 percent over the same month of 2007.

For Costa Rica Tourism Minister, Carlos Ricardo Benavides, these numbers indicate a positive trend for the current high season already taking place, and at the same time committing the government and sector to improve efforts to promote tourism activities.

"These figures are excellent news, a 13 percent increase is way over the annual estimates and we should take advantage of this to work even harder throughout the year, especially in terms of investment, in 2007 Costa Rica received an estimated \$800 million in tourism investment; excluding invest-



COSTA RICA NTO

ment in real estate development. Hilton, Marriott, Crown and Express are among some of the hotel chains that decided to invest in Costa Rica's tourism industry.

In 2008, Costa Rica will be the host of the next United Nations' International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development. In that sense, sustainable tourism will continue being a pivotal goal for 2008. Costa Rica has set a goal to become a zero carbon dioxide emissions (CO2) tourist destination by the year 2021.

Costa Rica closed 2007 with a total of 1.9 million international tourist arrivals, an 11.5 percent increase in comparison to 2006. Revenue generated by international tourists reached a historic high of \$1.9 billion, up \$300 million from last year.

Costa Rica, one of the countries with the greatest biodiversity in the world, has been since 1990, one of the first eco tourism destinations where the national heritage and resources have been used in a sustainable and responsible way. The Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), created by the ICT in 1999, is one of the initiatives to support sustainable development within the tourism industry.

Journey the length of Costa Rica from the northern border of Nicaragua, to Panama in the south; crisscross the country to bathe in the Caribbean and sail the Pacific. Visitors will be amazed to discover that the scenery here changes hourly, dramatically taking you from white-sand beaches to mountain passes, from dry tropical grasslands to lush rainforests, and from white-water rapids to active volcanoes.

Travelers will not find a countryside anywhere more varied in landscapes and seasons than here. Every tourism region has its own unique feeling and offers a variety of things to do and see.

The country counts eight tourism regions: the North Pacific, South Pacific, Central Pacific, Northern, Monteverde, San Jose, North Caribbean and South Caribbean. While many tour operators combine more than one region into tours that traverse the country, each one has its specialties and rich offerings.

North Pacific Region

This region crisscrosses some of the country's best beaches, parks and reserves so that if clients wanted to do a stay-put vacation, they could easily get a full flavor of the country by basing themselves right here.

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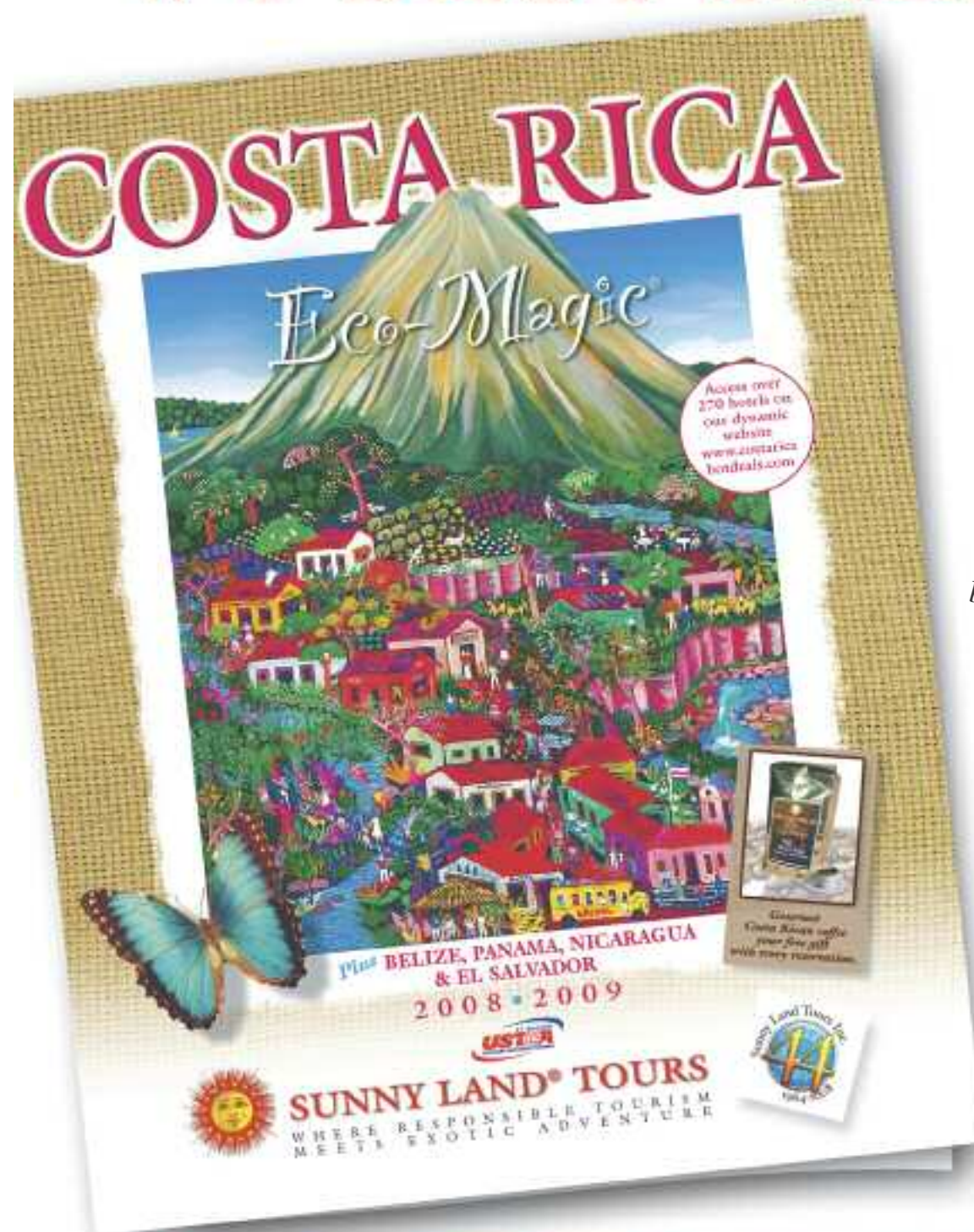
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SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

A picturesque stretch of beaches and seaside communities known as the Gold Coast is located on Guanacaste's North Pacific shores. From south to north, this alluring expanse of coastline includes: Playas Negra, Avellanas, Tamarindo, Grande, Brasilito, Conchal, Flamingo and Potrero. From booming resort towns to undeveloped white sand beaches, the Gold Coast is a Mecca for wave-riders, sun-lovers and adventure aficionados.

The region is also known for its active volcanoes, tropical dry forests (this is one of the driest areas in Costa Rica) and picturesque lakes. It is also home to several of the country's finest golf courses and National Parks.

Numerous islands are famous for their tranquil settings, snorkeling and turquoise waters. Among these islands are Tortuga, San Lucas and Chira Island. Many are winter nesting grounds for unusual birds like the roseate spoonbill, blue-footed boobies and peregrine falcons. Day trips to the nearby islands are available.

Liberia is the northern-most large city. Museums, markets, restaurants and top-notch resorts draw the most scrupulous tourist. The Sabanero (cowboy) culture is still prevalent in the northern grasslands near Rincon de la Vieja, where working cattle farms and haciendas dominate the landscape. Several have opened up their ranches to tourism as the new trend of hacienda tourism has begun here.

For more northern locations closer to Liberia, visitors can opt to fly into the city's Daniel Oduber International Airport,



COSTA RICA-NTD

located in the heart of northern Guanacaste. A small airport in Tamarindo serviced by Costa Rica's local carriers is another convenient option.

This northern part of this region has a different feel than the rest of the country. As you drive northwest, you leave the steep mountainous roads of the central valley and enter a wide-open, dry savannah where grasslands and tropical dry forest dominate. There are several types of ecosystems here from white sand beaches to dry grasslands and from aquatic ecosystems found near rivers and lakes to bubbling mud pits.

This southern part of the Nicoya Peninsula receives more rain than its northern counterpart, making more of a transition zone between dry forest climate and the tropical rainforests of more southern regions.

With distinct wet and dry seasons, you'd think you were in a different place if you visited during each season separately. Dry, dusty roads and crunchy leaves are found during the dry season, December through April. In the rainy season, May through November, this area turns into a lush tropical rainforest, with flourishing green vegetation and succulent foliage.

The town of Nicoya was Costa Rica's first colonial city and was once the center of Chorotega culture: pre-Columbian people from the Olmecas of Mexico. Now the city of Nicoya is the cultural center of the Guanacaste Province and hosts the oldest church in Costa Rica and many other ancient artifacts in museums.

Only a two-hour drive from San Jose, the city of Puntarenas is one of the most visited destinations on the coast. Puntarenas city sits on a three-mile long peninsula that reaches out into the Gulf of Nicoya. There are brown sand beaches and dozens of shops, markets and street vendors. Along the breezy seaside boardwalk, visitors will find fresh seafood and plenty of souvenir stands.

The Olive Ridley sea turtles are something you have to see if you're near the Ostional Wildlife Refuge. They come ashore every month in arribadas—large groups over a small period of time—sometimes by the thousands. Leatherback sea turtles nest between October and March at Playa Grande, and evening turtle tours can be arranged with Las Baulas Marine Park.

Visit www.visitcostarica.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Costa Rica see page 74 of the Listings Section

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IN THE NEWS

Costa Rica Wins "Tourism for All" Award

The Third Virtual Congress on Latin American Tourism Industry and Destination Competitiveness, recently recognized Costa Rica with the "Tourism for All" award in the category "Innovation in Tourism and Hotels."

Minister of Tourism, Carlos Ricardo Benavides said, "This award represents an additional incentive to continue the efforts promoting the CST program and also to strengthen our sustainable tourism development policy." The CST program was created by the ICT in 1999 and it has been internationally recognized by the World Tourism Organization. Presently 94 companies ranging from tour operators and hotels are certified in Costa Rica.

Later this year, the Fourth Meeting of the International Work Group regarding the Development of Sustainable Tourism will be held in Costa Rica. France, Germany, Australia, United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, Bahamas, Brazil, Cambodia, Cape Verde, China, Croatia, Madagascar, Mali, as well as the European Union, the UNESCO, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and representatives of professional and nongovernmental organizations will all be participating in this important event.

The objective of this gathering is to develop "good practices" regarding a sustainable tourism that is respectful towards local cultural identities, the environment, and that allows a harmonious development of small towns. Benavides, said the meeting will allow participants to familiar with Costa Rica's tourism development through a sustainable model. Benavides hopes that tourism policies include a fair distribution of the resources among the population, that the agreement follows the Kyoto Protocol, regarding the reduction of emissions causing the greenhouse effect, should include a mechanism of compensation for countries that protect wooded areas.

Solar's Romantic Costa Rican Trio

Solar Tours is selling three packages to Costa Rica with a major emphasis on romance, honeymoons at some of Costa Rica's most exclusive beach resorts. Hotel Punta Islita's exotic natural setting inspires romance and adventure. Clients get pampered for seven nights at their Casa Spa treatments and thrill yourself with nature-exploring activities. Included in the \$1,189 per person land-only price are all airport transfers, round-trip flight San Jose - Punta Islita, two nights at the Grano de Oro Hotel in San Jose and four nights at Punta Islita Beach Resort, and daily breakfast (most hotels). Air-inclusive prices range from \$1,335 per person out of Miami to \$1,655 per person from Houston. The Tambor beach area is home to some of Costa Rica's most outstanding beach resorts such as Tango Mar and Flor Blanca, both of which are very private and relaxing. With similar inclusions, this package also includes four nights in Tambor Beach starting at \$879 per person double for six nights in total; two nights in San Jose. Air-inclusive options are priced from \$1,019 to \$1,339 per person double depending upon departure gateway. Clients can enjoy their honeymoon at an isolated natural wonderland. Featuring: first night in San Jose, four-night package in Osa Peninsula, last night in San Jose. Priced from \$1,445 per person for land only, air-inclusive options range from \$1,585 out of Miami to \$1,899 out of Houston.

Call 800-388-7652; www.solartours.com

Women Go Wild in Costa Rica

BIG SKY, Montana-based AdventureWomen Inc, a pioneer in women's travel for active women over 30 is offering an adventure vacation for solo women travelers who want to see the exotic side of Costa Rica. Costa Rica is one of the most biologically diverse countries in Central America, and an ideal setting for an 11-day active travel tour. These adventurous women will go whitewater rafting on the mellow Sarapiquí River, sea kayak the lagoons and jungle waterways of Tortuguero National Park, horse-back ride on Cocles Beach, mountain bike Costa Rican country trails, explore the rainforests on an Aerial Canopy Adventure, relax in hot spring pools, hike the lava flows of the Arenal Volcano, and snorkel in the fabulous Caribbean waters of Cahuita National Park. AdventureWomen Inc. takes visitors from the beaches of the Caribbean to the beaches of the Pacific Ocean, from volcanoes to tropical rainforests, and from Costa Rica's rushing rivers to its canals and lagoons. Travelers stay in first-class hotels, extremely comfortable lodges, and beautiful resorts in the rainforest and at the foot of a volcano. The Costa Rican cuisine is fresh and delicious, and the ladies will be treated to the services of a knowledgeable (and vivacious) Costa Rican guide throughout this journey. Participants can do all of the activities or pick and choose the ones that are right for them. Group numbers are kept small, but the adventure is big. The tour runs October 9-19, 2008; priced from \$3,495 per person double (\$600 deposit required).

Call 970-568-7423; www.adventurewomen.com

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Mexico's Uncommon Retreats

By Maria Lisella

Every corner of Mexico seems to be in an international marathon to pursue big-name hotel systems to build, build, build. With all the flashing logos, it is easy to forget why one comes to Mexico in the first place. Its culture, its people, its food, its way of life, its natural resources -- good weather, sun, bay breezes -- and a place in which to catch one's breath.

Tucked away in the old hills of Acapulco, a jewel of a destination that has been neglected but to some travelers seems just tarnished enough to invite new interest in its "older" self are two of my personal favorites.

John Wayne may well have slipped off the barstool you find yourself on as you sip fresh coconut juice from its shell

at **Hotel Los Flamingos**, built in the 1930s, is destined to remain inextricably linked to the ghost of Tarzan aka Johnny Weissmuller (who actually hails from Timisoara, Romania) whose controversial grave lies on yet another hill over Acapulco. The legendary property is as well maintained as ever atop its

cliffside perch at 450 feet above the blue bay that feels so close to the clouds (and to La Quebrada where the famous high cliff divers perform daily) one could reach and touch one of those old stars. In the 50s the property was sold to the Hollywood Gang that found refuge here in the 40s and 50s such as Richard Widmark, Errol Flynn, Cary Grant, Fred McMurray to name a few. Suggest a stroll through the property to immerse in the gallery of black and white studio shots that line the walls in simple frames.

The prices are modest (from \$65 to \$125) but if your clients are not taken with the legend and love for this property, then do convince them to have lunch here where the ceviche is delicately prepared and served with care, suggest an exotic drink as well with or without alcohol or arrive for the sunsets, which are indeed memorable if not spectacular.

Call (011) 482-06-90; Email flamingo@prodigy.net.mx; www.hotellostflamingos.com

Downtown close to the heart of Acapulco's busiest boulevard, Costera Miguel Aleman, is a tourist class property often overlooked but known to insiders as yet another refuge for those who must be in the fast lane or at least close to the Convention Center.

The sapphire and bright white **Hotel Acapulco Malibu y Club de Playa** counts 80 suites, a pool, and beachfront and boulevard location. Despite its small parameters in an area that is increasingly eaten up with properties shooting long past the palm trees that line the streets, this property delivers. Refurbished in 2000, the 80 octagonal rooms are equipped with a/c, cable TV, Wifi and great views of Acapul-

co Bay and a knowledgeable and friendly staff. In its simplicity, it remains an original worth getting to know. Rates range from \$55 to \$75 per night. Call (011) 52-744-484-1070; E-mail reservaciones@acapulcomalibu.com; www.acapulcomalibu.com

Another region of Mexico that is simply chockablock with hotels and resorts is Ixtapa-Zihuatenejo. Certainly, those in the know, are aware of the fabulous beaches on the bay side, the pockets of the fishing industry and some of the characters who populate this town (such as the American lady who fell in love, gave birth to several children who run the finest shops in town and a little animal clinic to save reptiles and other wildlife in the area above one of the shops). To be fair, the big properties line Ixtapa's channel and the clientele for those properties is strong and vibrant as these properties for the most part occupy oceanfronts.

Terraced on a forested hillside (loma) above Ixtapa is one of Mexico's newest members of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, the **Loma del Mar Resort**. Its 16 spacious suites of the new, privately-owned **Loma del Mar Resort** overlook the property's landscaped grounds with waterfalls, three swimming pools with lounging areas, palapa-topped restaurant and bar. Tree-shaded paths meander through the five-acre property which borders Ixtapa's Palma Real Golf Course and nature reserve.

Chalk-white curvilinear architecture with red-tile roofs, inspired by both Mexican Pacific tropical design and Andalusian whitewashed villages, graced the "chic retreat" cover photo of **Continental Airlines** in-flight magazine's December, 2007 issue.

The 68-foot-long pool has been converted into a thalasso (salt-water) pool as part of the resort's new Thalasso-Wellness Center debuts this month. Elaborate spa facilities include four hydromassage chairs, four hydromassage beds, "volcanic" hydromassage for legs, and overhead water spouts designed especially for neck, shoulders and back. This "New-Age Thalasso-Spa" concept is designed under the auspices of the prestigious 5-star Incosol Spa founded 35 years ago in Marbella, Spain, and is supervised by Incosol's director of endocrinology and nutrition.

Rates range from \$485 a night Luxury Suite through Oct. 1, to \$763 a night for the Presidential Suite from Dec. through March 31, 2009.

Sales and marketing for Loma del Mar are by Miami-based VDS Marketing, Michael Cojocera, director (E-mail mike@vdsmarketing.com)

Call 866-496-1082; E-mail res@lomadelmar.com; www.lomadelmar.com



View from Hotel Los Flamingos

LOS FLAMINGOS



Loma del Mar Resort.

LOMA DEL MAR

BEST BUYS

\$159 MEXICO MexicoMayanResorts.com is introducing a new "Fun for All" package at **The Grand Mayan Wyndham Alliance Resorts** in Nuevo Vallarta, and Acapulco, Riviera Maya and Cabo -- ideal for families to indulge in the sun and fun with bonus inclusions for an even more enjoyable vacation, including free buffet meals for kids, a free round of golf, and a free spa service. With these added-value inclusions, travelers enjoy a savings of up to \$350 on their vacation at The Grand Mayan Wyndham Alliance Resorts. Plus, there is no per person pricing or extra charge for additional guests up to the selected accommodations' maximum occupancy - representing a significant per person cost savings on comparable accommodations.

At The Grand Mayan Wyndham Alliance Resorts in Acapulco or Nuevo Vallarta Prices package rates start from \$159 for a standard room and \$239 for a one bedroom with a full kitchen that sleeps up to five guests. At the company's properties in Riviera Maya or Los Cabos, package rates start from \$199 for a standard room and \$278 for a one-bedroom that sleeps up to five guests. The "Fun for All" package is valid on new bookings with a minimum stay of three nights for travel by October 31, 2008.

Call 866-999-3223; or book online www.MexicoMayan-Resorts.com

\$995 BELIZE Couples and especially those looking for a very special honeymoon can enjoy a secluded stay in **Casa Ventanas**, a one-bedroom, 1,000 sq. ft. over-water bungalow on the private island of Cayo Espanto, while taking advantage of the incredible introductory rate of only \$995 per night, valid now through December 15, 2008. This is a savings of \$600 per night based on the regular published rate and includes all the luxuries the resort offers, such as a private butler, three custom-tailored meals each day, snacks, all drinks (except Champagne, wine and cordials), and water sports. Call 888-666-4282; www.aprivateisland.com

\$4550 PANAMA Condoroutfitters is offering New Discovery cruise of the Panama Canal and other wonderful destinations in and around the country of Panama. Choose from a variety of sailings through 2008 & 2009. This cruise offers you a full transit through the Perlas Islands, through the Panama Canal, a visit to the Smithsonian Barro Colorado Island, the Darien Jungle, Fort San Lorenzo, and Portobelo.

This Catamaran style vessel is limited to 24 People, ensuring everyone can enjoy serenity and privacy together. Each cabin has climate control and private bathrooms and windows. The naturalist guides are well trained, knowledgeable and enthusiastic expedition leaders. Rate is based on double occupancy and includes arrival and departure night hotel in Panama City and airport and boat transfers and all meals while aboard the cruise portion.

Call 800-783-8847; E-mail info@condoroutfitters.com; www.condoroutfitters.com

\$91 COSTA RICA The Flamingo Beach Resort is selling a Bed & Breakfast Special, offering deluxe accommodations and daily breakfast for two with rates as low as \$91 per night, double occupancy. The all-Inclusive package includes accommodations, all hotel taxes and three meals daily. Guests are welcome to daily American breakfast, lunch and dinner, unlimited house brand beverages and cocktails for \$180 per night, double occupancy. Valid through Dec. 20, 2008. Call 888-500-9090. www.resortflamingobeach.com

Cozumel Gets More Lift

This month, **Mexicana Airline's Click** will increase service on its Mexico City to Cozumel route to offer flights twice daily. **Vivaerobus**, a low-cost carrier, now provides direct service from Monterrey to Cozumel three times per week. New airline operator **Mayair** now offers daily shuttle service between Cancun and Cozumel, flying four times a day.

Direct flights to Cozumel continue out of several U.S. cities including: Atlanta (**Delta Airlines**), Charlotte (**U.S. Airways**), Denver (**Frontier Airlines**), Dallas (**American Airlines**), Houston (**Continental Airlines**), Miami (**American Eagle**), and Newark (**Continental Airlines**). Visit www.islacozumel.com.mx; www.visitmexico.com

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Crossing Jordan

By Kathy Feeney

Perched in the heart of the Middle East, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a portal to the past and a celebration of the present. Visiting this ancient land is standing on the bank of the Jordan River where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. It is serenely floating in the Dead Sea and hearing the windy whispers of the sands of the Wadi Rum Desert where Bedouins still dwell in mountain caves.

Finding Jordan is strolling the cobbled roads of Jerash, the most preserved Roman city in the world, then feasting on humus and tabouli in a crowded restaurant served by a smil-

ing waiter garbed in a flowing robe who may think you look as exotic as he does. It is gazing at the gigantic red rocks, tombs and temple facades of "The Lost City of Petra," which was not known by the Western world until Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt discovered it in 1812 and was recently named as one of the "Seven Wonders of the World." Jordan is sailing on the bright blue Red Sea, and asking your driver to "please stop!" the tour bus so you can take a photo of a herd of camels clomping alongside the highway.

Jordan's city of Petra was the subject of a recent feature on *ABC's Good Morning America*, as well as a score of other cable or network shows and websites such as A

World of Wonders, *Compulsivetraveler.tv* and is among the highly recommended destinations on **Frommer's** site as well as **TripAdvisor** matched by multiple reviews by actual travelers who have compared Petra for instance with Machu Picchu, finding that neither disappoints but both excite.

Welcome to Jordan

"We are blessed with a country that is so unique in terms of archaeology, history, and unspoiled natural landscapes, not to forget that Jordan is the Land of the Old Testament and the birthplace of civilizations," said Maha Khatib, Jordan's Minister of Tourism & Antiquities, during her keynote address at the first-ever Jordan Travel Mart. The two-day event was hosted last February by the Jordan Tourism Board at the King Hussein Bin Talal Convention Center overlooking the Dead Sea. More than 250 suppliers and buyers representing North and Latin America attended the trade show. Jordanians JAX FAX met during the conference and traveling throughout the kingdom are eager to show off their country. The welcome mat is out and there is no better time for your clients to visit Jordan.

Accommodations

Overlooking the northern point of the Dead Sea, the Movenpick Resort & Spa Dead Sea offers 10 different room styles, including beachfronts with a mountain view. The resort's 358 rooms either have a balcony or terrace and offer amenities ranging from satellite television to minibars. In addition to its spectacular location, the hotel features a spa and gourmet restaurants. Rates per room per night based on two sharing a room range from \$230 for a standard room to \$450 for a beach room, including breakfast.

Visit www.moevenpick-deadsea.com

Featuring views of mountains, desert, sunsets, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, the Mövenpick Resort & Residence Aqaba has 296 rooms, suites and apartments. The hotel offers six dining choices, an outdoor pool, a fitness facility, and water sports. Rates (valid until November 1, 2008) per room per night range based on two sharing a room from a standard room at \$226 to a deluxe room at \$283 depending on season and availability.

Visit www.moevenpick-aqaba.com

Set on a cliff in Wadi Musa, just five miles from the entrance to Petra, the Taybet Zaman Hotel & Resort is equipped with an outdoor pool and comfortable rooms designed to look like caves. With 105 guest rooms and a royal suite, the resort resembles a village with shops selling pottery and other crafts, a bakery featuring Middle Eastern bread and pastries, a restaurant serving traditional Arabic specialties and a Turkish Bath. Rates per room per night include breakfast and start at \$110 per person with a single supplement of \$95; double rates per room per night at \$220 with breakfast.

The hotel does not have a website, but responds to inquiries at E-mail reservation@taybetzaman.com

The Grand Hyatt Amman is in the city's business and diplomatic center and 30 minutes from Queen Alia International Airport. With 311 guestrooms, including 16 suites, the

Grand Hyatt Amman offers amenities ranging from high-speed Internet connections to restaurants and bars to fitness and health center and an indoor pool with a star-lit ceiling. Rates are per room per night based on two sharing a room and "vary from day to day based on the best rate of the day," according to a hotel reservations spokeswoman, "however, a safe guide will be a Grand Room rate at \$353. Rates are commissionable and special group rates are available. Visit www.amman.grand.hyatt.com

Getting There

JAX FAX flew **Royal Jordanian** direct to Amman from JFK. More than 20 other international carriers also fly into Amman's Queen Alia International Airport, including British Airways, according to the Jordan Tourist Board. Flight time to Jordan the major European cities is about four hours. It takes about 30 minutes by taxi to reach the downtown Amman from Queen Alia International Airport and costs approximately \$22. Royal Jordanian Airlines; www.rj.com

For more information, contact the Jordan Tourism Board 703-243-7404; E-mail info@visitjordan.com; www.visitjordan.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Jordan see page 81 of the Listings Section

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Timeless Ethiopia Rides Modern Waves

By Dannielle Hayes

Called “the cradle of humankind”, Ethiopia is Africa’s oldest independent country and one of the oldest in the world. Located on the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is approximately twice the size of Texas and landlocked by Eritrea to the north, Djibouti and Somalia to the east, Kenya to the south and Sudan to the west. The country is mostly mountainous, dominated by Africa’s highest range, the Simiens and bisected by the Rift Valley.

Ethiopia is Africa’s third most populous country with approximately 70 million people and 77 different ethnic groups each with their own distinct language, customs and dress. The country’s population is mostly Christian living in the Ethiopian highlands, whereas most of the Muslims and followers of other beliefs inhabit the lowlands.

The country’s capital, Addis Ababa sprung up in the highlands a little more than a century ago and is now a modern metropolis of three million people. At an altitude of 2400 meters, Addis has comfortable temperate weather throughout the year, day and night, with the occasional downpour in the rainy season (June through September). Many travelers breeze right through Addis on their way to the historic north or fascinating south, but it is worth spending a few days exploring the capital.

A good place to start might be the National Museum of Ethiopia to see a replica of the 3.2 million year old “Lucy”, the oldest hominid found until the recent Ethiopian discovery of the 3.3 million year-old infant “Dikika”. At the Ethnographic Museum, there is an excellent exhibit of objects relating to most of the 77 indigenous tribal groups, and not to be missed is the Mercato, the largest open-air market in



Gondar Castle north of Lake Tana.

Africa. Addis comes alive at night when several restaurants and hotels feature traditional Ethiopian food followed by live music and the most vigorous “shoulder” dancing.

First-time visitors to Ethiopia usually begin with the northern historic circuit, by taking a short flight from Addis to Bahir Dar on Lake Tana, and the base for day trips to visit the numerous medieval monasteries dotted around the lake’s islands and peninsulas, as well as the Blue Nile Falls. Gondar, next on the tour is north of Lake Tana and noted for its impressive 16th century castles. The ancient capital of Axum follows and is famous for the palace ruins of the legendary Queen of Sheba and the Ark of the Covenant. Most visitors however, declare the highlight to be the medieval capital of Lalibela and its dozen rock-hewn churches called “the eighth wonder of the ancient world”.

To experience Ethiopia’s fascinating tribal cultures as well

as wildlife, one should head south from Addis towards the Rift Valley and Omo Valley. These 10-day to 3-week tours are usually by 4-wheel drive vehicles, and may include trekking, camping out or very basic accommodation. Visitors to the south can expect to see the Dorze people, known for their beehive-shaped dwellings, the Hamar people in Turmi who fancy elaborate hairstyles, and perhaps the Mursi people who live near Mago National Park. This is Africa as it used to be, a real living museum in the rough.

Accommodations

The Sheraton is only five miles from the capital’s new Bole Airport. The Sheraton Addis has 293 deluxe guest rooms and the largest conference facilities in the country. Prices start at \$240 and travel agents earn a 10% commission on all hotel bookings.

Visit www.addisethiopia@luxurycollection.com

The recently renovated Addis Ababa Hilton is close to the UN Headquarters and room rates start at \$150. There is also the new Queen of Sheba Hotel (queenshebahotel@ethionet.et) which combines traditional décor with international standard facilities and room rates are \$50-\$80 for a double. Visit www.hilton.addis@ethionet.et

Outside of Addis, the government-owned Ghion Hotels (www.ghionhotel.com.et) are clean and reasonably priced. Green Land Tours (www.greenlandethiopia.com), one of Ethiopia’s largest tour operators also operates a series of hotels throughout the country.

Getting There

Ethiopian Airlines (www.ethiopianairlines.com) is considered to be Africa’s best and in 2007 celebrated 60 years of operation. Featuring five flights weekly from Washington D.C.’s Dulles International Airport, the airlines offers both morning and evening departures, with the morning departure allowing seamless connections to 29 African destinations and 50 destinations around the globe.

Ethiopian Airlines has just launched “Ethiopian Journeys”, a new collection of three vacation packages showcasing the best of East Africa and designed for the U.S. travel consumer. The “Queen of Sheba Tour” features the northern



Colorful Ethiopian baskets typical of the highlands

cultural route of Ethiopia including the famous Blue Nile Falls, Gondar’s castles and churches, Lalibela’s fascinating churches carved from solid rock, and the ancient history of Axum, the country’s oldest city. The “Tanzanian Odyssey” promises to be one of the finest safari experiences in all of Africa, including the Serengeti National Park, the inimitable Mount Kilimanjaro and the spectacular Ngorongoro Crater known as the Eden of Africa. The third journey “Ethiopian Tribal Discovery” features the southern route of Ethiopia where travelers can discover tribal communities that have changed little over the last thousand years.

All “Ethiopian Journeys” tours include airfare, hotels, land tours and other amenities.

For more information, contact Ethiopian Airlines, 800-445-2733; www.seeyouinethiopia.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Ethiopia see page 83 of the Listings Section



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BEST BUYS

\$5675 KENYA Cross Country International, world renowned provider of equestrian vacations, is offering travelers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience Masai culture while riding through Southern Kenyan savannahs on the Masai Mara Ride. Participants will see the diverse African wildlife as they ride past grazing zebra, towers of giraffes, and migrating wildebeest while you explore the acacia forest and gallop through the open countryside to Njanknjak Gorge, where they pitch camp on the Olare Orok stream. Guests spend the final two days interacting with local Masai at the Acacia Camp. The eight-night package includes accommodations, all meals, guided trail riding, all transport ation by guides, transfers. Priced at \$5,675 per person double; add \$875 for singles. Departures are: July 19 and 30; Aug. 9, 20 and 30; Sept. 10 and 20; and Oct. 1, 11 and 22.

Call 800-828-8768; E-mail info@xcintl.com; www.equestrianvacations.com

\$2795 MOROCCO Overseas Adventure Travel's 15-day "Morocco Sahara Odyssey" is available through December with departures on February 26 and March 20 & 22, 2009. Highlights include guided tours of Rabat's Royal Palace, the ruins and wild gardens of the Chellah, a 14th-century Merinid necropolis; a scenic drive across the Middle Atlas Mountain Range; navigating through the sandy tracks of the Sahara desert for a two-night private tented campsite, hiking over sand dunes and camel rides.

The package includes a visit to a local woman's home to show how the Berbers apply traditional designs to their hands with paint made from the henna plant. Starting at \$2,795 per person double, among the inclusions are roundtrip international airfare from New York JFK and one internal flight, accommodations in Rabat, Fès, Erfoud, Tineghir, Ouarzazate and Marrakech.

Call 800-493-6824.; www.oattravel.com

\$7500 SOUTHERN AFRICA From the Garden Route to the Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls, International Expeditions' new Inventing Southern Africa custom desk creates itineraries for travel in Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique and Zambia. For families looking to create a one-of-a-kind experience, the new Inventing Southern Africa desk can custom-tailor any journey around specific dates or events including family celebrations, birthdays, graduations and anniversaries. International Expeditions arranges private trips for groups using pre-arranged transportation and accommodations.

While each Southern Africa program is crafted to accommodate personal interests, most custom itineraries range from 12 to 14 days and cost an average of \$7,500 per person, excluding international air. IE also sells tours to Peru, Costa Rica, Panama, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda.

Call 800-633-4734; E-mail nature@ietravel.com; www.ietravel.com/family

\$2145 JORDAN Ya'lla Tours USA's 8 day Ultimate Jordan program is a comprehensive, privately escorted tour of one of the world's up-and-coming destinations. Rich with cultural and historical treasures and natural wonders, Jordan is politically and economically stable and welcomes all visitors with sincere warmth.

The Ultimate Jordan program spends two nights in Amman, two nights in Petra and three nights at the Dead Sea. Sites include: Amman city tour; the Greco-Roman city of Jerash; the mosaic rich town of Madaba; the traditional site of the death of Moses, Mt. Nebo; the crusader fortress of Kerak; a full day at the awesome ancient city of Petra; a full day in the spectacular desert landscapes of Wadi Rum; the baptism site of Jesus, Bethany Beyond the Jordan; and a full free day for relaxing on the beach and spa visits at the Dead Sea.

The tour is priced from \$2,145 per person double and begins any day in Amman. This offer is valid through August 31 and November 16-December 23, 2008. Tours should be booked at least 21 days in advance. Call 800-644-1595; www.yallatours.com www.ietravel.com/family

\$9499 DUBAI Travel Impressions has added the international hotspot Dubai, United Arab Emirates to its portfolio of world-wide destinations and now offers vacation packages to some of the area's most luxurious hotels. "Interest levels for vacationing in Dubai have increased dramatically among the traveling public as well as with our travel agent partners," said John Hanratty, chief marketing officer of Travel Impressions. Select six-night packages, valid for travel now through Oct. 31, 2008, include: **Ritz-Carlton Dubai** with a Sharjah/Ajman Emirates excursion starting at \$9,499 per person; **Jumeirah Beach Hotel** with a Hatta Pool Safari excursion starting at \$9,549 per person; **Burj Al Arab** with a Show Dinner Cruise excursion from \$12,805 per person. Call 800-284-0044; www.travelimpressions.com

\$448 SOUTH AFRICA Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve was recently named Africa's Leading Safari Lodge by the Africa World Travel Awards, known as the "Oscars of the global travel industry" by the *Wall Street Journal*.

Located next to the Kruger National Park, Sabi Sabi is described as a classic bush experience with its four five-star lodges following the philosophy of "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." Guests can return to "Yesterday" while staying at the romantic Selati Camp that echoes of a vintage colonial era. "Today" may be found at the more contemporary Bush Lodge and Little Bush Camp with their familiar comforts. Guests will experience "Tomorrow" at the Earth Lodge which creates a harmonious balance with the land. Rates at Sabi Sabi starts at \$448 per person per night.

Call 800-524-7979; E-mail: warren@kainyc.com; www.sabisabi.com

IN THE NEWS

Zambia Flies Jo-burg/Livingstone Flights

Zambian Airways launched its first scheduled service flight between Johannesburg and Livingstone with a full passenger load on May 2 complete with complimentary on-board Champagne service and a "flypast" over the world famous Victoria Falls. Greeted upon landing by African dancers and the local press, **Charlie Roberts**, Zambian Airways Commercial Director said, "This is a fantastic start to what will become a very successful route for Zambian Airways - we have already been able to help lots of disappointed nationwide passengers, who have snapped up our "Rescue" fares, plus our new service is proving incredibly popular both with locals and the ever-expanding number of tourists choosing to see the Falls from the Zambian side."

The new service operates four times per week on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday on a Boeing 737 aircraft leaving Jo'burg at 11:50 arriving Livingstone 1:20, departing Livingstone at 2:15 arriving Jo'burg at 3:45 local time. Plans are already in place to increase the service to daily since June 2. Zambian Airways also operates domestic scheduled service between Mfuwe, Chipata, Lusaka and Ndola, plus international services between Johannesburg and the Zambian capital of Lusaka as well as Livingstone (for Victoria Falls) plus Dar es Salaam and Lumbumbashi from Lusaka.

Call 877-592-6242; www.zambianairways.com

Jerusalem: for Pilgrims and Pedestrians, too

Jerusalem is not only Israel's capital, but also its largest city, with a population of 800,000. The first Jerusalem streetcars were proposed by Theodor Herzl, visionary of the modern State of Israel on a visit to the city in 1898. Twelve years later, Palestine's Ottoman rulers initiated a tender for the project, for it only to be canceled with the outbreak of World War I.

The square-mile Old City of Jerusalem is the chief attraction for visitors to Jerusalem, with its holy places of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. While most of the Old City is narrow lanes, there are some vehicle routes, used primarily

by Old City residents. Israel's Ministries of Tourism and Transportation are currently working on feasibility studies on making the entire ancient walled town a pedestrians-only zone. "Obviously," says Arie Sommer, Israel's Tourism Commissioner for North and South America, "we want to do everything to make the city more attractive and accessible for tourists, but the Old City of Jerusalem is a neighborhood where people live too, so we need to study how other ancient towns in Europe - such as Dubrovnik, Carcassonne and Venice - have achieved the right balance for both residents and visitors."

Visit: www.goisrael.com.

EL AL's Coming of Age Promo

EL AL is 60 years old this year and Israel is 60 too. To celebrate, we're giving you \$120 toward a future flight. EL AL's summer promotion is available from any EL AL gateway in the U.S. (New York-JFK, Newark, Miami and LA), to coincide with airline's 60th anniversary this year.

Passengers traveling roundtrip in economy class to Israel this summer, between July 9 and August 12 are eligible to receive a \$120 voucher toward their next EL AL flight.

To take advantage of this special 60th anniversary promotion, each passenger should send both boarding cards (to and from Israel during the above travel dates) as well as a copy of their e-ticket to EL AL Israel Airlines (15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010, Attention: 120 Special). In return, each passenger will receive a \$120 rebate voucher in the mail for their next trip to Israel on EL AL in any class of service (Economy, Platinum Business, First) for departures through August 20, 2009.

To receive the check for \$120, simply email or mail your e-ticket of the second roundtrip ticket to Israel and the voucher number to 120@elalusa.com or to the EL AL address listed above.

The first 5,000 eligible EL AL passengers (1,000 passengers each week for the five-week promotion) are entitled to receive the \$120 discount on a first-come, first-serve basis.

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View of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

Nowhere but Nashville

By Kathy Feeney

anchors the downtown portion of the city's recently designated "Music Mile." Described as "a symbolic stretch of roadway," Music Mile connects the Symphony Center with Nashville's music district, Music Row, the heart of Nashville's entertainment industry.

Recording studios, record labels, music publishing houses, and radio stations are some of the businesses represented on Music Row. Tell your clients not to miss touring RCA's Studio B where performers including Roy Orbison, Elvis, Dolly Parton, The Monkees and the Everly Brothers, to name just a few, recorded. Other places to see include the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (www.countrymusichalloffame.com), the Musicians Hall of Fame & Museum (www.musicianshalloffame.com) and Ryman Auditorium (www.ryman.com)

Accommodations

JAX FAX stayed at the **Homewood Suites by Hilton** Nashville-Downtown. Within easy walking distance of the city's shopping district and restaurants as well as attractions ranging from The Country Music Hall of Fame to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, the hotel is housed in a 1916-era building formerly a physicians office complex called "The Doctor's Building." Amenities include free breakfast, free Internet connection, a business center and a fitness center. The hotel is also pet friendly (call for pet rules and extra rates). Room rates are per room per night based on two sharing a room and go for \$189 for a studio suite; \$209 for a one bedroom king suite; and \$219 for a two bedroom queen suite. Call 615-742-5550; www.homewoodsuites.com

Homewood Suites by Hilton is an expanding brand of all-suite hotels offering accommodations for travelers staying five or more nights, according to Brad Carmony, Director Brand Communications Homewood Suites by Hilton – Hilton Hotels Corporation in Memphis. Homewood Suites by Hilton has become so well associated with guest comfort that it sells its own selection of bedding, bath, and accessories including the "Body Cradling Feather Bed" and the "Down Comforter with Duvet Insert" at www.HomewoodCollection.com

For incentives visit www.hiltontravelagents.com

Getting There

The Nashville International Airport is six miles from downtown. The airport is serviced by Air Canada, American, American Eagle, Continental, Continental Express, Delta, Delta Express, Frontier Airlines, Midwest Express, Northwest, Skyway, Southwest, United Airways, US Airways and US Airways Express.

For information, contact the Nashville Convention Visitor Bureau, 800-657-6910; www.visitmusiccity.com

Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon played here. Ditto Virginia Patterson Hensley, Harold Ray Ragsdale and Harold Lloyd Jenkins. Their stage names - Minnie Pearl, Patsy Cline, Ray Stevens and Conway Twitty - made them household celebrities. But Nashville made them stars. The Music City has long been a catalyst to fame for country music performers, but today Nashville's sound transcends its country music roots. "Nashville is certainly the home of country music, and because country music is here, there is the infrastructure of studios, songwriters, musicians, and engineers which has allowed music of all genres to flourish. From a rock scene garnering wide spread music industry attention to a Grammy winning Symphony Orchestra, Music City is truly living up to its name!" said Heather Middleton, Director of Public Relations for the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau. Pop, rock, bluegrass, jazz, classical, contemporary Christian, soul, and blues songwriters and singers represented by entertainers ranging from Bon Jovi to Matchbox Twenty and Jewel have launched Nashville's status as an international music scene.

The Sound of Music

It's appropriate that Nashville was settled on Christmas Eve in 1779. As friendly as Minnie Pearl's signature greeting - "How-DEE!" - and as warm as a bowl of grits with melted butter, this gracious upbeat metropolis kindles the joy of the holiday spirit all year round. Visitors literally stroll the streets of Nashville to the sounds of music. The city has installed "Traffic Control Boxes" to orchestrate the stoplights and walk signs as well as to entertain pedestrians with a myriad of music. The traffic control box outside the Schermerhorn Symphony Center plays classical music and the one outside the Country Music Hall of Fame croons country tunes. During football season, other traffic boxes blast college fight songs and during Christmas time holiday music serenades the streets.

Music Mile

In 1925, the city's thriving music publishing industry was bolstered by the arrival of "The Grand Old Opry," a weekly country music radio show that earned Nashville the title "Music City USA." The Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which is home to the Award-winning Nashville Symphony,

BEST BUYS

\$265 NEW YORK HKHOTELS in New York City, which includes the **Casablanca Hotel**, the **Library Hotel**, **Hotel Elysee** and **Hotel Giraffe**, is offering a savings of \$10 to \$50 for stays through Labor Day. Regular summer rates at these boutique hotels start at \$265 to \$289.

Guests booking the Library Hotel and the Casablanca Hotel will also receive a complimentary signature tote bag to carry all the tax rebate swag (while supplies last). Use promotion code "taxrebate" when booking to receive the savings. Call 877-793-7323; or visit www.hkhotels.u

\$165 NEW HAMPSHIRE The **Blue Acorn Inn**, **Henniker House B&B**, **The Highland Lake Inn** and **The Rosewood Country Inn**, the four classic country Inns in New Hampshire that are the founding members of **Granite State Vacations**, are offering a "Frugal Yankee Package," that won't break the bank.

The Inns are located in the Sunapee region of New Hampshire, which offers a wealth of arts and culture, such as the Canterbury Shaker Village attractions, outdoor recreation, and unparalleled shopping at Tanger Outlet. The package includes a complimentary third night stay for the price of a two-night stay.

Choose from a variety of accommodations—from the cozy comfort of a family friendly B&B to the romantic splendor of a country estate, with double occupancy rates starting at \$109 per night at the Blue Acorn and from \$165 at the Rosewood Country Inn; valid through August 31.

For information, visit: www.blueacorninn.com; www.hennikerhouse.com; www.highlandlakeinn.com; www.rosewoodcountryinn.com

\$169 NEW ORLEANS In time for summer family travel, the **Marriott** and **Renaissance Hotels of New Orleans** are offering the Four Legs or Fins getaway that serves up a unique, educational and economical experience for mom, dad and the kids. The vacation, ideal for jetsetting families that are making the Big Easy a pre or post-cruise destination, is valid through September 30, 2008 and priced from \$169 based on quad occupancy.

Among the participating properties providing accommodations are the following: the **New Orleans Marriott**, **JW Marriott New Orleans**, the **Marriott at the Convention Center**, **Renaissance Pere Marquette** or the **Renaissance Arts Hotel**.

It includes a choice of the following: Audubon Aquarium of the Americas – Spend the day learning about sea creatures with enhanced exhibits and a wonderful aquatic animal collection. Visit new animals and old favorites including the beloved penguins and sea otters; Audubon Zoo – Home to more than 1,300 animals, the zoo blends the exotic excitement of animals from around the globe with the serenity of its lush gardens. Ask for rate code EARX.

Call 866-530-3763; www.neworleans.marriott.com

IN THE NEWS

The Ultimate Oceanfront Retreat

KSL Resorts recently completed a \$150 million transformation of the legendary Hotel del Coronado, the centerpiece of which is the stunning new **Beach Village at The Del** – their 'resort within the resort.' Situated at ocean's edge on San Diego's Coronado Island, Beach Village at The Del brings a compelling ultra-luxury addition to the property while retaining the hotel's distinctive architectural elements. In an era in which openings of top-tier oceanfront accommodations are few and far between, the 2008 opening of Beach Village is a milestone for Southern California. The response from The Del's loyal "repeat" guests and from new guests lured by the promise of true oceanfront luxury has made Beach Village California's "hottest ticket" in 2008. Beach Village has operated with an ADR exceeding \$900 since January 2008. Beach Village at The Del is a new member of **Preferred Boutique Hotels & Resorts**, representing the world's finest independent luxury hotels.

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Soft, Spectacular Summer Adventures

Family adventures beyond the couch potato types of activities like tustling over the remote control, time on the internet or whose iPod is whose, can bring family members new encounters with the outdoors, physical challenges and the chance to relate to each other beyond daily, banal struggles. Below are a few close to home adventures nearly in your clients' own backyards.

Redwood Adventures Tours, a division of Redwood Parks Lodge Company, is one of a few companies permitted to conduct guided tours within the Redwood National and State Parks. Available tours range from one-hour orientation tours to customizable day tours and multi-night backcountry adventures. Redwood Adventures Tours' salmon fishing packages are designed to help visitors experience salmon fishing in a way that best meets their interests and skill levels. Each tour includes supplies including boat, tackle and bait, meals and expert guides to ensure a unique and safe experience. Fishing is on the North Coast, which is home to California's best fishing. With two major rivers to choose from – the Klamath and the Smith – fully licensed, insured and Coast Guard certified Redwood Adventures fishing guides put anglers in the best position to catch the legendary fish. A six-hour expedition costs \$250 per person for a minimum of two and is available year round. Other adventures that are available include Jet Boat Fishing for a full day, \$300 per person for two in Summer and Fall; Ocean Bottom Fishing in Trinidad Harbor for a full day boat charter with up to four passengers, \$500, half-day costs \$350; and Drift Boat Fishing for a full day costs \$250 year round.

Call 866-733-9637; www.redwoodadventures.com

Keystone, Colorado invites families to immerse themselves in an ultimate outdoor retreat with the new "Family Adventure" package. Tour the Rocky Mountains on horseback, enjoy a thrilling river raft expedition, learn how to fly-fish and then take some time away from the kids to unwind at the luxurious RockResorts Spa. Bordering the White River National Forest on the banks of the Snake River, the Forest condominiums are in West Keystone, near the paved bike and footpath enabling a short walk to The River Golf Course and Lakeside Village. Available through August 31, 2008, the Family Adventure package is based on a family of four and includes: four nights' accommodation in a two-bedroom Forest condominium, a rafting trip down the classic Brown's Canyon Express on the Arkansas River (perfect for all ages and experience levels), fly-fishing lesson with Summit Guides. All equipment is provided, including rod, reel waders and flies, a horseback ride excursion, and for the adults, a 10 percent discount off a massage treatment at the newly renovated RockResorts Spa at Keystone Lodge & Spa. Through August 31, 2008, rates start at \$423 per night, representing a savings of 15 percent based on a four-night minimum stay with four people (two adults and two children age 15 years and under) sharing.

Keystone Golf offers a variety of fun programs for young golfers and their parents. Juniors receive special golf rates all summer. Keystone is an ideal summertime family locale

with numerous kid-friendly offerings, including Keystone Science School Nature Discovery Days, a day camp that invites children ages 8-11 to learn about the environment. In River Run village, Kid's Discovery Days takes place each Tuesday during summer months with entertainment, crafts and free pizza lunch. Additionally, a folk musical adaptation of "Pinocchio" will be offered on select Fridays throughout July and August at the Lake Dillon Theatre. There is a heated outdoor pool and indoor hot tubs.

Call 877-753-9786; www.keystoneressort.com

Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) is offering six Family Adventures Trips in 2008 at the Bobbie Burns and Bugaboo Lodges in the wildly beautiful mountains of British Columbia. While parents enjoy Heli-Hiking or Mountaineering with other adults and older children, the young ones can be occupied with mountain specific experiences such as rock climbing, mountain geology, wildlife and their habitats, map reading and orienteering. Young children also get the exciting opportunity to learn about helicopters and talk with the pilot - asking as many questions as they like.

After an exhilarating day in the mountains, guests return to one of the cozy CMH lodges. With children still in the capable hands of the CMH staff - building Jell-O mountains, playing volleyball and Ping-Pong, checking out the indoor climbing wall, and visiting the helicopters and their resident technicians – parents can take advantage of a hot tub, a relaxing massage, or a glass of wine by the fire before an evening family reunion and a gourmet dinner with special menu choices for the kids.

CMH's Family Adventure staff includes professional educators, science and environmental specialists, and physical education teachers who encourage all youth, ranging from preschoolers to teenagers, to do a lot more than hike.

Sharing the beautiful and exciting variety of experiences to be had on a mountain is an enduring way for families to bond. Both parents and children can pursue their individual interests during the day, and in the evening, gather around the fireplace to trade experiences and discoveries. This is the 'stuff' of never-to-be-forgotten life experiences.

The three-night adventures take place at two lodges: At Bobbie Burns Lodge, dates are July 12-15, and August 11-14; at Bugaboo Lodge dates are July 24 - 27, July 30 - August 2, and August 14-17.

Prices for adults are \$2,358; children 14 years old and under: \$1,760; youth of 15, 16 and 17 years old, \$2,082.

Heli-Hiking is also a great option for multi-generational family reunions. Lodges can be booked on an exclusive basis so that each group has their own private family retreat. Customizing each trip according to a group's needs and wants, CMH operates under a "the sky's the limit" policy when considering options for private groups. Call 800-661-0252; www.canadianmountainholidays.com



LEISA GIBSON

Nest Heads for Mexico for Nov. "Fiesta"

The Network of Entrepreneurs Selling Travel (NEST) has announced the details of its fourth annual conference. "Home-based and proud" NEST agencies from around the country will gather with suppliers and staff at the NEST FEST 2008 in Xcaret, Mexico Nov. 13-16, 2008.

The event will take place at the **Occidental Grand Xcaret**, with pre-FAM opportunities in Cancun and the Mayan Riviera. Of the destination, Kathryn Mazza-Burney said, "Mexico is a booming vacation destination, with a significant amount of recent new hotel builds and others currently underway, particularly in the luxury sector. NEST agencies who have experienced the region first-hand will be in the strongest position to sell the destination." The all-inclusive **Occidental Grand Xcaret** is tucked within an ecological and historical preserve, and includes spectacular grounds, a pristine coastline and unparalleled service and amenities.

An early bird registration fee of \$79 per person (\$30 off the full rate) is in effect until July 31. The fee includes: registration, all seminars, all materials, welcome cocktail party, private beach party and award ceremony dinner.

A two-night pre-FAM to Cancun and the Mayan Riviera – including deluxe stays at either the Paradisus Riveria Cancun or the Excellence Riveria Cancun – will be hosted by NEST preferred supplier **Travel Impressions**. NEST agents can

contact Rosemary Sarkis at 888-245-NEST x3007; E-mail rsarkis@jointhenest.com; for NEST membership, contact **Andrew Wainer** 888-245-NEST x300; E-mail awainer@jointhenest.com



Chichen Itza

MEXICO NTO

Elite by United

The Elite by United Vacations, The Great Las Vegas Give-away! This month's featured Elite incentive kicks off the first month of United Vacations popular travel agent incentive. This exciting program that teams up United Vacations and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau gives travel agents something truly amazing to look forward to during the next 21 weeks. And since this year cash is king, agent winners will be channeling Elvis with a great big "thank you very muuuuuuch." The prizes are that good.

The concept is quite simple. Every week the top two agent producers will each be awarded a \$350 VISA gift card. The incentive program runs May through October giving travel agents multiple opportunities to sell and win big. In the end, a grand total of \$15,000 in VISA gift cards will be awarded.

Contact **United Vacations** through **VAX VacationAccess**; or visit www.vaxvacationaccess.com

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ASTA Launches France Specialist Course

ASTA announced today that 600 specialist certificates were awarded to travel agents who received destination training such as the France Destination Specialist Course and in niche markets such as European Rail Travel, France Soft Adventure and Western European Culinary Travel while attending the International Destination Expo (IDE) in Lyon France (April 12-16, 2008). IDEs are designed to immerse travel agents in the culture, attractions and travel business of each year's chosen destination. Included in the program of this year's event was an open-floor trade show, one-on-one business meetings with suppliers, product seminars, networking and sightseeing.

"Nothing can beat first-hand experience when it comes to selling a destination," said Cheryl Hudak, CTC, ASTA's president and CEO. "Networking with local professionals helps travel agents gain an in-depth understanding of a region's culture and environment, as well establishing partnerships with niche suppliers they otherwise might not have met."

Certificates from this year's IDE were awarded in the following areas: European Rail Travel; France Soft Adventure; France Destination Specialist; Lyon, Beaujolais Countryside and Rhône Alps; Western European Cruise and River Barging; Western European Culinary Travel; Western European Honeymoons; and Western European Mature Adult Travel. A list of recently announced Destination Specialists from this year's event can be found at www.TravelSense.org.

ASTA's IDE is an annual gathering of travel industry professionals, seeking to immerse themselves in the culture, food and sightseeing of a destination, with the purpose of educating their clients about the region. The IDE provides destination-focused seminars and certifications, as well as opportunities for travel agents to build a business network with local suppliers. More than 1,000 travel professionals from 47 countries gathered in Lyon to learn about the culture, attractions and travel business of the city often referred to as "the gateway to Europe." The fourth IDE will be held in Sun City, South Africa, March 8-11, 2009, where agents will receive specialist training in South Africa destinations and other neighboring countries.

For more information, visit www.ASTA.org/events

Profiting from Vacation Bargains Even with the slow-down of the economy and decline of the dollar, travelers are still looking for that long-awaited summer vacation, but they definitely are looking to save money! A great option available through **Endless Vacation Rentals** helps traditional and home-based travel agents effectively stretch travel dollars on vacation stays for their clients, while also boosting travel agent earnings.

"Vacation rentals are a wonderful bargain, pretty much no matter how you do the math," said John T. Peters CTIE, vice president of Travel Trade and Business Development for Endless Vacation Rentals. "We also know that vacation rentals are perfect for families," continued Peters. "Our vacation rentals typically feature multi-room accommodations with enough space to 'hang out' in."

Think about it, no getting the kids dressed and rounded up for breakfast; Just enjoy it as a family in the kitchen! There's plenty

of room for the in-laws...you know, the extra bedroom on the other end of the unit with its own bathroom - because it's nice to have them close (okay, but not too close)."

Among the top 10 reasons to book alternative accommodations, here is one: For the cost of a long weekend at a comparable hotel, travelers can often stay for a whole week in a vacation rental. In addition, The "Last Minute Escapes" section of the site offers close-in deals on studio accommodations for \$329 per week, one bedroom stays for \$379 per week, and two-bedrooms and larger for \$399 per week. These offerings are updated every other Wednesday, are valid for travel within 30 days, and each is for a seven-night stay - even if the traveler doesn't stay all seven nights, the prices are virtually unbeatable.

Secondly, the \$36 billion vacation exchange and rental industry is a growing segment of the market - Clearly, one that agents can't afford to ignore. Booking at the site helps boost agent earnings with attractive commissions, customarily 12 percent and up to 20 percent on special promotions.

Traditional and home-based travel agents can use the website as a 'live' catalog from which to select accommodations at resort condos, villas, vacation homes and more in destinations across the globe - then simply book it right there online. The company also maintains a travel industry hotline for live assistance and a travel industry sales team.

Endless Vacation Rentals is part of Group RCI, one of the **Wyndham Worldwide** family of companies, (NYSE: WYN) and the global leader in non-hotel leisure accommodations. For additional information visit www.grouprci.com

Visit www.VacationRentals4Agents.com for traditional and home-based travel agents.

American Safari Cruises Christens Flagship

After a 10-month, \$3.5 million renovation, **American Safari Cruises'** new luxury flagship yacht, the 36-guest, 145-foot Safari Explorer, will be christened May 23 in Seattle. Two days later, the vessel will depart for Juneau and her inaugural season in Alaska, and will relocate in the fall to Hawaii and offer inter-island cruises late December through early May. In keeping with the company's focus on luxury in the pursuit of adventure, the Safari Explorer offers elegant accommodations for guests who want to see the waters less traveled for hiking, snorkeling, sailing, mountain biking, kayaking and wilderness exploration by shore boat. Among the new yacht's features are a wine library for tastings; suites with balconies, master bedrooms and Jacuzzi tubs, and an active spa environment with complimentary massages from a licensed masseuse, sauna, yoga classes, exercise equipment and an on-deck hot tub.

The guest-crew ratio is 2 to 1, with two certified naturalists and an executive chef and assistants who prepare outstanding fare based on fresh, local ingredients. A complimentary bar offers premium spirits, fine wines and boutique as well as traditional brews.

American Safari Cruises has three other yachts that carry between 12 and 22 guests in Alaska, Mexico's Sea of Cortés, Pacific Northwest, Columbia and Snake rivers.

Call 888-862-8881; www.amsafari.com



TransHotel USA Plants Seeds for Major Growth

When Alex Kodor, director of **TransHotel USA**, set up shop four years ago in Northern New Jersey, it was with the intention to make a name for the company among professional travel agents. TransHotel was established 15 years ago, maintains 25 sales offices worldwide, and counts on 73,400 agents in its clientele to book more than 4.1 million room nights at its impressive inventory of 44,000 properties, U.S. agents did not recognize the

name TransHotel as readily as Kodor had hoped. "Bookings are spread evenly," said Kodor, "between Business and leisure clients." TransHotel counts a few resorts in its portfolio but above all, Kodor wants to impress agents with the company's live inventory, its seamless web-services integration programs, and that the company deals solely with agents paying them 10% commissions (higher than the usual eight percent rate that most European properties pay) or net rates, all of which are processed on the 15th and the 30th of each month.

"Besides accommodations, TransHotel provides transfers for both corporate and leisure clients and we have a range of tour programs available in more than 80 countries," said Kodor. Further, TransHotel's inventory is worldwide with nearly 20,000 properties in Europe, about 13,000 in Latin America, 9,200 in North America, about 1,900 in the Asia Pacific region, from five star-deluxe properties to youth hostels, because brand loyalty starts at an early age. Call 866-550-7901; E-mail usa@transhotel.com; www.transhotelusa.com



Moira Smith, new GM at Goway AFRICAExperts

AFRICAExperts by Goway appointed Moira Smith as General Manager. Born and raised in South Africa, Smith has worked in the travel industry for 25 years of experience in tour operations, sales and marketing, and destination product knowledge.

"Being South African and having traveled extensively throughout Africa, Moira has first-hand knowledge of the intricacies of this vast, sometimes complicated and exciting destination,

which is imperative for this position" commented Founder and President, Bruce Hodge. "Moira also brings a well-rounded knowledge of the travel industry and has the skills to expand and improve Goway's Africa product offerings".

Starting in Jo'Burg

Commencing her career in the travel industry in Johannesburg, Moira has held senior management positions with the two largest tour operators in South Africa. Her most recent position was Operations Director for an out-

bound North American wholesaler.

As General Manager, AFRICAExperts, Moira is responsible for the quality and pricing of the entire Goway Africa product range, training and development of reservations staff, destination education training and growing relationships with travel agents.

"I am delighted to be joining such a dynamic and forward thinking organization that is so committed to the continent I love" remarked Smith.

Call 800-387-8850; or visit www.Goway.com



Germany Joins PATA to Pursue Asian Markets

Following a successful **Germany Travel Mart** that included more than 1,000 delegates and 500 buyers from around the world in Augsburg, **The German National Tourist Board (GNTB)** announced it would be the **Pacific Asia Tourism Association's (PATA)** fifth Allied Partner in Europe, along with VisitBritain, the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions, the Tourist Office for Flanders and Brussels and the Slovak Tourist Boards.

The largest delegation of international buyers at the GTM was from the U.S., attesting to this market's continued value with 51 journalists and travel-industry representatives in total followed by the U.K. in second place, then Japan, China and Hong Kong.

Chief Executive Officer of the GNTB, Petra Hedorfer said the Asia Pacific region was becoming an important generator of tourism for Germany, with China (PRC) expected to overtake Japan as the most important source market in Asia with around two million overnight stays. Strong growth is also

predicted from India, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.

"We are convinced that our partnership with PATA will help position Germany for greater visitation from Asia Pacific," Hedorfer said. "We look forward to a long and fruitful relationship."

In welcoming GNTB to the PATA community, PATA President & CEO Peter de Jong said European destinations were looking to grow their market share from the booming outbound markets in Asia Pacific.

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