

The Travel Agents' Path to Profits

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LAX	\$4393	\$3961	\$4610	\$4356	\$4881
HOU	\$4393	\$3961	\$4393	\$4356	\$4664

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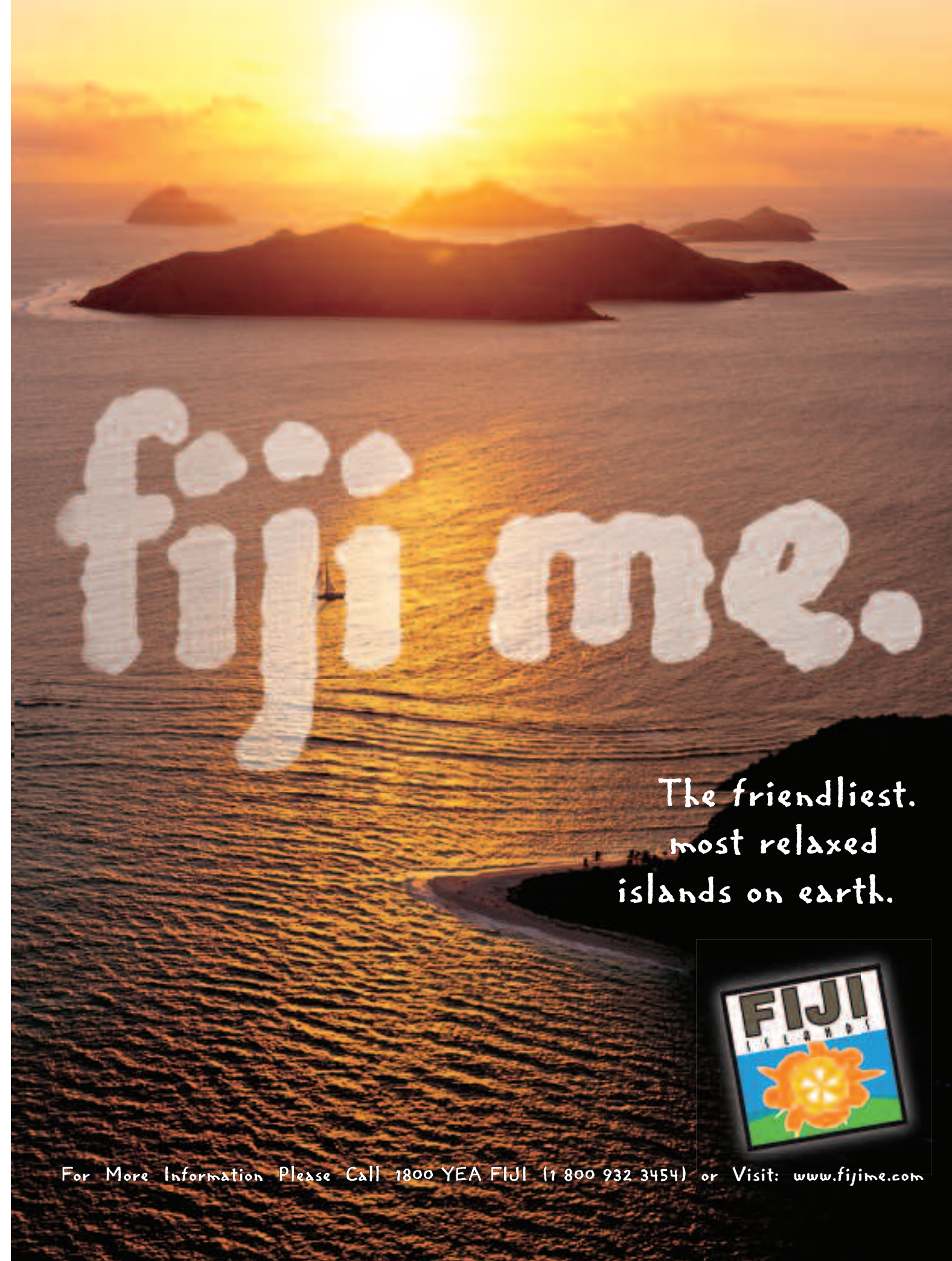
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Who is Today's Travel Agent?

This question is as relevant to our travel agent readers as it is to our industry supplier readers. It is important for agents to be aware of the current trends in the industry and what your agent colleagues are doing successfully. *PhoCusWright*, a leader in online travel research recently released the results of a study it conducted, identifying who today's travel agents are, and how they are faring against online competition. The following is a summary of the highlights of the findings.

Demographic Profile of Travel Agents

Not surprisingly, 50% of the travel agent community are over the age of 50; with just 22% under 45. Additionally, 75% of travel agents are women, which has been true since post WWII. Among the brick and mortar agencies, 58% of the agents counted more than 20 years of professional travel industry experience, while only 6% had less than five years. However, in the Home-Based segment, less than a third, or about 28% of agents reported 20 years+ experience and 27% had under five years, a stark contrast to the amount of experience agents in traditional settings have. Clearly, the vast majority of agents joining the industry are opting to operate independent of the traditional travel agency location.

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Traditional vs. Home-based Sales and Revenue

Taken as whole, the travel agent distribution system generated about 38% of all travel sales in 2007. Of this total, leisure agencies were responsible for about 40% of total agency sales, while leisure bookings generated by home-based agents represented only about 9% of total leisure sales.

I found this number surprising considering the emphasis that is being placed on the home-based agent market by suppliers and the media.

This further emphasizes that while the home-based market is the fastest growing segment of the market, brick and mortar agencies still book the lion's share of leisure travel products, backing those sales up with the widest breadth of knowledge.

Of these leisure bookings, traditional agencies booked 18% air, 11% hotels and 64% cruises and tours, while home-based booked 10% air and 71% cruises and tours. Leisure agents still make a majority of their revenue, about 68% from supplier commissions, 18% from service fees and 10% from markups on net fares.

The study also revealed that even at this point, only 52% of leisure agents charge service fees.

Evolution of Travel Booking Patterns

While travel agency sales continue to grow at a rate of about 5% per year, the percentage of overall bookings by agents continues to decrease when compared to online bookings and consumer direct bookings. In 2006, 41% of all travel sales went through the travel agent distribution system, while 12% were booked online and 47% directly with suppliers. Insiders are predicting that by 2009, agents will book 33% of all sales, while online and direct will grow to 14% and 53% respectively.

The good news is that the actual average value of a travel transaction from agents is 55% higher than that of online bookings, a clear sign to suppliers that agents will drive the higher revenue sales. In fact, only 28% of total online sales were for tours and only 12% were for cruises, indicating that travel agents remain the primary force behind leisure travel sales.

Summary

Anyone who has been working in the industry for any length of time will not blink an eye at these findings. This study further supports the idea that when it comes to booking vacations and complex "high touch" itineraries, consumers will still rely heavily on the value that an experienced and knowledgeable travel agent provides.

Likewise, suppliers of leisure travel products can rest assured that travel agents will continue to drive higher revenue sales and provide customers with the guidance, confidence and destination knowledge that can not be replicated online.

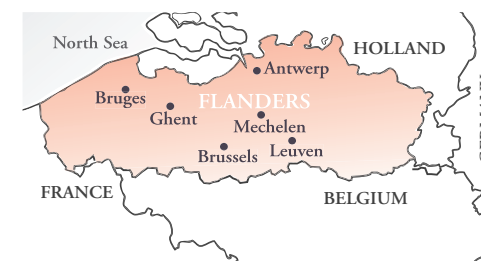
For more information about PhoCusWright and the above referenced survey go to www.phocuswright.com.

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Cashing in on the Intangibles

One of our readers actually need me to tell them the obvious: Today, life is more complex when compared to 20 or 30 years ago. At 300 million people, the U.S. represents about five percent of the world's population who, on average, have a choice of 104 TV channels from which to choose, 5,000 niche magazines with nearly 3,000 consumer titles, and about 40,000 items to choose from at the supermarket.

Is it any wonder clients feel overwhelmed by choices; what they want these days, according to **Faith Popcorn's Brain Reserve** and other research, is a limited range of choices as long as the range includes what suits them. So the challenge for agents in this time of plummeting stock prices, companies going belly-up, followed by the unavoidable lack of consumer confidence, is to help clients streamline their way to what they need.

Who doesn't need a vacation? Who is afraid to take one? Both of these at-odds impulses are stronger than ever according to various trend websites. So what can an agent do to reach his or her client? Keep it simple.

Help them through the morass of Sunday magazine travel

ads and articles, know what they are looking for, help them find their way there. Ok, maybe this is not the year for their African safari, but it could be the year for their first spa trip, find them an affordable reward. Help fulfill their unmet needs: to control the information, the complexity, the anxiety of choosing a vacation, customize and filter the information they need.

As societies prosper, consumers are inundated with "stuff," and at this point there is a backlash to this trend as people seek to simplify, de-clutter their homes and lives [look at the success of *Real Simple* magazine] and the burgeoning services that promise to "simplify your closets, your office, your life." What do you give a person who has everything? You can give them the intangibles they need – in this case, a personalized touch, a service, economic times are tough, but consumers still want to spend a memorable vacation, so tailor one for them.

According to **Marian Salzman**, *Culture Pulse* columnist for the Brain Reserve and a Partner and CMO at Porter Novelli Worldwide, there is also backlash toward multinational organizations, a crisis of confidence so to speak, so capitalize on the need to go local and back it up with your intimate personal service.

Maria Lisella, Editor



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Snapshots

THE MONTH IN REVIEW

Clif Cooke Awarded ASTA's Travel Journalist of the Year

Clif Cooke, Founding Publisher of JAX FAX Travel Marketing Magazine, received ASTA's Travel Journalist of the Year Award at the Society's annual meeting held September 7, during THETRADESHOW. The award recognizes a journalist whose outstanding efforts have contributed to the promotion of the travel agent community.

"Since his days working with the airlines, Clif has learned the travel industry from the ground up. As he moved along his career path and entered the world of publishing, he never lost sight of the importance of travel agents and has geared JAX FAX to meet the needs of this important distribution channel," said Cheryl Hudak, CTC, ASTA President and CEO standing above with Clif Cooke.



BILL MCQUE

Central European Networking and Tasteful Event to Remember



The six member countries of the Central Europe Experience, namely Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Poland and Slovakia, have it all when it comes to food. Peter Gomori (left), Director of Hungarian Tourist Office, USA and Victoria Keefe Larson (right) Public Relations Manager North America, German National Tourist Office welcome guests to a Wine and Culinary Night hosted by the Central Europe Experience.

Fiji Me Gets Around...



Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau, along with Air Pacific, Fiji's international airline and 13 travel partners, completed the summer "Fiji Me Roadshow" on August 8. The National Tourism

Board together with five wholesalers; including All About, Goways, Happy Vacations, Pleasant Holidays and Sunspots International; and nine suppliers (hoteliers) from Fiji visited 12 US cities. "This Roadshow demonstrates our continued outreach to key markets in the Western region and our commitment to sell Fiji as one of the top honeymoon and adventure destinations in the South Pacific," says Fiji Islands Visitors Bureau Regional Director Ili Matatolu.

Puerto Vallarta in New York

Mexico's Puerto Vallarta arrived in New York to launch its latest advertising and promotion campaign that emphasizes its proximity to the sea, the mountains and the countryside and its affordability especially for families.



At the event were from left to right: Clara Torres, Deputy Director of the Mexico Tourism Board in New York; Mariana Mora Pedrero, Director of the Mexico Tourism Board in New York, and Lt. Miguel Gonzalez, Director General of the Tourism to Puerto Vallarta.

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VAIL's Green Approach To Profits, Vacations & Saving... Those Mountains!!!

By Maria Lisella

Vail Resorts retains a huge presence in Colorado's Rocky Mountains, so when it makes a move in any direction, there is likely to be a ripple effect. Thankfully, this is one environmentally-conscious corporation that is working just as hard to preserve the environment it finds itself in as it does developing more leisure products that will appeal to your clients and put a little change in your pocket.

The company has honed a Ski Specialist program that has just celebrated its 10th anniversary and Vail pays travel agents a commission on every single component of its packages including airfare. One key component of the Ski Specialist program is the dedicated reservation desk for qualified agents, which sells vacation packages to all the resorts, giving agents the ability to book complete ski packages with one phone call.

Ski Specialist agents JF spoke to, advised novices to obtain a solid knowledge base and to participate in a Vail Resort fam trip to really know the product.

With an annual average of 346 inches of powder, more than 5,200 ski-able acres, expansive back bowls, 15 miles of recreation paths and surrounded by 350,000 acres of national forest, Vail is something of an American vacation treasure with enough options to cover spring, summer, winter and fall.

Modest Beginnings

Like many giants, **Vail Resorts** started out with one ski resort. Pretty quickly, the firm purchased **Beaver Creek**, and added **Breckenridge** and **Keystone** in 1996, while **Heavenly** in California and Nevada were purchased in 2002.

Today, Vail counts five ski resorts in its portfolio and this mountain segment includes lift tickets, ski and snowboard schools, dining, retail and rental businesses.

Vail Resorts Hospitality owns and/or manages a collection of luxury properties under the **RockResorts** brand, a number of hotels and condominiums located in proximity to its ski resorts, three destination resorts at Grand Teton National Park and six award-winning golf courses.

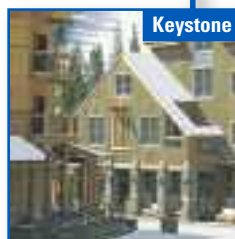
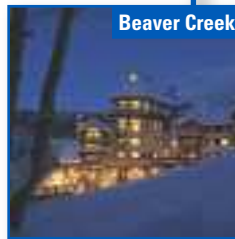
Says **Pamela Smith** of **Ocean Summit Travel** in Superior, Colorado, "We have a crossover where clients ski in

the winter and travel to beach destinations or golf during the summer and fall; there is about a 20 - 25% overlap."

At the same time, Vail's real estate segment, Vail Resorts Development Company, identifies and evaluates potential growth areas in the resorts and implements the projects as well as develops, buys and sells real estate in and around its resort communities. One example of the latter is the **Crystal Peak Lodge** that will open this year and **One Ski Hill Place**, a RockResort that will open in 2010 both of which are in Breckenridge.

New this season is **The Westin Riverfront Resort and Spa** located at the base of Beaver Creek Mountain in Avon, Colorado. It is the centerpiece of the new Riverfront Village, in Avon. The nearly 300-room hotel is adjacent to the new Riverfront Express Gondola that will conveniently connect guests to the ski slopes of Beaver Creek Mountain.

Two years ago, Vail distinguished itself alongside two other major U.S. companies when it converted all that wind power whipping around those majestic mountains into energy to move not just ski lifts and snow-making equipment but to support five mountain resorts (Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone and Heavenly), its 4,000 lodging units including RockResorts and **Grand Teton Lodge Company**, all of its 125 retail locations (operated through **Specialty Sports Venture**) and its corporate headquarters in Broomfield, Colorado.



Vail takes its stewardship of the spectacular environment it finds itself in very seriously. "We have both an obligation and an opportunity to protect the spectacular iconic settings in which our mountain resorts and hotel properties are located and therefore feel it important for our company to lead the travel industry in ground-breaking environmental programs," says **Bob Stinchcomb**, **Director of Sales**, Vail Resorts Management Company.

Green Power Communities [GPC] are joining a phalanx of cities, towns and villages where local governments, businesses and residents collectively buy "green" power. Today, Vail Resorts is perched among the top 25 of those Green Partners as it derives 100% of its energy from green power, to fire up its entire plant.

"We don't want to create environmental programs that force guests to change their behavior, we want them to know we are doing good," says Stinchcomb. Guests will not see little notes on their nightstands saying you can save \$10 if you don't change your towels, "that behavior will come naturally to them," he adds, "we want guests to enjoy their vacations knowing we have taken the appropriate measures to do the right thing in terms of the environment."

Why Is This Important to Agents?

Because the world in which we live is of the utmost importance to your clients. They may be fussy, price-conscious individuals, but their concerns about the environment are trumping cost. According to a report from **Sustainable Travel International** (STI), as travelers become increasingly aware of the impacts of their travel choices, companies that respond to consumer demand for more responsible travel services are moving ahead of the curve.

TIA and **National Geographic Traveler** released results from a study that found most travelers know which travel companies practice sustainable tourism. The study also found that although most travelers are concerned with price and value, 60 million Americans would be willing to pay between five and 10 percent more to use a travel company that strives to protect and preserve the environment.

Says **Ocean Summit Travel's** Smith, a Certified Ski Specialist, "[My clients] are concerned about the environment and gas prices. We've actually seen an increase in the number of guests that prefer to travel to Vail and Beaver Creek this year instead of Aspen and Telluride because of the added expense to travel to those destinations."

The **World Tourism Organization** (WTO) says sustainable tourism is among one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry. The WTO defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems."

Today, Vail Resorts is a member of the Green Power Leadership Club and a recipient of the 2006 Green Power Leadership Awards. This summer, **Condé Nast Traveler** recognized Vail as a winner of the magazine's 2008 World



Savers Awards in the category of environmental protection.

From Start to Finish

At press time, Vail was putting the finishing touches on its recent agreement with East West Resort Transportation Holdings, LLC, an affiliate of East West Partners, to acquire the resort ground transportation business, **Colorado Mountain Express** (CME), for total of \$40.5 million.

"The acquisition of Colorado Mountain Express is perfectly aligned with our mission of providing exceptional experiences at our extraordinary resorts as it represents the first touch

point with many of our guests when they arrive by air in Colorado. In addition, CME's service provides guests the option



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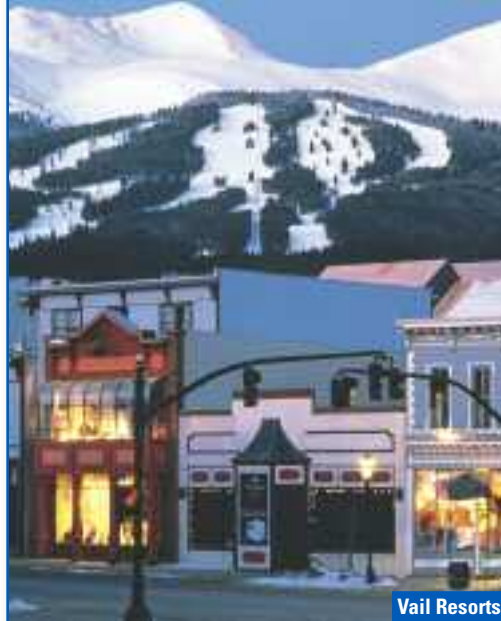


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to minimize the number of vehicles on I-70 as well as reduce the fuel used in ground transportation, both of which are critical goals for our company," said **Rob Katz**, CEO for Vail Resorts.

CME offers ground transportation from both Denver International Airport and Eagle County Airport to Vail (locations in and around Vail, Beaver Creek, Avon and Edwards), Aspen (locations in and around Aspen and Snowmass) and Summit County (includes Keystone, Breckenridge, Copper Mountain, Frisco and Silverthorne). The company offers four primary types of service, including door-to-door shuttle business, point-to-point shuttle business with centralized drop-off at transportation hubs, private chartered vans and premier luxury charter vehicles. The vehicle fleet consists of approximately 250 vans and luxury SUVs.

Stinchcomb says the purchase gives Vail more control over the quality and the scope of the vacation experience it delivers. "This is an exciting time for us—we are responsible and able to effect the total ski vacation experience with this purchase whereas just 10 years ago we only controlled how well we groomed the slopes, sold lift tickets and delivered food and beverage on the mountains, but now we can touch the client from the transfer to lodging to the skiing experience."



Vail Resorts

Demystifying the Slopes

Vail's business plans have been incremental to its success, but so has its awareness of the distribution channel travel agents provide. While Stinchcomb admits it would be difficult if not impossible to track the origin of every single booking throughout the Vail system, agents' contribution to the company's success cannot be underestimated.

"Our top producing travel agents sell to the top ski markets in the us: California, Texas, Illinois, the Southeast and Northeast. Fortunately, there are skiers throughout the entire US, so it mainly depends on the travel agent's relationships with their own customer base," he adds.

Olga Griffin, Manager of Travel Agent Programs at Vail says, "We have invested in this segment [the travel agent community] for the past 10 years. Our Ski Specialist program has been designed to encourage travel agents to sell more ski." Vail's program offers insight into the market, understanding of the products and destinations, along with what the skier seeks in a ski vacation.

Says **Donna Jones**, an agent with **Jett Set Travel** in Denton, Texas, "I became a specialist because I had very little knowledge about selling ski. I have accumulated many return clients each year with the ability to give them detailed information about the different areas offered by Vail Resorts." As stated, Vail Resorts owns and operates the RockResorts hotel brand, many of which are located in the mountain west—from La Posada in Santa Fe, NM to Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado as well as the signature hotels in Vail: **The Arrabelle** at Vail Square, and the **Lodge at Vail**.

Adds Stinchcomb, "We want agents to feel comfortable and knowledgeable with Vail Resorts, knowing this will lead to a higher confidence in selling ski." And the approach seems to be working.

"I would suggest to any agents new to ski to take the specialist program and keep current with updates. The FAM trips are amazing and you will learn so much. The ability to sell with confidence and assurance is priceless," says Jones, of Jett Set. "The knowledge I have brought to the table by working with Olga and her staff has planted a solid foundation with my clients, which, in turn, generates more customers," adds Jones.

Says Stinchcomb, "When an agent calls in to Vail, they speak with a staff member who understands the agent's position in the market, is extremely knowledgeable about the Vail product line, and can build a relationship with that Travel Agent."

The bottom line: relationships build business. And if you happen to be a ski resort, that relationship extends to the environment, so the next generation can one day feel the ecstasy of snow on their cheeks as they swoosh down a well-tended slope or snowshoe amid towering pine trees.

For information on the **Ski Specialist program**, contact **Olga Griffin**, OGriffin@vailresorts.com; or visit www.SkiSpecialistsOnline.com

For information on Vail Resorts, visit www.snow.com

WORLDWIDE SKI

Book Skiers Early for the First Snow, for the Best Deals and Commissions

By Maria Lisella

JF spoke with Ski.com's director of travel agency development, Kelly Wallace to ask about trends she might be spotting among skiers. The good news is that the ski market remains steady as Ski.com reports that sales for the 2008/2009 are on par last year. And according to other sources even aging baby boomers still head for the slopes and well-groomed trails.

JF: Ski.com offers great early booking incentives, are agents and clients responding to these offers?

Ski.com: The biggest trend we've spotted over the years is that people are booking early. In addition to locking in an air price and benefiting from early-booking specials offering things like free nights and free lift tickets, travelers are able to secure their first choices for dates, air schedules and lodging. The latter is especially beneficial for the popular December, Presidents Day week and Spring Break travel periods.

JF: Western Canada will soon be in the spotlight in 2010; anything relevant for our readers?

Ski.com: In preparation for the 2010 Olympic Games, Whistler Blackcomb has built a Peak 2 Peak gondola connecting the peak of Whistler with the peak of Blackcomb. Breaking multiple world records (including the longest unsupported lift span in the world at 1.88 miles and the highest lift of its kind at 1,361 feet), this new gondola is connecting two major mountains for a combined 8,171 of skiable acres. Ski.com will also be giving away a trip to be a part of the first Peak 2 Peak gondola. We have a landing page at <http://ski.com/peak2peak>

JF: Can travel agents profit from ski bookings?

Ski.com: Absolutely. Just over 50% of our business comes from travel agents, so we do everything we can to make sure our packages are easy to book and profitable for them. Travel agents earn commission on things like lodging, lift tickets, ground transfers, vehicle rental, travel insurance and sometimes air.

JF: How do agents become a specialist in booking ski?

Ski.com: They don't have to be specialists because we are. We work with travel agents to help them gather appropriate information from their clients such as dates of travel, ages of children and interests. Our Ski.com Mountain Vacation Specialist can then provide quotes for complete ski vacation packages that matches their interests and budget.

JF: How can Ski.com's staffers help agents to better match the client with the slope and resort?

Ski.com: We provide travel agents the proper questions to ask their clients so that we can arm ourselves with the infor-



VAIL-HEAVENLY

mation needed to properly choose the resort(s) that best suits them. We are also close to finishing a travel agent section on Ski.com (the button is found in the upper right of the home page). This area will include resources for travel agents such as FAQs and a how-to guide to easily book profitable ski trips. We also offer travel agents a Web site sans branding or a call to action specifically for their clients. www.skitravelagents.com

JF: Anything of note for skier-clients from Ski.com?

Ski.com: Yes, the Epic Season Pass [see details in sidebar] gives clients unrestricted (no blackout dates), unlimited access to Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone, Heavenly and A-Basin all season long. This allows them to ski or ride whenever they want, where they want and as often as they want. Combined with great deals on lodging from us, agents can organize more than one mountain vacation this year without breaking the bank.

JF: Any improvements in the resorts this year?

Ski.com: After a two-year hiatus, Jackson Hole is opening up a brand new tram and Ski.com is giving away a spot on the first one. <http://ski.com/jhtram>

Call 800-908-5000; for Spanish-speaking agent, 800-359-0747; www.ski.com

Epic Savings on Epic Pass-Book by Nov. 15

The Epic Season Pass is the only ski pass that offers unrestricted (no blackout dates), unlimited access to Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone, Heavenly and A-Basin

At only \$109 more per person than a five-day lift ticket to Vail during December's peak season, The Epic Season Pass allows you to ski or ride where you want, when you want and as often as you want. Take a trip to Vail or Beaver Creek over the December Holidays and then another to Heavenly or Summit County in February and use the same lift ticket. If you don't want to ski a full day, don't worry about it. Get out on the mountain for just an afternoon cruiser and then hit the hot tub guilt free. Clients with children will want to book unlimited skiing with The Epic Pass, from \$579 - Kids 5-12 for \$279. The only catch is that The Epic Season Pass must be purchased by **November 15, 2008**; the pass remains valid through April 15, 2009.

Call 800-299-0656; www.Ski.com

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BAHRAIN EMBASSY

Bahrain is hardly a household word and for many, it is a mysterious destination. It has traditionally been a hub of business deals in the Arab world. Just last month, the Crown Prince held talks with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg at his office in City Hall. They reviewed the existing ties between the two countries. They also discussed the possibilities of further co-operation in economic, commerce and investment sectors, so Americans might be hearing more about Bahrain in the not-so-distant future.

Gulf Air, the national carrier maintains a website that offers the most current information regarding culture, tourism, activities, accommodations and developments. Its **Bahrain e-guide** is published monthly. Below are some of the highlights JF culled from a few of the latest issues.

A Word about History

Situated between such major cultures as Mesopotamia and India, Bahrain was an important trade center. This historic role produced a cultural heritage spanning 7,000 years, evidenced by the richness of physical remains uncovered recently by international and local team of archaeologists. In 1982, the Government of Bahrain decided to replace the existing, inadequate display facilities with a new, purpose built museum. Located along the corniche next to the Diplomatic area, the **Bahrain National Museum** is one of the most popular tourist attractions of the Kingdom.

Bahrain is home to nearly 700,000 people, a population marked by diversity. The expatriate community comprises nearly 35% of Bahrain's inhabitants. Bahrain's strong eco-



BAHRAIN EMBASSY

omic opportunities and attractive conditions continue to draw people from all over the world.

Bahrain's residents include an international mosaic of people from Iran, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain, and the United States, as well as citizens from a number of other nations.

Mall Mecca

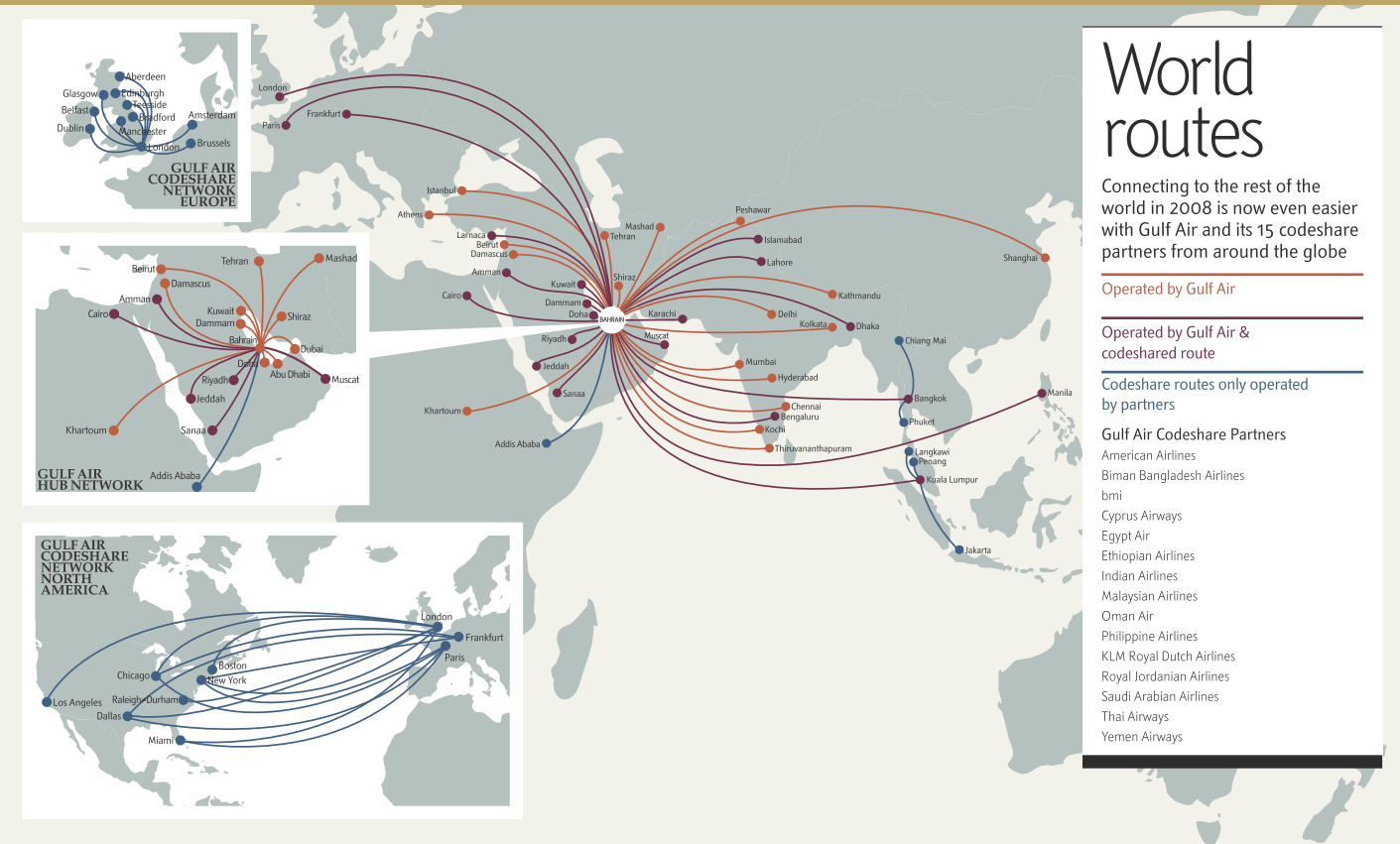
For some, shopping is a cultural experience that allows visitors to shop side by side with locals. Due to the wide selection of shopping malls and souks in and out of Manama, Bahrain is becoming a mall mecca.

First-time visitors, however will find appeal in the **Bab Al Bahrain Souk**, an older, more traditional shopping setting indigenous to the region, and therefore, compelling to visitors. Located in the heart of Manama, it offers hundreds of shops selling everything from jewelry to handicraft shops and antiques. Ethnic handicraft shops selling pashmina's, silver products and wooden handicrafts are particularly popular with visitor's and residents alike.

Shopping malls are open during weekdays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and on Fridays from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Street shops are open on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with an afternoon break not unlike that practiced in many European countries as the shops reopen around 4 p.m. and stay opened until 7 p.m. and on Fridays from 4 p.m. till 10 p.m. Most shops accept US Dollars, Euro's and all major credit cards.

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Aerial city view of Bahrain city and sea port.

After two years in development, the main construction of Bahrain's biggest and brightest mall is now complete and the next phase of life at the **Bahrain City Centre** begins.

Last month, the first of many retail stores - including H&M, Freedom Furniture, Virgin Megastore and Debenhams - were open for browsing and buying, with more and more opening each day. By next year, when its two hotels and the incredible indoor outdoor water park open, Bahrain City Centre will be positioned as one of the region's major shopping, leisure and entertainment resorts.

Located on Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Highway in the heart of Manama, it is just 15 minutes from the international airport. Anders Moberg, CEO of the Majid Al Futtaim Group, the owners of the mall, expect this project to put Bahrain's retailing on a par with Dubai, London and Paris.

Lulu Centre is purportedly home to the best bargains right in the heart of Manama with more than 50 shops from electronics to exotic Arabic perfumes and both ladies dresses and traditional men's wear. The anchor store is Mega Mart that ranges from food to home electronics.

Located in Sanabis just minutes from Manama, **Bahrain Mall** welcomes almost 500,000 visitors each month making it one of the most popular in the country as it features over 120 shops including Nine West, Polo Jeans, G2000, Jennyfer, La Senza, Damas Jewellery, Truworths, Bossini, Giordano, Shoe Mart, The Body Shop, Lee Cooper, Home Store and Mothercare.

Visit www.thebahrainmall.com

Getting There

Gulf Air, the award-winning national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, boasts more than 55 years' experience, features the largest network in the Middle East and serves destinations throughout Africa, Asia, Europe and the Far East. Gulf Air's current fleet of passenger aircraft includes; Airbus A340-300 (343) and Airbus A340-300 (Sleeper Seat service) for long and ultra-long haul flights; Airbus A330-200 (Sleeper Seat service) for medium and long haul flights, and the Airbus A320-200, for short to medium haul sectors.

On January 19, 2008 the carrier placed an order for 16 Boeing 787 Dreamliners and signed a letter of intent for an additional 8, on September 3, 2008. Gulf Air's First Class cabin features a personal Sky Chef and offers 8, Class 180 seats that convert into full size beds having an 80 inch pitch, aboard all A330 aircraft. Their A340 fleet is equipped with lay flat seats in Business Class and features a 63 inch seat pitch in a 2-2-2 configuration. Sky Nannies are specifically trained staff for in-flight childcare and are available in all classes of service aboard long haul routes across the Gulf Air network.

Call 866-513-4853; salesupport.gulfair@us-sales.com; www.usapartners.gulfair.com.

For information on Bahrain, visit: www.bahrainembassy.org

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

Morocco's Unlimited Appeal

Morocco has majestic mountain ranges, spectacular coastlines and some of the most intriguing cities in Africa. Its rich architectural tradition includes medieval cities, Roman ruins, Berber fortresses and Islamic monuments. Exploring the centuries old Kasbahs and maze of backstreets and the cultural adventure of bargaining for souvenirs are some of the reasons this North African nation is finding itself in Top 10 places to visit lists with frequency.

Where to Go Next

Hostelworld recently cited Morocco's coastal fishing village of Essaouira among Honorable Mentions in its latest list of Top 10 Upcoming Destinations.

Enclosed in a bay, the town is renowned for kite surfing and windsurfing opportunities. With a beautiful curling beach and charming alleyways, Essaouira is laid back and relaxed with a semi-tropical climate all year round. The unique architecture draws from French and Portuguese influences and offers another reason to visit the town, as does the central Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Listed area.

"We've seen a major increase in queries for destinations in Northern Africa," said Product and Marketing Manager Christy Fraser at **AFRICAExperts**, a division of **Goway**, "being such a varied and fascinating country, Morocco is on the 'hot-list' of African destinations for discerning North American travelers."

AFRICAExperts provides touring options such as the seven-day "Imperial Cities" tour. Priced from \$936 per person double, it includes time in Casablanca, Marrakech, Meknes and Fes, all of which have served as the capital of Morocco at some point in history. Among the inclusions are: accommodations, roundtrip airport transfers, transportation by air-conditioned vehicles, sightseeing and most meals. The 12-day "Magical Kingdom of Morocco" tour is priced from \$1,554 per person double with similar inclusions.

Call 800-245-0920; E-mail info@africaexperts.com; www.AFRICAExperts.com

Indus Travels is selling a roster of Magical Morocco programs from the eight-day Imperial Cities priced from \$642



per person double to the 11-day Discover Morocco priced from \$1,660 per person double to an eight-day tour, Big South and Kasbahs for \$1,039 per person double. The 11-day Discover Morocco includes a desert safari in Merzouga. Pricing covers land arrangements only, including all taxes and transfers. Call 866-978-2997; E-mail mail@industravels.ca; www.industravels.com

Sita World Travel is taking guests on a journey through some of Morocco's most captivating cities with the "Imperial Cities" luxury package. This seven- or 10-day trip departs for Casablanca every Sunday from numerous gateways. First stop on the tour is the capital city of Rabat, where attractions include the Kasbah of the Oudayas and the Hassan Tower. Fès, a living Medieval city, unfolds its ancient, labyrinthine medina, with age-old handicraft souks, magnificent architecture and delicious cuisine. After crossing the Atlas Mountains through Berber villages and the town of Beni Mellal, the tour arrives in Marrakech. Starting at \$1,295, this package includes: stays in luxury or deluxe hotels with private facilities, most meals, transfers, transportation by air-conditioned vehicle with English speaking driver/guide, tours of Rabat, Meknes, Fès and Marrakech, Moroccan dinner with folklore show, services of local English speaking guides for sightseeing, entrance fees to monuments per the itinerary and options on the 10-day trip include travel by land rover over the sand dunes at Merzouga and spending a night under the stars in a Bedouin camp. Call 800-421-5643; www.sitatours.com

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Among the inclusions are: roundtrip airport pickup and transfers from Menara Airport, two nights' accommodation in choice of suite, breakfast daily for two, guided tour of the famed "Red City" of Marrakech, complimentary bottle of wine and appetizers, a private candlelit Moroccan dinner served in a traditional tent, a hamman in the Sanctuary Spa followed by massage treatment for two. Valid through December 18, 2008, the two-night Romance package is priced from \$1,300 for a Junior Suite, \$1,710 for a Suite and \$1,980 for a Romance Suite. **Call 800-915-4012; www.octogonehotels.com**

Affiliates of **Global Hyatt Corporation and Alliances Group** recently signed a management agreement for **Park Hyatt Marrakech**. Located within the impressive Al Maaden residential and leisure development, Park Hyatt Marrakech will be designed to appeal to both hotel guests and the residents of Al Maaden. The 120-room hotel will open in 2011, making it the 33rd hotel in the Park Hyatt portfolio. Visit **www.hyatt.com**

The **Hostel Essaouira** was designed in traditional chic Riad style, this 'Boutique Hostel' offers more than most. Centered around a beautiful Moroccan garden, the Essaouira Hostel will make you feel instantly relaxed and at home. The rooms' high terraces offer magnificent views over the city and also offered are free yoga classes to guests. Barbeques with delicious local food can be organized for groups. Surf trips, kite surf lessons, fishing trips or camel/horse riding can also be arranged. Visit **www.hostelworld.com**

Kerzner International, the force behind **Atlantis** in the Bahamas and Dubai, is hard at work on the first phase of this \$830 million project in El Jadida, 25 miles from Casablanca, Morocco. The first hotel and casino will open in 2009, with final completion by 2018.

Mogador Essaouira: located in the beach town of Essaouira, west of Marrakech, this upscale resort is being developed by a triad of European developers including **Accor**. Golf, a European-style spa, 10 hotels and villas with 6,800 beds will open in phases between 2009 and 2012.

Taghazout: This upscale \$2 billion complex near Agadir will include 18,000 beds, with the first hotel opening in July, 2009, and completion by 2016. Especially of interest to the American clientele, five star brands including **Four Seasons**, **Raffles** and **Fairmont** will be included in this project located along the south Atlantic coast.

Set in the Sahara dunes across from the Canary Islands south of Agadir, **Plage Blanche** plans 19,500 beds in four and five-star hotels, the first of which will open in 2012.

South of Tangiers in the city of Larache, virgin beaches, dunes and rolling hills set the stage for 12,000 upscale hotel rooms, a marina, equestrian center from **Lixus**. The first hotel will open in 2009. For more information, call the Moroccan Tourist Office at 407-264-0133 or visit **www.visitmorocco.org**

Royal Air Maroc (800-344-6726) offers 10 nonstop flights from JFK to Casablanca.

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Africa see page 81-83 of the Listings Section

IN THE NEWS

Kenya Airways Takes Third Embraer

Kenya Airways (KQ) has taken delivery of its third Embraer 170 Long Range (LR) Jets. According to CEO Titus Naikuni, "this jet is set to boost our capacity in the regional routes particularly in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam." Kenya Airways is also scheduled to take delivery of a Boeing 737-800 to ease capacity constraints in its regional routes.

The aircraft which bears the registration 5Y-KYH is on lease from GECAS (General Electric Commercial Aviation Services) and will be joining the other 2 jets 5Y-KYK and 5Y-KYJ which are already in service. The Embraer 170 LR is configured in a comfortable single class layout, sitting 72 passengers. Short ground turnaround time, common parts and low maintenance costs are among the key benefits of the Embraer aircraft. In an environment of ever increasing oil prices, the high fuel efficiency of the E170 is an asset to better maximize revenue.

Call 866-536-9224; **www.kenya-airways.com**

United to Kick off Dubai Service in October

United Airlines, one of the world's biggest carriers having carried nearly 70 million passengers in 2006, said it plans to start daily flights to Dubai from Washington from October 26 pending government approvals. This makes United the second U.S. carrier after Delta Air Lines to operate flights to Dubai.

Leading Gulf carriers including **Emirates**, **Etihad** and **Qatar Airways** are operating daily flights to major US gateways - New York, Houston and Washington. Emirates has already announced flights to Los Angeles and San Francisco.

To inaugurate the new flights, United is offering special deals such as \$571 each way from New York; \$552 each way from Washington Dulles; and \$582 each way from Austin, Texas if purchased by Oct. 15. Rates will remain valid for outbound travel between Oct. 26-Dec. 11, 2008 or Dec. 25, 2008- March 31, 2009. Visit **www.united.com**

FIT Tour Appeals to Young Clients

Diane Panasci, Marketing and Product Development for **Foreign Independent Tours** said, "I think this air-inclusive tour will 'speak' to a younger demographic." The new program travels to Ancient Nubia, and combines a fully-escorted tour of Cairo and a cruise tour of Lake Nasser from Aswan to Abu Simbel. The eight-day Nubian Tour, priced from \$1,799 per person double, includes trans-Atlantic and domestic airfare (from JFK to Cairo; for BWI, Washington Dulles add \$98; Detroit add \$110; San Francisco add \$276), three nights' accommodations each in Cairo and aboard the cruise ship M/S Eugenie, 13 meals, all sightseeing, entrance fees, and services of an Egyptologist on all tours. Accommodations are at the five-star **Sofitel Sphinx Hotel** in Cairo, three nights aboard M/S Eugenie in a standard cabin--upgrades are available. Call 800-853-6453; 800-248-3487; **www.fittours.com**

BEST BUYS

\$4199 KENYA Clients looking for something really special and memorable to bring in the New Year? How about summiting Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak, on New Year's Day. **Bike-Hike Adventures** is offering this special departure combining a seven-day Kilimanjaro climb along the Lemosho Route, an African Safari into the Serengeti plains and Ngorongoro Crater and a bike ride through tribal Masai Villages. At midnight on New Year's Eve the group will gear up and trek from Barafu, the last high campsite, to Uhuru Peak, Kilimanjaro's summit at 19,340 feet. The goal is to reach the peak by sunrise on January 1, 2009. This special departure is from Dec. 25 - Jan. 8, 2009. The land cost is \$4,199 starting and ending in Arusha, Tanzania. The trip includes all internal transportation, accommodation (shared twin), most meals, all equipment (camping gear, bicycles), English speaking guides, porters and cooks. Call 888-805-0061; **www.bikehike.com**

\$4895 TANZANIA The mountains and plains of Tanzania are vibrantly alive in winter. **Boundless Journeys's** Tanzania: Migration Safari takes in the wonders of these places at a relaxed pace. Departing December 21, 2008; it is priced at \$4,895 per person double and includes: wildlife encounters; visits to the Ngorongoro Crater to the plains of the Serengeti, services of

expert Tanzanian naturalist guides, and lodging in mobile tented camps that allow easy access to the most animals at any time of year, and two nights at the renowned Migration Camp rival any luxury hotel. Prices do not include park fees of \$600 per person and a holiday surcharge of \$550 per person. Call 800-941-8010; **www.boundlessjourneys.com**

\$8795 TANZANIA **African Travel's** 13-day Great Migration program to Tanzania combines northern Tanzania's finest wildlife viewing with luxury lodgings. Highlights include four nights in the Serengeti with daily wildlife viewing, the famed Ngorongoro Crater; Tarangire, one of Tanzania's "secret" wildlife havens; and Manyara National Park in the Great Rift. Beginning and ending with a night in Arusha, the price includes roundtrip air fare from New York, luxury accommodations, 29 meals, and daily game drives with trained guides. Accommodations include **Arusha Hotel**, **Tarangire Tree Lodge**, **Lake Manyara Tree Camp**, **Crater Lodge** at Ngorongoro and **Mobile Migration**, a mobile camp in the Serengeti. Depending on the month of departure, prices begin at \$8,795 per person double in Nov., prices are slightly higher in Oct. and Dec. Roundtrip economy airfare from New York to Kilimanjaro is free through December with optional extension to Zanzibar. Call 800-421-8907; **www.africantravelinc.com**

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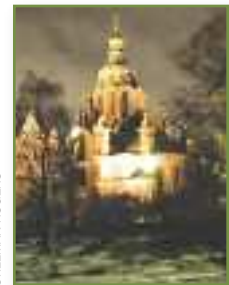
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Finland: Not Just in Summer

by Barbara Radcliffe Rogers



STILLMAN ROGERS

No place does winter better than Finland. Sure, it does summer well, too, with non-stop festivals celebrating everything from opera to samba. But the Finns love winter and are delighted to welcome your clients who share their love – or who are just looking for something different.

In contrast to summer's midnight sun, winter brings daytime crystal skies and night-time northern lights displays to Finland's great Arctic expanses of Lapland. Finns and foreigners mix in a genial blend at Levi and other centers for downhill and cross-country skiing, and explore the white-glazed landscapes by snowmobile, kicksled, dogsled, on snowshoes and even on reindeer sleds.

Winter packages begin in Rovaniemi, on the Arctic Circle (a short flight from Helsinki) with its stunning modern Arktikum, where visitors learn about the Arctic and the Sami, Lapland's semi-nomadic peoples that herd reindeer (right). Your clients can meet them in person at a Sami camp, while learning to drive a reindeer sled, slower and easier to control than a dog team. They are presented with a souvenir "Reindeer Driving License" as they warm up inside a tall tipi-like Sami house, sitting around the campfire in its center on reindeer skins, eating crunchy wheat toast and sizzling cured venison, cooked over the fire.

Other arctic options, offered by **Lapland Connection** (www.laplandconnection.com) are a dogsled or snowmobile safari and a ride on the icebreaker ship Sampo. Ski/spa packages at Levi, in the town of Kittilä, include lodgings at the four-star Ylläs Saaga Hotel, with indoor pool, a natural stone cave hot tub, steam saunas and Finnish saunas (www.5stars-of-scandinavia.com). Kemi's downhill ski area is served by two gondola lifts, and is the center of a 100-mile cross-country trail network and 550 miles of snowmobile trails. Clients traveling with children will want to add a stop at Santa Claus's hometown, the lively Santa Land, in Rovaniemi, to meet reindeer, elves and St. Nick himself.

Or book clients at the largest hotel in Lapland, the four-star **Gielas**, scheduled to open in November 2008, in Saariselkä. Each of its 84 rooms and suites has its own sauna, balcony, bathtub and internet connection. (www.tunturihotelli.fi) Ski slopes and trails are nearby, and you can also pre-book a traditional dinner in a Sami hut through the hotel.

For clients who prefer citified pleasures, Helsinki is an exciting city at any time of year. Its compact center, where most attractions are clustered, wraps cozily around the harbor. Above rise the exotic gold onion-shaped domes of Uspensky Russian Orthodox Cathedral (above), and in the other direction stretches the Esplanadi, a wide park bordered by elegant buildings.



STILLMAN ROGERS

At its far end is one of Helsinki's newest attractions, the Design District, anchored by the classy new **Design Museum**. Advise clients to wander into the shops and showrooms to see cutting edge designs before they hit the shops all over the world. At the Design Forum, they can find top designers' work in all price ranges. Finnish designers are best known for household and practical items - think Marimekko's striking decorator fabrics, Fiskar scissors, Alvar Aalto's furniture and Arabia tableware.

From the harbor they can take a boat (about \$7.50 round trip) to the fortress island of Suomenlinna, a World Heritage Site. The 15-minute mini-cruise offers good city views, and on the island they can explore the fortress, watch the excellent film, visit the museums and craft studios, and eat lunch at a brewery.

Advise those going in the summer to glimpse at Finland as it was a century ago, at the open-air museum of Seurasaari. On another island is the Helsinki Zoo, open year-round and famed for its rare big cats, including Snow leopards and Siberian tigers.

Finnish design shows up everywhere, even in Helsinki's hotels. The recently restored Belle Epoch Hotel Kamp, overlooking the Esplanadi within a few steps of the harbor (www.hotelkamp.fi) is elegant, historic and luxurious, a suggestion your up-market clients will thank you for. The brilliant modern transformation of Lars Sonck's Art Nouveau warehouse as the Scandic Grand Marina, near the Uspensky Cathedral (www.scandic-hotels.com/grandmarina) also overlooks the harbor.

HelsinkiMenu signs indicate seasonal menus featuring local fish from the lakes and rivers, reindeer and elk venison, woodland mushrooms and arctic berries.

Advise clients to look for these when choosing restaurants, and suggest two reliable choices: At **G W Sundmans** (www.royalravintolat.com/sundmans) they can try reindeer or pheasant stuffed with morels, and can sample Russian specialties, from blinis to bear (and Strawberries Romanov) at **Saslik** (www.saslik.com).

Assure clients that FIT travel is easy in friendly Finland, where English is widely spoken. **Finnair** (www.finnair.com) offers several money-saving packages that include direct flights to Helsinki, as well as onward flights into Lapland.

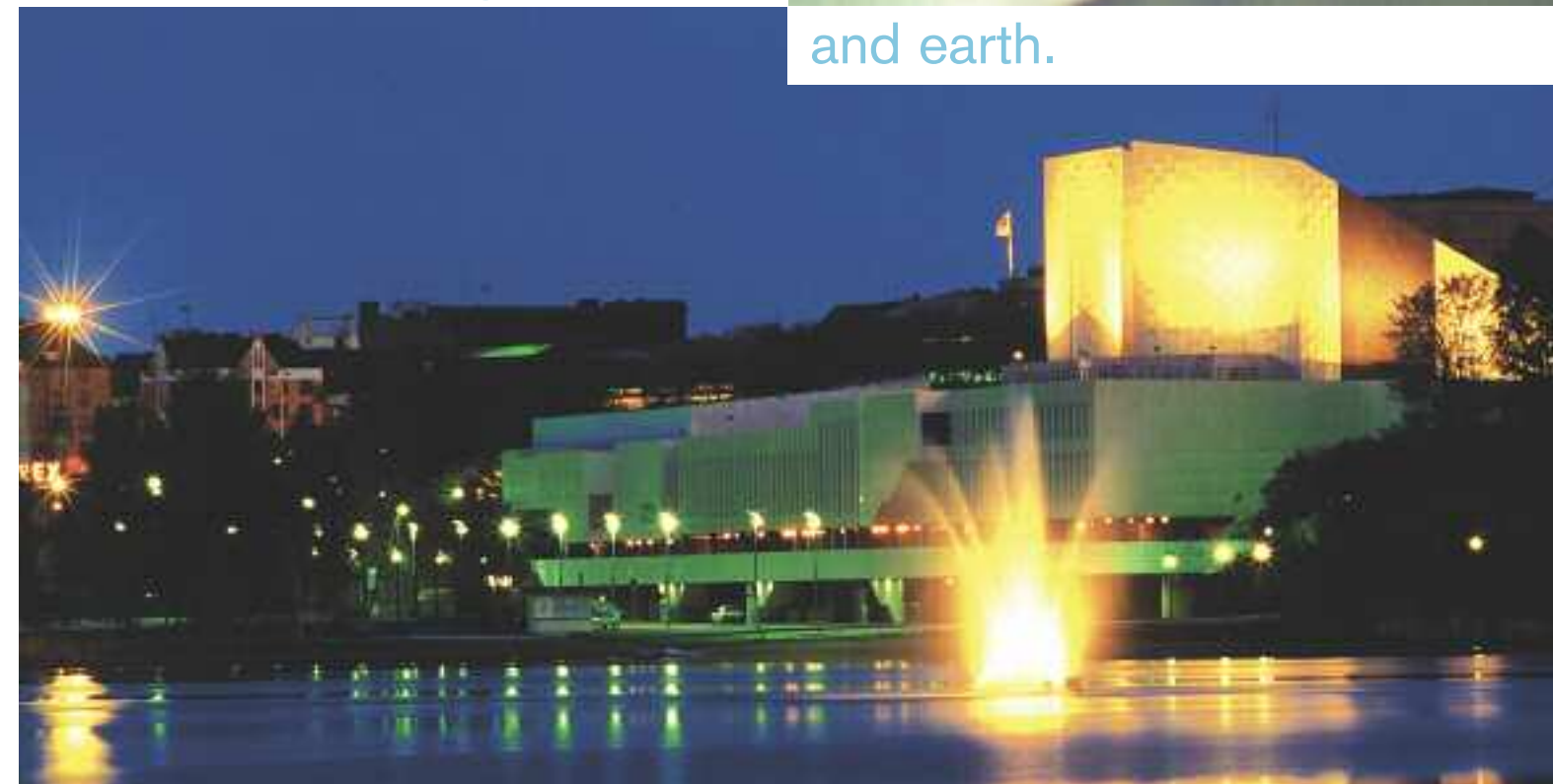
For information, contact the Finish Tourist Board 212-989-2333; www.visitfinland.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Finland see page 69 of the Listings Section



The land that lights heaven

and earth.



discover FINTASTIC variety

Few destinations can offer you the awe-inspiring sight of the Aurora Borealis casting its wild rainbow hues across the night sky. Even fewer can offer the unique creative inspiration that is fast turning Helsinki into the design centre of Europe. Whether your inspiration comes from the majestic outdoors or the love of unique inner expression, Finland is ready and waiting.

For additional information about travel to Finland, please contact us at: 646-467-9676 (Trade) or 212-885-9700 (Consumer), email: contact.usa@visitfinland.com
www.visitfinland.com



Vienna's Offbeat Passions: Wine, Design and Harry Lime

By Maria Lisella

For the first time, Vienna's "enjoyment path" extends from wine to design this year. Inaugurated as part of the city's wine and design promotion (October 1 – November 30, 2008) it takes in the most interesting and attractive places to enjoy a glass of wine in the city— from wine taverns to more than 100 city pubs and restaurants and will have plenty of vintage treats.

Competitions with prizes including 1,000 bottles of the very best Viennese wine and 100 objects by Viennese designers are slated all over town. The Vienna, wine and design brochure complete with information on the promotion and entry coupon for the competition is available at Vienna Hotels and the Tourist Information Center (corner of Albertinaplatz and Maysedergasse, 1st district, open 9 a.m.-7 p.m.). There are also 10,000 instant prizes waiting to be won at the Tourist Information Center.

The history of wine production in Vienna dates back more than 2,500 years. Today, it is the only capital city in the world with extensive vineyards within the city limits. Each year a total of about 320 growers produce around two million liters of quality wines. Wine is never far away in Vienna – the wine taverns and vineyards of Grinzing and Nussdorf are just a 20-minute tram ride from the historic city center. A raft of recent international awards shows that Viennese



wine is experiencing something of a renaissance, as reflected by the emergence of new approaches to wine cellar architecture and wine tavern design, both of which can be seen among top producers' like Fritz Weninger (www.wieninger.at) and Rainer Christ (www.weingut-christ.at).

From Imperial Courts to Avant-garde

Vienna is known as a breeding ground for art and design. From the Imperial Court to the Wiener Werkstätte and today's contemporary designers, The Vienna Design Week festival (Oct. 2-12, 2008, www.viennadesignweek.at) features a high-quality program that is supported by major museums and institutions as well as a selection of smaller shops and galleries. The "passion paths" take visitors on an expedition all around the city that includes experimental projects by designers in various locations. **Blickfang** (October 17-19, 2008, www.blickfang.com) at the **Museum of Applied Arts (MAK)** is a great place to find out about design and make a purchase. The art festival comes hot on the heels of the **Blickfang** design festival. During **viennaartweek** (November 17-23, 2008, www.viennaartweek.com) a total of 45 Viennese museums, exhibition venues and art institutes will open their doors for numerous events.

At the ARTmART exhibition about 2,000 works by 200 different artists will be for sale at a set price of just 70 euros or about \$100 each (www.2008.artmart.at).

Those who visit Vienna are really never very far from its post World War II icon – the silver screen classic, "The Third Man," which was shot in Vienna in 1949. Since the Burg Kino cinema on Opernring shows *The Third Man* every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday, suggest clients combine the film with a lavish brunch at one of Vienna's other classical experiences, its coffee houses.

In the Footsteps of Harry Lime

Visitors can retrace the footsteps of Harry Lime on the Third Man Tour, at the Riesenrad (the Giant Ferris Wheel) and in the Third Man Museum. The Giant Ferris Wheel in the Prater, the Vienna sewers, Orson Welles and the haunting zither music of Anton Karas – *The Third Man* painted a picture of Vienna previously unseen on the big screen. Director Carol Reed presented the story of the smuggler Harry Lime, played by Orson Welles, which turns into a game of cat and mouse set in the Vienna of 1947. While Reed portrays the city's dark side, like the sewers and the rubble left by the war, the film also shows the picturesque streets of the old town and Viennese trademarks such as the Giant Ferris Wheel.

Sixty years on, "The Third Man" has lost none of its fascinating qualities, as visitors can see for themselves by taking a Third Man tour. With the help of pictures and music samples, the Third Man walking tour gives visitors a taste of the film's atmosphere and follows the trail of Harry Lime to original locations in the Old Town, such as Josephsplatz and Mølkerbastei. The Third Man sewer

tour takes visitors down to the "underworld" of the Vienna sewers, as immortalized in the pursuit of Harry Lime.

The Third Man Museum also offers more insights into the world of this cinema classic. Besides numerous props from the film, and photos and objects from the post-WWII era, Anton Karas' zither from the world-famous theme tune is also on display here. Call +43 1-586 48 72; www.3mpc.net

The Third Man tour takes in both the Third Man Museum and the Burg Kino cinema. A visit to one of the stopping points entitles visitors to discounts on the others. Call +43 1-587 84 06; www.burgkino.at

Popular destinations for outings include the Zentralfriedhof (Central Cemetery) in Simmering – which can be seen at the beginning and end of the film – and the traditional Prater amusement park with its Giant Ferris Wheel. The location for one of the film's main scenes, it is in stark contrast with the underground sewers and offers amazing views over the city. Call +43-1-4000-3033; www.drittemanntour.at, www.viennawalks.com

The **Vienna Tourist Board** (www.b2b.vienna.info) operates a handy search engine for hotel bookings at choices of 350 properties. For more information, contact the **Austrian Tourist Office** 212-944-6880; E-mail: travel@austria.info; www.austria-tourism.biz

Austrian Airlines operates the only non-stop flights to



Vienna from New York, Chicago, Washington, DC and Toronto. A member of the Star Alliance Austrian flies to 130 destinations worldwide. Passengers can earn miles on Austrian's Miles & More, United Airlines Mileage Plus and US Airways Dividend Miles programs.

Marking its 50th anniversary this year, **Austrian Airlines** has placed First in the categories of Business Class Catering and Cabin Staff in a worldwide survey conducted by Skytrax – a British consulting company. The results were drawn from more than one million air passengers from 95 countries around the world.

This is the second year in a row that Austrian Airlines has won First Place in the "Catering in Business Class Long-Haul" global category. Austrian Airlines has a long history of employing Austrian and internationally renowned chefs to design its in-flight gourmet menus and features trained "on-board sommeliers" as well as a distinctive Viennese coffee house service in business class – all of which set it apart as unique and superior in the eyes of its passengers. Winning First Place in the "Cabin Staff of Europe" category underscores the success of Austrian's "we care" philosophy – again, making the company unique in comparison with international competitor airlines. "In this, our 50th anniversary year," says Paul Pafflik, Austrian Airlines' General Manager, North America, "it is especially gratifying that our dedication to consistent quality and service continues to be recognized by our passengers, reconfirming Austrian's leading status among international airlines." Visit www.austrian.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Austria see page 67 of the Listings Section

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Cypriot Primer

by Denise Mattia

From craggy paths leading to sun-bleached ancient villas and hilltop monasteries to narrow cobblestone streets leading to wineries and taverns, to luxurious beach resorts, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, Cyprus ripples with life and light. First time visitors will find that yesterday's culture blends with today's lifestyle as smoothly as the curves of an Aphrodite statue.

JAXFAX was among the six journalists participating in a press trip to Cyprus during March of 2008. From Lamaka International Airport we were transported to Agia (holy) Napa in the southeast. The area, built around a 16th century monastery, has become a popular seaside resort town. The 326-room Aeneas Hotel, where we stayed, recently completed an on-the-property Anglican and Catholic denominational church, which is used for weddings and can hold up to 120 guests. Currently the hotel is getting ready for the holidays with a Christmas and New Year's Festivity Program: an extravaganza of gastronomy creations.

Visit www.aneas.com.cy

In Cyprus, any time is a good time to sit and enjoy a variety of dishes with families and friends. At Andreas and Melani Beach Hotel, traditional meze (mezedhes: little delicacies) are prepared in the restaurant at Governors Beach. In a recent survey, Cyprus' beaches scored highest marks for safety and cleanliness over any beach in the European Union.

Historically, the island's richness in copper (kypros) and its strategic location as a trade route to Greece, Anatolia (Turkey), Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula account for the widespread influences that gave its art and architecture an eclectic style. The Thalassa (sea) Marine Museum in Agia Napa, the Roman amphitheatre at Kurion (still used for performances), the Kato Pafos Archaeological Park, the Agios Yiannis Cathedral and the Byzantine Museum are a few of the important places



St. John Cathedral

that demonstrate the development of Cypriot style.

Set against a small hill to the northeast of Pafos, once the capital of Cyprus, is the 300-foot wide theatre, constructed after the town was founded, around 300 B.C.E. Other impressive sites are the Villas of Dionysus and Aion and the Tombs of the Kings (there's no evidence to suggest kings were buried here). An array of artifacts found here dating to Neolithic times has classified the section as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Accommodations

A short walk from the Villa of Dionysus is **The Almyra**, a **Thanos Hotel**. The restaurant is noted for their special Japanese-Mediterranean fusion menu. Among the gastronomic creations are cerviche of scallops with a citrus and soy dressing and a grilled beef topped with gingered mushrooms. Visit www.almyra.com.cy

Before settling into the **Thalassa Hotel**, our caravan proceeded to Petra tou Romiou (Aphrodite's Rock). A climb to the top revealed the beauty of the Mediterranean Sea against the honey-colored coastline. Legend has it that it was here that Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was born out of the sea and carried on a shell to shore by dolphins.

Situated on three-quarters of a mile of beach overlooking a small peninsula, the luxury boutique Hotel, The Thalassa, prides itself on its cuisine, which focuses on Mediterranean-style cooking using seasonal Cypriot ingredients.

An Anagenisis spa menu features a wide selection of therapies derived from the ancient Greek and Roman specialties. Every suite comes with a personal butler. The service

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is available in all other room types as well. Generally, from the end of April to the end of July, savings of up to 55% off the price of a room are offered when an Executive Suite is booked. Visit www.thalassa.com.cy

At the western corner of the island, the cliffs of the Akamas peninsula are a sharp contrast to the manicured properties of the southern coast. This is the only area in Cyprus where a four-wheel drive vehicle is useful. Arriving at a vantage point, visitors can walk up a steep incline to the Baths of Aphrodite, a grotto, where few can resist anointing themselves with its waters. Because of the bio-diversity found here, the peninsula is scheduled to become a National Park.

The excellent infrastructure throughout the island makes it easy to drive into the hillside (driving is on the British side of the road). Our group stopped at several wineries before heading south to **Le Meridien Spa and Resort** in Lemesos (Limassol). There, we luxuriated in the only indoor/outdoor Thalassotherapy spa in Europe. A Japanese and Mediterranean restaurant and two snack bars are on the premises, and children below four years of age receive full board.

Visit www.Cyprus.lemeridien.com

The capital, Lefkosia (Nicosia) to the north is a "walking" city, where taverns are as numerous as the museums, galleries and places of interest.

JAXFAX visited St. John's Cathedral, the Byzantine Museum, the Faneromeni Church and the Cyprus Museum, and wandered outside the city to the Handicraft Center to study the development of the island through its pottery, lacework, wood and metalwork. The trip concluded with a leisurely lunch at the **Kath'Odon Tavern**. Call +357-226-61-656.

Getting There

Cyprus Airways flies from most European gateways and it has daily flights from Amsterdam, London, and Athens to Larnaka and four times a week from Frankfurt. There are also flights, less than daily, from London and Amsterdam to Pafos. Call 877-359-6629, www.cypriairways.com. European-based carriers—Virgin Atlantic, Olympic Airways and KLM—operate frequent flights from their hubs.

For further information, contact the Cyprus Tourism Organization, 212-683-5280, E-mail gocyprus@aol.com; www.visitcyprus.com

IN THE NEWS

Rome at \$599 from Eurofly

Did you think those \$599 roundtrip Rome deals were a thing of the past? Enter **Eurofly**, which not only values its relationship with travel agents by paying commission up front, this upstart carrier continues to carry on the tradition of cheap deals in winter.

Established in 1989 in Turin, Italy, Eurofly has quickly become Italy's leading airline in the leisure flights market, flying to more Italian cities than any other airline. From JFK airport, Eurofly travels non-stop to Rome, Palermo, Bologna, and Naples, and direct to Pescara, Lamezia Terme, and Bari.

On board, customers will find comfortable, modern seats, in-flight entertainment via personal monitor and telephones, along with in-flight meals served with Italian wines. In Eurofly's Business Class, customers enjoy state-of-the-art Weber seats with electronic controls, lumbar support and foot-rests, satellite telephone, and personal revolving LCD video screen. In Economy Class, customers can relax in spacious seats designed by Fiorucci, with personal video, remote control, and telephone. Through October 31, 2008 fares start at \$649 per person for Economy class and \$1,999 for Business class.

Fares do not include fuel surcharge of \$320 per person and taxes of up to \$86. Fares valid for flights departing through October 31st 2008. Pescara, Lamezia, and Bari flights valid only through September 30th, 2008.

ITALY FOR TWO: Through October 31st 2008, travel to Rome, Bologna, Naples, Palermo, Bari, Pescara, and Lamezia Terme at the great price of \$858 for 2 in Economy, and \$3,298 for 2 in Business class. Prices do not include \$640 fuel charges and taxes of up to \$172; valid for flights departing through October 31, 2008.

HOT WINTER DEAL: Between November 2, 2008 and March 29, 2009 roundtrip travel to Rome costs \$599.

Call 800-459-4980; www.euroflyvacations.com



Discover Galicia — The Celtic Soul of Spain

Hidden away on the Northwest corner of Spain, bordered on one side by Portugal and two sides by sea, is an enchanted emerald green land few Americans are familiar with. It's a place where nature, culture and cuisine have all conspired to make it the perfect destination.

As soon as your clients arrive, they are greeted by some of the most friendly, cultured, hospitable and artistic people in Spain. Gallegos like the Irish, share a Celtic background and history that dates back 3000 years. They even play bagpipes, called Gaitas. They have their own unique culture which they love sharing, especially with those coming to Galicia

for the first time.

If your clients love nature, few places in Spain can match Galicia for its varied terrain to explore. Hundreds of miles of rugged coastline and craggy granite faced cliffs rising from the sea, 700 pristine beaches, mountains, as well as rivers and streams teeming with fish.

When it comes to culture, Galicia has no less to show off. Two of its cities have been chosen by UNESCO as World Heritage Cities. Lugo surrounded by Roman walls and Santiago de Compostela, with its magnificent Romanesque architecture.

Although Galicia has not been fully explored by American tourists, it has long been a favorite destination of

gourmands from all over the world. One reason is that it's home to some of the best chefs in Spain. Another is the fact that five of the best wine regions in Spain are found in Galicia. And, then there are the natural ingredients this bounteous land provides; Full-flavored fruits and vegetables, rich creams and cheeses, tender mountain-grass-fed meats and over two hundred varieties of fish, 54 kinds of shellfish.

Pilgrims have trekked to the majestic Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela for over a thousand years seeking paradise in the next life. Today, sophisticated travelers come to Galicia seeking it in this one, in one of their many natural health spas. Visit www.turgalicia.org

GALICIA

The Celtic Soul of Spain

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like if the Irish
had settled in Spain?

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You'll discover our glorious emerald green land. Miles of rugged coastline. Granite faced cliffs rising from the sea. 700 pristine beaches, plus rivers and streams teeming with fish.

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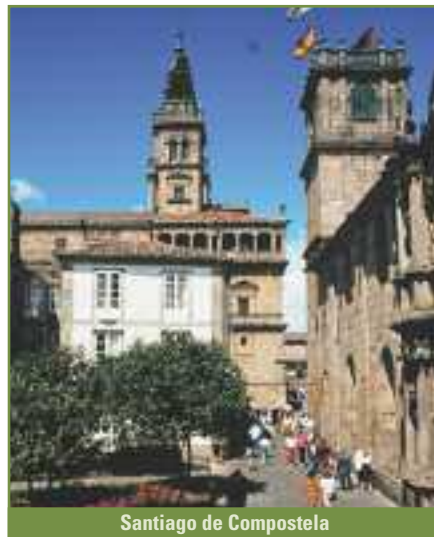
By Robert Levine

Having just returned from Spain, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that despite the weak dollar (a Euro cost \$1.60 when I was there; as of this writing, it's happily down to \$1.45), even the big cities – the hot tourist spots – are not over-the-top expensive. A great cup of coffee is never more than one-and-a-half Euros, as compared with say, three in France, even at a pricey hotel bar; dinner at a fine restaurant with wine can still come in at under \$40 per person. A similar meal in other top European cities would now cost about 30% more. Nonetheless, everyone likes a bargain on top of fair prices, and the poor dollar could still use a break.

Come autumn and winter, hotels all over Spain are offering top value – even the most chic places are within budget. And off-season in Spain means less heat and no crowds.

The **NH Hotel** chain has been sprouting properties everywhere. Many are offering two-night weekend getaways for 165 Euros or \$244 to 185 Euros or \$274 in Barcelona, Madrid, Cordoba, Marbella, Santiago de Compostela and a few other cities. The more elegant **NH Amistad**, also in Cordoba, and in the perfect location for visiting the Mosque, 14th Century Synagogue, Roman Bridge and Arab Wall, is 140 Euros or \$207 per night. The hotel's front desk will arrange for a taxi to take guests ten kilometers out of town (and wait for them) to the fabulous ruins of the Medina Azahara. Built in the 10th century by the powerful Caliph Abd ar-Rahman, it was sacked in 1010 and only rediscovered in 1910. It is only partially excavated and a fascinating visit to medieval times of the Arab dominance. Cost is 40 Euros or \$60 for the private car. And in Granada, the perfectly located, elegant **NH Victoria** is 125 Euros or \$185 for a double. Visit www.NH-hoteles.es

Spain's chain of paradors, now numbering close to 90 and covering the architectural gamut from starkly modern to 16th century monastery to 18th century palace has many fall-winter offers. A special Five-Night Card is available for 514 Euros or \$761, which covers a standard double (that's less than \$80.00/night per person); you and your client can choose the route



Santiago de Compostela

and the paradors. There are some restrictions, but it's a great deal. Also check into their "Young Persons' Getaway," which is offered to people between 20 and 30: A double including breakfast is 56 Euros or \$82 a night per person. Clients over 60 years of age are offered a 30% discount from the standard rate, including breakfast. Stay two nights or more in any parador and get 20% off regular rate of room, breakfast and dinner. **Call Marketing Ahead, 800-223-1356 or visit www.marketingahead.com; or Petrabax, 800-634-1188; or visit www.petrabax.com**

No one will ever accuse the **Hospes** group of being bargain-basements, but they are offering great packages in Spain that are in the affordable category for your up-market clients in the next few months. Each hotel has a spa and an excellent restaurant; furnishings are modern within an historic building. Clients will be dazzled by the scented hallways and the glass floor in the Cordoba property's dining room, with ancient Roman ruins beneath it.

"The Splendors of Al-Andalus" series offers complete vacations: One is for three nights in Seville, Cordoba and Granada (extra days can be added) and the other is for seven nights. Clients can combine the collection of hotels in the order of choice (including a minimum stay of two nights in Madrid for the seven-night package) and will be greeted with iced tea or cocktail and scented towel. Breakfast in bed or in their restaurant is included daily as are a full dinner for two one evening and a visit to a Flamenco show another

evening. In Seville a presentation of Iberian ham cutting is offered and passes to the major sights in Andalusia (the Real Alcazar in Seville; the Mosque in Cordoba, and the Alhambra in Granada – with a guide) are included. In Madrid, passes to the Prado, the Thyssen and the Reina Sofia are also thrown in. The price? The seven-night stay comes to \$267 per night per person; the three night is \$199 per night. **Call +34 902 254 255; www.hospes.es; or Design Hotels, 800-337-4685; or visit www.DesignHotels.com**

Agent Rates & Selling Spain Vacations

Travel agents looking to cross the pond and experience many "firsts" of Barcelona should make a point to stay at **Casanova by Rafael Hotels** where a special Travel Agent Rate of 80 Euros or about \$117 per night is being offered until Dec. 31, 2008. Along with being Barcelona's first hotel to incorporate solar panels into its design, the hip yet elegant hotel offers a Mexican, Catalan and Mediterranean fusion restaurant; an on-site choreographer, who changes the theme and décor several times a year; and the city's only indoor and outdoor spa. Casanova is surrounded by playful Gaudi architecture and a buzzing contemporary arts scene. Travel agents must provide appropriate IATA identification upon check-in. **Call 866-849-6396; or visit www.casanovaBCNhotel.com**

The **Travel Institute's Spain Specialist** course is your essential resource for planning a trip-of-a-lifetime on the Iberian Peninsula this fall (or anytime!) Spain comes alive in the fall with local celebrations, festivals, cooler temperatures, and some of the warmest people in all of Europe. Book with specific operators trip to Spain after earning your Spain Specialist designation, and they will reimburse your course fees. Learn more. Members save an additional 10%. Not a member? Join now and start saving! **Call 781-237-0280; or visit www.thetravelinstitute.com**

Call the Tourist Office of Spain at 800-OK-SPAIN, (NYC) 212-265-8822; or visit www.spain.info

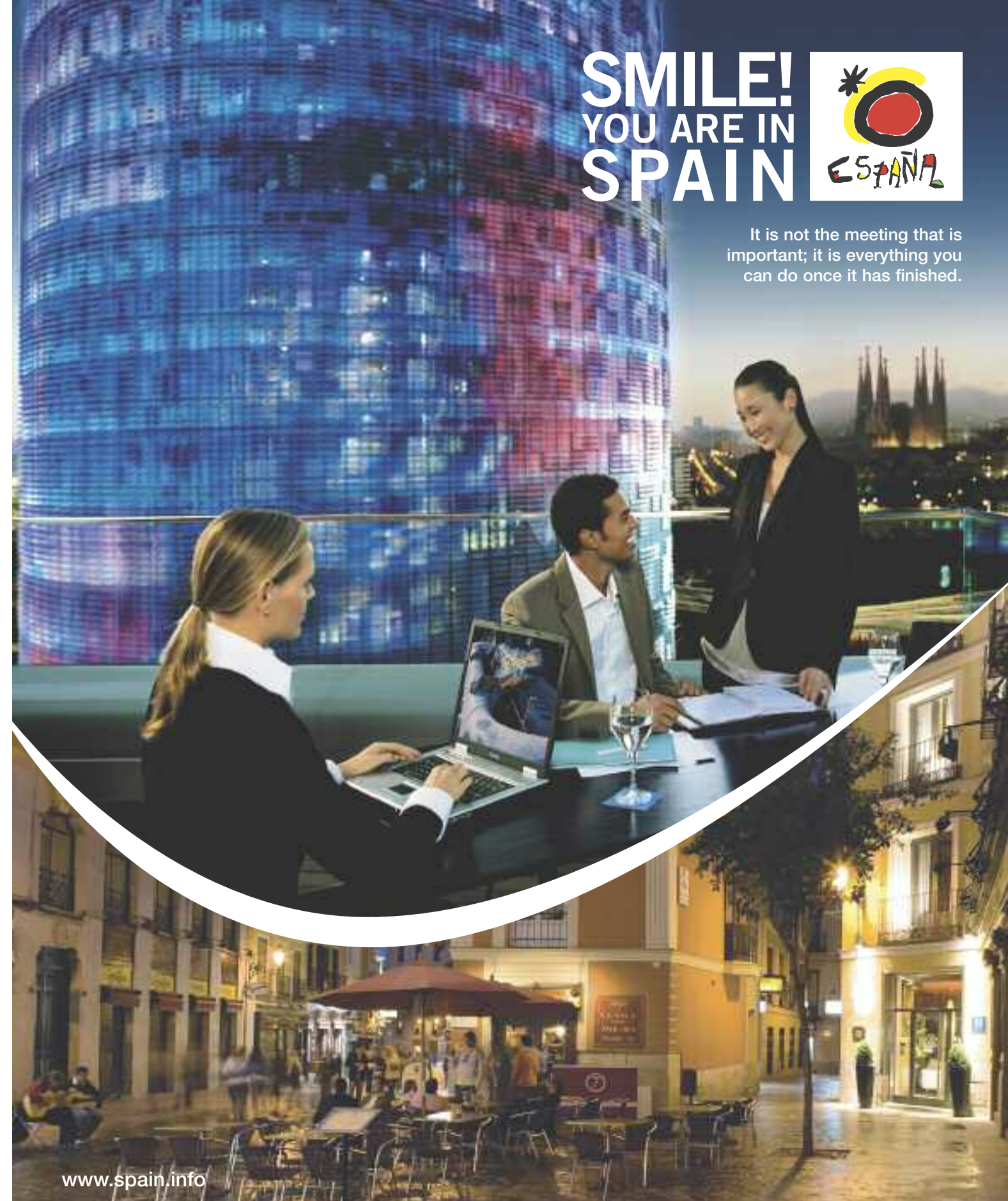
For consolidator fares and tour packages to Spain see page 76 of the Listings Section

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IN THE NEWS

Visit Italy's Winter City Series

Italy specialist, Visit Italy Tours is selling several price-conscious-priced packages that include roundtrip airfare from NYC, (lowest prices quoted are with NYC airfare), and offers other major gateways such as Chicago, Miami and Los Angeles. Airport taxes and fuel surcharges are extra. Packages also cover hotel accommodations plus the trio package of Rome, Florence and Venice, and includes train transportation between cities.

Trio of Marquis Cities: Rome, Florence, Venice—nine-day air-inclusive package that highlights the grandeur of Rome, the abundant artistic treasures of Florence and get romantic in Venice. Prices start at \$861 per person double.

Venice: A five-day air-inclusive package to La Serenissima, Venice a fairytale city so bewitching, so intimate, so truly unique. Prices start at \$ 457 per person double.

Florence: A six-day, air-inclusive package to Florence, Renaissance City and home of Da Vinci, Dante, Michelangelo and the great Medici's, is a treasure trove of artistic wonders. Prices start at \$443 per person double.

Rome: A five-day air-inclusive package to the Eternal City of Rome — exhilarating to both the first-time visitors and seasoned travelers. Prices start at \$ 485 per person double.

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**Turkish Classic
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Ancient Turkey
A Totally Escorted Tour
Package 228**

11 Days From **\$1999***

RT Trans-Atlantic Air from JFK. 8 Nights stay at center located 4* hotels (listed in itinerary). 1 Night stay at bed train for the route Istanbul/Ankara. Daily buffet breakfast at hotels, set menu meals per itinerary (22 total). Ground transportation with A/C luxury coach. English speaking, licensed tour guide. upgrade to all 5* hotels is available at a surcharge of \$219 per person. Fuel Surcharge. Tours and entrance fees. Charges and Service tax.



TURKEY NTO

Fully-Escorted Turkish FIT from FIT

Foreign Independent Tours' latest full-escorted, air-inclusive program to Turkey — the 11-day Exploration of Magical, Mystical, Ancient Turkey starts at \$1,999 per person double. Right from the start, this program begins with a full day tour of Istanbul followed by a sleeper train ride to Ankara.

Also featured are two full days in Cappadocia with a visit to the Kaymakli Underground City, and touring through Imagination Valley where animal-like natural formations like camels and fair chimneys are abundant. Truly, the Cappadocia landscape in itself is worth the trip. Passengers will drive through 13th century towns to see the Sultanhan Caravanserai on the way to Konya. There will of course be a visit to the Mausoleum of Mevlana, the worldwide famous mystic also known as Rumi. Mevlana was a philosopher and mystic of Islam. His doctrine advocates unlimited tolerance, positive reasoning, goodness, charity and awareness through love.

Among the highlights are: transatlantic airfare from New York's JFK including fuel surcharges, eight nights' stay at centrally located four-star hotels (listed in itinerary) with optional upgrades to all five-star hotels which is available at a surcharge of \$299 per person, one night's stay in a sleeper train for the route Istanbul/Ankara, daily breakfast buffet at hotels, set menu meals per itinerary (22 total), all ground transportation with a/c luxury coach, service of an English speaking, licensed tour guide, all sightseeing tours and entrance fees, and charges and service tax.

Call 800-248-3487 Option 3, mention Tour #228; www.fittours.com

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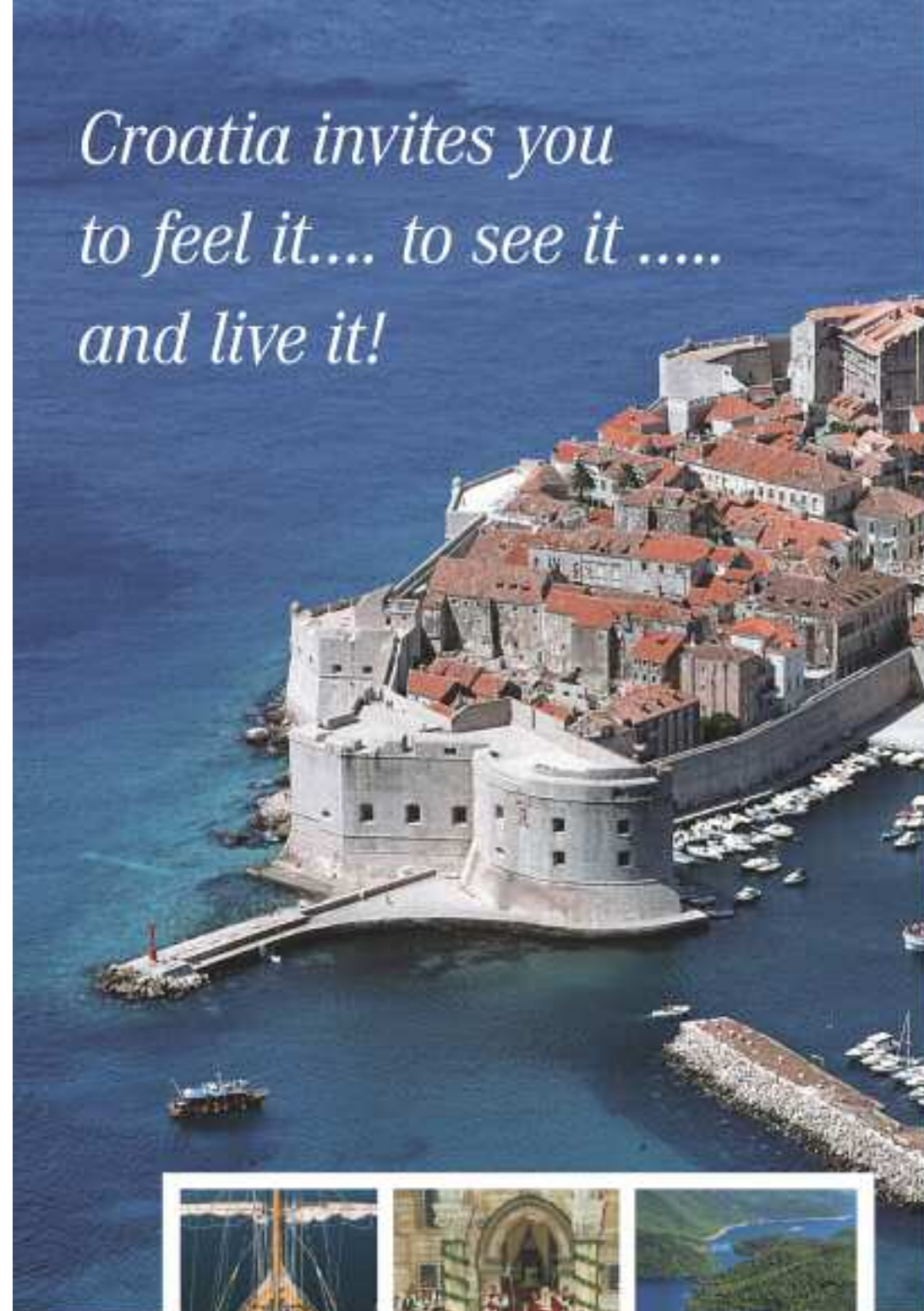
Alitalia Vacations represents a partnership between Gate 1 Travel and Alitalia Airlines leveraging airfares with a new website already live at www.alitaliavacations.com and a four-color brochure hot off the presses. Alitalia Vacations takes bookings for passengers who want to travel to Italy, Greece, Turkey, Spain, Croatia and Slovenia, Israel, Egypt, and Danube River Cruises.

With Alitalia's "Vacation Builder," travel agents can design custom vacations using any combination of destinations and accommodations and choose from a wide variety of transportation options from city to city — including air, rail, car, or bus — as well as optional sightseeing, excursions, and tours.

Destinations include Italian favorites of Rome, Venice, and Florence as well as combination tours that package Rome with Amsterdam, Vienna, Prague, Budapest, London, Cairo, Barcelona, Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv. Paris Alitalia Vacations also offers a series of escorted tour packages priced from \$1,749 per person, air and land, for eight days to Italy and beyond.

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BEST BUYS

\$375 ITALY The jewel of Vietri Sul Mar, **Hotel Raito**, invites guests to bask in the sun along the spectacular Amalfi coastline with its cost savings offer, featuring rates starting at about \$375 per night. Valid through September 27, this special offers provides an approximate cost savings of up to 20 percent off the luxury hotel's standard rates while inviting guest to experience one of Italy's most sought after destinations. Among the inclusions: accommodations in Standard Double guestroom, one dinner, buffet breakfast, a 10 percent discount on spa treatments and entrance to the spa for free.

Visit www.ragostahotels.com; www.summithotels.com

\$510 NORWAY Scanam World Tours also offers two-day/one-night "Norway in a Nutshell Plus" for \$510 including a nonstop panorama of spectacular scenery of the famous, steep Flåm Railway, cruise on the Sognefjord, Naeroyfjord, and the Stalheimskleiven hairpin road along the Stalheim canyon. Hotel choices include the **Fretheim**

Hotel in Flåm, the Viking style **Fjordtel** on the banks of the Naeroyfjord and the historic **Fleischer's Hotel** in Voss. Itineraries can begin or end in Oslo. Call **800-545-2204** or visit www.scanamtours.com

\$199 FRANCE Rail Europe launches a revolutionary way to travel with Anywhere Anytime France. Available exclusively through Rail Europe, this innovation is the first pre-paid electronic ticketing system for European train travel. Travelers simply create an Anywhere Anytime France account online on www.raileurope.com to purchase prepaid train trips at a flat fee of \$199 for the first trip, with all subsequent train trips costing just \$50. Anywhere Anytime France trips include 1st class rail accommodations for the lowest possible price and with no hidden costs. When travelers are ready to begin their train journey(s), they log onto their account to let Rail Europe know their travel dates and receive seat confirmations for their pre-purchased train trips. Travelers can then

retrieve and print their ticket(s) at any ticket office or self-service kiosk located in the train stations in France. Call **888-382-7245**; www.raileurope.com

\$4995 SPAIN Adventure Life Voyages has announced a Golf Cruise to Southern Spain & Morocco Dec 9, 2008. Play on continental Europe's pre-eminent courses, set amid green foothills and picturesque Andalusian villages, including Valderrama, which in 1997 became the only club outside of the United States and Great Britain to have hosted golf's pinnacle event, the Ryder Cup. In dreamlike Morocco, leave the crowds behind and be one of the few to experience such pristine courses as the El Jadida Royal Golf Course, whose flowering dunes are back dropped by the Atlas Mountains. While sailing the blue waters between ports, our onboard golf host will provide instruction and personal feedback on your game. Should you want to take a break from golf, each day offers an alternative touring option—discover the sublime Alhambra and explore fabled Marrakech, among other sites. Beginning cost \$4,995. Call **800-344-6118**; www.alvoyages.com

\$645 GERMANY Historic Highlights of Germany, a consortium of 14 historic German cities, has announced a five-day package that travels from the deep woodlands and rustic villages of the Black Forest in southwestern Germany to the waters of the Danube as it cuts across Bavaria. Along the way, travelers experience some of Germany's most ancient and historic cities rich with medieval abbeys and cathedrals, baroque castles and histories dating back 2,000 years to the Roman Empire. The package includes visits to Mainz, Heidelberg, Freiburg, Augsburg and Regensburg, four nights' hotel accommodations, breakfast daily, airport transfers, and a choice of an Avis rental car \$645 or first-class rail tickets for about \$800. In several cities, visitors also receive "welcome cards" for free or discounted access to public transportation and attractions.

Visit Historic Highlights of Germany, www.historicgermany.com or call **800-949-6362**; www.toeurope.eu

Tracing the Footsteps of Princes and Saints in the Czech Republic



CZECH REPUBLIC VITO

Religious and pilgrimage sights represent a great part of the Czech Republic's architectural heritage. Although most of the churches, monasteries, chapels and pilgrimage sights are Roman-Catholic, there also are many Jewish and Christian sights worth adding to a special interest itinerary.

Religious architecture has gone through more than thousand years' development. Christianity arrived in Bohemia during the 9th century with the coming of Cyril and Methodius to the Great Moravia, and afterwards, its presence became stronger once the Prince Bořivoj and his wife Ludmila adopted Christianity. At that time the sovereigns had the first churches built. Gradually, the first religious orders came to Moravia and Bohemia, where they developed the first monasteries and religious communities principally as cultural and educational centers.

A Pantheon of Saints

However, it was the Hussitism also known as the Hussite movement that interrupted the Catholic cult of worshiping the saints. It took nearly 200 years before this practice returned to what is now the Czech Republic as the Catholic Church reasserted itself in the 18th century. By then, the entire country primarily practiced Catholicism.

The Marian cult grew rapidly together with the construction of big public cathedrals, a variety of thanksgiving columns and pilgrimage places (more than 300 have been preserved) within the territory of Bohemia and Moravia. The most worshipped saint was Jan Nepomucký (St. John of Nepomuk), whose sculpture graces nearly every bridge or the village square.

Due to numerous wars and fires, which had been destroying the countryside over the centuries, compounded by the reign of Joseph II in the late 18th century, who prohibited pilgrimages, many churches, monasteries and other places of religious worship were abolished.

During the 20th century, under Communism many of the sights were neglected and some of them completely were completely ruined.

Today, many sights have been restored to their original splendor; and the tradition of Marian pilgrimages has been revived. The most significant and historically most famous religious monuments have been included on the UNESCO list of the cultural and natural heritage. Among those sights are: Kutná Hora, the historic center of Prague, the gardens of Kroměříž, and Zelená Hora. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en>)

Kutná Hora is comprised of several masterpieces of a well-preserved medieval urban fabric with some particularly fine private dwellings. The Church of St Barbara, a jewel of the late Gothic period, and the Cathedral of Our Lady at Sedlec, which was restored in line with the Baroque taste of the early 18th century, were to influence the architecture of central Europe.

The Gardens and Castle at Kroměříž, which stands across

the River Morava, at the foot of the Chřibý mountain range which dominates the central part of Moravia, are an exceptionally complete and well preserved example of a European Baroque princely residence and its gardens. Zelená Hora was constructed at the beginning of the 18th century on a

star-shaped plan, it is the most unusual work by the great architect Jan Blázeň Santini, whose highly original style falls between neo-Gothic and Baroque.

Jewish Heritage Sites

Jews first settled in Bohemia and Moravia in the 9th century and observed their traditions in many parts of the country. More than 1,000 years of their presence left remarkable traces both in culture and architecture. Some of the ghettos, synagogues, cemeteries, books and art objects have been preserved, yet many sights disappeared without any trace. The Crusades destroyed many Jewish sights during the 11th and the 12th centuries. They were razed after the pogroms or after expelling the Jews from the country. The segregation of Jews was abolished in the mid-19th century, and the original Jewish quarters were demolished or rebuilt and modernized.

A Jewish quarter dating from the medieval period has been preserved in Třebíč, where there are two synagogues and a cemetery. In the 20th century the Nazis destroyed most Jewish sights and afterwards the ignorance of the Communists was the last blow.

The first synagogues in what is now the Czech Republic were most likely simple wooden buildings. A reproduction of one of them is preserved in Vlachovo Březí. Since the Middle Ages, stone buildings replaced wooden ones. The oldest is the Old-New Synagogue in Prague from the mid-13th century.

A Baroque synagogue has been preserved in Boskovice. In the Czech Republic are the Classic and Empire-style sights, the most common are the ones in the style of historicism, such as the Maisel Synagogue in Prague.

Visit www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/amaisel.htm

Art Nouveau style or Moorish style are also seen in the architecture of synagogues. In Milevsko there is a synagogue built in the Cubist style. The most recent synagogue was built in 1937-38 and is situated in Kamenice nad Lipou.

Nowadays there are more than 200 preserved synagogues. Two in Prague and one in Brno continue to offer religious services for their communities.

In 1906, the Jewish Museum in Prague first opened; today, it is among the most visited in Europe. Visit www.jewishmuseum.cz

The Ghetto Museum and Holocaust Memorial are well worth visiting. (www.pamatnik-terezin.cz). Terezín, near Litoměřice, is the site of a former concentration camp.

For more information, contact the Czech Tourism Office, **212-288-0830**; fax: **212-288-0971**; E-mail info-usa@czechtourism.com; www.czechtourism.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to the Czech Republic see page 69 of the Listings Section

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BELIZE

Where Jacques Cousteau Meets Indiana Jones

By Doug Cooke, CTC

JAX FAX recently returned from Belize, having attended the biennial tourism expo – BETEX. This event brings travel agents to the area, and provides multiple excursions to choose from, covering the wide array of tourism products that this country has to offer. During the five-day expeditions, agents visit 2-3 different regions experiencing what each has to offer and meeting with local tourism suppliers on several of the nights in a table top tradeshow forum. This year, over 125 travel agents and tour operator buyers met with about 75 travel suppliers at 22 marketplace sessions.

Belize offers diversity on a topographical, economic and cultural level. Bordered by Mexico to the north, Guatemala to the west and south and the Caribbean Sea to the east, this small country is making a big name for itself in tourism.

Belize City is the arrival point for tourists arriving by air.



© DEMIAN SOLANO PHOTOGRAPHY

From there it is no more than a five-hour drive to reach any point in the country and the most popular tourism areas can be reached within two to three hours.

Four major highways (this term is relative – actually paved two-lane roads) the Northern, Western, Southern and Hummingbird Highways lead from Belize City to other tourism areas of the country. Domestic air service is also offered from **Tropic Air** (www.tropicair.com) and **Maya Airways** (www.mayaairways.com) providing frequent, quick and reliable connections throughout the country.

Belize's coast feels more like a Caribbean destination than a Latin American one with its Garifuna and Creole populations. Conversely, the further you get into the interior of the country, Mayan culture becomes more prominent. Belizeans see their country as a true melting pot of cultures reflected in the Creole expression – “*alla we makeup Belize*.”

Caribbean Coastal Towns

On this trip JAX FAX visited both Ambergris Caye and Placencia. Ambergris Caye is an island located about a 15-minute plane ride northeast of Belize City. Ambergris Caye is the kicking off point for both scuba or snorkeling and fishing adventures, having the longest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere just one mile off its shores. The preferred mode of transportation here is golf cart, bike or water taxi. The once sand streets are now covered in paving stones yet the capital city of San Pedro retains its laid back charm. The northern portion of the island is experiencing a construction boom as a result of the recently opened bridge connecting the two halves of the island.

JAX FAX stayed at **Ramon's Village Resort** (www.ramons.com) located just a short walk from the airstrip and downtown San Pedro. Ramon's is a collection of thatched roof, multi unit cottages on the beach and several “gingerbread style” cottages across the street. Rates start at \$145 off-season with the highest rate being \$435 for the Presidential Suite during peak season.

Located just a couple miles south of San Pedro, **Victoria House** (www.victoria-house.com) is a collection of luxury suites and villas located right on the beach. Rates start at \$163 in low season for a “State room” and go up to \$1,675

per night for a five-bedroom villa during high season.

Placencia is located on a peninsula jutting into the Caribbean, about a 30-minute flight south of Belize City. Arriving by air is the preferred method since the road leading down the peninsula is unpaved and rough. However, the newly elected government has promised to pave the road in the near future. Placencia has a small, quiet downtown area with a marina and harbor known as a kicking off point and destination for yacht charters. Most of the hotels are located within a couple miles north of the downtown area along the coast.

JAX FAX stayed at the **Inn at Roberts Grove** (www.robertsgrove.com). From beautifully-appointed standard rooms with views of Belize's Caribbean Sea to ocean-view and oceanfront one, two and three-bedroom deluxe and Grand Villa Suites, with spacious interiors and huge terraces, each of the accommodations are just steps from the beach and provide all the comforts and amenities you would expect from a top Caribbean resort.

The Inn at Roberts Grove also has a dive center on site and owns a private island perfect for daytrips. Rates start at \$180 in low season for a standard beach view room and range up to \$440 for a two bedroom Grande Oceanfront suite during peak season.

JAX FAX enjoyed a wonderful dinner while in Placencia at Francis Ford Coppola's **Turtle Inn Resort** (www.blancaneaux.com). This upscale resort has a distinctive Balinese style and caters to an upscale clientele with room rates starting at \$210 for a garden view cottage and ranging up to \$650 for a two-bedroom Seafront Villa.

Bustling with Mayan Ruins

San Ignacio is a bustling town about a 2.5-hour drive southwest from Belize City and just a few miles from the Guatemala border. It is located in the Cayo region of the country that is known for its many Mayan ruins as well as adventure sports including: caving and cave tubing, rainforest hiking, whitewater rafting and kayaking, horseback riding and bird watching among others.

While there are many hotels located in the Cayo region, there is only one luxury resort in San Ignacio, the **San Ignacio Resort Hotel** (www.sanignaciobelize.com). This family owned and operated hotel features 25 rooms all with views of the lush tropical hillside. Bird lovers will especially enjoy sitting on the terrace for breakfast spotting toucans and other tropical birds. Off season rates start at just \$130 for a balcony room up to \$300 for a large master suite located on its own floor and featuring a private balcony with hot tub. A new spa has recently been opened here as well.

Other luxury hotel options in Cayo include: **Ka'ana** (www.kaanabelize.com) – a boutique resort featuring just 15 luxuriously appointed rooms, wine cellar and excellent restaurant, pool and spa. Rates start at \$250 low season up to \$450 in the high season. The **Lodge at Chaa Creek**



RON STERN



Two of Belize's exotic adventures: Swimming with Sharks and Rays off of Ambergris Caye at Hol Chan Marine Reserve and repelling into a cave at Caves Branch.

(www.chaacreek.com) is located on a 330-acre private nature preserve and was Belize's first jungle lodge. Today it consists of 24 cottages including two treetop Jacuzzi suites, two Garden suites, an Orchid villa, Honeymoon Loft suite, and Sky rooms. Rates start at \$260 per night for a Skyroom in off-season and range up to \$450 for a Treetop Jacuzzi suite.

The best selling points for Belize are its relatively small size that allows clients to experience both beach and jungle activities during the same vacation (in some cases during the same day), English is the primary language spoken here and the friendly service that Belizeans pride themselves on.

For more information, contact the Belize Tourism Board at www.travelbelize.org or the Belize Tourism Industry Association at www.btia.org.

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Latin America see page 62-65 of the Listings Section

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—TripAdvisor Member, August 3, 2008

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Email: reservations@chaacreek.com Call Belize (501) 824-2057
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Panama's Discovery Cruise

by Dannielle Hayes

Panama is hot, and not just weather-wise. Birdwatchers are flocking to its rainforest canopy. North American retirees are moving to its city hi-rises and beach communities. Eco-tourists are flying beyond Costa Rica to discover an exciting frontier, and investors are singing all the way to the bank. One of the best ways to experience this "panamania" is aboard **Panama Marine Adventures'** new MV Discovery (www.pmatours.net). Panama Marine Adventures began in 2001 and until December 2007, offered just day tours of the Panama Canal. With the purchase of the Australian built catamaran, the MV Discovery, the company is now able to offer the best of Panama adventures while traveling in luxurious style on the Journey Between the Seas.

Small, Sweet, Intimate

The Discovery is 108 feet long and the passenger list is limited to 24, ensuring privacy yet all the excitement of a true exploratory cruise. Cabins are spacious with eight queen and four twin arrangements, all individually climate-controlled, with plenty of storage, wonderful bathrooms and huge cabin length windows so guests can enjoy the scenery. A front deck on the cabin level has lounge chairs for sunbathing, reading or spotting pods of dolphins; the bottom deck is equipped with a special platform that lowers kayakers safely in and out of the water. For shore visits or bird watching, two zodiacs are skillfully handled by Hector and Alexander and two expert naturalist guides from Panama's leading tour operator, **Ancon Expeditions**, Richard Cahill and Iann Sanchez (www.anconexpeditions.com).

The Discovery's dining area, bar and lounge are on the upper deck with floor to ceiling windows giving passengers a panoramic view while they sip a cocktail made by Melissa or Laura or enjoying Chef Juan Francisco's amazing culinary repertoire. Dinners consist of two or three entrée choices, including a vegetarian option and choice of wines. Another sun deck, a BBQ and the bridge where our Captain Raphael Munoz held command, occupy the uppermost deck.

Inspirational Itinerary

The expedition's itinerary is inspired by a sailing trip taken a few years ago by the company's CEO, Jose de la Garcia. "I thought of the unique essence of this country that offers so many different and distant places, cultures and worlds as these, within reach of each other in just a few hours". And so we begin the journey by sailing the first night towards the Darien and awake the next morning in that different world, the home of the Embera people, one of Panama's six indigenous tribal groups. The Embira girls and women dressed in brightly-colored sarongs or simple loincloths for the boys and men, all with elaborate tattoos, lead us into their village where they perform traditional dances and music. The Embira are known for their beautiful baskets that are so tightly woven they can hold water and some of the finest are in museum and private collections. We return to the Discovery with our woven Embira treasures.

Day three found us snorkeling and swimming the Pacific

waters of the Pearl Islands that once supported a substantial fishery in the early 1900's and are considered one of the country's best scuba diving locations. In the afternoon we see the rusted hulk of a Civil War submarine built in 1865 and sunk off the coast of San Telmo Island.

We awake the next morning at the entrance to the Panama Canal and observe as our pilot guides the Discovery through two locks to Gatun Lake, 85 feet above sea level. We are tiny compared to the enormous container ships that barely scrape through the Gaillard Cut, the narrowest section of the Canal, bisecting the Continental Divide.

On day five, we join scientists from the Smithsonian's Tropical Research Center on Barrio Colorado Island to see exotic birds, monkeys, sloths, iguanas and crocodiles in and around Gatun Lake, then exit the Panama Canal in the evening to make our way to the mouth of the Chagres River. The river was used by the conquistadors to move their gold from Peru to Spain and is now the lifeline of the Panama Canal full of wildlife and tropical jungle. We explore Fort San Lorenzo built by the Spanish in the 16th century to defend their gold trail.

By day seven, we are in the Caribbean town of Portobelo, founded by Christopher Columbus in 1502 and the scene of many sea and land battles between the Spanish colonials and British pirates. Today it is a sleepy town, but comes alive as we celebrate our last night with drumming and dancing in the square.

Getting There

Though there are many airlines that fly from the USA to Panama City's **Tocumen International Airport**, Panama's own **Copa Airlines** (www.copaair.com) is one of the best. Boasting more than 60 years in Latin America, Copa serves 41 destinations in 21 countries in North, Central and South America as well as the Caribbean. The airline has one of the most modern fleets in the region with 26 Boeing "Next Generation" aircraft and 11 EMBRAER 190AR planes and it is the first airline in America with "blended winglets" for greater reliability and more efficient performance. Copa has a strategic alliance with **Continental Airlines** so **One Pass** frequent fliers have privileges on both airlines, access to Presidents Clubs and partner VIP lounges worldwide, and access to more than 500 destinations worldwide on Continental. Onboard video entertainment is in Spanish, English and Portuguese, with many complimentary in-flight services including headsets and meal service on all flights. Business Class passengers are served international cuisine, as well as a good selection of wines and liquors. All this, and Panama is only a five-hour direct flight from JFK. For more information about Panama, visit www.visitpanama.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Panama see page 65 of the Listings Section



CONDOR OUTFITTERS

BEST BUYS

\$299 ARGENTINA

The Buenos Aires World Tango Championships wrap up on September 1st, but guests can enjoy Totally Tango at **Hilton Buenos Aires** through December 2008. The package now includes: deluxe accommodations, buffet breakfast daily for two at Hilton Buenos Aires' El Faro Restaurant, a lesson for two at the Carlos Copello Tango Academy, two tickets to a dinner-show at Esquina Carlos Gardel (Carlos Gardel Corner), including transportation, a techno-tango CD, two tickets to Casa de Carlos Gardel Museum, access to the Hilton Health Club Fitness & Spa. Rates start at \$299 per night, and the package requires a three-night minimum stay that includes a Saturday stay. Call +5411-4891-0101; E-mail Reservations.BuenosAires@hilton.com

\$2049 PANAMA

Windstar Cruises operates a three-ship fleet of luxury yachts that explore hidden harbors and secluded coves of the world's most treasured destinations, from Costa Rica with its lush jungles, pristine beaches and abundant wildlife to the legendary Panama Canal.

Travelers on Windstar Cruises can choose from 13 seven-day sailings roundtrip from Puerto Caldera, Costa Rica aboard Wind Star December through March. On Nov. 29, Wind Star offers a 14-day sailing between Barbados and Puerto Caldera featuring a cruise through the Panama Canal.

Two new shore excursions are now available on Windstar's 14-day cruise through the Panama Canal. In Isla de Margarita, a new 4-Wheel Drive Highlights and Beach Tour is offered where guests board their 4-Wheel Drive vehicle at the pier and travel across the island's arid landscape to the mountains en route to the village of El Valle. Also included is a short hike through a cloud forest, a drive to the capital city of Las Asunción to see Bolívar Square and the cathedral and a stop at lovely beach. Cruise rates begin at \$2,049 per person double on the seven-day sailing; \$3,799 per person double on the 14-day sailing.

Visit www.windstarcruises.com

\$8795 ANTARCTICA

The **Great Canadian Travel Company's** 10-day Antarctic cruise, is one of a series of "Changing Climate" tour programs that rank among the firm's most successful. Each program is designed to bring ordinary folk into the world's Polar regions to witness for themselves the environmental impact of our changing climate. On this program you will learn from onboard study leaders and naturalists, and take Zodiac excursions for a personal portrait of the "White Continent." Departure dates still available are January 9 and 29 and February 8 and 18.

Prices per person are from \$8,795 (based on twin occupancy). Included are 10-night cruise aboard the 140-passenger, 4,200-ton ship, one night in Buenos Aires (with a cocktail reception and breakfast) and round-trip flight from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia.

Call 800-661-3830, www.greatcanadiantravel.com

IN THE NEWS

Retreat Launched at Chaa Creek, Belize

The **Lodge at Chaa Creek**, an eco-resort in the western highlands of Belize, presents a new Rainforest Wellness Retreat package that incorporates eco-adventure, jungle spa treatments, guided-naturalist experiences, organic food, and luxurious accommodations in a tranquil, rainforest atmosphere that promotes well being. This Rainforest Wellness Retreat is offered for 4 – 7 nights starting at \$1,294 per person. The package may be combined with a stay at one of the Lodge's island or coastal partners in Belize. Call 877-709-8708; E-mail reservations@chaacreek.com; www.chaacreek.com

CasaMagna Marriott's "GRACIAS" to Agents

Upon completing a \$10.7 million renovation slated for November 1, 2008, **CasaMagna Marriott** invites travel agents to enjoy the FAMTASTIC rate through Oct. 31, 2008. Prices start at \$89 per night and include: three-night stay and \$60 resort credit or four-night stay and \$80 resort credit. Reservations must be made before October 31, 2008. Rates available to agents presenting a Hotel Excellence certificate, and IATAN photo ID upon check-in; refer to code HSSA.

Call 800-228-9290; www.casamagnapuertovallarta.com

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CTM Tours
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Capturing Kids and Grown-Ups on St. Lucia

Rated as the top Caribbean family vacation destination by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, the island of St. Lucia has also won the Caribbean region's 2000 Ecotourism Award for its Heritage Tourism Program.

St. Lucia provides rest, relaxation and rejuvenation for adults; and outdoor fun for kids. Several hotels welcome families and offer special facilities such as kids clubs, special meals, and comforting sleeping arrangements – beds and cots in room or adjoining rooms. An endless array of soft adventures, short tours and excursions on St. Lucia, make it easy to plan to share inter-generational experiences.

St. Lucia's calendar is spiked with adult-only events, too. The Food & Rum Festival (Oct. 30-Nov. 2) is a gastronomic event that attracts some of the best chefs, rum connoisseurs, food critiques and gourmands from not only the Caribbean, but internationally. The Festival will be a combination of dinners featuring menus from our invited chefs, lectures on rum, chef demonstrations, rum tastings of over 40 rums from across the region and concerts held on Saturday and Sunday night. Visit www.foodandrumfestival.com.

Activities and Locales

Marigot Bay (right): A lovely, sequestered, natural harbor that once provided a hideout for pirate ships, Marigot Bay also served as the setting for the film *Dr. Doolittle*.



Maria Islands Nature Reserve: These tiny islands in southern to the east of Vieux Fort are home to rare wildlife and birds. Several species exist nowhere else in the world.

Pigeon Island Museum and Interpretive Centre: Housed in the former British officers' mess building, which has been restored to its 1808 plans. A modern "hands-on" display brings Pigeon Island's fascinating history to life.

Whales & Turtles: St. Lucia is recognized as one of the leading whale-watching sites in the area. More than 20 species are spotted all year, including humpbacks, pilot whales, sperm whales and spinning and spotted dolphins.

Turtles are a fascinating thrill for nature-lovers and their abundance on St. Lucia is due to the protection provided by local environmental activists, who have ensured there is a permanent suspension on turtle hunting.

A Few Deals in the Offing

Windjammer continues to offer up to 30% in resort credit (Sun Dollars) to guests based on the land portion of their



stay at **Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort**. The percent is based on the season. An additional incentive is that the resort offers 15% commissions to agents.

Windjammer Landing is converting its ocean view rooms to luxurious Anthurium Lily Junior Suites and will be completed by December, 2008. The new suites will have deluxe touches like 27" plasma TVs, romantic rain showers, as well as feature vessel sinks that are locally designed by a St. Lucian artist and whose

design will be replicated in the shower walls. Each suite will have its own scene.

The suites rates will start at a nightly rate of \$450 (based on double occupancy, EP, plus tax and service charge) from Dec. 21, 2008 to Jan. 2, 2009, and then start at \$350 effective Jan. 3 through April 18, 2009.

While the suites sound very grown-up, one recent nine year old guest, Samantha Strelzer, rated the kids and teens programming as A++ there. She confided that when it came to fabulous excursion opportunities, she hated to leave the property and her parents sent her meals to the kids club with evening programs every night – from disco parties, PJ & Cookie parties, pizza parties. Her parents say, "The real sell here is the ladies who run it are so loving!" Call **800-345-0356; 800-958-7376; www.windjammer-landing.com**

The literature promises clients will find beauty, pleasure, retreat and romance at **Discovery at Marigot Bay**, a contemporary eco-friendly hotel overlooking what novelist James A. Michener described as "the most beautiful bay in the Caribbean." Through Nov. 2, a highly desired bay-view room costs \$378, including taxes and breakfast. Call **758-458-5300** or visit www.discoverystlucia.com

Sandals Regency La Toc Golf Resort and Spa in St. Lucia debuted four lavish new "Millionaire Suites at Sunset Bluff," transporting guests to new levels of extravagance. Situated above the resort's highest point, ensuring an unhindered, full 180-degree view of the Caribbean Sea. Call **800-SANDALS; www.sandals.com**

New Developments

The Tides, an elite brand with resorts in the world's most desirable locations, announces plans to reposition The Jalousie Plantation in St. Lucia. Kor Hotel Group, operator of The Tides brand, has entered into an agreement with property owner Roger Myers to manage, rebrand and reopen the resort as The Tides Sugar Beach in 2010.

"We are very excited to embark on this project in St. Lucia, which will apply our unique blend of high design and intuitive service to the exceptional work already achieved

there," said Kor Hotel Group President, Nicholas Clayton.

Located in the "Valley of the Pitons," a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the future Tides will have a spectacular setting, with 192 acres of rainforest and white-sand beaches. Guests at The Tides will be enveloped in views of the two majestic pitons (mountain-like formations) and the Caribbean Sea beyond. Upon opening, the resort will offer 150 villas and guestrooms with private pools, four restaurants, and a world-class spa. Visit www.thetidesresorts.com

Getting There

Flying time from Miami is 3.5 hours, four hours from New York and five hours from Toronto. The Airport departure tax is \$26 for all passengers over 12 years is applied to ticket prices at the time of purchase.

There are two airports on the island: Hewanorra International Airport at Vieux Fort (UVF) is 40 miles south of Castries and George F. L. Charles Airport (SLU) is on the outskirts Castries.

American Airlines' suspended thrice weekly service between New York JFK and UVF as of Sept 4th but will recommence on Thursday, Nov. 20 with its Thursday, Sunday and Monday flights. American's Airlines nonstop daily service from Miami..

Since last month, **American Eagle's** service between San Juan, Puerto Rico and George Charles Airport, Castries (SLU) has been reduced from three flights per day to one flight per day. As of November 24th the flights will operate on a daily basis for the foreseeable future.

Delta Air Lines: Flies between Atlanta and St. Lucia using a 150-seat B737-800 during the week and a 188 seat B757 at weekends. As of September 7th the ATL-UVF service was reduced to two flights a week (Sunday, Monday). As of Saturday November 15th it goes to three (3) flights a week with the reintroduction of Saturday service. On December 20th it goes daily until the first week of January when it reverts to five flights a week (no Wednesday or Thursday flights). As of February 9th it goes to six flights a week and on February 16th it goes back to daily service.

US Airways: currently flies once per week, on Saturdays, between Charlotte, North Carolina and St. Lucia using a 120 seat Airbus. The Charlotte flight is suspended as of Saturday August 30th and recommences service on Saturday November 8th. The Philadelphia nonstop flight is currently suspended and will recommence Sat., Dec. 20.

LIAT currently flies into St. Lucia from Barbados, Port of Spain, Antigua, Dominica, St. Vincent, and Martinique. This schedule will be maintained for the foreseeable future.

Airport Transfers: Taxis are readily available from the Hewanorra airport to Castries and the north of the island and should cost in the region of (EC \$120 up to 4 persons). Public transport is an alternative, will take twice as long to get there than by taxi.

For more information, contact the **St. Lucia Tourist Board, www.stlucia.org**

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to St. Lucia see page 61 of the Listings Section

Act on Snowbird Sales Now

While your clients may not fit the strict definition of a "snowbird," Canadians and people from the Northeast or Midwestern United States who spend a large portion of winter in warmer locales such the Caribbean, they may harbor a similar impulse to get away as the darker days of winter arrive. Used loosely, we are all snowbirds of a sort, looking for that warm and sunny getaway from pre or post holiday stress. This year, many of the top hotel systems and individual properties are offering major incentives to agents to book clients into very choice spots in the Carib. Beware that some offers must be acted upon almost as soon as you read this, and bear booking deadlines of Oct. 23 or Nov. 1; some have restrictions, minimum stay requirements and blackout dates; while others offer free nights. And do take note of special Promo Codes that must be quoted at the time of booking so clients may be eligible for top savings.

Bolongo Bay Beach Resort St. Thomas is offering a pre-Christmas Holiday Package and a 2009 Early Bird Special featuring a 10% savings off all European Plan (EP), reservations made by Nov. 1, 2008 for travel Jan. 1 – Dec. 22, 2009.

The Holiday Shopping Special features a savings of 30% off the resort's European Plan (EP) is available on all bookings made by Nov. 1, 2008 for travel Dec. 1 – Dec. 15, 2008. The Holiday

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Shopping Special must be booked directly through the resort's on-island reservations department. Nightly rates for the Early Bird Special for Bolongo's EP option reflect the 10% savings: \$297 per room, valid Jan. 1 - April 30, 2009; \$239 per room, valid May 1 - Aug. 31, 2009; \$218 per room, valid Sept. 1 - Oct. 31, 2009; and \$239 per room, valid Nov. 1 - Dec. 22, 2009. Rates per room, per night, based on double occupancy and do not include 15% tax and service charges and \$5 per day energy surcharges. Additional people sharing a room are \$25 per person (maximum total of people per room is four). **Call 800-524-4746**; E-mail: reservations@bolongobay.com; visit www.bolongobay.com

Couples at **Bucuti** in Aruba can sip fruity drinks along the white sand of Eagle Beach. Lovers who want romance without bringing it from home, can custom order their own romance package and the attentive staff at Bucuti will stop at no end to deliver the magical vacation. A five-night stay at Bucuti starts at \$1,459 per couple. If planning ahead for your clients, do take a close look at Bucuti's One Happy Honeymoon packages that are all-inclusive five to seven-night stays starting at \$1,917 for seven nights in a Superior Garden View room through Dec. 22, 2008; add about \$40 for Optional Dine Around plan. **Call 888-4-BUCU-TI**; www.bucuti.com

San Juan's Caribe Hilton is offering fall travelers extra value this season, with a resort credit of \$50 or more.

From now through Dec. 22, 2008, resort guests who stay two or three nights will enjoy a \$50 resort credit. Guests staying four nights or more will receive a \$75 resort credit. The credit may be applied toward food & beverage at any of the resort's nine dining outlets or a treatment at Olas Spa. Rates at the Caribe Hilton start at \$139 per night based on single occupancy and \$159 per night based on double occupancy. **Call 877-GO-HILTON** and request booking code P1 for the \$50 two or three night resort credit special and P2 for the \$75 four or more night resort credit special; www.hiltoncaribbean.com/sanjuan

Elite Island Resorts' plan is to give away the seventh night free as part of its "January White Sale" promotion, which is available January 3 - 31, 2009, at five Caribbean luxury properties when booked by October 31, 2008.

Known for its green-certified, casually elegant Caribbean resorts, stunning locations and caring, personal service, Elite Island Resorts' nightly double occupancy room rates start at \$580 all inclusive at The Verandah Resort & Spa; \$625 at St. James's Club & Villas; \$965 at Galley Bay Resort & Spa; \$855 at Palm Island The Grenadines; or \$346 Modified American Plan only at Long Bay Villa Beach Resort. The all-inclusive rates feature all meals, top-shelf liquor, non-motorized water sports, entertainment, tax and service charges. European Plan rates are available too and apply to this promotion. **Call 800-345-0356** or visit www.eliteislandresorts.com

St. Martin-The Grand Case Beach Club is offering a Fall "Honeymoon Magic" package ranging from three to seven nights from Sept. 1-Dec. 20. Rates are 40-50% less than in the winter season. Included are AC accommodations with balcony or terrace; breakfast daily; tennis court; Grand Case beach bag; welcome cocktail; bottle of wine; casino voucher; island floral bouquet on arrival; one day car rental (plus gas and insurance); picnic basket for two; non-motorized water sports equipment.

The three-night package through October 31 for garden-



ST. MARTIN INFO

view accommodations is \$500 per couple for a studio and \$545 for a one bedroom. For oceanfront, \$545 for a studio; \$590 for a studio with loft; and \$635 for a one bedroom. From Nov. 1 - Dec. 20, three night gardenview is \$620; and one bedroom \$775. Oceanfront studio is \$755; studio with loft, \$800 and one bedroom \$860. The resort has a wide range of facilities for its guests. These include the Sunset Café, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily plus Happy Hour; To book on-line visit www.grandcasebeachclub.com or email info@gcbc.com; call 800-344-3016.

Half Moon, Rose Hall, Jamaica is offering The Ultimate In Luxury from Dec. 15, 2008 - April 15, 2009, which includes accommodations, five-star dining, breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, premium drinks at hotel bars and mini bars, room service, ultimate golf green feed, horseback riding, glass-bottom boating, sailing, snorkeling, windsurfing, kayaking, paddle boats, lilos, unlimited use of tennis courts and fitness centre, bicycles, welcome gift and champagne in room, and roundtrip airport transfers. Three-night minimum is required at rates ranging from \$780 per night in a Superior Room double and to \$2,440/night in a two-bedroom Royal Suite double occupancy. Rates are subject to 8.25% government tax and 10% service charge. **Call 800-626-0592**; E-mail reservations@halfmoon.com; www.halfmoon.com

Holiday Inn Resorts Aruba & Jamaica has published rates for 2009 that have been reduced by 40%. Travelers to Jamaica can enjoy all-inclusive rates starting at \$113 per person, per night based on double occupancy. Aruba all-inclusive rates start at \$163 per person, per night. Savings are available on bookings made now for travel throughout next year as follows: **Holiday Inn Resort Montego Bay**, for travel from Jan. 4, 2009 to Dec. 22, 2009, minimum one-night stay in any room category but suites; and at the **Holiday Inn Resort Aruba** for travel from Jan. 4, 2009 to Dec. 17, 2009, with two-night minimum in any room category but suites and the Lanai rooms. Group bookings are ineligible. **Call 800-HOLIDAY**, mention **Promo 140**; www.caribbeanhi.com

The 76-room **Mango Bay in Barbados**, is a beachfront, boutique-style property that offers spacious accommodations, a centrally-located swimming pool, dining and all-inclusive activities.

Off-season prices—per room, per night for double occupancy—now through Dec. 14, 2008 start at \$385 in Standard rooms; \$400 in a Standard One-Bedroom Apartment; \$415 in Superior accommodations; \$460 in a Deluxe room; and \$525 in an Oceanfront room; the Penthouse Suite starts at \$1,500. The property is within walking distance of many shops in Holetown, 25 minutes from Bridgetown and 40 minutes from Grantley Adams International Airport. **Call 246-432-1384**; E-mail: reservations@mangobaybarbados.com

Marriott and Renaissance Caribbean & Mexico Resorts offer rates as low as \$127 per night, through December 16, 2008. The Sand Dollars Package includes one free night and a \$100 food and beverage credit. Nine beachfront resorts in seven of the top tropical destinations, Aruba, Curacao, St. Kitts, St. Thomas, Cancun and Puerto Vallarta, offer this package: **Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino**, \$259 - \$419; **CasaMagna**

Marriott Cancun Resort, \$135 - \$247; **CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort**, \$179 - \$299; **Curacao Marriott Beach Resort & Emerald Casino**, \$189 - \$299; **Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort** (St. Thomas), \$179 - \$424; **JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa**, \$305 - \$359; **Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino**, \$223 - \$353; **St. Kitts Marriott Resort & The Royal Beach Casino**, \$127 - \$299; and the **Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort**, \$159 - \$376.

Call 888-727-2347, ask for Code **S29**; or visit www.ParadiseByMarriott.com

Nikki Beach Resort in the Turks & Caicos Islands is inviting island hoppers to enjoy this Caribbean sanctuary with a sexy, playful edge at a special "Endless Getaway" rate. Guests of Nikki Beach's first-ever luxury resort who book a deluxe king oceanfront room at \$250 per room, per night through October 31, 2008 will receive an automatic upgrade to a one-bedroom oceanfront suite on travel through December 14, 2008. Guests will enjoy VIP airport limo transfers, a personal assistant, the Nikki Beach Resort signature turndown amenities daily and a glorious oceanfront adult playground with live entertainment and DJ throughout the day and into the night. Visit www.nikkibeachhotels.com, enter promotional code **GETAWAY**.

Due to popular demand, guests traveling to any of the 12 **Sandals Resorts in the Caribbean** now have until October 23, 2008 to book a minimum three-night stay to receive an air credit of up to \$550 per person. Valid for travel through Dec. 20, 2009, the promotion also features up to 35 percent off regular rack rates and one night free for guests who book a six-night stay or longer. Book a seven-night stay in select top-category suites so clients can receive up to two nights free, in addition to up to 30 percent off rack rates and the air credit; book stays between three and five nights and clients are still eligible to receive up to 30 percent off rack rates, plus the air credit.

Sandals is also offering couples a chance to "test drive" their honeymoon during a one-day jaunt to Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort & Private Island in Montego Bay, Jamaica for \$149 per person with air. With non-stop flights departing in the morning, returning same day in the late afternoon, the "test drive" offer is available out of New York (JFK), Philadelphia (PHL), Baltimore (BWI), Atlanta (ATL) and Chicago (ORD) on Jan. 14, 2009 and Jan. 28, 2009. **Call 800-SANDALS**; www.sandals.com

Travel to one of **SuperClubs'** five Jamaican resorts for one low, Super-Inclusive price and enjoy unlimited land and water sports, meals, snacks and premium cocktails - even tips are covered. Guests who book by October 31 will enjoy the season's lowest rates - from \$138 per person, per night - on travel through December 20. Double-occupancy rates for the all-suite Grand Lido Negril Resort & Spa start at \$188 per person, per night (with blackout dates Dec. 4-7), while rates at the Jamaican village-style Grand Lido Braco Resort & Spa start at \$175 per person, per night (with blackout dates Nov. 27 - Dec. 2).

Travelers who don't need all the amenities of an all-inclusive getaway can choose the budget-friendly **ROOMS Negril**, the new 57-room Continental Plan (CP) hotel, which opened its doors on July 31. In celebration of its grand opening, guests who book their three-night minimum vacations by October 31 will save up to \$50 per night. **ROOMS'** nightly rates start at \$100 per room, and include continental breakfast. **Call 800-467-8737**; www.superclubs.com



MEXICO INFO

Book USVI Winter Escapes by Oct 31

Travelers looking to warm up their winter travel plans find hot savings in the U.S. Virgin Islands. When booked by October 31, 2008 for travel between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2009, the Department of Tourism's Winter Escape promotion features a complimentary 5th night based on a five-night minimum stay at participating hotels, plus \$300 in travelers checks, and a coupon book with savings on activities and attractions.

Participating hotels include: **The Palms at Pelican Cove**, **Chenay Bay Beach Resort**, **Carambola Beach Resort & Spa**, **Divi Carina Bay Resort**, **Hibiscus Beach Resort**, **Sand Castle on the Beach**, **The Buccaneer**, **Best Western Holger Danske**, **Club St. Croix** (Antilles Resorts), **Colony Cove** (Antilles Resorts), **King Christian Hotel** and **Hotel Caravelle on St. Croix**; **The Ritz-Carlton**, **St. Thomas**, **Best Western Caribbean Beach**, **Best Western Emerald Beach**, **Bolongo Bay Beach Resort**, **Holiday Inn Windward Passage**, **Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort**, **Sapphire Beach Resort** (Antilles Resorts), **Point Pleasant** (Antilles Resorts), **Sapphire Village** (Antilles Resorts) and the **Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa on St. Thomas**; and the **Estate Concordia Campground** on St. John.

The Winter Escape applies to new bookings only. Reservations can be made through tour operators, including American Airlines Vacations, American Express Vacations, Book It.Com, Cheap Caribbean, Delta Vacations, Expedia/Hotels.com, Funjet Vacations, Liberty Travel, Island Resort Tours, Orbitz, Pleasant Holidays, Spirit Vacations, TNT Vacations, Travelocity, United Vacations, and US Airways Vacations.

For more information about the U.S.V.I., visit usvitourism.vi

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BEST BUYS

\$1098 MARTINIQUE Martinique's 138-room **Sofitel Bakoua** is serving up new four-day/three-night Gourmet Gastronomy packages for fall 2008 travel. Travelers can enjoy an assortment of gourmet meals, fine wine, oceanfront accommodations and more for one price. Travel agents earn 12 percent commission. Packages include: accommodation for two in an oceanfront room, buffet breakfast daily, one lobster dinner at the Sofitel Bakoua's "Chateaubriand Restaurant" and two gourmet dinners with drinks included. The Gourmet Gastronomy packages are priced at \$1,098 per person; travel must be completed by October 30, 2008. E-mail Marion Riffelmacher, Rooms Division Manager at **H0968-DM@accor.com**. For information of Martinique call 212-838-6887; E-mail info@martinique.org; www.martinique.org

\$303 JAMAICA The inaugural WATA Rose Hall Triathlon & Wellness Festival will be held October 23-26, 2008 at Rose Hall, Jamaica's "Elegant Corridor" on the north coast near Montego Bay. Locals and visitors alike will compete alongside Triathletes of the Year, Australian Greg Bennett and his American wife, Laura Bennett (4th place in 2008 Beijing Olympics), US Olympic team member Julie Ertel Swail and top Ironman competitor Jordan Rapp.

Island Resorts & Tours is offering package deals at The Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall, Iberostar Rose Hall and the Rose Hall Resort & Spa, a Hilton resort. Packages include roundtrip airfare from the originating city, three nights accommodations, roundtrip airport/hotel transfers, and all hotel taxes and service charges. All rates are for one adult, based on double occupancy. The Ritz Carlton Rose Hall package rate begins at \$401 (EP), for accommodations in a Gardenvue room; the Iberostar package starts at \$643, and includes all meals, drinks and select activities; the Rose Hall Resort & Spa package starts at \$303 (EP) and \$605 for the all-inclusive option. Visit www.islandresorttours.com

\$425 VIRGIN GORDA, BVI Rosewood Little Dix Bay on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands is offering guests a triple upgrade worth \$1,100 for a four-night stay in an ocean cottage through Nov. 20, 2008. When guests book a garden view room at the rate of \$425 per night, they will automatically receive a triple upgrade to an ocean cottage, never more than 25 steps off the beach, with buffet breakfast included each day (normally priced at \$758 per night). The recently renovated ocean cottages feature larger accommodations plus separate bath and tub. Additional nights are available at the same special rate, with breakfast included.

"Escapes Extras" include three category upgrades to an ocean cottage at time of booking a four-night stay in a garden room, plus complimentary full buffet breakfast for two daily. Savings are valued at \$1,158. Additional nights are available, priced at \$425 per room, based on double or single occupancy. Call 888-767-3966; www.littledixbay.com

\$1194 CURACAO As food prices and airfare continue to rise worldwide, **Curacao Marriott Beach Resort & Emerald Casino** is offering travelers flying to Curacao direct from USA/Canada the ESCAPE to Curacao Now Package, when booked by Nov. 1.

This special offer includes: the seventh consecutive night free, a \$140 dining credit, a \$100 air credit, a rental car for free for one day, buy one get one FREE entrance ticket at participating museums, one FREE shore or boat dive day, attractions, tours and transfer companies offer 50% discounts on second purchases.

Must be booked by November 1, 2008. Dining credit will be applied at the end of the stay. Prices for this package start at \$1,194 per room. Visit www.curacaomarriott.com; enter Promotional Code: P50

\$539 DOMINICA **Sunset Bay Club's** "Discover Dominica Package" is valid Nov. 1, 2008 through Oct. 31, 2009. The package includes four nights' accommodations, daily breakfast, tour of Northern and Southern Dominica, spa treatment and an hour massage. The package is available November 1, 2008 through April 30, 2009, starting at \$567 per person double; May 1, 2009 – Oct. 31, 2009, the package starts at \$539 per person based on double occupancy.

Call 767-446-6522; E-mail sunset@cwdom.dm; www.sunsetbayclub.com

IN THE NEWS

Jazzy Deals in Anguilla

The **Anguilla Tourist Board** and BET Event Productions have announced the special performers for the Sixth Annual Tranquility Jazz Festival, set to take place in the island paradise of Anguilla on November 6-9, 2008. The "Straight. No Chaser. Tranquility Jazz Festival" has earned a reputation as one of the Caribbean's only true all jazz events and this year's lineup is guaranteed to keep the tradition going.

Special packages are available island wide at a selection of luxury and affordable accommodations with options for land only and air/land offerings and tickets to the festival.

A sampling of land-only three-night packages include: **Anguilla Great House** - \$590; **Sirena Resort & Villas** - \$590; **Paradise Cove Resort** - \$600; **Carimar Beach Club** - \$499; **CuisinArt Resort & Spa** - \$1,179 and **Cap Juluca** - \$1,185.

Four-night deals include: **Anguilla Great House** - \$715; **Sirena Resort & Villas** - \$715; **Paradise Cove Resort** - \$720; **Carimar Beach Club** - \$609.00; **CuisinArt Beach Resort & Spa** - \$1,350 and **Cap Juluca** - \$1,400.

For more information, contact the Anguilla Tourist Board, 877-4-ANGUILLA; or visit www.anguilla-vacation.com; www.anguillajazz.org

EURODAM

HAL's newest ship makes U.S. debut in New York City

By Jonathan Siskin

I was recently a guest aboard **Holland America's Eurodam**, the newest ship in the HAL fleet, which marked its U.S. debut with an inaugural cruise out of New York City's West Side Terminal the weekend of August 29-31.

Many passengers were on deck as the ship departed just after 5 p.m. and began cruising south along the Hudson River, passing the Statue of Liberty and under the Verrazano Bridge before heading out to the ocean on a three-night "cruise to nowhere." The ship entered service on July 1 when it was christened in Rotterdam—founding city of Holland America Line—by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in a ceremony attended by 2,000 employees, dignitaries, past guests, and top travel sellers from around the world.

NEWEST OF THE NEW

Eurodam is Holland America's largest vessel to date with a capacity of 2,105 guests and is also the first Signature-class ship offering a host of new premium facilities and amenities not available on the 14 other ships in the HAL fleet.

Among Eurodam's most distinctive new features are Holland America's first luxury spa accommodations. Situated on the top two decks adjacent to the Greenhouse Spa and Salon, these 56 spa staterooms contain special in-room spa amenities amidst an atmosphere of relaxation, privacy and serenity. Spa staterooms are equipped with organic cotton bathrobes and slippers, a Burmese teak mat for bath and shower, aromatherapy bath salts, yoga mat, pedometer, fitness DVD and a spa concierge to book treatment. The décor reflects a nature theme with walls of soft earth tone hues while a water feature provides a soothing ambient background sound.

According to Rick Meadows, HAL's executive vice president of marketing & sales, "Our spa staterooms meet the growing demand for the onboard spa experience as more of our guests seek to partake of the pleasures of ultimate relaxation during the cruise." Also new on the Eurodam are private tented cabanas located in an area called the Retreat situated on Observation deck. Here guests enjoy iced fruit skewers at mid morning and frozen grapes, chocolate covered strawberries and a glass of champagne in the afternoon. All of Eurodam's 1,052 staterooms provide Signature of Excellence premium amenities such as plush Euro-top Mariner's dream beds, Egyptian cotton towels, flat panel TVs with DVD players, make-up mirrors with halo lighting and massage shower heads.

ASIAN AND ITALIAN DINING

Wining and dining has long been a top priority of cruise passengers, and there is an expanded lineup of dining options on the Eurodam beginning with the Tamarind, a 144 seat pan-Asian restaurant with a menu of Asian-inspired entrees created by Master Chef Rudi Sodamin. Among the choice of entrees are Steamed Lobster with Garlic, Ginger and Chili; Red Curry



HOLLAND AMERICA

Coconut Chicken; Roasted Peking Duck; Shrimp Szechuan with Thai Basil; and Baked Snapper in Rice Paper. Adjacent to Tamarind is the Silk Den, a new lounge with a full menu of signature Asian themed cocktails which is one of the ship's favorite pre-dinner gathering places.

A second new onboard dining venue is Canaletto, a casual restaurant seating 66 that serves traditional Italian fare including spaghetti with meatballs, penne alla vodka, veal Milanese, and chicken Marsala scallopini. Another Italian foodie favorite is Slice, a new pizzeria making its debut on the Eurodam that is open daily from 10:30 a.m. to midnight offering hand-tossed pizzas with a variety of specialty toppings such as eggplant, mussels, arugula, artichokes, Canadian bacon, pineapples, and spinach.

Also offered for the first time on the Eurodam is the Holland America Line Digital Workshop powered by Microsoft Windows. Free workshops led by Microsoft-trained "techsperts" offer instructions in how to take better quality vacation photos, make and edit movies and create scrapbooks using a variety of Microsoft Windows and Windows Live services.

Besides its new facilities and amenities, the Eurodam continues several well-known Holland America features available on its other ships including outside view glass elevators at mid-ship; the Explorations Café (an Internet café powered by The New York Times); the Pinnacle Grill and Pinnacle Bar; and an expanded Greenhouse Spa with thermal suites, hydro pool and the largest gym ever built for a HAL ship. Throughout the cruise the Culinary Arts Center presented by **Food & Wine** magazine offers cooking demonstrations and classes in its state-of-the-art show kitchens.

HAL Returns to Bermuda in 2010

At a press conference during the cruise, president Stein Kruse announced that in 2010 Holland America will begin a series of 10 roundtrip cruises from New York City to Bermuda aboard the 1,350 passenger Veendam. HAL will be the only major cruise line that calls at both Hamilton and St. Georges, Bermuda's cultural and shopping hubs. Holland America first visited Bermuda in 1926 on the company's first Caribbean cruise, and during the summers of 1930 and 1931 it offered five-day roundtrip cruises from New York to Bermuda. Following the ten sailings between late August and October, 2010, Holland America will visit the island for a full season beginning in May, 2011, with 20 or more roundtrip cruises anticipated.

For up to the minute news on the Eurodam visit the Eurodam blog at www.eurodamnews.com; information and schedules for all Holland America ships through 2009 is available at www.hollandamerica.com

Tropical Touchdown in Fiji

Visitors to Fiji will hear the traditional Fijian greeting — “Bula” — once they touch down in this beautiful and friendly country. While all South Pacific islands are noted for warmth and hospitality, the Fijians go just one step further to make sure their guests are made welcome, and that their visit is a happy one. Fiji is a group of islands located north of New Zealand, that is a genuine tropical paradise. Accommodations vary from high-end luxury resorts, to very basic hostels.

Let clients know that there are three official languages: English, Fijian and Hindi and not to worry, all Fijians speak English. Fiji is a multi-cultural society. About half the people are indigenous Melanesians, and about 45% are East Indians, descendents of those brought in to work the sugar cane fields in the 1880's. These diverse cultures are woven by British customs, a holdover from colonial days.

Most visitors will only see Viti Levu, the main island, but they will miss most of what Fiji has to offer. With over 300 islands in the Fijian Archipelago, there are many with excellent beaches, reefs and resorts. Beqa, Mamanuca, Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Yasawa are just of few of the islands that have superior beaches and reefs. However, moving around the islands requires good planning. The **Fiji Tourist Bureau** website, is an excellent resource for information to the hotels, transportation, activities and touring options.

What to Do & Where to Stay

Besides water sports, golf is also popular here, as Fiji is the home of top professional golfer Vijay Singh. Sightseeing, hiking, tennis, fishing, sailing and horseback riding are other activities readily available to tourists. No trip to Fiji would be complete without a visit to a Fijian village; many hotels arrange visits to them. A special Fijian treat not to be missed is the *lovo*. This is the local island version of a *luau* and many hotels, such as the Shangri-La Fijian, will contract a local village to host an under-the-stars feast.

Spa experiences are also blossoming in Fiji. Your clients will certainly enjoy a visit to a spa such as Pure Fiji, which not only has a wide range of treatments but creates their own coconut-based products on site. And don't forget this is THE place for your clients to quaff Fiji Water, a Hollywood staple of dieting fashionistas.

Denarau Island Resort is a major resort area very close to Nadi. Sheraton, Westin, Hilton, Radisson and Sofitel all have large resort hotels here. The property also has condos, a golf and racquet club, restaurants, shopping, a full range of water sport activities, and a marina where you can catch a fast catamaran to the Mamanuca and Yasawa Islands. The beaches are not the best here, but its proximity to the airport makes it a good place to start a vacation before venturing to Fiji's other islands. Visit www.denarau.com

With about 450 rooms, **Shangri-La's Fijian Resort & Spa** is the largest resort hotel in Fiji. It occupies an entire small 100 acre island on the south or “Coral Coast” of Viti Levu. Its clear lagoon has the best beaches and reefs on Viti Levu. The Fijian has a full range of amenities, including tennis and a nine-hole golf course. Chi, a new Spa, opened in 2007, features a full range of services.



By Ann & Tom Burgess

Visit www.shangri-la.com

Royal Davui Island Fiji is located on Beqa Island. This full service facility luxury resort has only sixteen units. Beqa Island is world famous for its scuba diving, with several good sites that feature both hard and soft corals. The surfing is also excellent here, but only for experienced surfers. Visit www.royaldavui.com

Malolo Island Fiji is one of the resorts in the Mamanuca Islands that caters to families and is particularly well-suited to small children. The facility also has babysitting and laundry services. Visit www.maloloisland.com

Turtle Island resort is in the Yasawa Islands, and is considered to be the most beautiful in Fiji. It was the location for filming *The Blue Lagoon*, starring Brooke Shields. Rates include meals and activities, such as scuba diving. Children are not allowed except for holidays. Visit www.turtlefiji.com

Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort is possibly the “greenest” resort in Fiji, this property is set on Savusavu Bay on the island of Vanua Levu. The resort has a great educational program for children and many environmentally oriented activities. Visit www.fijiresort.com

Matangi Island Resort is family-owned and operated on Matangi Island, just northeast of Taveuni Island. Catering mainly to scuba divers, this resort is very close to some of the best dive locations in the world. It also offers many other water sport activities, but does not allow children under 12 years of age. Visit www.matangiisland.com

Getting There and Getting Around

Air Pacific (www.airpacific.com), Fiji's national carrier flies from Los Angeles six times a week, from Honolulu three times a week and from Vancouver twice a week. **Air New Zealand** and **Qantas** also have regular flights most days of the week from Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Fiji has a very good transportation system, including airlines, rental cars, taxis, ferries and buses. Most major rental car companies are represented, but remind clients that in Fiji they drive on the left. Good air-conditioned buses are available for airport transfers to and from hotels. Local buses are basic, but frequent and inexpensive. Taxis are available, but few are metered. The government issues fixed rates, but visitors should ask the cost before departing.

Developing Your Expertise

Agents have a chance to learn more about Fiji by joining the Matai Fiji Specialist program, a destination loyalty program for travel agents selling Fiji that is designed to develop and guide Fiji travel specialists who have the passion and the desire to build Fiji as a holiday and business destination. The program is now available to U.S. agents.

For more information, contact the **Fiji Visitors Bureau**, 800-932-3454; E-Mail infodesk@bulafiji-america.com; www.bulafijinow.com

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Fiji see page 88 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

\$2115 **JAPAN**



Orient Flexi-Pax Tours has introduced a family tour of Japan, including kid-friendly excursions to Disneyworld and city tours of Tokyo and Kyoto (left). The five-night Family Fun Japan tour includes roundtrip airfare from Los Angeles or San Francisco on **United Airlines**, five nights at the **Keio Plaza Hotel**, a Tokyo City Tour, a fun-filled excursion to Hayao Miyazaki's Animation World and a one-day pass to **Tokyo Disneyland**. Families can upgrade with an extension to Kyoto, featuring a one-way Bullet Train ride, two nights at **Kyoto's Rihga Royal Hotel** and a Kyoto City Tour. The program is available for daily departure through December 2008 and starts at \$2,115 per person (child discounts are available), optional Kyoto extension, from \$630 per person. Call 800-545-5540; www.orientflexipaxtours.com

\$778 **MALAYSIA**

Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa, Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia is offering the “Borneo Romance” package for honeymooners and couples looking for a romantic getaway. Valid until December 31, 2008, the “Borneo Romance” package starts at about \$780 for three nights accommodation in a Tanjung Seaview room overlooking the South China Sea and the resort's lush gardens.

Included are breakfast daily for two at Café TATU; an massage for two at the newly opened CHI, The Spa at Shangri-La; welcome drinks at the Sunset Bar; dinner for two at Peppino restaurant; gifts of aromatherapy candles, a pair of black pearl earrings, his and her sarongs, and a bottle of Champagne. Guests preferring more adventure, may climb the tallest peak in Southeast Asia, the 13,436 foot-Mount Kinabalu; white-water raft; scuba dive; or take a jungle trek. Visit www.shangri-la.com

\$6000 **MYANMAR**

Balloons over Bagan announced a seven-day itinerary that incorporates three distinct landscapes of Myanmar (Burma) while traveling in a style reminiscent of the great days of luxury adventures decades ago. The tour is designed for small groups of six to eight people who have arranged their travel together in advance.

This tour is priced by the number in a group with a per person rate of \$6,800 for six and \$6,000 for eight. Rates include interior air flights, transfers, accommodations and meals, on-ground touring and six hot air balloon flights. Regions explored are Pindaya, Inle and Bagan. Pindaya's rolling hills are set against some of the highest Shan Mountains. Inle Lake in Shan State is home to the Inthar people renowned for their floating villages and gardens. Bagan is one of the most remarkable sights in the world, full of ancient temples along the Ayeyarwaddy River. Call +951 652-809; balloons@myanmar.com.mm; www.easternsafaris.com

\$4595 **BHUTAN**

Asia Transpacific Journeys cultural tours are focused on the Himalayan region in Bhutan. Among the unexpected sybaritic pleasures of the region are the spa menu at **Ananda in the Himalayas**, a dip in the infinity-edge pool at **Wildflower Hall**, a former British aristocrat's retreat near Simla, glimpse the Dalai Lama (luck permitting) from a cozy, family-run cottage in Dharamsala, play lawn croquet at a Heritage Hotel restored to Raj-era splendor

Bhutan has been largely isolated from the outside world for centuries, making it anachronistic yet visionary. Travel to Bhutan now, as it is on the brink of transformation.

The 11-day tour departs: October 3, 2008 and is priced from \$4,595 per person double for land arrangements only.

Call 800-642-2742; www.AsiaTranspacific.com

IN THE NEWS

Sharp Deals on Blue Lagoon Cruises in Fiji

Blue Lagoon Cruises, which operates in the Fiji Islands, is offering a special discount of 15% on all cruises and free deck upgrades when agents book any Blue Lagoon Cruise and mention Booking Code: NA15%OFFALLUG. Vouchers must also have the 'NA15%OFFALLUG' code stated.

The sale applies to all cruises departing from Dec. 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009 and May 1, 2009 through June 1, 2009. Confirmation will be provided at time of booking subject to availability at time of request. This offer may not be sold in conjunction with any other offer available in market. Standard cancellation policies and no show policies apply as per current wholesale contracts. No request will be accepted after initial request if there was an omission of this code.

This offer excludes Sky Deck on Mystique Princess, Cruise in Luxury Dive in Paradise Cruises.

Visit www.bluelagooncruises.com

Travel Indochina Opens US Office

For more than 15 years, this premier ground operator, **Travel Indochina**, has delivered signature Small Group Journeys to Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, India, Japan, China & Tibet through preferred partnerships in the U.S. and Canada.

Said Paul Hole, Managing Director. “North Americans are increasingly being turned to our destinations in Asia as they seek out truly remarkable vacation experiences.”

Call 866-459-6162; www.travelindochina.com, www.essenceofasiatravel.com

Cook Islands Correction

Last month JF's cover story on Cook Islands included the correct website, but the incorrect phone numbers. Below are correct and current details for the **Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**, call 888-994-2665; 310-545-3529; 310-545-4221; E-mail: usamanager@cookislands.travel; or visit www.cookislands.travel

New & New-Old Faces in NYC

By Maria Lisella

Most first-timers to New York City visit its traditional icons like the Empire State Building, which is itself undergoing a major makeover. The \$500 million renovation will conserve, restore and return the lobby to its original 1930s glory; new Art Deco-inspired security and observatory uniforms recently unveiled; and a gift shop re-fit and remodeled selling souvenirs exclusive to the Empire State Building. If you look around, however, the icons are not the only ones getting facelifts and primping for new and old visitors. Below are a few of the most notable newcomers and old faces to get just a nip and tuck.

The Empire Hotel: The historic Empire Hotel officially opened its doors after an extensive redesign this summer. Located steps away from Lincoln Center, the Empire Hotel first opened in the mid 1890s but was completely rebuilt in 1923, when the iconic red neon "Hotel Empire" sign was erected.

The elegant, 413-room hotel is one of the oldest establishments on the Upper West Side still operating under the same name at the same location and might well be considered one of the "Grande Dames" of New York City hotels.

The Empire's Ultimate Manhattan package urges visitors to live large in Manhattan. The package for two includes deluxe Living Room Suite with magnificent NY city views of Central Park and Lincoln Center. The Deluxe Living Room Suite is furnished with a sofa, club chairs, wet bar, dining room table for four, two bathrooms and a luxurious king bed, one two-hour private luxury suite in the hotel's Jeunesse Spa complete with 60-minute massage for two, couples hydrotherapy tub, sauna and lounge area, a bottle of Champagne, full American breakfast for two; available for \$2,500 per night. **Call 888-800-6301**

The New Yorker Hotel: Will debut its new look after undergoing a \$65 million renovation program which revitalized one of the biggest art deco buildings in the heart of midtown New York City. The design concept of the New Yorker Hotel's new look is the exotic and glamorous New York/Hollywood art deco style of the 1930's, as a nod to the hotel's past, but with a distinctive modern edge. Guest service enhancements include improved free Wi-Fi service and better television programming, upgrade and refurbishment of the hotel's restaurants (the 24-hour Tick Tock Diner and Cooper's Tavern.) As a result of the renovation, the New Yorker Hotel increased its room count from 860 to 910 guestrooms, all re-styled and remodeled, located on the top 21 floors of the building – floors 19 to 40 (the first 18 floors are dedicated to commercial tenants). Nightly rates start at \$269. **Call 866-800-3088; www.newyorkerhotel.com.**

The Premier Hotel: Formerly known as the Premier at Millennium Broadway, has reopened in New York's Times Square. The hotel had been an extension of the Millennium Broadway when it opened in 1998, but the property now stands alone after a refurbishment. The hotel remains in the Millennium portfolio.

The 125-room Premier now has a floor exclusively for women. Accessible only with an elevator key card, the floor has seven rooms with yoga mats; plush robes and slippers; a lighted make-



The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the largest museums in the world.

up mirror, wash mitts and bath salts in bathrooms; and women's magazines. Upon arrival, all guests receive complimentary overnight dry cleaning and pressing of one item. Prior to arrival, the hotel sends guests emails from the hotel's concierge asking for any special requests, such as dinner reservations, theater tickets or special in-room amenities. The lounge on the hotel's mezzanine level serves a buffet breakfast in the morning and complimentary cocktails and crudites in the evening. Rates start at \$329. **Call 212-789-7670; www.thepremierhotel.com**

SHORT AND EXTENDED STAYS: The Marmara—For a few nights or a few months, New York's Marmara Manhattan offers luxurious studios and one-bedroom suites each with a fully-equipped kitchen, and all the amenities of a five-star city hotel, are available into 2009, at prices starting at \$319 for a studio and \$349 for a suite. Rates are valid through Jan. 5, 2009. Located on the corner of Second Avenue and East 94th Street, the 32-story Marmara Manhattan Hotel & Residence offers 108 impeccably appointed studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, ranging in size from 360 square feet to 1,450 square feet. The sunny, spacious rooms offer spectacular views of the Manhattan Skyline and the East River.

Call 212 427 3100; www.marmara-manhattan.com

FOR FIRST-TIMERS: The Milford Plaza—The first foray to the Big Apple can intimidate even the most seasoned travelers. To ease this tricky transition, the Milford Plaza has unveiled its Big Apple Ease package. Over the past several years, New York City has averaged over 40 million visitors annually, many of them making their first trek to the city. The Big Apple Ease package will offer these visitors a mix of food, convenience and fun, served with a slice of comfort and consideration. Priced from \$299, the Big Apple Ease package includes: a \$25 gift certificate to Virgil's Real BBQ Restaurant, serving comfort cooking just a few blocks from the hotel, a copy of "Not for Tourists" 2008 Guide to New York City, including maps, a primer on subway etiquette "Do's and Don'ts," a Macy's Herald Square discount booklet and a round-trip MetroCard. Mention the "Big Apple Ease" Package. **Call 888-649-0915; www.milfordplaza.com**

Agent Booking Engine at NYCVP

Difficulty finding rooms for your clients? Just go to www.nyctrip.com and click on "For Travel Agents."

NYCVP's exclusive TripQuote can book your client's entire New York City vacation with just a few clicks. It's easy and fully commissionable.

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

BEST BUYS

\$3800 FLORIDA

A favorite of past and future United States Presidents for its remote location, privacy and unplugged philosophy, Little Palm Island Resort & Spa is the perfect place to hide out from election year overload.

From now until Election Day 2008, travelers who need a little time to "dry out" and reconnect with their loved ones can enjoy three nights in a bungalow suite; an "inaugural" bottle of champagne; full breakfast each morning; \$100 spa credit per person, for a "secret service" at SpaTerre; Retreating from election news is a breeze as there are no televisions, telephones or radios at Little Palm Island. The Election Reflection getaway starts at \$3,800 per couple.

Call 800-3-GET-LOST; www.littlepalmisland.com

\$1000 HAWAII

Maui-based Tropical Villa Vacations specializing in luxury vacation rentals, is offering a new incentive program for agents booking luxury accommodations for fall. The Fall Rewards Program offers rewards for agents and their clients for minimum five-night bookings at Tropical Villa Vacation properties with rates of at least \$1,000 per night. For qualified bookings, agents will receive 15% commission, and their clients will receive two one-hour massages (compliments of their agent) in their rental home or villa at a Tropical Villa Vacation property.

The Spring & Fall Rewards Program is valid through November (excluding the Thanksgiving period). **Call 888-875-2818 ext. 205, E-mail info@tropicalvillavacations.com**

\$270 CANADA

This fall, the Artisan Inn and the Campbell House are offering a "stay two nights, get one free" package, which includes accommodations for two, full daily breakfasts and four-course dinners all three days in the Twine Loft Restaurant including two passes for the Trinity Museum Tour and a year's subscription to Newfoundland Quarterly. The rate, at \$270 per person, double occupancy, is an 18 percent savings. Guests staying three or more nights, pay a nightly rate of \$112, 15 percent off the high-season price.

Call 877-464-7700; www.trinityvacations.com

\$309 BRITISH COLUMBIA, CA

You don't even have to pack for the Coast Plaza Hotel's "Girl's Night In" package. Their pajama party includes a set of fabulous pajamas for each guest, plus a bottle of wine to enjoy during your stay. Relax and have fun in their beach-view one-bedroom suites which can accommodate up to six guests. Package starts at \$309 through Sept. 30. Visit www.coasthotels.com

Vancouver's Pacific Palisades Hotel has a special package for yogis. The "Mind, Body and Soul" package includes a one-night stay in an executive one-bedroom suite, deluxe continental breakfast for two in Zin Restaurant, along with two 30-minute massages.

Yoga can be practiced in the privacy of your suite; there's even a yoga instructional CD to take home. From \$375 per night (through October 15) or \$320 per night October 16 to December 30. Visit www.pacificpalisadeshotel.com

IN THE NEWS

Turning 50 in the 50th State

Get ready to get carded if you turn 50 years old in 2009. The Alaska Railroad is offering anyone in the world who shares this birthday year with Alaska's statehood anniversary – that'll be 1959 – one free day of rail travel anytime during 2009. Bookings will be available beginning in the fall of 2008 for the happy birthday program, called "Turn 50 With Us." visit www.alaskarailroad.com/50BD

To qualify for the program your birth date must fall on, or be between Jan. 1, 1959 and Dec. 31, 1959. **Call 907-265-2494**

Vancouver Sightseeing Made Easy

Vancouver All Terrain Adventure's new City and Nature Sightseeing tour is the city's luxury sightseeing alternative. Groups of up to 24 people at a time can be accommodated in the company's four luxury SUVs for a six hour tour that includes a gourmet picnic lunch. The trip includes a city-tour around Chinatown, Robson Street and Stanley Park before heading up the scenic Sea-to-Sky highway for a stop at the majestic Shannon Falls - the third highest waterfall in BC. After a lunch of free-range grilled chicken breast with house-made five fruit chutney, baby red potato salad and citrus dressed green bean Provencal, the group heads back to Vancouver to explore the beaches of English Bay and Vancouver's world famous Granville Island Public Market. Hotel, cruise ship or airport drop-offs conclude the tour. The tour is priced at \$225 per person and can be customized to include an add-on to Whistler or Seattle. Visit www.all-terrain.com

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For clients yearning to connect with the powerful energies of the ancient sacred sites where mysterious forces are probed and absorbed, or are seeking transformation and personal growth, tour operators are lining up to guide them on such pilgrimages. Besides the traditional motorcoach-style pilgrimages that vary in the sites of worship and frequency, many of the newest programs involve yet another higher power: getting in touch with self through nature.

Body Mind Spirit Journeys is among those self-appointed guides. Among the group itineraries are "Sacred Sites of the Divine Feminine" set in France where participants follow the route of the Black Madonnas, Chartres Cathedral, Notre Dame in Paris, the Rennes-Le-Chateau Mystery and Mary Magdalene, Lourdes and its Grotto, a place of healing and peace...and the Holy Grail and "Sacred Journeys in Sedona." Andrea Mikana-Pinkham leads the way offering skills to enlighten on spirituality, metaphysics, yoga, holistic lifestyle, green living, and New Thought principles.

Two new programs set for Nov. departures head for Egypt: Sacred Journeys Egypt: November 8 - 23, 2008 with optional extension to attend healing classes in ancient Egyptian Healing Techniques: November 23 - 25, 2008. Prices depend on inclusions and group size.

Call 800-231-9811; www.bodymindspiritjourneys.com

Toronto-based **Sacred Rides Mountain Bike Holidays** is recognized as one of Canada's top mountain bike holiday companies. Since 1996, Sacred Rides has offered community-based mountain bike holidays in British Columbia, Peru, and Chile. Sacred Rides employs local guides and suppliers, contributes a percentage of tour costs toward local development projects, and allows participants to interact with the communities in which they ride. For the past five years, Sacred Rides has also run skills camps for women, led by top-ranked coaches, and some of whom are former national champions. The Five-Star Singletrack holiday is \$4,495 for 11 days of riding, deluxe lodging, gourmet meals, and additional activities, such as floatplane mountain biking and houseboating on Shuswap Lake.

Call 888-423-7849; www.sacredrides.com

Serenity-seekers can go with the flow — physically and spiritually — in southern Manitoba, Canada, on weekend wilderness expeditions that combine canoeing and yoga. **Northern Soul Wilderness Adventures'** three-day, two-night "Yoga Canoe Weekend" program is the exact opposite of white-knuckle rafting through raging rapids; instead, it is a gently paced experience designed to lower the pulse rate, not elevate it. The all-ages program, set in Whiteshell Provincial Park, mixes paddles and postures in a program of flat-water canoeing, lakeside camping (in lightweight tents). The "Yoga Canoe Weekend" costs \$399 per person double. Inquire about 2009 tours. Call 866-284-4072 or visit www.northernsoul.ca.

No matter the budget or special interest, **Ya'lla Tours USA** has a program to match. Two nine-day, privately escorted tours are designed to connect Jews and Christians



INDIA NTO

with their spiritual and cultural roots. Magnificent Israel focuses on Jewish heritage with two nights in Tel Aviv, two nights in Tiberias and four nights in Jerusalem.

The Christian Journey of Faith is a spiritual pilgrimage visiting all the significant sites associated with Jesus as well as a number of Old Testament sites with one night in Tel Aviv, two nights in Tiberias and five nights in Jerusalem. Both tours begin any day in Tel Aviv and are priced from \$3,495 per person double. An eight-day Israel Highlights motor coach tour is conducted as a general interest tour, not a religious tour, yet visits many sites significant to both Christians and Jews. Priced from \$1,095 per person double, this tour spends two nights each in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and at a kibbutz hotel in the Galilee. Call 800-644-1595; www.yallatours.com

In sync with the growing business of faith-based travel, **CIE Tours** has expanded its repertoire of group travel arrangements to places of pilgrimage and religious significance in Europe, according to Brian W. Stack, Managing Director of CIE Tours International.

Sample itineraries to the holy places of Ireland and Italy as well as faith-based travel ideas to Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje, are outlined in CIE Tours International's new Group Travel Planner 2009 - Ireland - Britain - Italy - Europe.

Designed to simplify the selling and booking process, this new 20-page Planner is a vital tool for travel agents to boost group sales for faith-based travel. Call 800-243-8687 or, for groups, 800-223-6508

Religious Travel Expo

The **World Religious Travel Association** (WRTA) has announced two of the keynote speakers for this fall's historic World Religious Travel Expo 2008 in Orlando, Florida: the Honorable Neko C. Grant, Bahamas Minister of Tourism, and Maurice Zarmati, President & CEO of **Costa Cruise Lines**. More than 100 exhibitors and more than 400 participants are expected at the unprecedented event. The Expo will be held October 29-November 1, 2008 at the Gaylord Palms Resort Hotel & Convention Center in Orlando, Florida. Call 800-657-1288; www.ReligiousTravelExpo.com

From New Age to Native American

This revised 408-page comprehensive travel guide examines North America's most sacred sites for spiritually attuned explorers. Important archaeological, geological, and historical destinations from coast to coast are examined, from the weathered pueblos of the American Southwest and the medicine wheels of western Canada to Graceland and the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. Histories and cultural contexts are objectively surveyed. Detailed maps, and travel directions are included.

Call 800-888-4741; www.ipgbook.com

BEST BUYS

\$185 ALASKA

For the client who likes to view the world through a lens, this tour is the perfect blend of scenery and adventure. **Gastineau Guiding** offers a guided photography tour for the active cruise ship passenger or independent traveler to tour Juneau with a naturalist photography guide who will lead guests to local "photo hot spots", while sharing tips and techniques to help enhance their images. The first part of the tour takes place on land, with visits to top destinations such as the Mendenhall Glacier. Then board an exploration vessel for an unforgettable journey through the waterways of Juneau's Channel Islands. The star of the show is different every day: wildflowers in bloom, soaring eagles, spawning salmon, light on a foggy channel, migratory birds, bubble feeding humpback whales, curious sea lions, sleek killer whales, and even lumbering black bears are among the subjects that might provide the perfect Alaska vacation shot. Tours depart daily; ask about 2009 dates. Call 907-907-586-8231; E-mail: Tour@gguiding.com; www.stepintoalaska.com

\$535 CALIFORNIA

Campton Place, a **Taj Hotel** in San Francisco presents its summer line-up of packages to make the season spectacular. There's something for everyone in the family to enjoy at San Francisco's luxury hotel, just steps off Union Square.

All rooms now feature wireless Internet access, flat panel televisions and in-room espresso makers in addition to the fine service Campton Place is famous for.

The SF Spa package at Campton Place gives guests a quick dose of rejuvenation that's designed to last.

This one-night-stay package (double occupancy) features the services of the nearby LaBelle Day Spa or Kamala Spa, both right off Union Square.

Welcome drinks are served upon arrival, and Campton Place provides two \$125 gift cards for your choice of treatments. Deluxe bath amenities from Molton Brown (valued at \$60) are complimentary. Package is \$535 for a deluxe room and \$659 for a suite, valid through Dec. 31. Call 866-332-1670; www.camptonplace.com

\$2250 VIETNAM

The active travel company with the funny name, **Pedalers Pub & Grille** (PP&G), puts cyclists to the test on its new "Vietnam: Journey to Sapa" cycling adventure with three scheduled departures in the coming year. Home to numerous ethnic tribal groups, this challenging journey takes in the northeastern mountains and some of Vietnam's most alluring scenery and cultures.

Departing on Dec. 8, 2008, Mar. 9 and Dec. 7 2009, the 10-day trip is the only excursion that actually pedals the quiet back roads to Sapa; most other visitors arrive by air or train, blurring by the hill country and villages that define the true essence of the region.

This trip will also focus on Hanoi's ancient past and the more recent French influence in the graceful colonial architecture and tree-lined boulevards that accentuate the capital city. The land arrangements cost \$2,250 per person double (single supplement is \$425).

The tour begins and ends in Hanoi; prices are for land-only arrangements. E-mail tours@pedalerspubandgrille.com; www.pedalerspubandgrille.com

\$450 ARIZONA

The **Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa** is planning the ultimate getaway for the guys — the "Stogies & Sticks Foursome Mancation" that is a long weekend of lighting up fine cigars, sipping premium bourbon, dining on delectable American Lodge Cuisine and teeing off on two of Phoenix's best golf courses.

The three-night/four-day vacation package for four will be offered Oct. 16-19, 2008. It kicks off at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 16 with a uniquely crafted 'Bourbon & Cigar Dinner' in the resort's signature restaurant, Wright's at The Biltmore.

It combines a gourmet menu with both pre-dinner and after-dinner cigar smoking and bourbon on the restaurant's beautiful patio and lawn. An array of top-brand cigars will be offered and selections from the Jim Beam Small Batch Bourbon Collection will be poured.

The Stogies & Sticks Foursome Mancation package includes accommodations for three nights, the Bourbon & Cigar Dinner, two rounds of golf, and breakfast daily. The cost is \$450 per person, double occupancy, per night.

To make it three days of golf — and a total of 54 holes over the long weekend, the guys can add an instructional option to their Mancation: the Hilton Golf Academy. The optional Hilton Golf Academy is \$300 per person.

Call 800-950-0086; www.ArizonaBiltmore.com

\$7395 HAWAII

A new Hawaii honeymoon package that promises exclusive, private experiences for newlyweds is part of **American Safari Cruises'** offerings aboard its soon-to-debut 145-foot, 36-guest yacht Safari Explorer. The company will begin inter-island cruises between Maui and the Big Island in December. The romance package includes one of two top-deck balcony suites that feature a living room with a large, flat-screen TV, master bedroom with king bed and Tempur-pedic mattress, refrigerator stocked with the couple's favorite beverages, and bathroom with heated tile floors and Jacuzzi tub.

Guests also receive a private helicopter tour of Volcanoes National Park and be feted at a honeymoon celebration one night at dinner. The honeymoon package begins at \$7,395 per person and includes yacht activities, shore excursions, private transfers and complimentary premium spirits and fine wines. Guest-crew ratio is 2-to-1.

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



Enterprise Pres. Tops Forbes' Most Powerful List

Enterprise Rent-A-Car President and Chief Operating Officer Pamela Nicholson has been named to Forbes magazine's 2008 list of "The World's 100 Most Powerful Women." It is the first time on the list for Nicholson, who is the only travel and leisure industry executive to be included.

"It is no surprise to Pam Nicholson's colleagues to see her receive this distinction," said Andrew C. Taylor, the company's chairman and chief execu-

tive officer. "Pam's energy, experience and passion for our business have earned her not only the high leadership position she holds at our company, but the admiration and respect of our industry, as well."

Forbes cited her recent promotion to Enterprise president in its profile of Nicholson, No. 92 on the list, noting that she is only the second non-member of the Taylor family to hold that post at the privately held company. Nicholson was joined on the list by the likes of Oprah Winfrey and Queen Elizabeth II of England.

Nicholson began her career with Enterprise Rent-A-Car in 1981 as a management trainee in St. Louis after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree. At the time, Enterprise was a small but growing regional rental car and auto leasing company with approximately 200 employees, 50 locations, 20,000 vehicles and less than \$100 million in annual revenue. Nicholson was promoted to senior vice president, North American operations, in 1999 and to chief operating officer in 2003, before being named president. Visit www.enterprise.com



Sudeikis Named ASTA Travel Agent of the Year

Kathryn W. Sudeikis, CTC, vice president of corporate relations for All About Travel in Mission, Kansas, was honored with **ASTA's 2008 Travel Agent of the Year Award**, during its annual meeting at THETRADESHOW in Orlando.

The award, inspired by Joseph W. Rosenbluth, recognizes an active travel agent member who has made a great contribution to the travel industry and whose outstanding influence and pro-

fessional activity have advanced the status of travel agents. Said **ASTA president and CEO, Cheryl Hudak, CTC**. "Kathy has devoted her life to the travel industry and I can think of no better person to receive this award as she personifies the words 'travel agent.' When Kathy says that the travel industry is a relationship business, she means it. She really is there for her clients—and the industry—before, during and after and event." Sudeikis is a former ASTA National President and CEO and served a two-year term in this role beginning in October 2004.

Sudeikis has also served the Society as presiding officer of ASTA's Chapter Presidents Council and chaired ASTA's World Congress in St. Louis in 1993.

A 40-year industry veteran, Sudeikis is frequently quoted in national publications, including the and has appeared on numerous national television programs. She is currently active on the travel agent advisory boards for Travel & Leisure, Greaves Tours of India, Rail Europe, Dollar-Thriftly Automotive Group and The German National Tourist Board.

Visit www.asta.org



CTO Names Riley Interim Secretary General

The Chairman of the **Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO)**, Hon. Allen Chastanet, today named **Director of Marketing for the Americas, Hugh Riley**, as Interim Secretary General of the organization. Mr. Riley will act in the position while the CTO's Executive Committee completes the search for a new Secretary General. During this period, Deputy Director for Projects and Administration, Sylma Brown Bramble, will act in Mr. Riley's

substantive position as Director of Marketing for the Americas. Riley's interim appointment was necessitated by the recent passing of Interim Secretary General Arley Sobers, who assumed the position at the beginning of July when the Secretary General, Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace returned home to become Minister of Tourism and Aviation of The Bahamas.

Back then, Riley was appointed Director of Marketing for the Americas in March 2002 and has since overseen the Caribbean's marketing programme in the United States of America and

Canada. He is also co-Chief Operating Officer of the Caribbean Tourism Development Company (CTDC), the marketing and business development unit owned equally by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) and the CTO.

The CTO, headquartered in Barbados with marketing operations in New York, London and Toronto, is the Caribbean's tourism development agency with membership of over 30 governments private sector entities.

Visit www.caribbeantravel.com or www.onecaribbean.org.

LAN's Youthful 50th Sees Major Fleet Investments

By Maria Lisella

Travel professionals agree on two issues concerning this interview: that South America is a growing region for business and leisure travel and that the Chilean carrier, LAN has long been hailed as the premier airline throughout South America. Because of the demand for access to this region, LAN has invested in new routes, and service enhancements to its aircraft sparing no cost when it comes to onboard entertainment—from the front to the back of the plane—two salient facts that will affect your clients. JF spoke with Pablo Yunis, Vice President North/Central America and the Caribbean.

JF: What are LAN's most distinguishing features?

LAN: This year marks LAN's 50th anniversary of service between South America and the U.S. while we'll also be celebrating 80 years of overall service in 2009. We have grown to be the leading carrier in the region. LAN provides non-stop and connecting service to every major city in South America from the U.S. out of its New York, Los Angeles and Miami gateways in addition to 42 North American cities through its airline partners in the **oneworld Alliance**, through which passengers flying on LAN can earn miles with partner airlines American Airlines within the alliance.

JF: Any expansion plans in the near future?

LAN: On Sept. 3rd we launched new service between Toronto and Santiago via JFK; from JFK, passengers can connect to Lima. And, from both Lima and Santiago, passengers can connect to other destinations within South America including new service from Lima, Peru to Medellin, Colombia via Quito, Ecuador; we have also added service to the cities of Tumbes and Cajamarca in Peru and the city of Neuquen in Argentina.

JF: What factors are influencing these plans?

LAN: We use a combination passenger/cargo model, which creates two revenue streams on our routes. LAN's net income for 2007 reached \$308.3 million, reflecting an increase of 44.8% over 2006. Total sales for 2007 reached \$3.5 billion. Our affiliate model has also helped us expand the airline's reach. By incorporating local carriers in Peru, Argentina and Ecuador, we've been able to service more routes under the LAN

Service Alliance. Today, the LAN Service Alliance includes LAN Airlines, LAN Peru, LAN Ecuador LAN Argentina and LAN Cargo and its affiliates.

JF: LAN has recently made substantial investments in retrofitting aircraft and in acquiring new planes, is there more to tell agents?

LAN: Our new fleet of Boeing 767 aircraft features two cabin classes: Premium Business and Economy Class, with a robust in-flight entertainment system throughout the cabin. LAN Premium Business Class offers one of the few full-flat, 180° reclining, sleeper-style seats from North to South America. Our Premium Business Class also features gourmet cuisine created by a panel of renowned chefs from some of the finest restaurants in the region and a wine list selected by South America's only master sommelier. Economy Class on all international long distance flights from South America operated by LAN, passengers will now be able to take advantage of a new on-board programming offer that places LAN among the airlines that offer the most variety and onboard entertainment in the world.

The Economy Class has been in complete renovation and now offers high-resolution individual screens with movie formats in every one of the seats. This translates into over 85 alternatives; 32 new and all-time favorite movies, 55 channels that show series and documentaries.

During 2008, the complete first season of **Prison Break** and six series of **House** will also be available. Passengers will also have 14 games that may be played individually or with other passengers and 450 music CDs to listen to on their flights.

The Airbus A320 fleet of aircraft is dedicated to short haul flights that will now be serviced by this new family of Airbus A320s. During the replacement process, LAN acquired 40 aircraft including models like the A320, A319 and A318; aircraft valued at about \$2.4 billion.

On board the new Airbus A320 fleet, every passenger will have more space and enjoy greater comfort in a cabin



designed for 12 people. The middle seat converts into a table for a better working environment during a flight.

JF: Any new investments being made for future?

LAN: We are incorporating 26 Boeing 787, Dreamliner aircraft into our fleet, scheduled to arrive between 2011 and 2016 that represent an investment of about \$3.5 billion, the largest investment in the company's history.

JF: Where do you see LAN in the global market in the next five years?

LAN: We have never been more optimistic about the future and look forward to our growth within our home territory and in the international marketplace.

JF: Will LAN be charging for incidentals onboard?

LAN: We are committed to offering the highest level of service to all our passengers and have no plans to limit or curtail our in-flight service. We offer complimentary meals and beverages, including wine, on all long haul flights.

JF: What about luggage allowances?

LAN: Luggage allowance has remained the same. Passengers traveling on LAN may carry the following free of charge: 1 piece of carry-on luggage plus one personal item such as a purse, laptop, etc. Passengers may also bring two pieces of checked luggage (dimensions and weight vary from point origin and destination). Maintaining a reasonable amount of luggage allowance free of charge is one the ways we maintain good service.

JF: Will the LANPass continue?

LAN: LANPass will continue to offer the opportunity to earn miles toward travel and upgrades on LAN flights.

For more information, contact LAN 866-435-9526; www.lan.com

Why Central America, Why Now?

Of course no company posts negative testimonials on its website, but those you will find at Condor Outfitters are interesting because they run the gamut of multi-generational small family reunions to alumnae ad

hoc groups to incentive programs and individual trips. Fluent in English and Spanish, CEO Lori Snow has lived in both Latin and Central Americas. Established in 1991 the company specializes in selling travel to Central and South America, the Caribbean and South Africa.

JF: Whether it's Panama travel, Fishing, or even a Galapagos Islands Package, how would you characterize travel to Central America during the past three years?

SNOW: This is our largest growing segment of travel. We expect a growth rate of 20% minimum per year for the next five years to the entire region.

JF: Is air service aiding the growth, if so, what new service has been crucial to growing the market?

SNOW: The growth is not actually linked to access. Clients are looking for something different and rates in this part of the world are the most affordable.

JF: What are Condor Outfitters' specialties?

SNOW: We offer all-inclusive land and air packages or can custom tailor a package for you or a group. Panama and the Panama Canal, Costa Rica, Belize including Ambergris Caye, Honduras including Anthony's Key, Guatemala, Argentina including Patagonia, Ecuador including the Galapagos Islands, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uruguay, Peru including Machu Picchu, Chile, Caribbean destination and cruises and South Africa including safari's and cultural are our areas of expertise.

JF: How do you plan to convey that this region presents a doable, affordable get away, which is not third world but first world, and which places would you advise agents to send their clients if the clients are even the least bit nervous about visiting Central America?

SNOW: Most of the countries are US friendly and safe to travel to with minimal health risk involved. The concerns about "third world" are a constant battle I am addressing but our marketing efforts along with the countries advertising are "slowly" breaking this down. For some folks the mystique of 3rd world actually intrigues them

JF: What segments do you see the most growth in?

SNOW: The adventure traveler is ageless.

JF: What portion of your sales are through agents? Is this portion growing or waning?

SNOW: Growing, as our operation does packages that are not easily found in the US.

JF: What about the role of agents?

SNOW: Not as many, but they are loyal once you prove to them the quality of the products and destinations.

JF: Do you offer agents incentives?

SNOW: Our commissions are 10% with occasional better offers as we strive to get the best value to the client, which prevents us from offering much more. Call 800-783-8847; fax 770-995-8017; E-mail info@condoroutfitters.com; www.condoroutfitters.com



Let No Buzz Go Unrewarded

Fare Buzz has launched Buzz Rewards, an award and appreciation program that allows travel professionals to accrue points for every air and hotel booking made with Fare Buzz.

According to **Arnold Walter**, President & CEO of Fare Buzz, "The Buzz Rewards program is a token of thanks and gratitude to our members for their continued support. This program is truly one-

of-a-kind as none of our competitors offer anything similar in the marketplace. We at Fare Buzz are very excited about this new program and hope that our partners will make the best of it."

Each point translates into \$1. Upon accruing 15 points, members will automatically be sent a co-branded Buzz Rewards Card, pre-loaded with a \$15 value from American Express Incentive Services, which can be redeemed at more than 190 retail chains throughout the U.S. for shopping, dining, travel and entertainment.

The Card is re-usable and will be re-loaded weekly as the member continues booking with Fare Buzz.

Who Qualifies?

Open to all existing and new member, members need only to Register for this program online at www.farebuzz.com/rewards while new members simply need to Sign Up for their free Fare Buzz membership at the same website and they will automatically be enrolled in the Buzz Rewards program. All bookings made as of August 15, 2008 will qualify for Buzz Rewards points.

For more details on Buzz Rewards visit www.farebuzz.com/rewards

In other news, Fare Buzz is also celebrating the anniversary of the launch of FareBuzz.com that was established in 1994.

Based in New York City, Fare Buzz has grown to be one of the leading travel suppliers in the U.S. Since its inception, the company's strategic negotiations with key suppliers has helped to revolutionize the air travel component by establishing strong partner alliances that provide a wide range of travel solutions for agent members.

For years, Fare Buzz has been among the leading suppliers of premium class airline tickets and the company launched a new net rate Hotel Booking Engine enabling travel professionals to book hotels at net rates at more than 100,000 hotel and resort properties worldwide.

For Buzz Rewards Queries, E-mail memberships@farebuzz.com. For Program Information contact Tannia Ortega. Call 888-808-4123, Ext. 100; E-mail tannia@farebuzz.com



Collette Rewards Agents

For the second year in a row, **Collette Vacations** is offering travel agents extra commission months, as part of its Agent Focus campaign, which started in 2007. Effective immediately, preferred agents who book clients for travel January 1- February 15, and August 2009 will earn 20% commission. Non-preferred agents booking clients for travel during those same periods will earn 18%. "We launched our Agent Focus Campaign with the intent to give the agent community more earning opportunities at a time when some tour operators, cruise lines and airlines were cutting commissions," **Daniel Sullivan, Jr.**, President and CEO of Collette Vacations said. "We're taking our campaign into 2009 full force with new extra commission months, in addition to continuing to offer all agents 10% commission on air and 5% commission on pre-sold options." Collette also has thousands of guaranteed departure dates in 2009, as well as guaranteed land pricing for European packages through April 2009 despite currency exchange fluctuations. "We appreciate the hard work and loyalty of our agent community and will continue to find ways to reward them," Sullivan said.

Call 800-340-5158 ; www.collettevacations.com

United Vacations Covers Fuel Surcharges

United Vacations has launched FuelSafe, a program that protects customers from United fuel surcharge hikes occurring after they buy a vacation package.

If the fuel surcharge rises after purchase, United Vacations will cover the cost increase if customers purchase the United Vacations Cancellation Waiver or the WorldCare Complete Coverage plan at the time of booking. The prices of the United Vacations Cancellation Waiver and the WorldCare Complete Coverage plan range from \$39 to \$79 and \$59 to \$129, respectively.

"The cost to include one of the two travel-protection plans is minimal compared to recent airline fuel surcharge increases," said United Vacations.

The FuelSafe program applies to all destinations and all vacation packages, and is available to travel agents through the VAX VacationAccess booking engine and consumers on www.UnitedVacations.com

Spirit Offers Agents More Potential

Spirit Vacations is moving to an exclusive "Set Your Own Commission" model for travel agent compensation. By emulating the traditional retail world, travel agents take full control of the price their customers pay and ultimately their profitability.

Since September 8, 2008, Spirit Vacations will remove standard commissions on all new bookings and transition its compensation structure to only feature the set your own commission option. Set Your Own Commission provides travel agents complete control over the entire booking process. It offers a payment structure that allows travel agents to set their own prices and the commission levels they want to be paid. Low prices can be marked up for greater profit or the savings can be passed on to clients; it is your choice.

Commission is still distributed the same way as the standard commission structure. The only change is that there is no more

guessing how much you will earn. If you enter \$300 or 30% in the Set Commission screen in the Dynamic Booking Engine, you will receive that amount minus a 3% transaction fee 30 days after your client travels. No speculating whether or not you will receive commission on a certain product or feature. Spirit Vacations is available through VAX VacationAccess at vaxvacationaccess.com/spiritvacations, Amadeus AgentNet, Sabre Vacations, Vacation.com's AgentNet or by calling 407-583-5501

GE Money and Goway Travel

A leading tour company specializing in expeditions to Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific, Asia and Africa, **Goway Travel** announced a multi-year agreement to offer the GE Money Travel finance program on Goway tours, vacations and other travel-related expenses.

The private-label credit card program, managed by GE Money's Sales Finance unit, provides a menu of offers and promotions, including deferred interest for six months with monthly minimum payments as well as extended payment financing on one-time trips or ongoing travel.

"The GE Money Travel card is a great option for people to make travel plans, track expenses and manage payments," said Peter Lacy, vice president of finance for Goway Travel. "Our travelers look for trips and holidays that provide once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and now we offer a financing program that fits their needs and budgets."

For information contact, Emma Cottis, Goway Travel, 800-387 8850 x5376 ; E-mail press@goway.com

Back to School with NEST

The **Network of Entrepreneurs Selling Travel (NEST)** announced that it is continuing its popular series of virtual training for home-based agents this fall, in conjunction with the group's preferred suppliers.

The one-hour webinars are offered two or three times a week over a secure server, and home-based agents participate from their home computers. Suppliers present their product features and benefits, and provide sales and marketing strategies that are designed to increase the agents' revenue potential.

"Our e-learning program has been a tremendous success," said Kathryn Mazza-Burney, President of NEST. "Travel agents have the opportunity to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date and on the cutting-edge, without ever having to leave the comfort of their home offices. The response to the program from agents and suppliers alike has been overwhelmingly positive. Most importantly, the NEST virtual trainings bridge the gap between the need for home-based agents to be fully trained and the need for suppliers to build relationships with this dynamic and ever-growing distribution channel."

NEST is holding its fourth annual NEST FEST 2008 "fiesta" conference in Xcaret, Mexico on November 13-16, 2008. The event will take place at the luxurious Occidental Grand Xcaret, with pre-FAM opportunities in Cancun and the Mayan Riviera.

To find out more about the NEST virtual trainings, NEST agencies can log onto the Agent Extranet at www.inthenest.com or contact their local Service Director. To learn more about joining the NEST, contact Andrew Wainer, 888-245-NEST x3008 or, visit www.jointhenest.com

Agent Incentives

Sandals Joins VAX

Grand Pineapple Beach Resorts joined the VAX VacationAccess online booking platform just two months after Sandals Resorts International added the two resorts in Antigua and Jamaica to its portfolio. Grand Pineapple Beach Resorts is being marketed as Sandals' new value-oriented, all-inclusive brand, welcoming families, couples, singles and groups. Visit www.sandals.com

Agent Retreat at Puerto Plata

Victoria Golf & Beach Resort has given a new image to the traditional all-inclusive by providing its guests with chic décor and vibe, newly renovated accommodations, gourmet dining and on-site spa services at low all-inclusive prices. With its special "Travel Agent Retreat," travel agents are invited to enjoy the property's newly renovated upscale accommodations with all-inclusive meal plan and spa treatment of their choice for \$195 per person per stay through Dec. 15, 2008.

The "Travel Agent's Retreat" package includes three night accommodations with all-inclusive meal plan, choice of spa treatment at the Bagua Spa at sister property Casa Colonial and unlimited access to facilities and activities at sister property Gran Ventana. Rates are inclusive of tax and service charge and travel agents must provide proper travel agent identification at the time of check in.

Call 809-320-1200; E-mail reservasvr@vhhr.com; www.vhhr.com

Jolly Deals for Agents Only (+ Friends)

Jolly Beach Resort has organized agent incentives valid through Dec., at savings of up to 50% at the brand new Palms Wellness Centre Spa and a choice of a \$25.00 match play coupon per adult, per day or \$10.00 in slot tokens per adult, per day for the nearby Grand Princess Casino.

This special all-inclusive travel agent rate for a Standard room is \$80, \$103 for a King/Queen Superior and \$111 per person per night for a Junior Suite. Children 3-16 stay for just \$38 and the 3rd and 4th person rate is \$83. Kids under 3 stay free at Jolly Beach Resort & Spa all the time. Rates are based on double occupancy and include accommodation, all meals, snacks and afternoon tea, house brand beverages, non-motorized watersports, taxes and service charges. Travel agents must present their valid IATA or CLIA card on arrival. Specify booking code TAUS08.

Besides earning a 15% commission on all bookings, travel agents also earn one free night for every five bookings of five nights or longer as part of the resort's incentive program. Free nights can be redeemed through Dec. 20; there are no limits on the number of nights that can be earned.

"Seeing is believing – and we want travel agents to come with their families for a first-hand vacation experience at Jolly Beach Resort & Spa", says P. Hilary Modeste, Director of Marketing Worldwide for Jolly Beach Resort & Spa. "We have some wonderful new additions to the property including the Palms Wellness Centre Spa and Jolly Teenz Club,

and our beach and year-round value are Antigua's best."

Call 866-905-6559; www.jollybeachresort.com



NTA Welcomes Agents to Pittsburgh

The National Tour Association is inviting professional travel buyers (such as travel agents, bank and educational travel planners) to participate in a one-day Buyer-to-Buyer Exchange at the 2008 Annual Convention in Pittsburgh, Nov. 15-19 for \$45.

Participants can take part in the Buyer-to-Buyer Exchange, a prescheduled business appointment session that allows participants to buy and sell from each other. As part of the one-day program, professional travel buyers will connect with NTA tour operators all of which have been in business an average of 23 years and are among the most distinguished and diverse in the industry offering a wide range of products from group to FIT catering to nearly every demographic from student to seniors. NTA has members in 34 countries, the Destination Pavilion showcases North American as well as international destinations.

Call 800-682-8886; E-mail questions@NTAstaff.com.

Couples Garners Praise for Agency Plan

"Couples Resorts understands and appreciates how travel agents fuel our growth and success in such a competitive market. It is important to us to show our gratitude, as well as inspire our agents to excel and get to that next prestigious level," says Randy Russell, chief romance officer and senior vice president of sales & marketing.

Couples Resorts' 2008 Preferred Agency Program Levels range from the Preferred Level requiring a minimum of five VIP registrations to the Prestige Level, based on 25 VIP Registered Bookings and to the Platinum Level for 50 VIP Registered Bookings minimum. The current program has continuously drawn praise for being one of the simplest and least restrictive travel agent incentive recognition programs in the Caribbean. Once registered, travel agents can make a booking with a favorite source, register clients online, and start reaping the incentives.

Other Developments

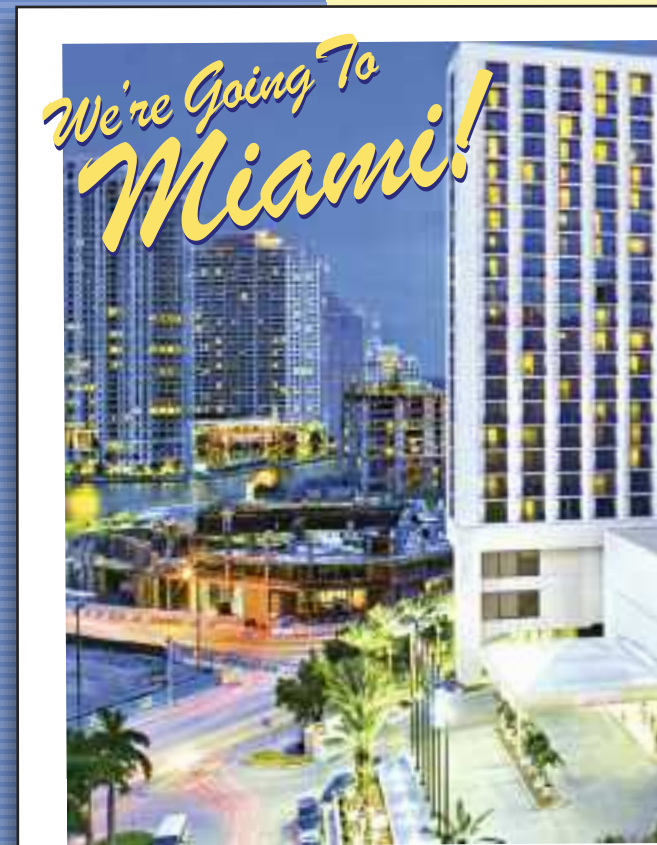
In other news, the all-inclusive, 226-room Couples Ocho Rios in Jamaica will reemerge as Couples Tower Isle when its \$22 million renovation project is completed in December. The new name harkens back to the resort's early days when it was a private island retreat for Hollywood celebrities in the 1950s and 60s back then it was known as the Tower Isle Hotel, Jamaica's first year-round beach resort. Renovations include the addition of four suites and 16 guestrooms (all with ocean views), a 1950s-style diving board at the main pool, a wedding gazebo, a spa with 10 treatment rooms, and a floating dock at the resort's private island. Agents can enroll in the Couples Resorts' 2008 Preferred Agency Program by visiting www.couples.com/06travelagentF.htm.

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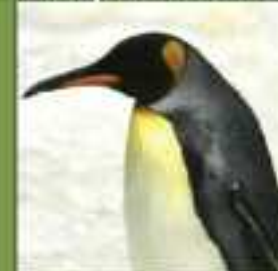


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