

DESTINATIONS OF THE WORLD

news

Essential travel intelligence

November 2011



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SAADIYAT ISLAND

Abu Dhabi's newest luxury hideout

SUITE DREAMS

Paradise found in the Maldives

Vintage *Bohemia*

Wellness meets glamour in the spa towns of the Czech Republic

CONNOISSEUR

The girl from Ipanema

912

STARÉ MĚSTO

24 HOURS: ISTANBUL

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ON THE ROAD

Concept cars with attitude

BURBERRY
BODY

THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR WOMEN





The background of the entire image is a dark, rich brown wood paneling. The panels are arranged in a grid-like pattern with recessed lines, creating a sense of depth and texture. The lighting is dramatic, with some areas being slightly brighter than others, highlighting the grain of the wood.

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LEGEND
THE NEW FRAGRANCE

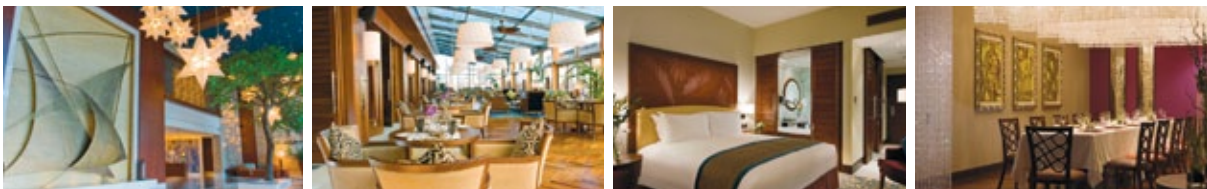


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Life is *Magnifique*

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Island life
Monte-Carlo Beach Club is the place to see and be seen on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island

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DUBAI FESTIVAL CITY

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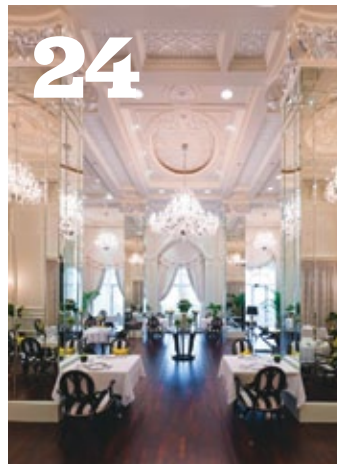
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Letter from the Editor

IT HAS BEEN A REWARDING MONTH AT

Destinations of the World News. We were among the first to see the long-awaited **Monte-Carlo Beach Club, Saadiyat** – one of the handful of projects in the first phase of Abu Dhabi's exciting **Saadiyat Island** development. The beach club marks a turn away from the typical beach concept in the UAE (most decent ones are currently situated in hotels) and yet a return to the heady days of the early 90s, when independent beach clubs were prevalent across **Abu Dhabi** and **Dubai** and anyone who was anyone was a member of at least one.

It also marks the first time in history that the 100-year-old Monte-Carlo hospitality company **Société des Bains de Mer** has launched a project outside Monaco, which shows the extent to which the company thinks both the beach club and Saadiyat Island as a whole will be a success. Turn to page 60 to find out more about the club and the other new developments due to open on Saadiyat this month.

Our man in Europe, Andy Round, was delighted to stumble upon a hidden jewel on his doorstep when he visited **Antwerp**. Although it's not far geographically from his current base in **Brussels**, the atmosphere and attitude of Antwerp is a far cry from the stiff upper lips and starched suits of the European capital. The wild combination of creative designers, contemporary art and people who do strange things with chocolate makes for a rewarding visit, he explains on page 52.

Meanwhile, I was in the **Czech Republic** enjoying glorious early October sunshine, and was lucky enough to escape the picturesque but jam-packed streets of **Prague** to spend a few days in western **Bohemia**, almost on the border with Germany. The postcard-perfect spa towns of **Marianske Lazne** and **Karlovy Vary** are impossibly pretty, both custom-built as wellness escapes for the country's elite.



Karlovy Vary

The Czech Republic's original spa town is as beautiful today as it was 500 years ago

Today they continue to attract wealthy visitors from all over, but the addition of modern medical spas and new technology, combined with stunning architecture and fresh mountain air, mean they are far more than just an indulgence for the mega-wealthy, but a popular destination in their own right. Read the full story on page 44.

Back in Dubai, *Destinations of the World News* had lunch with a man who has spent the last six years and more than EUR50 m (US\$68 m) building "the best place and the best hotel I could imagine, with love and generosity". **Philippe Soulier**, owner and developer of the most exciting new hotel in Marrakech, **Palais Namaskar**, is one to watch. Read the fascinating interview on page 42.

There's plenty more travel inspiration to be found in this issue, with a colourful lineup of stunning resorts, exotic destinations and fascinating people – we hope they inspire you as much as they did us. Happy travels.

Joe Mortimer
Editor

joe@dotnews.com



COMPETITION...

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Think you can identify the location in the photo? Visit www.dotnews.com and click *Competition* to enter. The winner will receive a 12-month subscription to *Destinations of the World News* worth US\$99*. The destination featured in our October 2011 competition was Stonehenge in England, UK. This month's winner is Souad Hobeika from Lebanon.

*This competition is open to residents of the Middle East and North Africa. The closing date is November 22, 2011. Entrants with the correct answer will be entered into a prize draw. The winner will be announced in the December issue of *Destinations of the World News* and on dotnews.com



A HOTEL AS LEGENDARY AS ST PETERSBURG ITSELF

1911 On St Isaac's Square, in booming Imperial St Petersburg, the fashionable architect Fyodor Lidval is fitting out new building that will be his masterpiece a luxury hotel. Every modern convenience is being installed: telephone lines, automated vacuuming system, steam-driven central heating, guest lifts... This is the Russia of Nicholas II, and money is no object.

2011 The illustrious Hotel Astoria has never rested on its laurels. We have welcomed Romanovs, Rasputin and regal ballerinas, but we wear our history lightly. Now, when we talk about being well connected it is more likely in reference to the high-speed Internet in our rooms. We call it the art of simple luxury.



THE ART OF SIMPLE LUXURY IN KEY DESTINATIONS

Brussels ■ Berlin ■ Frankfurt ■ Munich ■ Florence ■ Rome ■ ST. Petersburg ■ Geneva ■ Edinburgh ■ London ■ Manchester ■ Prague ■ Sicily
COMING SOON: Abu Dhabi ■ Jeddah ■ Marrakech ■ Cairo

Contributors

Joe Mortimer

After a year exploring the wild side of South America, editor Joe Mortimer returned to the UK and embarked on a career in journalism that has since led him all over the world in search of breathtaking landscapes, mouthwatering dishes, and the most luxurious hotels. He recently set off for the Czech Republic to find out why thousands of Czechs flock to western Bohemia every year to indulge in the wellness rituals of the region's spa towns, and found it's not just the promise of eternal youth that draws visitors. More on page 44.



Caitlin Cheadle

Deputy editor Caitlin Cheadle packed her things and left her native Vancouver three years ago after catching the travel bug while backpacking through Europe. Although she misses the mountains and fresh air of Canada, she's happy to stay in Dubai as long as she can travel frequently – which she does. This month Caitlin was blown away by the 8,000-year-old history of Turkey's cultural capital Istanbul, where east meets west on either side of the mighty Bosphorus. Read her recommendations for your next short visit on page 68.

Andy Round

Andy Round works between the Middle East and Europe as the senior editor of *Destinations of the World News*. He has worked as the editor of a daily newspaper in Malta, run a portfolio of glossy magazines in Dubai and got lost looking for gorillas in Rwanda. Closer to home, Andy recently discovered that there's more to the Belgian city of Antwerp than meets the eye, with celebrity tea-makers, rock 'n' roll chocolatiers and an edgy collection of designers all itching to grab the attention of the world. Read his story on page 52.



Gemma Greenwood

Gemma Greenwood is a freelance travel journalist and editorial consultant who recently gave up a full-time position in Dubai to take care of her first-born daughter back home in Essex in the UK. Far from putting an end to her travels, being a mum appears to be opening up new doors for Gemma and her daughter, who seems to be catching the travel bug just like her mum. Last month the family set off for the Dorchester Collection's Le Richemond in Geneva. Find out how they got on in our family luxury column on page 84.

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Four Seasons Resort, Kuda Huraa



Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru Island,
North Malé Atoll



Hilton Maldives Iru Fushi Resort & Spa



Huvafen Fushi, Maldives



DESTINATIONS OF THE WORLD

Among the many fond memories left behind by world-renowned designer Bijan Pakzad when he passed away earlier this year was this limited-edition Rolls-Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe. The 'Bijan Edition' Rolls blends the flamboyance of the man himself and the luxury lifestyle encapsulated by his Beverly Hills boutique, Bijan.

The extravagant car is the result of a partnership between the Iranian-American designer and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, forged at last year's LA Auto Show. The model features all sorts of luxurious touches, including carefully sculpted bodywork in Bijan's signature yellow, a white diamond-embedded wooden veneer dashboard and a set of crystal glasses and picnic set stashed in the rear.

This inaugural edition was unveiled outside the Bijan store on October 6, but the Rolls-Royce/Bijan partnership says it will produce at least 12 of them, each priced somewhere between US\$850,000 and \$1.6m. This isn't Bijan's first foray into luxury automobiles – the late designer owned a custom-made Bugatti Veyron (in yellow of course), and commissioned another Grand Sport before he died.



11.11 NEWS



‘Occupy’ movement intensifies

DEMONSTRATORS took to the streets of major cities across Europe and last month, following an international call to action by the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US.

Peaceful organised protests took place in London, Frankfurt, Berlin, Cologne, Munich, Brussels, Zurich, Lisbon and Vienna as groups of demonstrators ranging from 300 to 5,000 protested against the influential role of major corporations in political, economic and financial policymaking, and the role of banks in the European financial crisis.

Similar protests in Rome turned violent when tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets on October 15, torching cars, setting fire to buildings and smashing bank windows. Reports said around 135 people were injured in the violence, and Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno said the damage caused by rioters amounted to more than US\$1.4 million.

In Germany, several thousand protestors took to the streets outside the European Central Bank in Frankfurt to voice their discontent with the European banking system, with similar peaceful demonstrations in other Germany cities.

The UK branch of the movement, Occupy London Stock Exchange, set up an encampment of more than 200 tents outside St. Paul’s Cathedral’s western edge, despite pleas from church and city officials asking the protestors to move on.

According to church officials, the presence of the protestors was putting off tourists from visiting the famous UK landmark, forcing it to close its doors to tourists

“Our intention was to highlight the inequities of the global economic crisis, in a peaceful manner, especially as the Cathedral has been so hospitable”

and churchgoers for the first time since the Second World War, which they say is costing the cathedral GBP20,000 (US\$31,850) per day in lost revenue.

“Our intention was to highlight the inequities of the global economic crisis, in a peaceful manner, especially as the Cathedral has been so hospitable,” wrote members of Occupy London Stock Exchange in an open letter to St. Paul’s Cathedral staff.

“We have endeavoured to clarify perceived health and safety issues and continue to place these as a priority for the health and safety of everyone, both inside and outside of this historic Cathedral.”

The ‘Occupy’ movement started in the US in September, when a large group of protestors moved into Wall Street to protest against corporate involvement in politics.

The movement gained very lit-

tle media attention at first, but momentum grew as word spread via social media using the Twitter hashtag #occupywallstreet. @Occupywallstreet had almost 84,000 followers at time of press.

Protests in the US have led to dozens of arrests in New York and Chicago, but the ongoing movement has also become a tourist attraction, with groups of tourists flocking to New York’s Zuccotti Park to take photos of the protest.



Germany's new health hub

THE German city of Bonn is strengthening its reputation as a leading destination for medical tourism following a major partnership between the Kameha Grand Bonn hotel and the University Hospital Bonn.

The ultra-modern hotel, located on the banks of the Rhine, is positioning itself as a luxurious place for patients to stay before and after treatments at University Hospital Bonn, which specialises in the surgical fields of orthopaedics and accident surgery, plastic and aesthetic surgery, oncology and cardiology.

“Many of our patients stay in Bonn before and after medical treatment. The Kameha Grand Bonn is renowned for its excellent service and is thus an ideal place to relax for our patients,” said Prof. Dr. Christof Burger from University Hospital Bonn.

The hotel promises a dedication to wellbeing and offers services including VIP airport transfers to Frankfurt Airport and personal shoppers.

Kameha Grand managing director Thomas Kleber said Bonn was proving to be increasingly popular with Arabic visitors.

“The cooperation between the lifestyle hotel Kameha Grand and the University Hospital Bonn is a successful symbiosis. Increasing numbers of guests from Arab countries are travelling specifically to Bonn, on the one hand to avail of the medical expertise and on the other hand to enjoy our warm hospitality,” he said.

The hotel features a number of quirky themed suites – the Beethoven Suite, Diva Suite, Fair Play Suite and Royal Suite – as well as the Kameha spa, run by international spa experts ESPA.

IN FOCUS



London mayor Boris Johnson and Emirates Airline president Tim Clark sign a sponsorship deal for a new cable car system spanning the River Thames worth AED204 million (US\$55.55 m). The cable car project will be known as the Emirates Air Line and the stations at either side of the river will carry the company's name when it opens in summer 2012. This is the biggest UK sponsorship deal for Emirates since its AED567 million shirt and stadium naming deal with Arsenal in 2004.

MARY SAYS...

The latest in luxury travel

AFRICA'S most southerly winery, Strandveld Vineyards, 2.5 hours' drive southeast of Cape Town, is an impressive 670 hectares of stunning landscape. Strandveld's 'First Sighting' label commemorates Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias' first sight of land, in 1488. The Cape of Good Hope is only 11km away. Winemaker Conrad Vlok also shares the joy of this amazing 'terroir', location. You see dozens of buffalo in fenced areas, and solar panels and a windmill, all part of a scheme to offset Germany's carbon footprint. The 69 hectares that are planted with vines are in neat, pipe-irrigated lines, rows of vines alternately spaced by piles of canola stalks, for mulch, or wild mustard, to repel insects from the vines.

In Santa Monica, a few miles northwest of Los Angeles, the beach-set Shutters on the Beach has handmade green Italian bicycles that are designed by Hollywood favourite Kate Spade. www.katespade.com

My latest must-have travel accessory is a Travel Blue go-anywhere adaptor. Yes, I have boxes of adaptors at home but apart from Australia and China, which both require V-shaped plugs, and India and South Africa, who want big-rounds, this colourful little thing is universal. It has three bright blue and lightweight parts that fit, as a puzzle, into a box. I love it. www.travel-blue.com

Former New York fashionista Elizabeth Kiester was so enamoured of her travels in Cambodia that she up and moved there, lock stock and barrel. She now has three Wanderlust stores, two in Siem Reap and one in Phnom Penh. www.wanderlustcambodia.com.

MARY GOSTELOW

Dubai's designer dining

FOR evidence that Dubai is well and truly back in business, look no further than its buzzing food and beverage scene, which has exploded with sensational new outlets over the last few months.

Most of the action comes courtesy of two major players, Jumeirah Restaurants – a subsidiary of Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts – and the new Tower Two at Grosvenor House Dubai.

Jumeirah Hotels recently opened Voi at Jumeirah Zabeel Saray on The Palm, a Vietnamese restaurant with a contemporary twist inspired by the French colonial Southeast Asia of the 1920s. Award-winning chef de cuisine Phuong Mai has given typical Vietnamese street food the fine-dining treatment, with signature dishes including marinated Scottish salmon spring rolls and Brittany blue lobster with mango artichoke salad, in a colonial setting with high ceilings, black lacquer furniture and floor-to-ceiling mirrors.

Over at Tower Two, a trio of new openings already has mouths watering. Siddharta Lounge is a chic white and gold tapas-style lounge bar with sweeping views of Dubai Marina and an elegant poolside bar. It's destined to become the haunt of

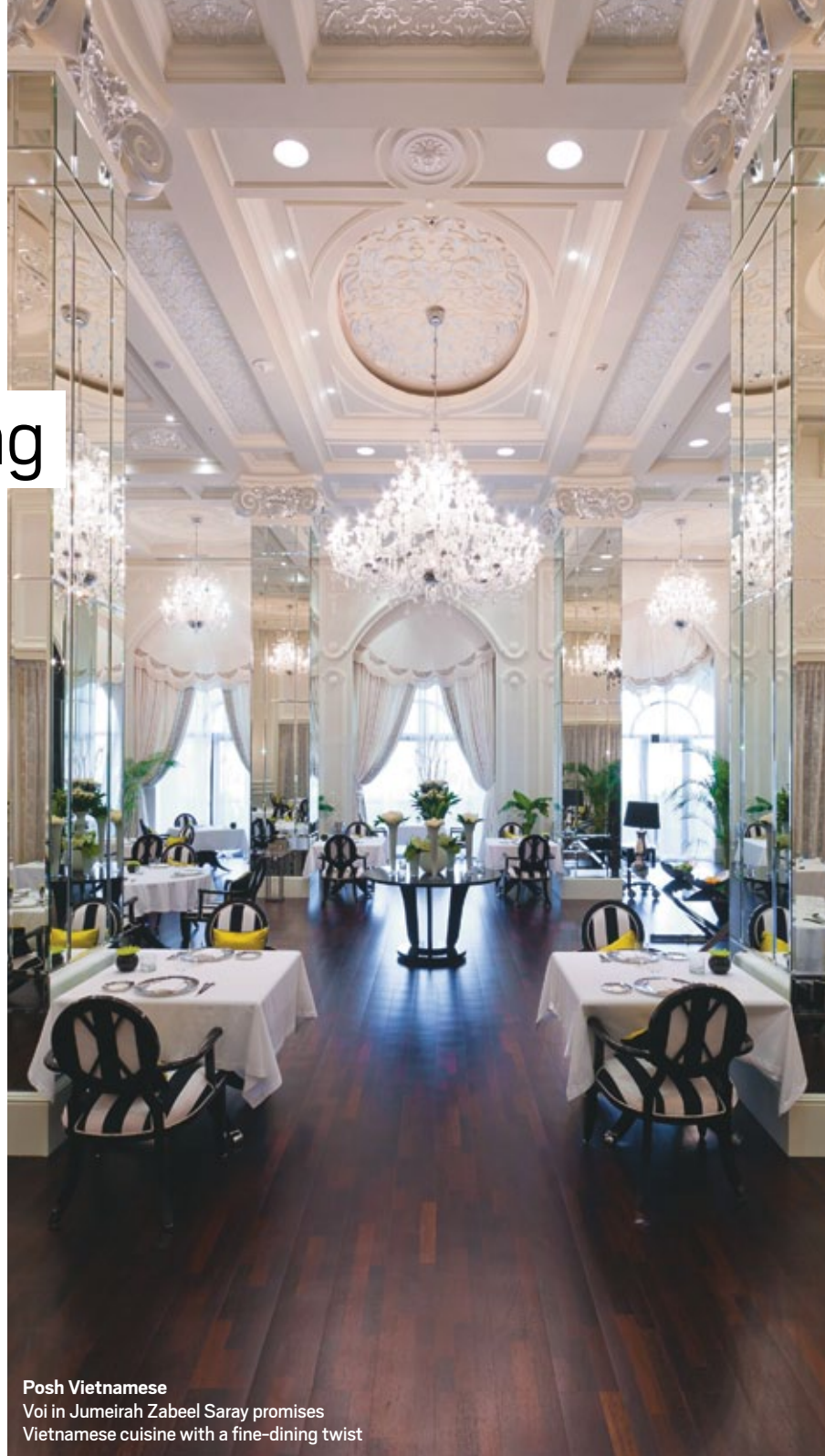
Dubai's rich and famous in no time at all, as is Embassy Dubai – London club entrepreneur Mark Fuller's exclusive new supperclub.

But the piece de resistance at Tower Two is Toro Toro, a new three-storey Pan-American concept from Richard Sandoval. The moody interiors are black and burnt orange, and two specialist bars feature a huge range of South American spirits.

This month also sees the opening of Hakkasan Dubai in Jumeirah Emirates Towers, the second Middle Eastern location for the Michelin-starred restaurant, which opened in London's Hanway Place in 2001.

Like its counterparts, Hakkasan Dubai promises exquisite Cantonese cuisine in a stunning setting, including an 88-seat outside terrace and the casual Ling-Ling lounge.

The New Year will bring yet more good news for UAE-based gourmands, with the opening of dunhill's Alfie's Restaurant and Lounge next to a new dunhill store in Jumeirah Emirates Towers. Alfie's Dubai will be the third Alfie's restaurant, following in the footsteps of outlets in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Management describe the new venue as "masculine, elegant and contemporary".



Posh Vietnamese
Voi in Jumeirah Zabeel Saray promises Vietnamese cuisine with a fine-dining twist



Toro Toro
Richard Sandoval's new Latin American restaurant

“Award-winning chef de cuisine Phuong Mai has given typical Vietnamese street food the fine-dining treatment”

Spring 2012 will also welcome a second Rivington Grill, following the successful partnership between Jumeirah Restaurants and Caprice Holdings, which saw the opening of The Ivy Dubai earlier this year. The new three-floor Rivington Grill will open in Souk Madinat Jumeirah and promises British cuisine using ingredients sourced from local and international artisan suppliers, practitioners and farmers.

Celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay recently pulled out of his Dubai restaurant Verre, however Scott Price and Nick Alvis, the chefs currently heading up Verre, are set to relaunch the venue as Table 9 this month.



Hakkasan Dubai
Opening soon in Emirates Towers

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Cherry on top

Gordon Campbell Gray's trendy Le Gray Beirut has opened a stylish new lounge venue for Beirut's beautiful people. Cherry on the Rooftop features comfortable cherry red and pure white couches on the pool deck, with live music and sweeping views of the city.

Enter SnoozeCube

Dubai International Airport has introduced 10 sound-proofed SnoozeCubes next to Gate 122 in Terminal 1, offering short-stay sleep solutions for travellers with long transit times. The modular sleeping pods each feature a full-sized bed, touch-screen TV and wireless internet access, and are connected to the airport's flight information system to ensure that snoozing passengers don't miss their flight. Rates start from AED65 (US\$17.80) per hour for the first four hours.

Royal CEO

The Ritz-Carlton, Dubai International Financial Centre has appointed a dedicated CEO – chief executive organiser – to provide personalised service to guests staying at the hotel's two 220 square metre Royal Suites. The Royal CEO will act as an extension of the guest's own business team, providing admin and technical support, making travel arrangements and booking business lunches.

Viceroy takes over Yas Hotel

Change is afoot on Abu Dhabi's Yas Island, where the iconic Yas Hotel will soon be taken over by the Viceroy Hotel Group. Yas Viceroy Abu Dhabi features 499 guestrooms and suites and straddles the Yas Marina Circuit – home of this month's Etihad Airways Formula One Abu Dhabi Grand Prix – and the exclusive Yas Marina.



IN FOCUS

The Chedi Muscat's new 103-metre Long Pool is part of a vast new 12,000 square metre spa complex, featuring health club with Technogym equipment, eight new spa treatment rooms, and men's and women's steam and sauna areas. Treatments and relaxation rituals will feature rejuvenating natural ingredients, plus a range of high-end organic branded products. The Spa plans to introduce a limited number of membership opportunities for non-guests, providing access to the hotel's facilities, as well as complimentary laundry service, spa treatments, personal trainer, dining discounts and special rates at other GHM properties.

The legend is reborn in Aswan

ONE of Egypt's most historic luxury hotels has reopened under the Sofitel Legend flag, following an extensive three-year renovation.

The Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan was built in 1899 and has seen an A-Z list of celebrities and world leaders walk through its lobby in its 112-year history, from Winston Churchill to Agatha Christie, both of whom now have premium suites named after them in the hotel.

The magnificent property is the third hotel to be opened under French hotel group Accor's Legend collection, which includes Sofitel properties in remarkable locations with remarkable histories.

The recent refurbishment was overseen by French interior designer Sybille de Margerie, who was tasked with preserving the original Victorian building and bringing the spirit of the legend to life. The result is a marriage of Victorian, Middle Eastern and French styles in the hotel's two wings – The Palace and The Nile. The former features 76 guestrooms, 45 of which are suites, including the spacious Winston Churchill and Agatha Christie Suites, each of which have their own private terrace. The Nile wing has 62 rooms with 37 suites, including the signa-



Legend reborn
The hotel has stood on the banks of the Nile since 1899

ture Agha Khan Suite, all of which boast views of the Nile.

The hotel is also home to a 1,200 square metre So SPA and four restaurants, including the signature 1902, which is decked out in Thousand and One Nights décor and features a Qualan crypt and 20-metre-high dome.

The Old Cataract is part of the Egyptian General Company for Tourism and Hotels' (EGCTH) new Historic Hotels of Egypt brand, which currently includes nine of Egypt's most notable historic properties.

EGCTH has committed to investing some US\$368 m in restoring and refurbishing the hotels within the collection, both in a bid to preserve Egypt's rich history of luxury hospitality and to attract new hotel companies to Egypt.

Other hotels in the collection include The Shepherd Hotel in Cairo, which was recently taken over by Rocco Forte Hotels; The Nile Ritz-Carlton Cairo, which is also undergoing a significant renovation; and The Palestine Hotel in Alexandria.

a perfect view at the perfect place



Image of Sonesta Beach Sharm

what's *your* passion? A day at the beach. A room with a view. A taste of faraway culture. Sumptuous dining where food is art. At Sonesta, our Egypt Collection delivers it all.....from elegant riverfront hotels and enchanting Red Sea resorts to luxury cruises along the Nile. We have a passion for providing memorable experiences..... Close to everything you desire and far from the ordinary. Come experience it with Sonesta.



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BOSTON • MIAMI • NEW ORLEANS • CHILE • COLOMBIA • ECUADOR • EGYPT • PERU • SINT MAARTEN

Mantra Samui Resort & Spa

After a 3.5-year US\$20 million redevelopment, the Mantra Samui Resort & Spa in Koh Samui's northern coast, a member of Great Hotels of the World, has reopened. The hotel's 74 rooms include 'Love rooms' for couples, with private Jacuzzis on the terrace, and the 'Grand rooms', which are ideally suited to families.

Free flights to Japan

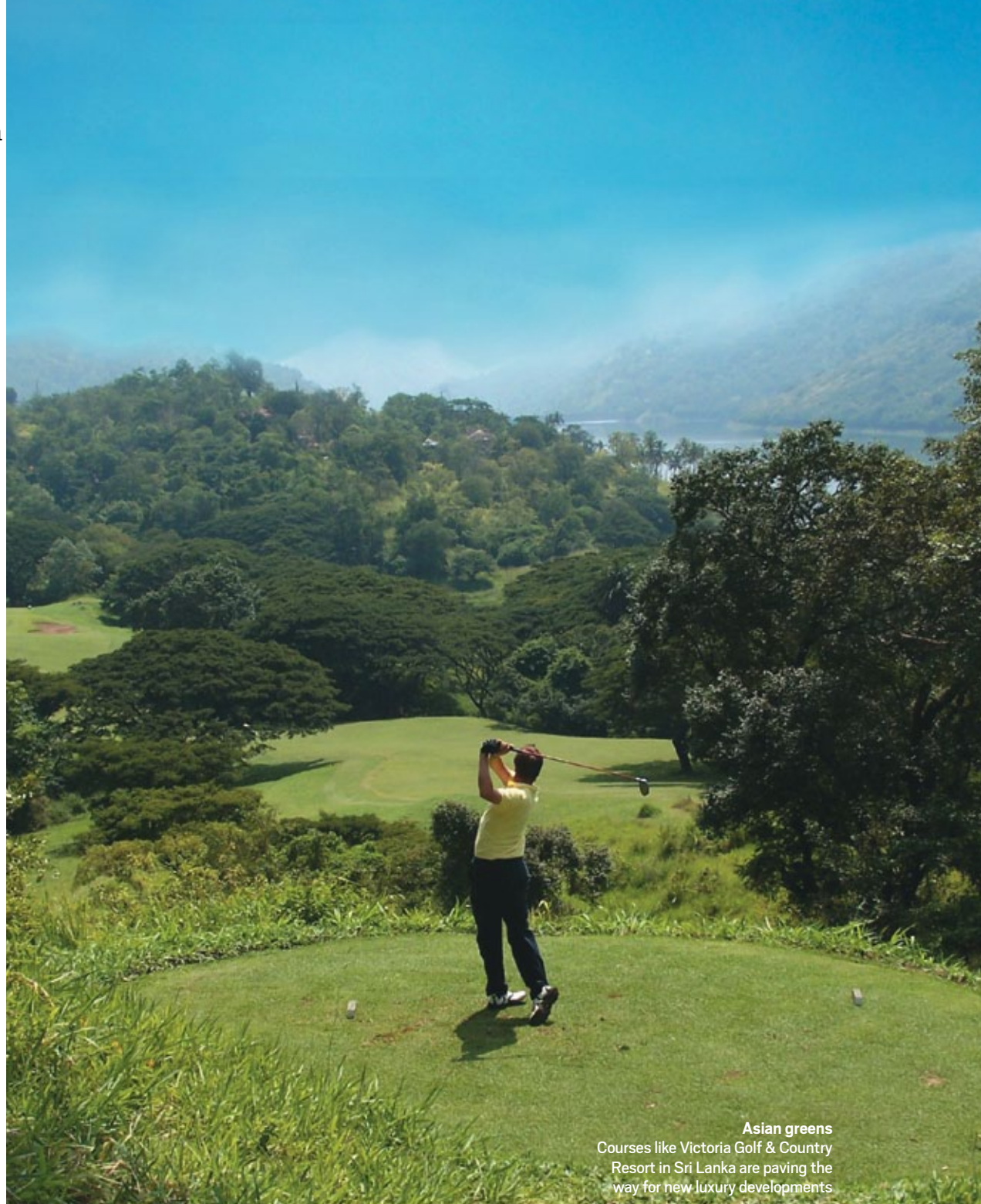
In a bid to re-attract visitors after the March 11 tsunami and nuclear accident at Fukushima, Japan is giving away free return flights to 10,000 foreign visitors, starting in April 2012. According to Japan's tourism agency, the programme will cost more than one billion yen (US\$15 million) to fund. Applicants will need to outline their travel plans and answer questions about post-disaster tourism in Japan in order to win the flight tickets, however they will need to pay their own accommodation once there.

First Class from OZ

British Airways will be offering its new First Class cabins on all aircraft flying from Australia by March 2012. Each individual suite has its own wardrobe, 400-thread count Egyptian cotton linen, a writing desk that converts into a dining table with extra seat, and 'intelligent' mattress for a good rest.

Helping wings

Kudos to Thai Airways, which opened up special flights last month to assist in transporting food and medical supplies, plus flood victims and government officials between the lower northern and upper central regions of Thailand, where washed-out roadways have made travel difficult.



Asian greens
Courses like Victoria Golf & Country Resort in Sri Lanka are paving the way for new luxury developments

Asia's booming luxe golf scene

A strong economy, improving developments in infrastructure, and an increased interest in golf as a pastime and a competitive sport have allowed luxury golf course development to flourish in Asia.

While Thailand and Japan have long been credited for their abundance of top-rated championship courses, destinations with emerging economies like India and China are enjoying a proliferation of luxury golf course developments, in a bid to keep up with demand from tourists and to cater to a host of new Asia-based golf tournaments.

With professional courses now popping up in places like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Vietnam, all graced with an abundance of wide-open spaces, idyllic

grass-growing climates and beautiful scenery, it's no surprise these destinations are quickly becoming popular golf tourism markets.

Cheaper rates than Europe and the US mean tourists can go for a golfing holiday in Sri Lanka or India for a

fraction of the cost they would pay to play on a course in western destinations. Add to that the comparatively inexpensive hotel rates and it's easy to see why Asia is one of the strongest new players in golf tourism.

India alone already has 200 courses, with more than 40 currently under construction and additional plans in the pipeline. Developers are also looking to expand the professional course portfolios of Sri Lanka, Vietnam

“Developers are looking to expand the professional course portfolios of Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia, bringing in top professional golfers to help”

and Cambodia, bringing in top professional golfers like Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Greg Norman and Max Wexler to help in the design and branding of future courses.

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BANYAN TREE
—SEYCHELLES—

New Zealand tourism suffers in wake of oil spill

THE leaking of oil last month from 47,000-tonne cargo ship *Rena* into the sea surrounding the Astrolabe Reef off New Zealand's North Island town of Tauranga has been branded the country's worst ever environmental marine disaster.

There is no doubt that the spill will have disastrous consequences for the local marine wildlife, which includes dolphins, whales and blue penguins, but also for New Zealand's tourism industry, which had previously been enjoying the positive after-effects of hosting the Rugby World Cup 2011.

Northern New Zealand's waters are popular fishing, surfing, diving and swimming spots, and in October, locals and authorities were forced to close beaches, including major tourist attraction Mount Maunganui beach, as clumps of oil washed up on shore.

Many small business owners who thrive on tourism are extremely angry at the situation. Mike O'Neill, who runs Sunfish Charters in Tauranga, told New Zealand Newswire that his business has come to a "100 percent standstill" since the *Rena* oil spill. He wants maritime officials held accountable and expressed frustration with the ship's crew and with Maritime New Zealand.

"Our livelihoods are going down the drain and we're sitting here watching no action and nobody taking any responsibility," he said.

Meanwhile Tourism Industry Association New Zealand spokeswoman Ann-Marie Johnson attempted to draw attention to other attractions on offer, stating, "There's loads of things to do around Tauranga and the Bay of Plenty that don't involve going near the beach."



Gross National Happiness up

HRM King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, 31, and his bride, Queen Jetsun Pema, 21, a student and the daughter of an airline pilot, exchange a tender glance during the purification marriage ceremony, held at the Punakha Dzong in Punakha, the same venue where King Jigme was crowned in a lavish coronation ceremony in 2008. The young Oxford-educated King took over following the abdication in 2006 of his father, who began the country's transition toward democracy. Prior to the 1970s, tourists were not allowed into the isolated nation, which is well-known for its Gross National Happiness index.

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

73-100

The floors of Shenzhen's new Kingkey Finance Tower that will be occupied by The St. Regis Shenzhen when it opens in late 2011. The hotel will feature restaurants on the 95th, 96th and 100th floors, as well as 257 guest rooms and 40 suites.

7,530

The estimated number of airplane deliveries Boeing has predicted North American airlines will take over the next 20 years, at a market value of over US\$760 billion. Boeing also predicts the majority of these will be smaller, single-aisle planes.

48

The number of flights Thai Airways is operating this year specifically for Thai Muslims attending the Hajj Pilgrimage, departing from Hat Yai, Phuket and Krabi and flying direct to Jeddah in accordance with authorization from Saudi Arabia.




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HERITAGE  RESORTS



Four Seasons to launch Disney resort

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts is building a 444-room luxury resort in Disney World in Florida. Complete with rooftop restaurant, the property will be incorporated into the Osprey Ridge golf course and is scheduled to open in 2014.

Fairmont goes to the dogs

Fairmont Hotels and Resorts has begun stationing lobby dogs in many of its properties around the world. For example, there is Edie, a boxer/labrador retriever mix who wears an employee nametag and keeps an appointment book for guests who want to walk her. "Her main job is to just sit around and be cute," says Julie Abramovic, spokeswoman for the Fairmont Pittsburgh Hotel, where Edie is stationed.

Ramsay moves to hotels

Outspoken British TV chef Gordon Ramsay has been working with US network Fox News on a new reality TV show titled *Hotel Hell*, in which Ramsay and a team of 'hospitality experts' will travel around the US, visiting struggling hotels and turning them around. We can't wait.

New York, new park

Following in the footsteps of the Highline, a public park converted from a disused elevated railway line, plans are now in effect to develop several more strategically placed public parks in New York City, which has little room to spare for such endeavours. Among the plans is the Delancey Underground, an underground park that will be developed from an old trolley terminal that has been abandoned for the last six decades.

Mexico tries to shake undesirable image



Escaping the past
Juarez is trying to rid itself of its image as Mexico's most dangerous city

THOUGH it borders El Paso, Texas, one of the safest cities in the US, Juarez, Mexico can't shake its reputation as the 'most dangerous city in the hemisphere'.

Mexico's warring drug cartels have brought a bad name upon the city of 1.3 million – 8,900 people have been killed in drug trade-related violence since 2008, as the Sinaloa and Juarez cartels battle for control of a major route for contraband across the US border. Needless to say, tourists aren't exactly flocking there these days.

Mexico has been making huge efforts to improve its image to foreign tourists. Last month Juarez hosted a 16-day festival, Juarez Competitiva, packed with concerts, performances and speeches by prominent figures such as former New York City mayor Rudy Guiliani, who is credited as the power behind the cleaning-up of NYC's once crime-tarnished image, and former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev.

Juarez has recently sought the help of its very own crime-buster, Police Chief Julian Leyzaola, a retired army lieutenant colonel who drastically improved US border-town Tijuana's crime situation before being commissioned to work in Juarez. Since his move six months ago, the city has expe-

tell foreigners it is a 'safe' place to visit once again.

The majority of Juarez Competitiva will be held at a newly built centre that houses a modern children's museum, and the city is also planning a new baseball stadium and remodelled horse racetrack to attract visitors. Locals say that

"Unfortunately for Juarez, Tijuana and other areas of Mexico affected by drug violence, the improved homicide figures are still putting off potential tourists"

rienced a significant drop in homicides, and the local crime rate has dropped by roughly 50 percent.

In the wake of these improvements, Juarez wants to capture global attention with its Juarez Competitiva, or 'Competitive Juarez' festival, modelled after Tijuana Innovadora, a similar event held in Tijuana in 2010 to celebrate its crime rate improvements and to

business has been picking up in recent months, whereas most bars and restaurants were deserted by sundown six months ago. August saw 121 homicides in Juarez, the lowest rate in 26 months.

Unfortunately for Juarez, Tijuana and other areas of Mexico affected by drug violence, the homicide figures are still putting off potential tourists based in the US and Canada.

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“

“I think they made a mistake in taking off. I don't think we ever should have been in the air.”

Colleen O'Neal of Lubbock, Texas, who is suing Continental Airlines over 'extreme turbulence'.

“Customers who encroach upon any part of the neighboring seat(s) should proactively book the needed number of seats prior to travel. The armrest is considered to be the definitive boundary between seats and measures 17 inches in width.”

Southwest Airlines' Customers of Size' policy, which stipulates that overweight passengers who do not easily fit into one seat must purchase additional seats. The policy is now being adapted by other American airlines.

“I had no idea stewardesses on Pan Am had to be college-educated, speak multiple languages and that they could go on missions for the government.”

Actress Christina Ricci, star of new TV drama *Pan Am*.

”



IN FOCUS

The final frontier

Sir Richard Branson is at it again. In October the world's first-ever commercial spaceport, for the British billionaire's Virgin Galactic venture, opened in the deserts of New Mexico, USA. The opening ceremony saw Sir Richard abseil down the side of the new spaceport terminal, which he has named the 'Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space', sipping from a bottle of champagne. So far Virgin has sold around 430 tickets offering a 2.5-hour flight into space, which includes five minutes of weightlessness at a cost of US\$200,000 per ticket. The first flights will get underway at the end of 2012.

Hotel Bel-Air reopens after costly renovation

THE famous Hotel Bel-Air in Hollywood, California, which has long been a favourite of Hollywood movie stars and the A-list, reopened its doors last month after an extensive two-year, multi-million dollar renovation project.

Nestled on a 12-acre property in Los Angeles' ritzy Bel-Air neighbourhood, the Hotel Bel-Air has hosted celebrity guests including Marilyn Monroe, Grace Kelly, Nicole Kidman and Angelina Jolie in its 65-year history. It's also the spot where former US president Richard Nixon came to write his memoirs, and where chat show queen Oprah Winfrey came to celebrate her 50th birthday.

Owned by Hassanal Bolkiah, the Sultan of Brunei, the Hotel Bel-Air, part of the exclusive Dorchester Collection, has had a major face-lift that includes a new spa and



Skyscraper city
Canyon view suite living room

fitness studio and 12 new canyon-facing rooms with private infinity edge spa pools, bringing the total number of rooms up to 103 from its former 91.

The Hotel Bel-Air Restaurant is now managed by world-renowned chef Wolfgang Puck, with a menu featuring modern Californian cuisine with European influences.

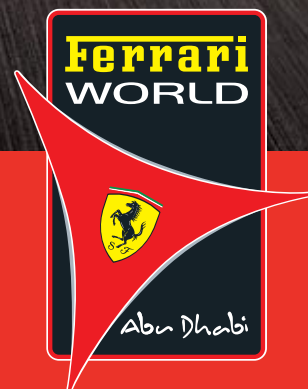


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SKY-HIGH INNOVATIONS



Space race (again) ▲

The race to put passengers in space seems to be getting pretty cluttered. The newest kid on the spacecraft block is Space Expedition Curacao, a company set up by Michiel Mol, one of the owners of Force India Formula 1. The company is promising to offer travellers the chance to fly 100 kilometres into the air, experience weightlessness for a few minutes and then glide to earth – all within an hour – for just US\$95,000. It's pretty competitive. Flights on Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic are twice the price. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, the flight will leave from the island of Curacao and has "attracted interest from celebrities, with 35 people signing up".

#nerdbird logs on ►

When it comes to getting the edge over the competition in the airline world, one of the biggest battlefields is in the realm of entertainment. It's a battle that Virgin America is determined to win. Enter #nerdbird. It's a normal Airbus A320, but it's loaded with more 'special ops' than a Mission Impossible movie. The main aim of #nerdbird is to test clever things, and there are a lot of clever things up VA's big sleeves. One game-changer is a larger seatback HD touch-screen monitor that's fully wireless. Passengers can also access the system pre-flight, in-flight and post-flight, using their own phones or computers.



In-tray entertainment ▲

The challenge that every airline faces is reducing the weight of flights to save expensive fuel without compromising quality. We've seen metal cutlery replaced by plastic and in-flight magazines use lighter paper, so inevitably one area of focus would be those heavy, hard-wired TV monitors that we use to watch *Britain's Fattest Pets* while flying over Mumbai. A new TrayVu system from Skycast Solutions, showcased at the Airline Passenger Experience Expo 2011, combines an 8.9-inch screen and a tray in one clever unit. "The system offers HD resolution and uses a touch-screen keypad for control of the display, which shows through a panel in the tray itself when it is folded up," says Skycast, describing the concept as "an industry breakthrough".



▲ Google flight deals

Google has entered the flight search business. And blimey it looks good. OK, at the time of going to press, only destinations in the US were supported on Google Flight Search, but it was blindingly fast. It was really, really easy to use compared to sites such as Kayak and Expedia, and basically incorporated all those effortless elements that come without unnecessary frills from Google. There are loads of filters to make your "user experience" a good experience – such as sorting by airline, alliance, arrival and departure – and Google says it's only the start of something big – "it's just an early look: the take-off, not the final destination". With such a major player in the market it will be fascinating to see what happens next. Google doesn't sell flight tickets itself... yet.

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		KE5952	0330	1635	Daily
Seoul	Dubai	KE951	1500	1920	Mon,Tue,Thu,Sat
		KE5951	2355	0425 ⁺¹	Daily

* Flight schedules are subject to change.



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Excellence in Flight



Trends

GLOBAL TRENDS



◀ **RUSSIA**

Gorky park

The last time we visited Gorky Park in Moscow it was a clutter of dangerous-looking rides, sad donkeys and spooky men who looked like gulag refugees. Now, the city's new 'parks tsar' Sergei Kapkov has introduced free WiFi, mass yoga classes and even beanbag chairs. The old rides have been removed and the park will become a venue for Dasha Zhukova's contemporary Garage gallery next year. "Last year 80 percent of visitors to the park were not Muscovites – they had come from around the Moscow region to drink and have cheap rides," says Kapkov. "We are ready for a different way to relax".

◀ **GERMANY**

Express service

We are big fans of rail travel at eco-conscious *Destinations of the World News*. We like the decent leg space, security that treats you like a human being and connections right to the heart of the city. So, imagine our unbounded joy when we heard there would soon be direct connections between Germany and the UK. Of course, we know the Eurostar is cool, but we've done Paris-London to death. So what about London-Amsterdam, Cologne-London or Frankfurt-Brussels? This is what rail company Deutsche Bahn is proposing for 2013. The trip from Cologne to London could take under four hours.



UK ▶

Secret service

This month our 'travel niche of the world award' goes to Mark Birdsall and Deborah Plisko. These wonderfully clever folks have come up with *The Insider's Travel Guide to 150 Spy Sites in London*. The guide is published by the equally wonderful *Eye Spy Intelligence Magazine* and charts the history of espionage in London, as well as offering maps and walking routes. It's shrewd timing with the launch of the film *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, but also fascinating. We walked past Whitehall Court for years and had no idea it was full of false walls and staircases to nowhere when it was the HQ of MI6 in the early 1900s.



▲ **WORLD**

Chinese revolution

As the world starts to travel and spend, we're getting used to nationality-specific support to market services – *BBC News* in hotels for travellers that speak English or Russian assistants for high spenders from Moscow. But the scope of Hilton's ambition has taken our breath away. The company has launched Hilton Huanying – a new sub-category of 50 hotels in 12 countries that are user-friendly for the Cantonese and Mandarin-speaking travel market, with reception folks fluent in Chinese, menus featuring fried-dough fritters and Chinese-language TV programmes. The bottom line is that Hilton is taking this giant travelling demographic seriously.

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Dr. Peter Lorange

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Crash course

If the unthinkable happens, you have to think fast

So what do you do with your airline mileage points? Sneaky upgrade, weekend break or hotel suite? What about swapping them for a course on how to survive plane crashes?

British Airways is offering Executive Club members the chance to take the four-hour course on safety for points or, if they fancy, just pay GBP125 (US\$192). "The course just makes people feel a lot safer when they are travelling," says Andy Clubb, who runs the course for BA. "It also dispels all those crazy internet stories about what the brace position is all about and gives passengers more confidence."

Destinations of the World News has long advocated the importance of checking exits, having a little reassuring touch of the life jacket under the seat and unbuckling the seatbelt a couple of times (to practice). It's not that we are overcautious, it's because we are fans of Amanda Ripley, who is the author of *Who Survives When Disaster Strikes And Why*.

Ask any airline (and Ripley) about why some people survive crashes and others don't, and they will say that it's down to brain freeze after a crash. Those people who have listened to safety warnings, checked out exits and all that other stuff have basically trained their brains to know where to go and what to do when something bad happens.

In 2006 the Civil Aviation Authority discovered that during an emergency evacuation too many passengers struggled with even basic thoughts such as, 'How do I unlock this seatbelt?' Or 'Where is the life jacket?' "In the case of a fire, for example, every second of delay is potentially fatal," says Clubb.

"Passengers have to respond positively to instructions being given by crew."

The airline developed the training programme for BP, which dispatches employees to the middle of nowhere on a regular basis to ensure that even if safety procedures are not in place locally, their staff understand what actions could save their lives.

So what can travel executives learn to help them cope in a crisis? The short answer is, stay alert. Take it easy on the in-flight beverages if you want to keep a clear head (and watch out for those that haven't) and listen to the safety briefing, because every aircraft is different in terms of seat configuration, layout and exit.

In terms of exits, check out the closest one of course, but also count the number of seat-tops between you and the exit. If smoke fills the cabin visibility disappears and all you have is a sense of touch. And if you're faced with options, go for the exit at the front or back; there's no guarantee that passengers at the over-wing are capable enough to open the door.

Once out on the slide it's important not to hold the sides as this not only slows you and other passengers down, but also causes nasty friction burns.

And what about that brace position urban myth of identifying bodies through 'preserved dental records'? "Rubbish," says Clubb. "Keeping conscious after a crash is critical and we spend most of our time during the course discussing the importance of the brace position." The position stops the head smashing against the seat in front, flaying arms and may even protect bodies from flying debris. "It saves lives, it's as simple as that," says Clubb.

IN

Fully booked

The Dutch city of Haarlem has introduced a book and magazine library at its train station. Featuring more than 1,500 items, the station's officials claim it's the first of its kind in Europe. "People just don't have time to go to the library anymore," said a spokesperson.

Know your place

GPS systems are great, but they just tell you how to get somewhere. So hat-tip to TomTom, whose new navigation device includes real-time TripAdvisor reviews and info from Yelp, Expedia and Twitter.

Rockstar holiday

We love the book *Rock & Roll Hotels*, which does what it says on the tin. It tells us where Led Zeppelin rode their Harleys through the lobby; where Jim Morrison, erm, checked out; where Metallica wrote their best riffs and where Lennon camped out.

Insider advice

TripAdvisor, airbnb and couchsurfer are all well and good for city insight, but what if you want travel advice from like-minded individuals? Enter nectarandpulse.com, which profiles users and promises to find travellers with the same interests... only available in Vienna, London and Stockholm, but worth a click.

OUT

Battle for recognition

The 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu saw the ultimate collapse of the French colonial empire by the Vietnamese. Today the area is packed with the tanks, artillery and relics of war. It's a great attraction but the infrastructure is so poor hardly anyone can visit.

Dictator talk

Pity the hometowns of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini, who have to deal with 'tourism visits' by neo-Nazis. Last month, representatives of Gori, Predappio and Branau met to look at new ways of transforming these locations into "frontlines of democracy".

US\$16 muffin row

Auditors are standing by claims that "extravagant and potentially wasteful" foods were served at a US government seminar at a Hilton, including US\$16 muffins. Hilton denies the claims, saying the cost of an entire breakfast totalled US\$16.

Flush with success

Forget '10 most luxurious destination' lists, bring on the '10 best toilets'. Believe it. A Reuters profile found that NYC's Bryant Park was, erm, number one, followed by Covent Garden, London.

have a little affair with royalty.

Enjoy the isolated splendour of the royal heritage houses in Himachal Pradesh, as the snow-capped mountains envelope you. Then row across to the emerald isles in the South, to the palaces from the days of yore. Dine under the stars or pamper yourself with the 5-star treats of modern-day luxury. Or for a living, breathing museum that sits comfortably along with the present, hop aboard one of India's finest luxury trains. With royal butlers and critically-acclaimed chefs, enjoy a journey replete with grandeur as you scale the windswept sand dunes of Rajasthan.

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One more reason to visit



Dream weaver

Philippe Soulier just spent EUR50 m (\$68 m) building his dream hotel. He now plans to take some time out with his girlfriend to explore the islands of Oceania in his new private jet – this is a man with his priorities in order



Interview: Joe Mortimer

I'm sitting at lunch in the Armani Hotel in Dubai with French businessman Philippe Soulier and his girlfriend Jade. They're in town with new colleagues from European luxury hoteliers Oetker Collection, with whom Soulier has just signed a management contract for his new boutique resort in Marrakech. Six years and around EUR50 m (US\$68 m) after he first set eyes on the building site, Palais Namaskar is almost ready to welcome its first guests.

After building a lucrative logistics business in Nigeria and travelling the world for much of his adult life, Soulier decided in his mid-30s that it was time to settle down and plant roots. He planned to head back to the south of France, but after a few days in Marrakech, he realised he had found his eden. Seduced by the city's heady mixture of Oriental mysticism, North African culture and Moroccan hospitality, he found a property that immediately conjured up images of a private haven that he could share with friends.

Philippe is a busy man – there are press conferences in Abu Dhabi and Paris to attend, then Soulier and Jade are heading off to explore the world in his new private jet. Alright for some, as they say – we have a new hero.

Tell us a bit about your background.

I am of French descent but I am a citizen of the world – I have been travelling all my life. I am 42 years old now, and when I was 24 I went to work in Nigeria, where I set up my own business in shipping and transportation. I always had a passion for southern France and luxury hotels. When I was about 27 years old, I used the first of the money I made to visit Hotel du Cap Eden Roc in the south of France and spent a week there. Later, after 10 years running the business in Nigeria, I decided to travel around the world. Finally, about six years ago, I needed a home where I could settle down, and I arrived in Marrakech and fell in love with it at once.

How did you discover Palais Namaskar?

I had been thinking of buying somewhere in the south of France because that is where I was born, but I realised that for the same price I could buy something wonderful in Marrakech. I arrived in Marrakech and asked a friend to show me around some of the properties. I visited what is now Palais Namaskar and within half an hour I said, 'this is my place'. Just like that. I immediately understood that this was

a place that I would share with others, so I discussed it with the former owner and made the deal. In the process of buying I had the luck to meet a great architect, Imad Rahmouni, who had an office in Marrakech. We shared the same passion and the same vision and he said to me, 'Look, you have been travelling around the world and are always complaining that things are not quite right – this chair is nice but the blue is not quite right or the venue is nice but the lighting is not quite right.' So I decided that now it was my turn. I decided to set up a hotel just for me.

What was your original plan for the hotel?

I wanted to know what I would do just to please myself – that way I wouldn't look at it at the end and say: 'I would have done it differently'. I wanted to create the best hotel and the best experience I could imagine, with love and generosity. When was the last time you experienced a perfect moment? The idea was to create an environment where you feel that everything is taken care of – you have a nice comfortable chair, the drink is cold, the music is soft, the food is excellent and the ambience is right. I hope I've created a hotel where everyone will have their own personal space where they can enjoy serene moments, but still belong to a dynamic public place when they want. So we spent the last five or six years in Marrakech discovering the area and the nice climate, the laid-back atmosphere and the cuisine. You ask how you can combine all those elements and put them all together to provide the world with a setting where people can come and experience a very personal place, where the visitor is at the centre of the action.

How did you find your first venture into hotels?

It's a difficult process because you have to demystify so many fields – construction, design – you have to be practical. It has to be beautiful but also comfortable and working. It's a very delicate and difficult process. At the same time it was very easy because I was the only one making the decisions. I was the one to say yes or no to each detail. I got involved in the process of designing, creating, even drawing sketches with the architect.

Tell me about the design and the spiritual side of the project?

During my travels I became a specialist in Feng Shui, which I have used carefully in the hotel to define the structure and the flow of energy.



“When you arrive in Marrakech in September, the temperature is perfect, the light is perfect – you walk around a property at seven in the evening and you really feel the magic”

Feng Shui is about being aware of the interaction between people and the surroundings. For example, you make sure you don't put any plants with spiky leaves where they might come into contact with guests, and you make sure that you don't have a light shining in your eyes and that the flow of furniture and the mood is just right. You have to ensure that every single surface that will be in contact with the guests will be pure comfort.

How much did you budget for the hotel?

Because I had a successful business in Nigeria, I was lucky enough to have no limitations on resources. For an architect, it's not easy when you have an owner dictating the style or the budget. All in all I have spent about AED5 m (US\$1.36 m) per room. There are 41 keys and 50 beds, so I've spent about AED250 m (\$68 m) in total. You have to think a little about the investment versus the money that you make, and it is always good to think like that because it gives you a bit of vision, but you cannot only think like this. You can't come up with a product filled with so much generosity if you have to think, 'how much do I get if I do this?'. When you spend more than EUR2 m (\$2.75 m) on a pool, it doesn't make sense to think like this. If you start making decisions because of an Excel spreadsheet – that is your loss.

You recently partnered with the European hotel company Oetker Collection to manage the resort?

I was approached by a lot of hotels. Some of them offered me millions of Euros just to be able to put my hotel in their portfolio, but I wasn't thinking only about the money. I met the people from Oetker and it immediately clicked. They have this delicate collection and when

you go to the hotels you really feel there is something different. Of course for me it was a dream come true – 20 years after going on vacation to Hotel du Cap Eden Roc, my hotel was becoming a part of the group.

What is it about Morocco that convinced you it was the right place?

When you arrive in Marrakech in September, the temperature is perfect, the light is perfect – you walk around a property at seven o'clock in the evening and you really feel the magic. You arrive in an exotic place where there is a sense of heritage and there is a kind of

“If you start making decisions because of an Excel spreadsheet – that is your loss”

laid-back atmosphere: there's palm trees, the mountains, the snow in the winter, you can swim during the day and you have the medina during the night – at the end what more could you want in life?

But it's obviously an investment for you too?

The hotel business is great. I don't know why I didn't think of it before. People pay to sleep. Isn't it wonderful? And you have to sleep once a day. The math is very simple. You have 50 suites at EUR 1,000 (\$1,370) per day on average for 350 days a year, plus another 25 percent for food and beverage. Potentially that's around EUR25 m (\$34.3 m) revenue per year if it was running at full occupancy. If it's 50 percent occupancy, that's still EUR12 m (\$17 m). If you are really successful and your hotel is full because you have created the place to be... you do the math. Is it the wrong

time to be moving into the hotel business? It's like going into the stock exchange – you never go in at the right time and you never come out at the right time.

And the business you set up in Nigeria – what will happen to that?

I still have my business in Nigeria – I have 1,000 people there and I have partners. We finance and arrange logistics importation for large companies. Logistics is about people – it's about managing flows of information, and it's about managing people from a distance, which is not unlike running a hotel.

What will you do when this six-year project is complete?

I have a little place of my own in the property, and my girlfriend and I just bought a plane. We will go from Marrakech and visit Asia and then arrive in Australia and New Zealand. We'll visit the islands that I never had the chance to visit and take the time just to expand our consciousness about what's there.

THE OETKER COLLECTION

- Brenners Park Hotel & Spa
- Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc
- Le Bristol Paris
- Chateau Saint-Martin & Spa
- Palais Namaskar (opening March 2012)
- Le Bristol Abu Dhabi (opening 2013)



Bohemian rhapsody

The spa towns of western Bohemia are blessed with mineral-rich waters and clean mountain air, not to mention an International Film Festival that draws celebrities and dignitaries from all over the world

WORDS: Joe Mortimer





The Royal Cabin
The Royal Cabin at Nove Lazne hotel was created for England's King Edward VII

The smell is best described as a mixture of rotten eggs and science laboratory, and the sensation is what I imagine it would be like to be immersed in a giant glass of Dom Pérignon.

I'm sitting in a cavernous copper bathtub in the westernmost part of the Czech Republic, up to my neck in mineral water that sizzles and pops in my ears as I soak. My arms and chest resemble a lemon submerged in a glass of fizzy water – bubbles cover every inch of me.

The bathwater, apparently, is packed with carbon dioxide, mineral salts and humic acids, a natural cocktail that increases blood circulation and, when taken repeatedly, can help heart, kidney, nervous system and urinary tract disorders.

Twenty minutes later I emerge from the mineral bath in front of a matronly nurse, who seems much less fazed by my state of stark nakedness than I am, and am ushered to a bed, where I'm wrapped up tight in heavy blankets and left alone – and completely immobile.

There is of course a reason for my sub-aqueous state and present downy incarceration. The waters of Marianske Lazne and the other spa towns dotted throughout western Bohemia have long been celebrated for their curative properties, and have formed the basis of a whole encyclopaedia of medical treatments – both preventative and curative – for hundreds of years.

Marianske Lazne (formerly Mariensbad) is one of three major spa centres in the Karlovarsky region of the Czech Republic, and at just over 100 years old, it is also the youngest. The small town is home to a collection of stunning late 18th century buildings, a manicured park, a charming trolley bus system, the Czech Republic's only Royal Golf Course, and around 100 natural springs.

It's a purpose-built resort town created specifically with health and wellness in mind. Czech people come to soothe aching limbs and imbibe the healing spring waters, which were originally believed to promote longevity, and have since been proven to contain minerals that can help a litany of ailments, from aches and pains and skin conditions to kidney disorders, urological problems and liver disease.



Marianske Lazne ▲
The picturesque town is perfect for unhurried exploration

The treatments available are grouped into three categories – carbon dioxide baths, dry gas baths (or gas injections), and mud-based treatments – all of which are combined with drinking prescribed amounts of water from various mineral-rich springs around town.

Any visit, which doctors recommend should be no less than three weeks, is usually combined with gentle physical therapy: Nordic walking, swimming, a round of golf, or skiing in the winter. Here's the best bit – Czechs can actually claim the cost of these wellness breaks back from their insurance providers.

The healthy mountain air and stunning natural setting of Marianske Lazne, which is located deep in the Bohemian countryside, just 17km from the German border, also play their part in the healing process. Rivers meander across the landscape and pine forests surround the town on all sides, like a giant set of lungs that keeps the air rich with oxygen.

The wooded slopes that surround the town are dotted with lookouts, memorials and belvederes that commemorate some of the famous characters who have frequented Marianske Lazne over the ages – Goethe's Retreat, Friedrich's Stone, Charles'

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Cross. Looking down on the town on a clear September day, it's easy to see why so many literary greats spent extended periods of time ruminating on the human condition and other philosophical quandaries in Mariánské Lázně.

Today, the Danibus Health Spa Resort Nove Lázně (New Spa) is the heart of the medical wellness scene. The 'Resort' element of the name was only added in 1999, when some of the 170 spa treatment rooms were converted into guestrooms to give the increasing number of out-of-town visitors a place to stay at the vast spa complex, which also houses the Centralni Lázně hotel and spa (which specialises in children's treatments) and the recently reopened Maria Spa Courtyard, the site of the town's original mud baths.

The rooms now feature all the mod cons you'd expect from a five-star hotel, but many elements of the original spa have been preserved. King Edward VII's Royal Cabin is a palatial private spa chamber decorated with wall-to-wall tiles and furnished with marble-topped vanity tables, columns festooned with flowers and a vaulted art nouveau ceiling.

The original Roman Baths, dating from 1896, are located in a red-columned chamber with a glass ceiling; the pools themselves are black and white mosaic masterpieces enjoyed by the bathers, who come to soak before or after a treatment.

The ultra-modern Maria Spa Courtyard, which opened in June, offers traditional treatments and procedures performed using the latest technology – peat wraps and massages take place on a temperature-controlled waterbed; gas inhalations are controlled using high-tech lab equipment; and the sunken dry carbon dioxide bath and oxygen bar allows patients to enjoy a gas wrap without climbing into a plastic bag first (the traditional method).

Back in my cocoon, my thoughts have taken an existential turn, and I'm relieved when after 20 minutes of intense sweating, I'm released from my wrap and sent on my way.

Rejuvenated, I take a stroll around town. The streets of Mariánské Lázně are full of people ambling slowly around drinking from the spouts of colourful spa drinking cups (*láze ský pohárek*), which they fill up with spring water from the numerous fountains in town.

Most of the public fountains are fed by six principal springs, each of which varies hugely in terms of mineral content and temperature. Ambrose, for example, is fairly mineral-light; just 333mg/l of hydrogen carbonate compared to, say, Ferdinand's 3,050mg/l (which explains why the latter is so aromatic).

Check in ▲
Visitors in Mariánské Lázně can check their drinking goblet into a 'cloakroom' after their daily tour

Mill Colonnade ►
Karlovy Vary's Mill Colonnade features 124 marble columns

Park Colonnade ►
Park Colonnade is a wonderful place to stroll and sip your medicinal water



The fountains also vary in taste – some resemble lightly carbonated mineral water, but as the mineral content increases, so does the pungent sulphuric taste and aroma. In the central colonnade, there's a stall where you can 'check in' your cup so you don't have to carry it around – a kind of cloakroom for cups.

I sample a selection of springs from the fountains around the Kolonada and the carefully manicured gardens leading to the famous Singing Fountain, but for serious ailments, doctors will tell you exactly which springs you need to drink from, how much and how often.

KARLOVY VARY

An hour from Mariánské Lázně is Karlovy Vary (formerly Carlsbad), the Czech Republic's original spa town. The legend goes that when King Charles IV was on a hunting expedition in 1370, his dog fell into a pool of steaming warm water. The King dived in to save his dog and shortly after he emerged, he discovered that an injury on his leg had healed. And so the legend of the healing powers of the spa water was born. Karlovy Vary quickly became a popular destination among Czech nobility, and luxurious mansions sprang up all over town, many of which are now home to five-star hotels.

I check into the St Joseph's Royal Regent Superior Spa and Wellness Hotel, which is the town's newest medical spa hotel, promising "new levels of luxury spa in Karlovy Vary", but the lobby and spartan rooms are more like a top-end clinic than a five-star hotel. Other guests wander around the lobby in white robes and turquoise slippers, and it's clear that the focus is on function rather than appearance. The in-house St Joseph's Spa is a full-service medical spa, so treatments range from mineral baths and mud wraps to more exotic procedures such as magnet therapy and pneumopuncture. This is serious wellness.





Glass master
The Moser glassworks produces some of the finest glassware in the world

“Calling Moser a glassmaker is like calling Michelangelo a decorator – the glassware produced at the Moser factory is exquisite”



Carlsbad Plaza
Perched at the top of town, Carlsbad Plaza is a member of Leading Hotels of the World

But the main appeal of Karlovy Vary is the town itself. The historic heart is built along either side of the river Ohre, and the picture-perfect buildings represent several centuries of architectural style. The town's 12 warm springs are gathered in several colonnades, each one unique. Each fountain is identified with a bronze plaque stating its name and the temperature of the water, which reaches 73.4°C at the Thermal Spring.

Personal favourites include the Mill Spring in the Mill Colonnade, whose 124 marble columns are a popular place to wander and soak up the atmosphere of the town, and the Charles IV Spring in the Market Colonnade – an open-sided, hand-carved wooden structure that used to be the main farmers' market for Karlovy Vary.

Not all hotels in town are so focused on wellness as the Royal Regent. Karlovy Vary is also home to one of the Czech Republic's most stunning properties – the Grandhotel Pupp – a home away from home for celebrities, politicians and other VIPs, especially during the annual Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, which takes place each July. Images of Hollywood A-listers and Czech celebrities gaze down from the walls around the lobby level – stop for a coffee in the hotel's main lounge and it's hard to avoid the stare of Morgan Freeman's giant portrait.

Scenes from the 2006 James Bond blockbuster *Casino Royale* were filmed in the hotel – posing as the Hotel Splendide in Montenegro – which is situated at the top of the town's historic spa centre next to the Carlsbad Plaza, another one of Karlovy Vary's top hotels and a member of Leading Hotels of the World.

The funicular behind the hotel takes visitors to the top of the wooded hill behind – a five-minute ride up the hillside brings you to its summit, where the Deer Leap Lookout and Diana Tower have panoramic views back over the town.

The Bohemian town is also the home of the Czech Republic's number-one glass manufacturer, Moser. However, calling Moser a glassmaker is like calling Michelangelo a decorator – the glassware produced at the Moser factory is exquisite.

The Moser family has been making glass for Czech nobility, dignitaries and foreign royalty for the last 120 years, and the glassware produced at the family factory is used for all official state functions, royal weddings, and of course the film festival.

Walking around the Moser museum, you can read the names of some of the royal commissions – apparently Her Majesty the Queen of England is a big fan. Look out for the vivid green pieces made in the 60s; they achieved the vibrant green hue by using Uranium in the process.

Moser is also famous for its very exclusive Giant Snifters Club, whose members include Sophia Loren, Louis Armstrong and former Czech president Vaclav Havel. The oversized glasses are perfect for enjoying the local beverage – Becherovka – a herbal liquor that's said to have medicinal properties, and is known by locals as the “13th fountain”.

When your day's exercise is done, you'll be keen to sample the somewhat eccentric local cuisine. Enjoy a traditional Czech dish of Svickova – beef sirloin in cream sauce, with dumplings, lemon slices, cranberry sauce and whipped cream – washed down with a glass of Pilsner Urquell, the Czech Republic's leading beer, or some of the country's very underrated wine.

Karlovy Vary is a town you can walk around for hours and hours. Far from the hectic, tourist-clogged streets of Prague, the spa towns of western Bohemia are quiet and tranquil – perfect for a rehabilitating break or an indulgent escape from city life. ■



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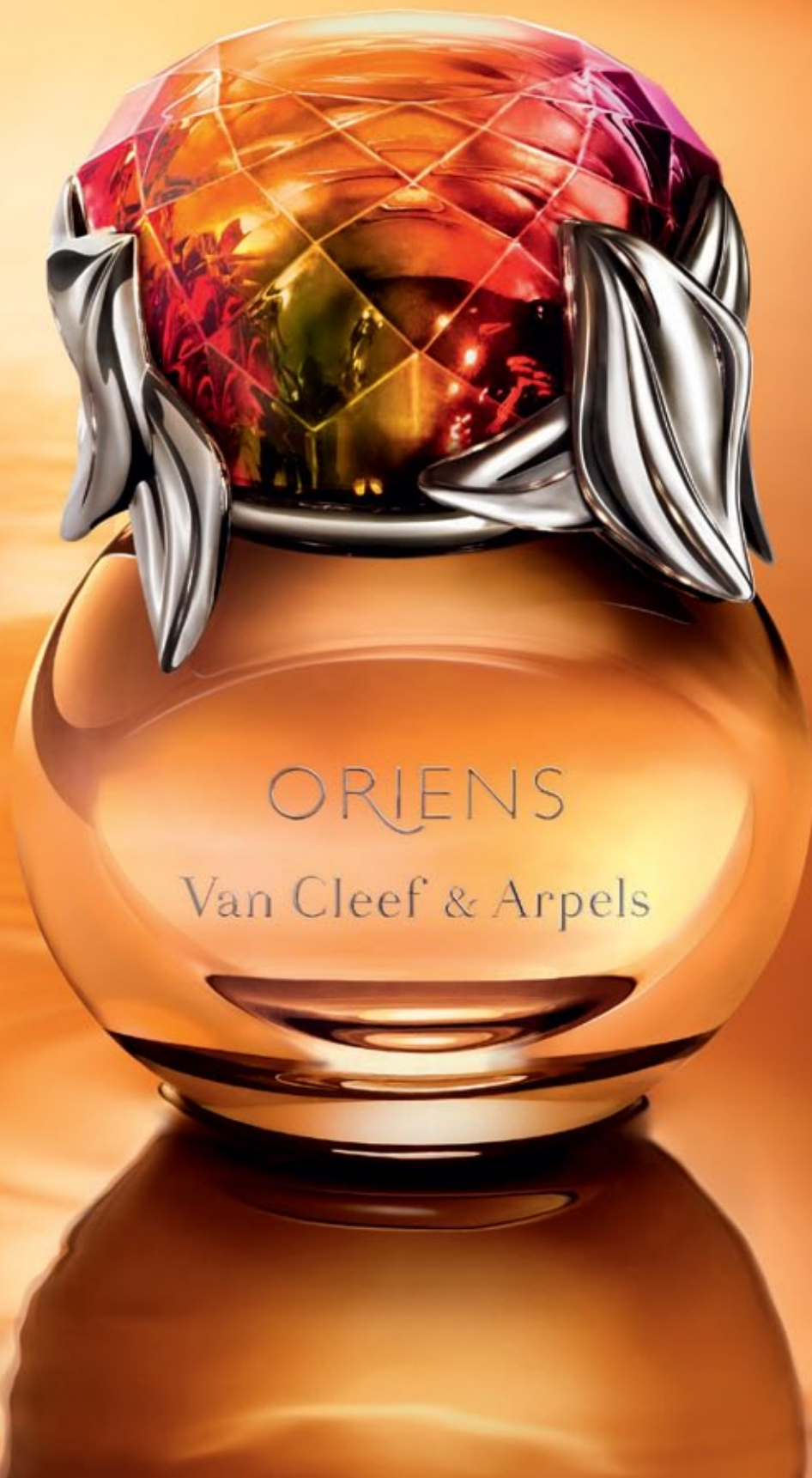
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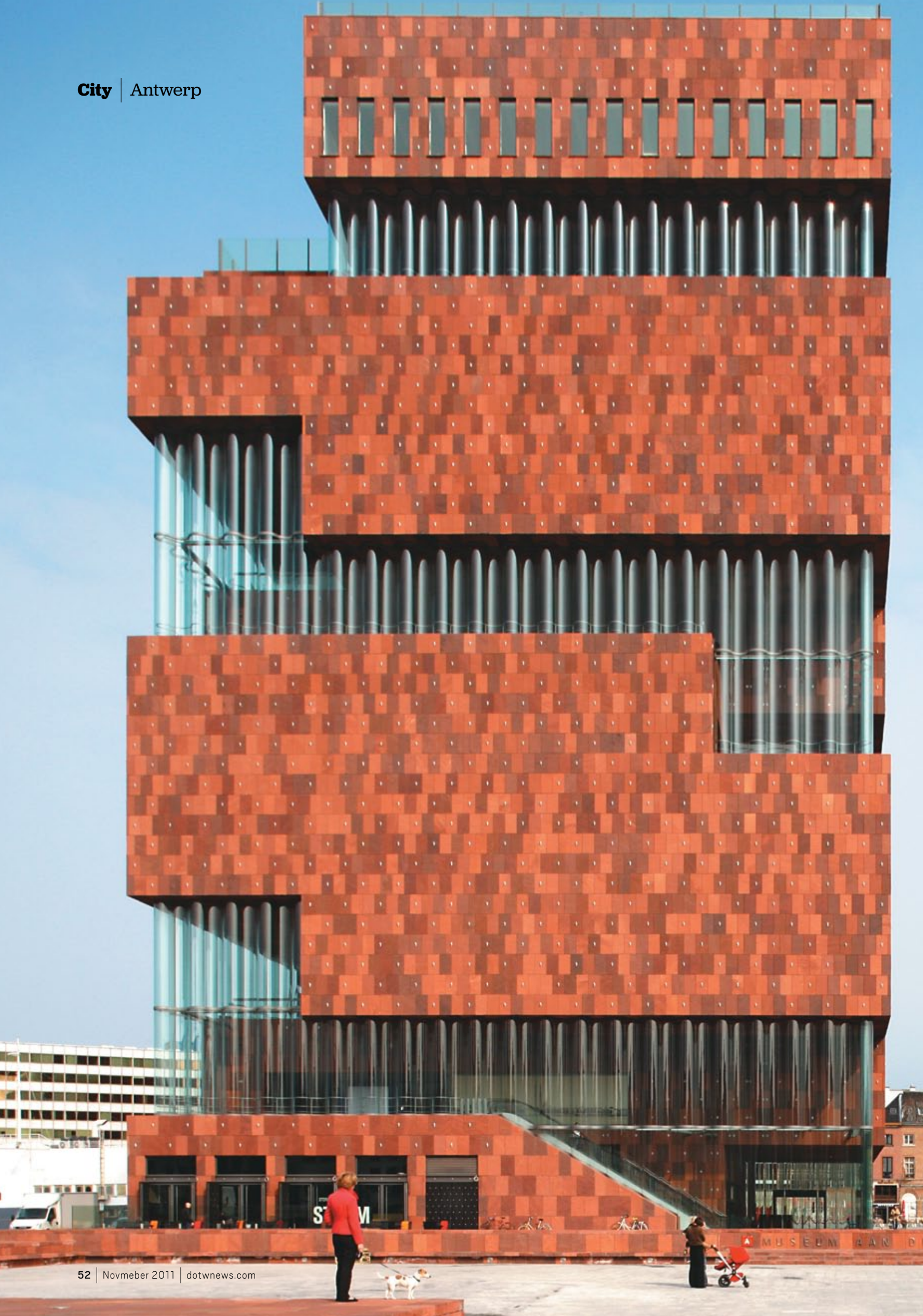
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T A L E S

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Wooden bears, golden cows, Hadid buildings, Haring graffiti and a museum that's too cool for school – Antwerp offers more than chocolate and Rubens

WORDS: Andy Round

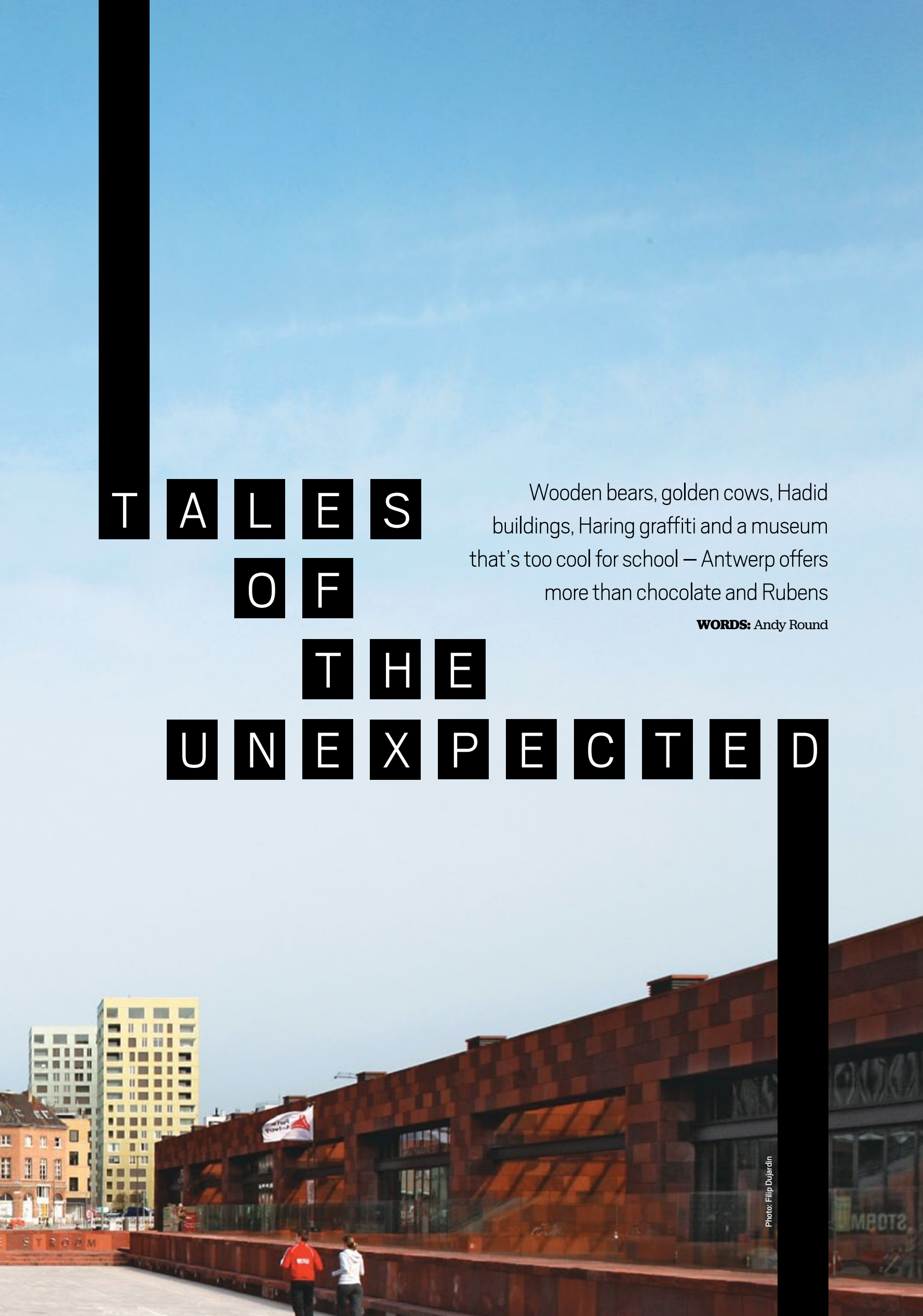


Photo: Filip Dujardin



Antwerp is the epitome of cool. And Belgium needs at least one of its cities to be cool. In a country famous for chocolate (yawn) Antwerp is the urban Praline of the cutting edge. It's not chocolate-box pretty like Bruges, not pick'n'mix tourist hub like Brussels, it's the surprisingly dense, slightly gritty centre you never expected. In fact it tangoes past Buenos Aires, out-cools Berlin and gives Tokyo a run for its yen.

Why? Well, because it's so effortlessly individual. Only this city could have created the fashion powerhouse that became the Antwerp Six (see panel); a chocolatier to The Rolling Stones; a fashion museum that's a European first; a personal tea maker that pours for Moby – and then sprinkle the lot with independent shops that are more like nightclubs, and hotels that resemble retro design exhibits.

Even the docks and warehouses are cutting-edge thanks to the skill of Napoleon's 19th century engineers, who created them as the perfect base from which to invade Britain, as well as 21st century plans by über architect Zahid Hadid to build a 12,800 square-metre giant diamond, 50 metres above the ground as the city's shiny new Port Authority headquarters.

The latest of Antwerp's iconic landmarks, also overlooking the docks, is the wonderful MAS Museum, which recently opened its doors. "It's a landmark, a love mark, a space to experience and experiment," vice mayor Philip Heylen tells *Destinations of the World News*. It's also a stylish statement of confidence – complete with a Michelin-starred chef – that celebrates the city, its history, its culture and, well, the world, actually.

"The docks really shaped the city's history. Spanish, Dutch, Germans and French have been coming here for centuries; it's what gives Antwerp its unique cosmopolitan flavour"

You see, Antwerp has always been open to worldly influences. That port and those docks are some of the biggest on earth, and have been around since the 12th century. "The docks really shaped the city's history," says Tom Le Clef, co-owner of the unspeakably cool dock warehouses of Felix Pakhuis – awash in multi-functional exhibition space, restaurants, clubs, bars and food markets. "Spanish, Dutch, Germans and French have been coming here for centuries; it's what gives Antwerp its unique cosmopolitan flavour."

And that internationalism spreads like a light-speed virus from the docks across every cobbled stone of Antwerp's streets, from the famous diamond district to the city's fashion stores. A five-minute tram ride from the docks and you'll find fashion tourists huddled over their guides outside the store of Antwerp Six superstar Walter Van Beirendonck.

Inside this converted garage, past unfeasibly large carved wooden bears, the big bald giant himself is scratching his beard with giant ringed fingers. "Antwerp is Europe's hidden treasure," he says. And this is from the man who designed stage costumes for both U2 and the Royal Ballet. "Once they finally discover the city, they find the allure irresistible. My favourite area? The Art Nouveau district."

▲ **Creative space**
FoMu photographic museum curator Elviera Velghe says Antwerp is a city that "just can't stay still"

▶ **Antwerp style**
The quirky works of Walter Van Beirendonck have been worn by bands including U2

▼ **On location**
Contemporary works at FoMu photography museum



Paul Smith
OPTIMISTIC

THE NEW FRAGRANCES FOR MEN AND WOMEN



“Fashionable lofts and apartments march alongside the river like stars of an interior design special, leading to the freaky roof of the controversial Richard Rogers building”



Warehouse Felix Pakhuis
A multi-functional exhibition space with restaurants, clubs, bars and food markets

Brutal justice ▲
Richard Rogers' Court of Justice is a striking addition to Antwerp's skyline

Like most Antwerp locals, Van Beirendonck recommends walking the city rather than taking the tram. So that's what I do. From the centre and the elegant gothic spire of the cathedral to the banks of the River Scheldt and the pretty medieval Het Steen castle, I head south, letting the cobbled streets guide me.

Here, fashionable lofts and apartments march alongside the river like stars of an interior design special, leading to the freaky roof of the controversial Richard Rogers building. It's Antwerp's Court of Justice, less like a court and more like a collection of giant dangerous children's blocks – with spikes.

Enter the eccentric street of Kloosterstraat and you'll find shops that stretch the very definition of 'shop'. Split-level outlets like RA boast a café, one-off fashions, exhibitions, a library and even silent film shows. A concept store called Your sells designer bicycles, racks of nose-bleedingly expensive clothes, hair-dressing service, and a limited-edition Alpha Romeo car. Further down, past the vintage clothes and record shops in the south (or Zuid) is the wonderful Contemporary Art Museum, or MHKA, housed in a converted grain silo.

"I like to think of it as art's home away from home in the city of Rubens", says director Dieter Roelstraete. Indeed. Its avant garde collection of 1960s and 1970s art are certainly more entertain-

ing than the tourist-packed Rubens House in central Antwerp. Overlooking Zuid square is MHKA's café-terrace, featuring graffiti art by the joyous Keith Haring. "He knew the director at the time", says the museum's Rita Compere over coffee. While Haring was painting, the museum's cleaner was sent out to buy him herring from the nearby fish market. He did her a little drawing to thank her. Wonder what that's worth now?

Anyway, there is no fish market now, but the south has become one of the most desirable addresses in town. There are venues with names like Stereo Sushi, Little Buddha, Bilbao and the intensely popular Velvet Lounge (jam-packed with champagne-swilling clubbers when I visited later at 1.30am). Nearby is FoMu, the photographic museum. Curator Elviera Velghe has just joined and is still getting used to the city. "Antwerp is a place that just can't stay still, it always seems so alive," she says.

It's a claim backed up by the exuberant Ellen Hubert at Antwerp's Tourist Authority. "We have a regular Taste Festival, huge Winter Festivals and are a stop-off point for the Tall Ships races," she says. "Tourism is growing here and so is the city's reputation. The MAS Museum will really put Antwerp on the international map."

Antwerp residents say, with some pride, that in recent years the city has

raised its game when it comes to tourism. There has been a rash of boutique hotels such as the Matelote (urban cool in a 16th century house); De Witte Lelie (11 rooms in a grandiose townhouse) and a personal favourite, Linnen (just three suites in the shadow of the cathedral), with the city's coolest cocktail venue downstairs at Nine.

Even more pleasantly surprising is the restaurant scene, which is a genuine revelation. Fiskebar is booked days in advance by locals who appreciate their food fresh from the sea daily, and Zuiderterras is such an architectural oddity with its stunning river view that you can be easily distracted from the greatness on your plate.

This is all very well and good, but if you fancy a nice pot of tea, where do you go? The answer, dear Antwerp explorer, is the Lombardia base of former professional windsurfer Alain Indria. With an interior that features kitschy golden cows and giant apples suspended from the ceiling, this restaurant/drop zone is the last place you would expect to see Sting, Moby or Jamie Cullum.

But Indria is their caterer of choice when they tour the continent. "Word got about when Sting came to Belgium," laughs Indria. "Now everyone wants some Lombardia love." Lombardia love basically consists of seriously healthy food with a vegan twist. Personally I

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PASSENGER
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THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR HER AND FOR HIM



Photo: Walter Van Beirendonck © Antwerpen Toerisme & Congres - fotograaf Johannes Vande Voorde

THE JOY OF SIX

Loads of money, the import and export of textiles and a reputation for finery may have made Antwerp a fashion favourite in the 16th century, but it's nothing compared to the big bang that occurred when the Antwerp Six got going in the late 80s.

Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee were a new generation that took the fashion world by storm 30 years ago when they loaded a truck with designs and headed for London's fashion shows.

They then proceeded to remake fashion history with their avant garde designs. For those unfamiliar with the Six, Van Noten is a global brand and eccentric fashion favourite of Cate Blanchett; Van Beirendonck created the costumes for U2's PopMart tour; Demeulemeester describes fashion as 'silly' but still made enough to live in the only Corbusier house in Belgium; Bikkembergs creates must-have sports kits, underwear and even football boots, while Yee and Van Saene are consistent continental catwalk stars.

"Antwerp designers have always been known for their cutting-edge designs, love of quality and craftsmanship as well as their attention to detail," says Kaat Debo, the director of Antwerp's fashion museum. "And some things never change."

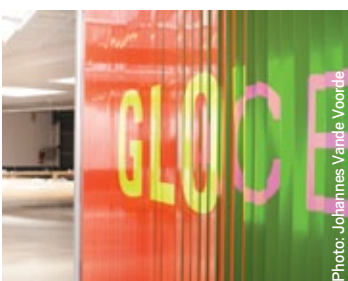


Photo: Johannes Vande Voorde

can recommend Indria's Gingerlove tea (a Belgian star at the Beijing expo) and his pumpkin seed croissant. Apparently Moby's a fan too. He's got good taste.

One of the last things the tourism authority's Ellen Hubert said to me as I left her office was not to forget to buy some Belgian chocolate. I snorted with derision, and then she introduced me to Dominique Persoone. Mr Persoone is a mad genius. He's the sort of man who tours Mexico for months just to find the right breed of cocoa for his products. He's also the sort of man who likes to build life-sized chocolate Alice in Wonderland characters, create his own range of chocolate lipsticks and makeup and move to Antwerp just so he can live in Napoleon Bonaparte's old house.

Antwerp Six ▲
Walter Van Beirendonck's flagship store in Antwerp

Old meets new ▼
The new designer boutiques and cafes of FelixPakhuis

So, he's ideally suited to be the official 'shockolatiër' (see what he's done there?) to The Rolling Stones. "I first met the Stones when they were in Belgium on tour," he says. "They asked me to design something special for the birthday party of Ronnie Wood and Charlie Watts... so I did. I created a chocolate snuff machine that fires minty powder up your nose." Persoone demonstrates, and I get the strangest sugar rush of my life.

But why move to Antwerp of all the cities in the world? "It's a creative, vibrant place," he says. "And because I love the people and this beautiful building. People ask if the antiques and paintings in my salon are real. They are. I never imagined how cool Antwerp could be." He's not the only one. ■



Photo: FelixPakhuis

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PLEASURE ISLAND



Floating on a lagoon of impossibly blue water, ringed by fine white sand and surrounded by green mangrove forests, Saadiyat Island is set to become the UAE's new cultural and luxury destination of choice

WORDS: Joe Mortimer

For the last three years, Abu Dhabi's master developer, the Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC), has been turning 27 square kilometre-Saadiyat Island into a luxurious cultural, lifestyle and business destination that will be home to seven distinct districts when it is completed in 2020, providing a place to live, work and play for more than 145,000 future residents.

The leisure and entertainment attractions on the visionary island will be centred around Saadiyat Beach, a nine-kilometre stretch of pristine sand where luxury hotels, a world-class golf course and a glitzy beach club for the UAE's elite and international visitors will live in harmony with the local fauna, including hawksbill turtles and bottlenose dolphins.

At the far end of the beach is Saadiyat Cultural District, which developers and the UAE government hope will position Abu Dhabi as a cultural beacon in the Arabian Gulf. As well as world-class schools, universities and galleries, the district will be home to Middle East branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim museums, a performing arts centre and the Zayed National Museum.

This month sees the opening of the first two hotels on Saadiyat Beach, along with the much-anticipated Monte-Carlo Beach Club, Saadiyat, operated by Monaco's Societe des Bains de Mer, and the first phase of the premium Saadiyat Beach Villas.

Read on for a glimpse of the latest additions to the Middle East's prestigious portfolio of luxury properties – we call it the Saadiyat Collection.



“The 650 square metre infinity pool is surrounded by timber pergolas for the ultimate in luxury lounging”

MONTE-CARLO BEACH CLUB, SAADIYAT

If a venue's appearance dictates the clientele that frequent it, then Monte-Carlo Beach Club, Saadiyat will welcome beautiful people by the boatload. The giant doors outside the clubhouse, permanently flanked by Bentley Continentals, Audi R8s and countless different models of Ferrari, give way to a chic all-white interior cooked up by LW Design Group, through which you get your first glimpse of the Arabian Sea. The main building is home to four restaurants and lounges including a members-only Library Lounge and two venues exported from the original Monte-Carlo Beach Club in Monaco – the open-air Sea Lounge and Le Deck. The Workout Room is kitted out with the latest Technogym gear and there is a studio for group and individual classes. Staff are also on hand for personal training, physical rehabilitation and nutritional counselling.

But the real show-stopper is the pool area. The 650 square metre infinity-edge beauty is surrounded by timber pergolas for the ultimate in luxury lounging, decorative urns and views of the grassy sand dunes and the azure waters of the Arabian Sea. Off to the side, the Sea Lounge is swiftly becoming the place to be seen on long lazy weekend afternoons or for mid-week sundowners. Resident DJ Natalie Brogan spins chillout tunes all evening long and executive chef Emanuel Ciarravano's tantalising menus promise to make members and day-visitors come back again and again. Discreetly tucked away to the side of the main pool area are a kids' pool and play area, which will keep the little ones entertained – and out of earshot.

As you would expect from the UAE's most luxurious beach club, membership isn't cheap, but according to general manager Patrick Nayrolles, the club is hoping to appeal to the

type of people who are currently snapping up the nearby Saadiyat Beach Villas, so money is no object. Annual membership costs AED 35,000 (US\$9,528) per person, for which you can expect to receive two fitness assessments, 10 daily beach club passes for guests, a complimentary spa treatment and two swanky members-only cocktail receptions each year. Monthly membership is AED4,500 (\$1,225) per person and day passes start from AED400 (\$109) during the week. In the true spirit of Riviera beach clubs of old, there's also a one-month credit facility for members, 15 percent off food and drinks, plus access to the original 1920s Monte-Carlo Beach Club in Monaco.

CONTACT:
T: +971 2 656 3500
info@montecarlobeachclub.ae
montecarlobeachclub.ae



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PARK HYATT ABU DHABI

At the other end of Saadiyat Beach, Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi is a hideaway resort – not quite boutique at 306 rooms, suites and villas, but one that promises an intimate and luxurious experience for all who check in. The resort has an Arabic appearance, with Bedouin tent-style daybeds by the pool draped in light cotton sheets, and intricate Arabian carvings on the wooded portions of the white and timber exterior. Designers have attempted to create a structure that complements the natural setting of Saadiyat Island, blurring the lines between the interiors and their natural surroundings and creating energy efficient designs that meet the Green Building Council's criteria for a silver LEED rating. Top-end villas and beach and garden suites have their own private jet pools, outdoor rain showers and sun beds overlooking the golf course or the beach, plus easy access to four pools and an enormous beach, which is decked out with a network of boardwalks to protect the sand dunes, used by nesting hawksbill turtles.

Wining and dining takes place at The Park Bar & Grill for steaks, grilled meats and seafood specialties prepared in an open show kitchen, with a floor-to-ceiling wine display; The Café, for all-day dining; The Library for tea and pastries; and The Beach House for casual dining during the day and sundowners and chillout tunes on the roof terrace at night.

Anyone familiar with Park Hyatt's Dubai property will have high expectations from the Atarmia Spa (meaning aromatic flowing waters), which has nine treatment rooms including a VIP couples' room, private outdoor terraces, plus fitness centre and tennis court.

CONTACT:

T: +971 2 407 1234

Abudhabi.park@hyatt.com

abudhabi.park.hyatt.com



“The resort has an Arabic appearance, with Bedouin tent-style day beds by the pool draped in light cotton sheets”



MANARAT AL SAADIYAT

The first project to open on Saadiyat was Manarat al Saadiyat, a 15,400 square metre visitor centre, cultural space and exhibition centre that opened in November 2009. The centre was designed to showcase the overall vision of Saadiyat Island, as well as provide visitors with an overview of the history of Abu Dhabi. The Abu Dhabi Arts Gallery is a

permanent space for a series of exhibitions and educational programmes organised by TDIC. Other galleries provide exhibition space for local and international artists, and the Fanr Restaurant provides contemporary dining.

CONTACT:
manaratalsaadiyat@tdic.ae
saadiyat.ae



ST. REGIS SAADIYAT ISLAND RESORT

Combining a luxurious 377-room resort hotel and 32 exclusive luxury freehold villas, St. Regis Saadiyat Island promises guests and homeowners something unique. All the spacious rooms and suites at the resort face the sea and the Saadiyat Beach Golf Course, putting it well on track to become a favourite among the golfing jet set. It's St. Regis' first venture into the Middle East, so you can expect innovation as well as the traditions upheld since St. Regis was born in 1904, when the Astor family of New York – investors in the *Titanic* – opened the doors to the first property as a place to entertain high society friends in NYC. From the evening champagne ritual to the St. Regis butler service and daily afternoon tea, the new resort will be steeped in tradition, with a few modern twists to keep the brand both fresh and relevant to the region. The 2,000 square metre duplex Royal Suite has a huge private terrace for entertaining guests, as well as a private pool and gym, while the Bridal Suite has direct elevator access to the 3,000 square metre ballroom for the ultimate grand entrance. Three spa-themed suites will offer in-room treatments in themed settings – Thai, Contemporary and Moroccan. Guests staying in premium suites will be picked up from the airport in a custom-made Bentley with hand-stitched St. Regis embroidery. There's also an early check-in/late check-out lounge with shower and changing facilities, WiFi and refreshments, so guests arriving early or departing late have a place to freshen up before meetings or relax before a flight.

The 32 Woods Bagot Architects-designed villas all have sea and golf course views plus a torrent of optional privileges from the hotel, including housekeeping and maid services, personal chef and catering, personal butler service, personal secretary/assistant/catering services and car valet, plus discounts on hotel stays, spa treatments and dining.

CONTACT:
T: +971 2 498 8888
reservations.saadiyat@stregis.com
stregissaadiyat.com

SAADIYAT BEACH GOLF CLUB

The Gary Player-designed Saadiyat Beach Golf Course undulates along the coastline – a 317-acre, par 72 course dotted with three lakes and 67 bunkers, not counting the open stretches of beach that flank several holes. Sea birds and hawksbill turtles are your spectators as you make your way around the ocean-side setting, with the crash of the surf as the soundtrack. The course has already won international acclaim (it officially opened in March 2010) and continues to appeal to international pro golfers and amateur enthusiasts thanks to its mixture of challenging par-three holes and technical par-fives, with total length ranging from 5,290-7,806 yards. The course, pro shop and Golf Institute are managed by Troon Golf, whose pro golfers provide coaching at the 15-acre driving range or the putting greens and chipping areas. A Frank Gehry-designed clubhouse and boutique hotel will be added in 2012, but in the meantime, a temporary clubhouse with Hawksbill Restaurant and Golf Shop meet the needs of players and spectators alike.

CONTACT:
T: +971 2 557 8000
info@sbgolfclub.ae
sbgolfclub.ae



“Sea birds and hawksbill turtles are your spectators as you make your way around the ocean-side setting”



SAADIYAT BEACH VILLAS

The vision behind Saadiyat was to build a new self-contained island environment in which Emiratis and foreign residents could live, work and play. The first residential units to come online are the Saadiyat Beach Villas, the first of which are being handed over to owners this month. The villas come in three styles – Arabian, Mediterranean and contemporary – and feature three to six bedrooms in various configurations. Designed by JZMK Partners and interior designers CDC, the villas offer premium luxury living ranging from AED6.5 m (\$1.77 m) to AED39.9 m (\$10.86). Residents will be part of an exclusive gated community with landscaped parks and play areas for children, swimming pools and terraces, basketball and squash courts, plus schools and gyms. UAE nationals and citizens of other GCC countries can own the villas freehold, while foreign investors can purchase a 99-year lease on the properties.

CONTACT:
salesandleasing@tdic.ae
saadiyat.ae

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IMAGES (TOP) YAS MARINA
(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)
ROOFTOP SWIMMING
POOL AT THE YAS HOTEL;
CONCERT AT YAS ARENA;
TRACKSIDE BERTHS

WWW.CNMARINAS.COM/YAS
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Sunset silhouette
The minarets of Istanbul's Blue Mosque
are an unmistakable part of the skyline

NIGHT & DAY

Choose your own adventure in Istanbul – a city bursting with history but firmly heading for the future

Words: Caitlin Cheadle

08.00 Arrive at Ataturk International Airport or Sabiha Gokcen International Airport. You'll have to pay a visa fee on entry (cost dependent on nationality). Both airports are roughly equal distance from central Istanbul and it's easy to hail a taxi. However if you're arriving between the gridlock traffic hours of 4pm and 8pm, consider booking a shuttle service in advance (istairportservice.com), which will take you to your hotel for a pre-determined flat rate.

10.00 Pull up to **The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul** (www.ritzcarlton.com T: +90 (212) 334 4444), perched atop a hill overlooking the shimmering **Bosphorus** and the **Dolmabahce Palace**, in Istanbul's **Besiktas** district. The impressive breakfast spread at Çintemani Restaurant on the lobby level, with floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing the Bosphorus and Galata Bridge extending to the Asian continent, is a great way to start the day.

11.00 The hotel is conveniently located between the Old Town, **Sultanahmet**, and the northern districts of Ortakoy and Bebek. Because of the aforementioned rush-hour gridlock, start your day in Sultanahmet, the heart and soul of the city. The public streetcar is a short walk from the hotel.

11.30 Istanbul was voted the 'Cultural Capital of 2010', and for good reason. With its rich history dating back more than 8,000 years and spanning **Roman**, **Byzantine** and **Ottoman** empires, it's literally crammed with beautiful mosques, cathedrals and palaces. The **Blue Mosque** in central Sultanahmet is the main attraction. Its domed ceilings are lined inside with a mosaic of over 20,000 hand-painted blue Iznik tiles – take a photo of the light pouring in through the stained-glass windows.

12.00 Across from the Blue Mosque is the **Hagia Sophia**, originally a Catholic church (built 537 AD), then a mosque (est. 1453) and today a museum (est. 1935), housing centuries of history from Turkey's varied periods of rule.

Wander its vast floors and take in the frescoes and intricate artworks adorning its interiors.

13.00 Within walking distance is the **Grand Bazaar**, a crowded beehive of shops, markets, boutiques and cafes selling everything from pricey gold and diamond jewellery to silk Turkish rugs, trinkets and designer handbag knock-offs. Be prepared to haggle and keep your wits about you – Turkish salesmen are some of the best in the world.

14.00 Grab a quick shish tawook at one of the many food stands and continue by foot to **Topkapi Palace** to admire the ornate relics from the Ottoman and Byzantine empires, almost all of which are solid gold and encrusted with diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds.

16.00 Get a taxi or the streetcar back to your hotel, before the traffic hits. A quick change and a glass of bubbly in the **Club Lounge** on the 12th floor looking out over the Bosphorus is a good way to unwind.

18.00 Within walking distance is **Istiklal Avenue**, the high-street shopping district that's bursting with bars, restaurants and nightclubs. **360** (360istanbul.com) is an elegant rooftop supper club with panoramic views of Istanbul and an extensive wine and cocktail list.

20.00 The rush-hour traffic should be coming to an end, so it's safe to head **Ortakoy** in a taxi and get lost in the maze of stalls, restaurants and bars.

21.00 Flanked along the shores of the Bosphorus nearby are two of Istanbul's hottest 'summer clubs'; so called because they are open-air and closed in the winter. **Sortie** (www.sortie.com.tr) is a sprawling venue of restaurants under the stars – you'll have your choice of almost every type of cuisine, from Japanese to Arabic. DJ beats get progressively more up-tempo as the night wears on, and by 11pm the central dance-floor is in full swing.

23.00 It's up to you whether you want to stay at **Sortie** or try your luck at **Reina** (www.reina.com.tr), **Sortie's** trendier sister, beside the **Galata Bridge**. The crowd is gorgeous, the music will have you dancing all night, and the drinks are outrageously expensive. If you get in, you'll be here a while.

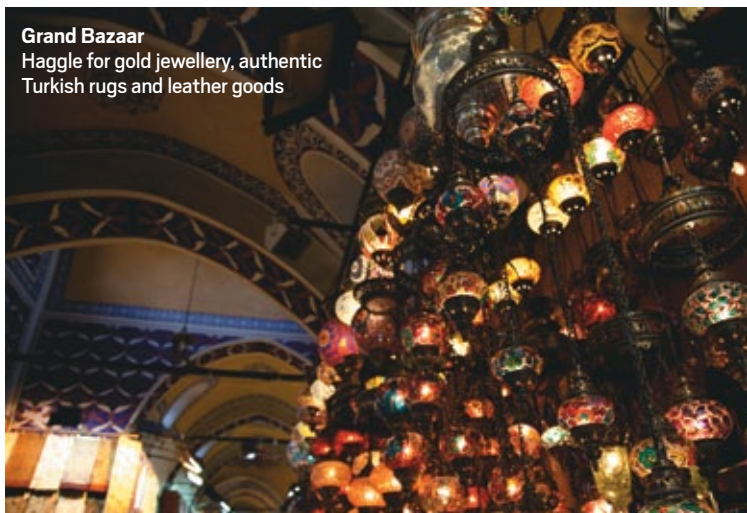
08.00 Order yourself a taxi back to the airport – on the way there you'll be planning your next trip to Istanbul; there's still so much more you need to see. ■

Stay

The Ritz-Carlton,
Istanbul
34367 Sisli,
Istanbul, Turkey
+(90) 212 334
4444
ritzcarlton.com



Reina
Dance the night away under the stars at this exclusive outdoor club



Grand Bazaar
Haggle for gold jewellery, authentic Turkish rugs and leather goods



Grand Hotel Europe, Orient-Express



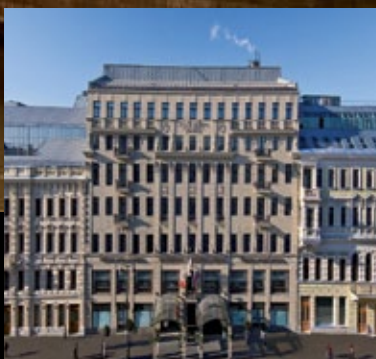
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St Andrew's Day ►

Nov 30, Scotland

The feast day of St Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland, November 30 is also the country's national day, when locals put on special events such as Scottish country dancing shows, art exhibitions, poem recitals, bagpipe concerts, and traditional Scottish lunchtime ceilidhs (lunch, live music and dancing). Edinburgh promises to have the biggest and best in terms of celebrations, but there are also events in the smaller towns and villages.

www.scotland.gov.uk



Day of the Dead ►

Nov 1-2, Oaxaca City, Mexico

Although the Day of the Dead is celebrated throughout Mexico, Oaxaca is where you will see one of the liveliest and most colourful displays. Local markets, homes and streets are adorned with playful skeleton decorations, and families honour their deceased loved ones by creating elaborate altars inside their homes, some of which are open to the public. There are parties and festivals, as well as special Mexican dishes like candied pumpkin, pan de muertos (bread of the dead) and Oaxacan mole negro (black mole), a rich sauce consisting of more than 20 spices, served inside tamales.

www.dayofthedead.com



◄ Melbourne Cup Day

Nov 1, Melbourne, Australia

Held on the first Tuesday of November every year since its inauguration in 1861, Australia's best-known horse racing event is dubbed "the race that stops the nation" as it was designated a national public holiday in 1877. Held at the Victoria Racing Club, this is the richest and most prestigious "two-mile" handicap in the world, and one of the richest turf races. 'Fashions on the Field' is a big part of the event, with prizes awarded for the best-dressed woman and man, and it's not unusual to see celebrities in the stands.

www.melbourncup.com



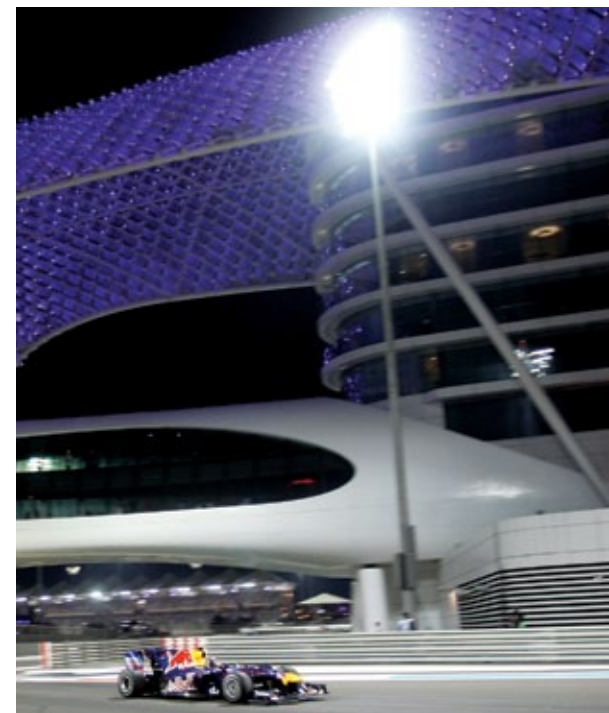


◀ **Guy Fawkes Night**

Nov 5, England

"Remember, remember the fifth of November," as the saying goes. On November 5, 1605, Londoners were encouraged to celebrate King James I's escape from assassination at the hands of Guy Fawkes, the man behind the infamous foiled Gunpowder Plot. Every November 5 there is a huge bonfire in Lewes in Sussex to commemorate the event, where an effigy of Guy Fawkes is burned, and fireworks shows light up the sky throughout the country. There are similar events across London and throughout England, and many towns and villages host their own unique bonfire events and parties.

www.bonfirenight.net



▲ **Abu Dhabi Grand Prix**

Nov 11 - 13, Abu Dhabi, UAE

This is a great time to visit not only Abu Dhabi but Dubai as well, as F1 fever takes over both cities for the duration of the three-day event and beyond. This year the Yas Marina Circuit will be busier than ever, with yacht parties, afterparties and live performances by Britney Spears, Paul McCartney, Incubus and The Cult. For details and information on corporate hospitality packages visit the website www.yasmarinacircuit.com

Thanksgiving ▶

Nov 24, USA

Celebrated on the third Thursday of every year in the USA (Canada celebrates in October), the annual event, which began in 1621 as a celebration of the end of the harvest season, is a time for feasts and family. Though it means a day of roast Turkey feasts and football for many, New York is home to the biggest public Thanksgiving event, as the streets are flooded with crowds who queue to catch a glimpse of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, with its hordes of marching bands, floats and giant helium balloons.

www.macys.com/parade





Amsterdam escape

Take an exclusive European break with Emirates Holidays to Amsterdam and enjoy an extra night's indulgence on the house. Check into the rather splendid Hotel Sofitel Legend The Grand Amsterdam for four nights and take the time to get to know the beautiful Dutch capital. Explore the canals on either side of the 15th century hotel and find out exactly why Amsterdam is called 'The Venice of the North'. Hire a bicycle and criss-cross the cobbled streets and countless wooden bridges that dot the city, explore the Van Gogh Museum and Anne Frank House or simply wander around the stunning Kuekenhof tulip gardens before returning to the hotel for some 21st century five-star pampering. One of just three 'Legend' properties in the Sofitel portfolio, The Grand has everything you would expect from a Sofitel – French know-how wrapped up with local flavour – plus the addition of 500 years of history.

Cost: from AED 8,213 per (\$2,236) person based on two people sharing. Includes return flights and airport transfers in private car.

From: now until December 27, 2011.

www.emiratesholidays.com



Grand dame
Enjoy Amsterdam in style
at Sofitel Legend The Grand

Romance in Beirut

Beirut is a city of passion, where romantic evenings unfurl to the backdrop of domed mosques and ancient churches, and the hum of activity on the city's streets continues until the early hours. In the heart of the action is Le Gray Beirut, a stunning property from British hotelier Gordon Campbell Gray, which immediately won the attention of Beirut's beautiful people when it opened last year. Le Gray's Romance Package invites you and your loved one to spend two nights in the Executive Suite, where you'll be treated to a bottle of bubbly on arrival, a pampering 60-minute couples' massage at the PureGray Health Club & Spa, and daily breakfast. On the first night, enjoy a romantic three-course dinner and a bottle of wine at Indigo on the Roof – the hotel's stunning rooftop restaurant – and take in some of the best views in town.

Cost: from US\$975 per couple for two nights in an Executive Suite, including champagne on arrival, 60-minute couples' massage, daily breakfast, three-course dinner at Indigo on the Roof, and special gift.

From: now until December 31.

Book: reservations@legray.com

www.legray.com



Spend it

An exclusive Moroccan retreat, your own Scottish castle and a luxury golf holiday in Dubai – here's what a millionaire's salary will get you this month

*All prices are subject to change. Please contact the listed companies for further information.

Magic in the Kasbah

To really escape it all, immerse yourself in the magic of 1001 Arabian Nights with Virgin Limited Edition. Until December, the luxury hotel collection is offering a very special rate at Kasbah Tamadot – Sir Richard Branson's luxurious Moroccan retreat in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains, just outside Marrakech. The picturesque property boasts 27 individually-named rooms and suites including nine luxuriously appointed Berber Tents, all decorated in traditional Moroccan style. All rooms feature original antiques and furnishings belonging to former owner Luciano Tempo, an antiques dealer and interior designer. In the evenings, watch the sun go down surrounded by spectacular scenery from the pool terrace or a table at Kanoun Restaurant, or choose a cosy spot for a private candle-lit dinner for two followed by some stargazing through the telescope or au naturel on the roof terrace. During the day, unwind in the traditional Moroccan Hammam or explore the surrounding area – on a clear day you can see Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in the Atlas Mountains – or visit the market at the nearby village of Asni.

Cost: from EUR1,480 (US\$2,020) for four nights' accommodation in a Superior Suite, including all meals. Additional nights from EUR495 (\$675).

From: now until December 21.

www.kasbahTamadot.virgin.com



Beirut nights
Enjoy great food and views from Indigo on the Roof at Le Gray

Set sail in 2012

Set sail in style with Royal Caribbean International in 2012 on any of its Mediterranean, Middle Eastern or Transatlantic sailings and receive a fistful of credit to spend while you're onboard. Book your Balcony Stateroom or Suite before November 30 and you'll receive a range of onboard benefits, which can be used to make your incredible 2012 journey even more indulgent, with up to US\$200 onboard credit available for bookings on voyages of 10 days or more. The onboard credit is yours to spend as you wish – a luxurious spa treatment, a meal in one of Royal Caribbean's premium onboard restaurants, bars or lounges, or a treat from the duty-free boutique. The offer includes journeys on Royal Caribbean's Dubai-based cruise ship, *Brilliance of the Seas*, which runs short departures around the UAE and Oman until April 2012, plus a whole calendar of departures to destinations throughout the Mediterranean.

Cost: book 3-5 nights and receive US\$50 onboard credit; book 6-9 nights and receive \$100 onboard credit; book 10+ nights and receive \$200 onboard credit.

From: now until November 30.

Book: info@royalcaribbean-arabia.com

www.royalcaribbean-arabia.com



Royal Caribbean
Enjoy onboard credit with Royal Caribbean's Mediterranean sailings

Reserve your own castle

What better way to spend the festive season this year than bringing all your friends and family to one place to celebrate the finer things in life in luxurious surroundings, with an endless selection of activities and outings on your doorstep? How about doing all that in your own private castle? Abercrombie&Kent Villas has teamed up with the owners of 400-year-old Aldourie Castle, on the shores of Loch Ness in Scotland, to create a festive offer that is chock full of Highland hospitality. The castle is set within the 500-acre Aldourie Castle Estate, an expanse of green woodland and gardens just six miles from the city of Inverness. Spend your time clay pigeon shooting or touring the local area's distillery or go fishing on Loch Ness. The full complement of castle staff and caterers will provide everything from a daily full Scottish breakfast to a Christmas banquet in the Great Hall. There's nowhere better for an after-dinner nightcap than the Red Drawing Room, with its family portraits and roaring fire (*right*), or head to the Library for some quiet time.

Cost: from GBP35,000 (US\$54,680) for the exclusive use of the castle for four nights, with accommodation for up to 28 guests, plus full Scottish breakfasts, lunches, afternoon teas and three-course dinners.

From: now until the New Year.

www.akvillas.com



Seeing red
Enjoy an after-dinner nightcap
in the Red Drawing Room



Fun for all
Shopping and race car driving
in Barcelona: what's not to love?

High-adrenaline shopping

Combine five-star hospitality and top-end shopping with high-speed adventure in Barcelona, with the Adrenaline and Shopping package at La Roca Village. For a special rate of EUR416.50 (US\$579) per person, you'll enjoy a night in the recently renovated Hotel Ciutat de Granollers in the heart of Barcelona, followed by an action-packed day of shopping and driving. Your private chauffeur will drive you to La Roca Village in the morning, where you will receive a personal welcome at the Village Reception and a VIP Card offering a 10 percent discount on purchases in your nine favourite boutiques. When you've sated your appetite for shopping, you'll be whisked to the Catalunya F1 Circuit for an afternoon of heart-stopping action. After a complete briefing from the track professionals, you'll be let loose onto the track to complete two laps of the circuit in a Ferrari 460 Spider, a Lamborghini Gallardo and a Porsche 977 Turbo.

Cost: EUR416.50 (\$579) per person including one night in the Hotel Ciutat de Granollers, limousine transfers, VIP Card with 10 percent discount, and track experience at Catalunya F1 circuit.

From: unlimited.

Book: reservations@ichdfcc.ae

www.larocavillage.com



Escape to pastures green

The summer has long gone, and cooler afternoons make the golf course an especially nice place to be, particularly if you're at InterContinental's 18-hole championship Al Badia Golf Club at Dubai Festival City. This luxurious golf coaching break is aimed at golf pros or keen golfers with a big group of friends, plus their own golf coach who is keen for an expenses-paid trip to Dubai. Bring a group of seven golfers to the InterContinental Dubai Festival City and check in for seven nights or more and receive a host of benefits including complimentary tee times, daily breakfast and free accommodation for the coach. Spend a full week exploring the gentle undulations of the Robert Trent Jones II-designed par-72 course at Al Badia, dappled with oasis-like clusters of palm trees, rivers of sand and 11 lakes, making it one of the most enjoyable and challenging courses to play in the Middle East. When you're not on the course, improve your skills in the TaylorMade Performance Lab with motion analysis technology, or the SAM PuttLab to improve your short game, relax in one of the club's restaurants – Blades and Spikes – or find refreshment at Trent's, the 19th hole. If you need a break from the course, there's plenty of inspiration at the InterContinental, with fine dining from French master chef Pierre Gagnaire at Reflets, traditional French cuisine at Bistro Madeline, and succulent steaks at Terra Firma. Treat yourself to a visit to the spa at the end of the week and soothe away the aches and pains with a selection of treatments.

Cost: book seven rooms for seven nights (approx AED 1,200 per room per night) and golf pro receives seven nights' free accommodation and complimentary tee-times for the group.

From: now until April 2012.

Book: reservations@ichdfcc.ae

www.intercontinental.com/dubai

DEBUT



Hotel Deep Blue

Providencia, Colombia

On the remote Caribbean island of Providencia in Colombia, the Hotel Deep Blue has been offering guests great accommodation and service for over 20 years. Having just completed a year-long renovation process, the property's 14 rooms have been redesigned to the highest standard, with its Luxury Suites now including private infinity-edge pools looking out over the striking azure sea. Located on one of the most desirable parts of the island, Maracaibo Bay, the property also offers excursions like scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, boat trips, hiking and kayaking through nearby McBean Lagoon National Marine Park.



Privacy please
Villas feature private infinity-edge pools



Par for the course
The Westin Abu Dhabi's rooms and suites overlook the greens

Westin Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi, UAE

This sprawling, modern hotel features a stunning championship golf course with world-class amenities, plus rooms, suites and a central Presidential Suite all overlooking the greens. Dining options include Lemon & Lime, an elegant cocktail venue; Agadir, a specialty Moroccan restaurant offering authentic cuisine; The Retreat, an English-style lounge

with classic bar and comfort food; and Fairways, an all-day dining restaurant. The Westin Heavenly Spa features six treatment rooms with outdoor relaxation area in a tranquil garden setting, offering specialty treatments for golfers including the "Golfer's recovery", a therapeutic massage designed to rejuvenate the body and skin after a day on the course.



Melia Zanzibar

Zanzibar, Africa

Built on a 100-acre estate with private beach, this five-star resort features seven villas with private pools and gardens plus 100 rooms with lounges and either gardens with outdoor showers or terraces with sea view. The hotel features a luxurious beach club, Gabi Beach, with beach concierge service, large Balinese-style beds and wood-fire

ovens for delicious grilled dishes. For dining there is the Arabian/African market-inspired Spices restaurant; Aqua cliff-top restaurant for romantic dining; and The Pool Bar for light meals and snacks. An Anantara spa offers Thai massage pavilions, a lap pool with sun deck and fitness centre with sauna.



View to sea
Melia Zanzibar is surrounded
by stunning ocean vistas

Movenpick Hotel Bangalore

Bangalore, India

Conveniently located near Bangalore's main business district and a 30-minute drive from the airport, this modern hotel features complimentary high-speed WiFi in all 182 rooms and public areas, a first in the city. Dining options include the 24-hour My Place restaurant; the Obsidian bar, featuring 1920s art deco design; the Italian restaurant Mezzaluna; and Perfect Sky, a rooftop restaurant and lounge. The Sohum Spa offers Ayurvedic treatments, plus Oriental and European healing techniques in a Hindu temple-inspired setting, and guests can relax beside the infinity-edge swimming pool.

Jumeirah at Etihad Towers

New luxury in the heart
of Abu Dhabi's corniche



Jumeirah at Etihad Towers

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Part of an iconic new five-tower complex, the latest from Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts features 382 spacious rooms and suites plus 199 serviced residences, business centre with four meeting rooms, one of the largest conference centres in Abu Dhabi, a ballroom that can seat up to 1,400 plus 13 meeting rooms, a dedicated executive lounge with all-day food and beverage, and a variety of restaurants and lounges. The hotel features Jumeirah's signature Talise Spa, with 13 treatment suites including the spacious Rasoul and Hammam suites, and guests will love the landscaped gardens and pools extending across the private beach and the Etihad Towers shopping arcade, home to over 30 designer boutiques.

A person wearing a hat and a light-colored shirt is relaxing in a white hammock strung between two tall palm trees. The scene is set on a sandy beach with a clear blue ocean in the background. The palm trees are lush green and their fronds create a canopy overhead. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and tropical.

Paradise found



Shangri-La Villingili Maldives | **Suite dreams**

Setting the tone
A neutral interior of natural wood furnishings draws focus to the outdoors

Nicci Perides crosses the equator for a weekend break at **Shangri-La Villingili**

Someone once told me that his idea of paradise is sitting on the verandah of a hut on a remote island, listening to the sound of the rain falling on a tin roof. I'm lying on the bed of my ocean villa on the island of Villingili in the Maldives; I can see the turquoise seas of the Indian Ocean gently swaying under thunderous rain. Only single flashes of yellow as the lightning strikes interrupt a sky of dark grey. There is no other place I would rather be at this very moment.

The Maldives is only a four-hour flight from Dubai, making it a perfect weekend getaway. I touch down in Male, the capital and the most inhabited island of the Maldives, and am immediately met by a Shangri-La representative, who swiftly takes our bags and escorts us to a lounge. He asks if we would like to relax in the lounge or go for a tour of the town while waiting for our domestic flight onwards. Tour it is.

The tour of Male only lasts an hour – the town is very small and has that unique laid-back island feel about it. The highlight has to be the mosque made entirely out of coral. The rest of the tourist attractions are centred on the colourful fruit and fish markets, where surprisingly for an island nation, most of the fish are imported.

Back at the airport, we board the domestic flight to Gan, the airport nearest Villingili Island, our final destination. The plane is comfortable and the 90-minute flight is mainly taken up by gazing out of the window at the tiny islands dotted around the turquoise sea below. As we cross the equator we receive a certificate commemorating the occasion.

We arrive at Gan by midday and another member of the Shangri-La staff greets us, grabs our bags and whisks us onto a speedboat bound for the island. Palm trees, water villas on stilts and the general manager await our arrival, complete with a fresh coconut and our own butler ready to take us to our villa. I'm truly in paradise now.

Check-in is done in the villa, so there is no wasting time in reception. There are several types of villa to choose from. We opt for the stilted variety – a private abode that looks out over the large, crystal-clear lagoon.

Villingili is located on top of a series of reefs, which makes for excellent snorkelling.

Turtles, parrot fish and so much more await just 20 metres or so from our private dock, and snorkelling equipment is available at no charge.

Whether you chose the water villa, ocean villa or the super-private tree house, each option comes complete with breathtaking views, large baths for two, outdoor and indoor showers, a mobile phone to summon your private butler whenever you choose, and two bikes for exploring the island at your leisure. The villas are done in neutral colours to ensure they almost blend into the idyllic environment. In fact as we travel around the island, we notice each set of villas has a unique feel. The tree houses have an emphasis on outdoor living – they are wilder and more rugged than the other categories. The ocean villas have that laid-back beach feel complete with towering palm trees, while the water villas are geared towards pure paradise, offering uninterrupted views across the lagoon. Sunset is simply magical.

If you're feeling particularly active, an organised bike tour takes you to the neighbouring islands to see what 'real life' is like for the Maldivians. Villingili is the only Maldivian island connected to other islands by a causeway.

The island is lush and green – wild on one side while the other is gentle and calm – perfect for relaxing under a palm tree on a white sandy beach.

For those of you who wish to indulge in doing absolutely nothing, your villa is very well equipped: in-villa dining is available at the push of a button, your private balcony is ideal for getting a perfect tan minus the tan lines, and the sea is right on your doorstep for late-night dips.

The following day we hop on our bikes and visit the island spa. The Chi spa is an unrivalled pocket of peace and tranquillity on the island. My partner and I opt for the 'Signature Partner's Treatment' – a 90-minute massage using cowry shells. This is something everyone needs to try. The cowry shells are warmed and then used to soothe away stress, leaving you in a completely relaxed state.

The three restaurants on the island are well worth venturing out for. The first night we try Dr. Ali's, a fusion of three tastes set across three lounges. Choose from Arabic, Indian Ocean or

foods from the South China Sea, or like us, try a little of everything. Delicious. Javvu is for all-day dining. If you choose to, you can have your lunch served in a cabana while you sunbathe by the pool.

For our final night on the island we try the highly recommended seafood restaurant Fashala. This is set on the northern tip of the island and has a panorama of the lagoon. The first and last course is buffet style. For the main course, try the lobster.

After four blissful days of exploring the island's water world, the lush green interior and indulging in the finest cuisine, it is time to go home. One last late lunch in Javvu as we look out over the beach and then onto the speedboat, as we quite literally head off into the sunset. ■

The important bit

What: Shangri-La Villingili Resort and Spa, Maldives

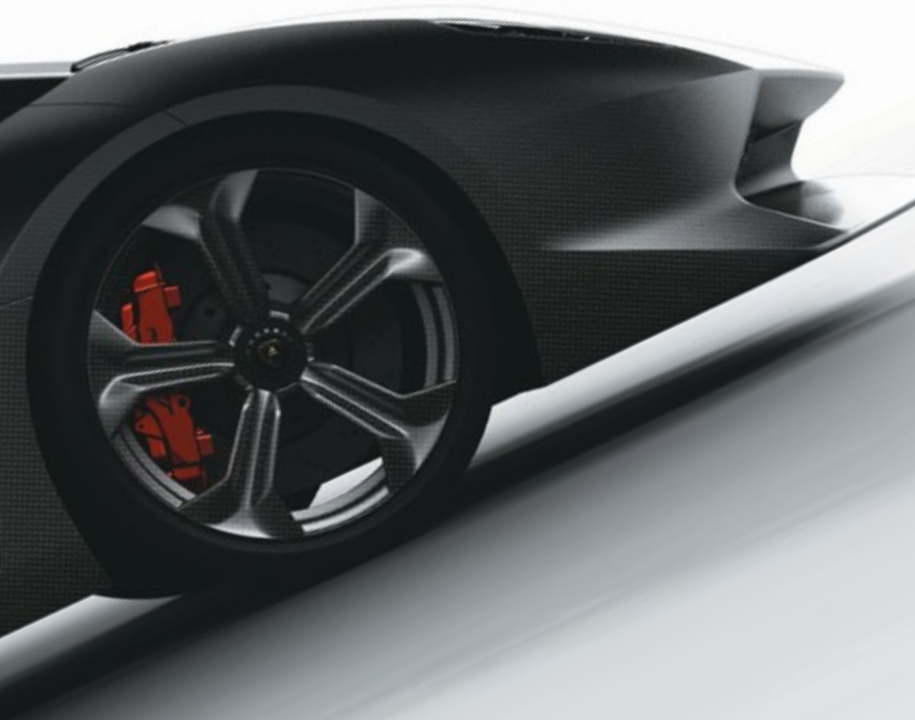
Where: Villingili Island, Addu Atoll, Republic of Maldives

Cost: Water Villa per night ranges from US\$1,100++ to US\$2,400++ depending on the season

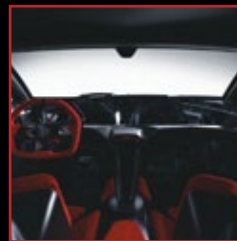
Web: www.shangri-la.com



Overwater world
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ON THE ROAD



Lamborghini Sesto Elemento

Engine: naturally-aspirated V10 based on the Gallardo LP 570-4 Superleggera

BHP: 570

0-100kph: 2.5 secs

Top speed: >300km/h

Origin: Italy

Cost: EUR1.6m (US\$2.2m)

With its sharp edges, ridged back and flared, nostril-like air vents adorning the hood, the Lamborghini Sesto Elemento could be the devil's chariot. Yes, if Satan had a car, this would be it. From appearance to performance and technology, this is truly a car of the future. The all-black, carbon-fibre design with fine crystal Nano-Technology red trim looks incredible, but it also weighs in at just 999kg, improving not only fuel consumption and emissions, but power-to-weight ratio and performance too. The technology that keeps everything ticking was developed in collaboration with Boeing, and the interior is so minimal that the centre console has just three buttons. Only 20 units will be made – the first ones to be delivered from 2013 – and hell will freeze over before it's street legal.





Porsche 918 Spyder Super Sports

Engine: V8 hybrid drive with liquid-cooled lithium-ion battery
BHP: >500 (including two electrical motors outputting at least 218 bhp)
0-100kph: 3.2 secs
Top speed: 320km/h
Fuel consumption: 3.0l/100km
CO2 emission: 70g/km
Electric range: 25km
Origin: Germany
Cost: EUR 645,000 (US\$878,260). Only 918 units available - production starts September 18, 2013.

Another high-performance hybrid, Porsche's 918 concept was rolled out earlier this year, promising to show just what can be achieved when state-of-the-art technology is combined with cutting-edge design. On the outside, it's a two-seater carbon fibre-reinforced plastic monocoque sports car with removable roof panels that can be stowed in the front luggage compartment. Under the hood, it's an all-wheel drive, fuel-efficient hybrid that exploits the best of both drive systems to create an ultra high-tech sports car.



▲ Audi Spyder Urban Concept

Engine: two e-tron electric motors powered by a lithium-ion battery
Top speed: 99km/h
Electric range: 56km
Origin: Germany
Cost: Audi says this version of the Urban Concept probably won't make it to the manufacturing stage.

Not all cars of the future are designed with only speed and performance in mind. The Audi Urban Concept is the perfect all-rounder of tomorrow, with elements of sporty roadster, weekend joyride and urban warrior all rolled into one. The body is made from ultra lightweight carbon fibre-reinforced polymer; the all-electric power unit promises zero emissions; and the staggered two-seater cabin features adjustable pedals and ground-hugging profile. Entry is via the rear tailgate and the entire roof slides open to the rear.



▲ BMW i8 Concept

Engine: lithium-ion battery-powered electric motor (front) + turbocharged 1.5-litre three-cylinder petrol engine (rear)
BHP: 170 (electric motor) and 220 (engine)
0-100kph: <5 secs
Fuel consumption: <3.0l/100km
Electric range: 35km
Origin: Germany
Cost: TBC

Billed by BMW as "the most progressive and innovative sports car of its time", the i8 blends performance, technology and aesthetic allure. The i8 combines a modified electric eDrive technology system with a turbocharged, low-emission engine at the rear, all crammed into a sleek, futuristic body.

SPARK OF CREATION

This month's motoring section is dedicated to concept cars – a mixed bag of fanciful creations that give carmakers' R'n'D teams something to practice on, and state-of-the-art high-performance hybrid vehicles that are already being snapped up by brand fanatics the world over.

One thing all the cars on these two pages have in common is that they are all powered by electricity to some degree, from Audi's 100 percent battery-powered urban roadster to Lamborghini's hybrid battery- and petrol-powered monster.

Now that carmakers are allocating money into developing non-petrol solutions, they seem to be discovering that electricity might be a benefit, rather than a hindrance to performance.

But the concern for many motorists today is not whether battery-powered and hybrid cars will perform as well as their petrol-guzzling ancestors, but whether the infrastructure to support and maintain them will be there.

The nightmare scenario of running out of charge in the middle of nowhere is still one that enters most people's minds whenever electric cars are mentioned, and with the charge range of many vehicles still relatively low, it's not a problem that's about to go away any time soon.

Now that carmakers have invested their time and expertise into developing low emission, battery-powered vehicles, we need to see similar commitment from governments to provide the necessary foundations to make widespread ownership a reality.

The other big question-mark surrounds the fact that most electric cars take somewhere in the region of 12 hours to recharge – not practical if you run out of juice during the evening commute, lending weight to the hybrid option.

So governments, the ball is in your court. In the meantime, we can only hope carmakers will keep wowing customers with jaw-dropping designs and innovation.

JOE MORTIMER



Geneva ‘convention’ bends to baby rules

Le Richemond hotel offers kids much more than Swiss chocolate



Gemma Greenwood

Luxury travel aficionado and full-time mum

“We had nightmarish premonitions of a screaming toddler wreaking havoc in the many refined public areas of this prestigious property”

Geneva: a city famous for banking, diplomacy, great chocolate, world-class watches, snowy mountains, pristine lakes and much more – but not necessarily its child-friendly hotels.

In fact before we checked into Le Richemond, which is one of Geneva’s top hotels, my husband and I were a little concerned about just how well Baby G would fit in.

We had nightmarish premonitions of a screaming toddler wreaking havoc in the many refined public areas of this prestigious property, which was recently taken over by the Dorchester Collection – a portfolio of top-end international properties including Park Lane’s iconic hotel, The Dorchester.

We pulled up outside the property in a car packed full of the usual baby paraphernalia, which did not seem to faze the unwitting doorman. He simply beamed as he welcomed us and looked genuinely happy when he opened the back door and received a toothy grin from Baby G. He even managed to continue smiling as he juggled the cases, pram and many other awkward items before valet parking the car.

The front desk also looked pleased to see Baby G, even though she had already dropped a raisin or two in the lobby, leaving me to frantically scramble around on the floor in the hope no one would notice.

Safely ensconced in our Le Richemond Deluxe Room, we took in the balcony views of Jardin Brunswick below and glistening Lake Geneva,

which was literally at the hotel’s elegant doorstep.

Behind that, up high on the hill, sat the Romanesque-meets-Gothic St Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva’s Old Town, framed by a postcard-perfect mountain landscape in the distance.

But as we breathed in the fresh air, our daughter was doing a bit of her own reconnaissance work back inside the room.

She approved of the king-sized bed and the comfortable sofa (good for climbing and bouncing on); the large walk-in wardrobe with cupboards galore (great for hide-and-seek antics); plus the sizeable marble bathroom with rain shower and luxury REN products (they were for mummy and daddy only). There were also squeals of delight when our little bundle of joy spotted a white fluffy Le Richemond teddy bear, complete with a red hotel-branded hooded top that had been placed on the bed for her amusement.

At Le Richemond’s main restaurant, Le Jardin, we decided to dine on the terrace in the sunshine, where a high chair and child’s table setting had already been prepared.

Here, head chef Roberto Benvegnù delighted us with his Italian-inspired menu combining classics with local seafood – deliciously seasoned and lightly battered calamari for an entrée followed by well proportioned mains including ravioli with scampi.

He also wowed Baby G with a specially-prepared dish of smoked chicken and petit pois and spoiled her

with other culinary choices, from juices to purees, all made from local produce.

She didn’t once complain – and neither did we.

The breakfast service was also very accommodating, with Baby G attracting a lot of smiles and attention from the child-friendly staff.

And that’s what makes Le Richemond so appealing: it is an elegant and refined hotel that takes service seriously, and this includes making its guests – particularly those with children – feel relaxed and at home. ■



THE GOLDEN BOOK

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Connoisseur

An insider's guide to the most luxurious hotels in the world

Rio Grand
Sofitel Copacabana straddles Copacabana and Ipanema beaches



Mary Gostelow

Lifestyle and luxury commentator

RIO DE JANEIRO

When planning a trip to Rio, there is one simple rule: choose Copacabana or Ipanema, but make sure you are on that beach. Copacabana Beach is dominated by Orient-Express' **Copacabana Palace**, a two-tower, 245-room icon. The original 1923 vintage building, a six-floor wedding-cake confection, is currently being upgraded. My favourite suites are mirror-image 601 and 602, which have private terraces for sunbathing and watching the 24/7 beach life below – all sixth-floor suites share a private, rooftop pool that catches the sun all day.

Cariocas (Rio people) are fit and healthy. The annual Carnival, next February 17-21, 2012, means all hotels are booked, at a premium, well in advance. Copacabana Palace's famed Carnival Ball on the Saturday (February 18) is an annual highlight. For days before, even ultra-stylish GM Andréa Natal, and all servers, sashay samba-style through the hotel, and you join in, too. Year-round, however, borrow bicycles to join locals along the beachside cycle path.

Pergola's celebrated buffets, inside or out by the main pool, include an unbelievable cornucopia of exotic and perfect breakfast fruits (learn the difference between seeded and non-seeded papaya). For fine dinners, Cipriani's new-look interior includes Murano chandeliers, and chef Nicola Finamore still offers his best-selling green tagliatelle and tiramisu.

www.copacabanapalace.com.br

The 388-room **Sofitel Rio de Janeiro Copacabana** straddles Copacabana and Ipanema. Choose which one you want to look at from the stupendous 2,200 square foot top-floor Suite 801, which faces Forte de Copacabana, the military zone at the beaches' junction.

This hotel, run by Alban Dutemple, is where captains of industry stay – especially if they are French, Lebanese, Spanish or from the USA – plus Air France and Iberia crews. It is worth paying the surcharge for one of the 66 Club Millésime rooms. Perks include a three-station business centre, a 12-seat meeting room with sockets at the table, a complimentary daily wine tasting, Chandon (the Brazilian sparkling, by Moët) and access to the very stunning nine-floor, above-hotel lounge, with a huge terrace that is a day-long sun trap. The hotel also has two outdoor pools, one for morning sun, and one for the afternoon. www.sofitel.com

For Ipanema, try **Hotel Fasano Rio de Janeiro**, managed by GM Cristiana Kastrup. It looks like an eight-floor wood, metal and glass sculpture with lots of acute exterior angles to allow maximum sea views for its 89 rooms.

The hotel's focal point is the glass-walled rooftop, with a 35x20-foot rectangular pool that is half-paddle, half-swim depth. The open-sided rooftop bar is for lounging, with supermodels and movie biggies among the clientele: the adjacent glass-walled Technogym is for the determinedly fit, and the La Prairie spa entices those who like fuchsia-lit bathtubs.

The 1,000 square foot Suite 601 is typical of what Philippe Starck has put throughout the rest of the hotel, with sleek wood floors and off-white walls relieved by big blow-ups of 1930s swimmers on sky-high diving boards, or the gold-edged pearl-shaped mirrors that could be the hotel's logo (one mirror is on the ceiling, above the bed).

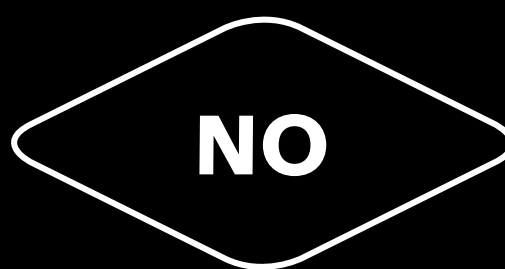
Floor-length ceiling-hung curtains not only cover the wall-length windows, leading to your private terrace, but can divide your space to bed and living areas.

At ground level, curtains swirl around semi-circular sitting areas and shelter Fasano al Mare restaurant. The Fasano family are Brazil's most famous restaurateurs; here they offer traditional and great Italian, with lots of extra healthy fixes – try breakfast's addictive acai berry and granola smoothie. www.fasano.com.br

Orient Express elegance
Copacabana Palace's famed Carnival Ball is a highlight of the Rio Carnival each year



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SEAN COLLINS

Founder and CEO, *pureholidayhomes.com*

After graduating university, Sean Collins joined the London Wasps Rugby Club and began a career in professional sports, before a shoulder injury forced him to think again. The economic crisis in 2008 prompted him to recognise a gap in the property market: a large supply of holiday homes around the world and a lack of portals where holidaymakers could rent them. Thus *pureholidayhomes.com* was born. The website allows villa owners to upload details of their properties for a one-off subscription fee, and gives travellers the freedom to choose from 25,000 luxurious holiday homes all over the world.

The website was recently nominated Best Accommodation Website at the Travolution Awards and the 2011 Travel Pioneer of the Year award, while Sean has been nominated as one of the 2011 Rising Stars of the Year. Based in Marlow, UK, where he lives with his wife and three children, Sean's extensive worldwide travels have seen him contribute regularly to *The Sunday Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* and the BBC as an authority on travel.



Canadian Rockies

The vast, dramatic mountains and wilderness of the Rockies are hard to compete with anywhere in the world. After a morning of skiing at the pristine Lake Louise ski hill, enjoy afternoon tea at Chateau Lake Louise overlooking the glacier, followed by the private dining room at the Saltlick in Banff. Heli-skiing in the winter and heli-hiking in the summer are also fantastic, mind-blowing experiences.

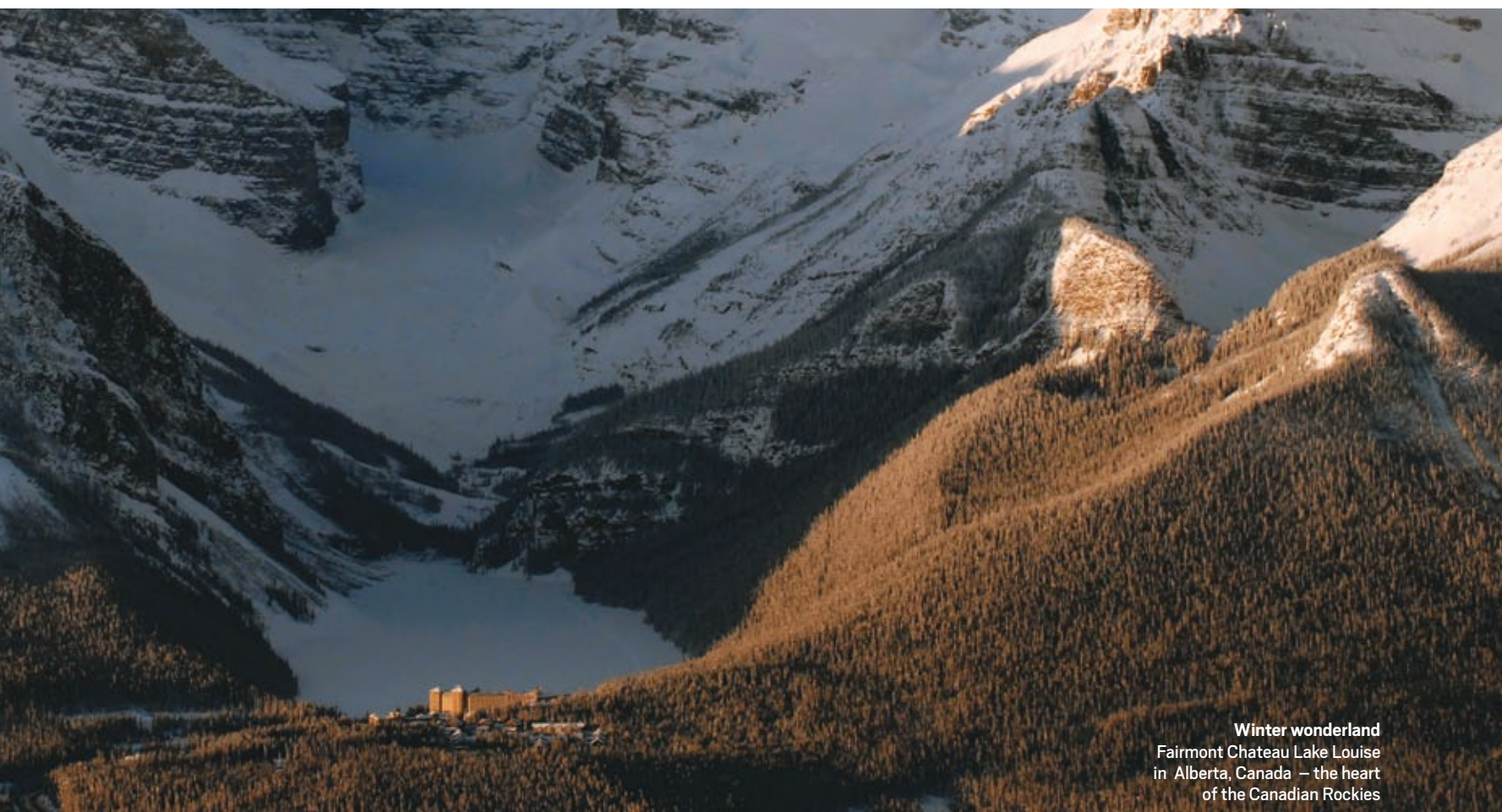
Florence, Italy

I'm a country boy at heart, so the rolling hills and historic hill-top towns are just wonderful. It's great for a weekend break but has so much going on that it's also perfect for a family holiday. Castello del Nero is one of the finest hotels in Tuscany, providing huge suites with stunning views, and Osteria dei Benci is an incredible restaurant off the beaten track in the centre of Florence – it's always filled with locals, and they serve Sassicaia, my favourite wine.

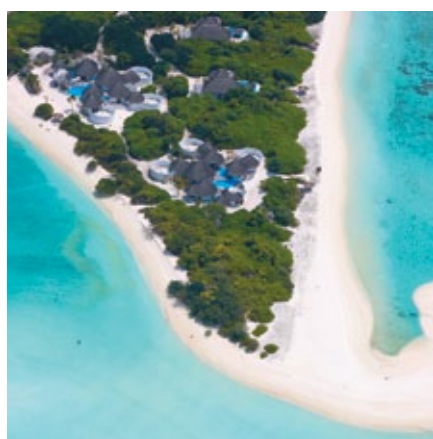
Marlow, UK

It's where I live but also the best hidden gem within an hour of London. It's not as big or well known as Henley but has the same countryside shops and atmosphere with the Thames providing a stunning backdrop for the town. There are so many beautiful walks and viewpoints, such as the nearby Hambleton Valley and an abundance of country pubs and restaurants, like The Hand and Flowers, the only gastro pub in the UK with two Michelin stars.

“The vast, dramatic mountains and wilderness of the Canadian Rockies are hard to compete with anywhere in the world”



Winter wonderland
Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise
in Alberta, Canada – the heart
of the Canadian Rockies



Maldives

An obvious choice for my honeymoon was the Maldives, so it holds a special place in my heart. When we were booking it I was slightly sceptical as I just assumed it was nothing but a stunning destination to go and relax and read, and typically I like to be a bit more active in body and mind on my holidays. The beauty of it really blew me away and we did lots of water sports and excursions but also quite a lot of relaxing, eating and drinking!



Monaco

This is the perfect city-break destination, with shopping, casinos, nightlife, restaurants and beaches all on your doorstep. The ultimate extravagant indulgence, a weekend in Monaco may be something you only do once in your life, but this vibrant and historic location is an incredible experience – a guilty pleasure. Stay at the Monte Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort for the perfect mix of luxury and relaxation with the fantastic Blue Gin bar.



Hong Kong

My favourite bar in the world has to be the top-floor bar of the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong, the M Bar. They have a great range of cocktails – try the Mandarin Spring Punch – and they do dim sum and light food, which is a perfect aperitif. Hong Kong itself provides a sense of one of the world's great cities (much like New York and Paris), but it also has a fantastic blend of the old empire, with just the right amount of the New World.

Christopher Hogan
Artist and designer



The world's a canvas

When did you decide to become an artist?

My father's business was sign-writing, and it was only natural that I would follow in his footsteps. Not happy with the formalities of the sign industry, I decided in the early 80s to pursue my passion to become a full-time artist.

How did that evolve into a career?

I was living on the Gold Coast in Australia where I had my home and studio on the beach, and was travelling to Hamilton Island resort on the Great Barrier Reef as their artist in residence. I developed my programme for teaching guests how to do an abstract painting in two hours. My core business was supplying resorts with paintings, and my love of travel now allows me to continue to do both.

What is a painter's most valuable skill?

As an abstract painter, you must be able to see things not as they are, but rather to identify the most interesting elements and interpret them in a totally different way. Don't be afraid to take risks and experiment with colour and composition.

Where do you feel most inspired to paint?

Because most of my subject matter mainly involves creating compositions using macro images of marine life, I find inspiration anywhere in the world where there are coral reefs. The Maldives in particular is perfect because I am completely surrounded by marine life and far away from the busy cities, so it is very inspiring. I snorkel and dive and use my underwater camera to help me create new compositions.

What would you tell someone thinking of making a career out of a creative trade?

I would tell them to think about one of my favourite quotations and just go for it: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions perhaps it is because he hears the beat of a different drummer...let him step to the music which he hears..." – Henry David Thoreau, 1854.

Can you share some memorable experiences from your classes?

I recently conducted a class for a wedding party in the Maldives. It was a group of 20, and the eldest was a retired architect from Brazil, aged 86 years, whose son, the father of the bride, was an engineer. The old man paid me the ultimate compliment. He said, 'Chris, I did not know my son had such artistic talent. I made him go to university to become an engineer, and he's a very good engineer, but he could have been a wonderful artist'.

How can we improve our painting skills?

Visit art museums and look closely at the masters of contemporary abstract works. You will be surprised by how imperfect they seem up close. This can help you lose your inhibitions and learn that bumpy lines and pencil marks are ok to leave as evidence of the process for the viewer. Don't be afraid to experiment, think laterally, and most importantly, have fun and enjoy the experience. ■

Christopher Hogan's work is on display at five-star resorts in the Maldives, Thailand and Australia, for brands including Anantara, Banyan Tree and One&Only.

GLOBAL GOURMET PARIS | FRANCE

EATING at dinner-only Sur Mesure de Thierry Marx at Mandarin Oriental Paris is a galactic gourmet experience. Designer Patrick Jouin's white tunnel leads to what looks like the inside of a 40-seat all-white spaceship. You sit surrounded by white. Walls, extending over to the ceiling, have panels deliberately half falling away, courtesy of Japanese firm Commes des Garçons.

I'm dining with a French friend: she wears a pink tweed jacket over blue jeans, which adds colour to the otherwise stark-white environment. Each setting has exquisite Limoges, the display plate set on a flat doughnut-shaped golden disk. Hold it up and it makes a halo behind one's head. The entire experience is rather heavenly.

Today's ribbon-wrapped menu features six or nine set courses. I start with a tier of three dim sum-style glass pots, each holding a different red pepper confection, and finish with another dim sum-tower of three china pots, with sweetmeats. The highlight is a dome of ice supporting a mound of scallop mousse with a finger-size toast sandwich of French caviar.

Mr Marx, trained by such true greats as Joël Robuchon, was last cooking at a Bordeaux château. Here at Mandarin Oriental Paris, he also oversees the more-casual all-day Camélia Restaurant, which has wall-size windows overlooking the hotel's central garden.

www.mandarinoriental.com/paris

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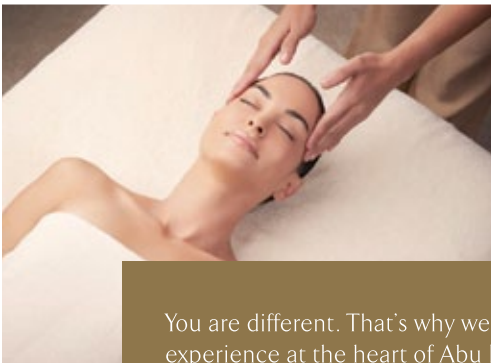
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