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Editorial	4
On Top	6
• Hotel, restaurant, and airline news	
• What's on – the most interesting cultural events	12
• Giftmania	28
Cover Story	14
• Up in the air	
Tried&Tested	20
• Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni	22
• Sowa & Przyjaciele	24
• Stary Dom	26
• Restaurant Biała Gęś	27
• Galaxy S5 is here	
Report	30
• Bunking down	
Air Travel	36
• Lufthansa announces more novelties	
• Austrian Airlines – everything for passengers!	38
Hotels	40
• Discover the Sweet Secret by Mercure	42
• Luxury Hamburgers	
Business	44
• Image of your company and personal branding	
Destinations	48
• Into the light	54
• In the Kingdom of the Mayas	60
• Beijing Bites	72
• 4 hours in... Glasgow	
Moto&Techno	65
• The Dream Series	68
• Watch and learn	
Ask Peter	74

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TRAFFIC JAMS IN THE SKY

The big blue is becoming more and more congested. Each year planes carry more than 2.5 billion passengers worldwide. European airspace covers 4.1 million square miles and is watched over by 60 air traffic control (ATC) centres with 16,900 controllers! Domestic US airspace, on the other hand, covers 3.5 million square miles (plus 24.6 million square miles of international oceanic airspace) and has just 13,000 controllers. In 2010, the European ATM system handled 33,000 flights on busy days, but by 2020 this is expected to rise to 50,000. Airbus predicts global air traffic growth to average 4.7 per cent leading up to 2032, but markets such as the Middle East will exceed 7 per cent. The question that we have asked in our cover article entitled “Up in the Sky” is: “Does the future of aviation belong to the so-called ‘express skyways’ where planes would be flocking together and flying in formation like birds, and if yes, then, will it be a safe solution?”

I encourage you to read this and other articles from this month's issue of BT Poland.



Marzena Mróz

Marzena Mróz
Editor-in-Chief



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Hotels

Radisson Blu

RENOVATED CONFERENCE SPACES

Three Radisson Blu hotels – one in Cracow and two in Warsaw – have recently completed renovation of their conference centres. In Warsaw changes were made to all 8 conference rooms at Radisson Blu Centrum and 10 of the 13 rooms at Radisson Blu Sobieski. The hotel in Cracow also now boasts a completely refreshed conference foyer as well as refurbished all of its eight conference rooms. The refreshed interiors have added new character to the spaces and rooms, which are used for business meetings, elegant receptions, and various galas. All Radisson Blu hotels in Poland (in Warszawa, Cracow, Gdańsk, Wrocław, and Szczecin) offer its business guests the highest standard of service. The Experience Meetings concept implemented by the brand, guarantees organization of meetings at the highest level, with a suitably selected menu, space for creative work, free internet, and concern for the environment.

Austria

Skiing

IN THE SUN OF PAZNAUN-ISCHGL

Ischgl invites ski aficionados to the spring rendez vous. The attractive packages are as tempting as the concerts of great stars. Lots of snow, excellent skiing conditions, sports, fun, and great events – all of this is guaranteed here until May. When the first rays of spring sun reach Ischgl, life in the Alpine capital of style picks up the pace. Excellent skiing conditions and open-air concerts enable you to combine active holiday with cultural events. The April calendar is filled with numerous great events: “Sterne-Cup der Köche” (Cook-



ing Cup; 6-7 April), “Heroes Challenge” (25-26 April), Gourmet Skiing World Championship (9-10 April), Trida Spring Snow Festival (13 April), and “VW Mountain Move Woche” with concerts of world stars. On 3 May the season will end with the legendary “Top of the Mountain” concert. This year, the galaxy of stars that performed in Ischgl in previous years (Elton John, Pink, Sting, Tina Turner, Jon Bon Jovi, and Kylie Minogue), will be joined by Robbie Williams. The concerts held under the open sky are free for all holders of valid ski passes!



Airlines

Lufthansa

FIRST CLASS!

Lufthansa's new First Class is enjoying strong recognition worldwide. Not only has there been excellent feedback from top customers in the few months since it was introduced, it has also received major awards. Lufthansa's First Class and its range of services were awarded five stars in the Skytrax star ranking, while the American Academy of Hospitality Sciences (AAHS) presented its International 5 Star Diamond Award to Europe's leading airline. Key improvements in 2014 will focus on Business Class in particular. The current in-flight service on long-haul routes will be enhanced, with the introduction of a signature service. The aim is to provide a service that reminds passengers of being in a top restaurant. Currently, a total of 7,000 full-flat seats are being installed on the 106 long-haul aircraft. From as early as August 2014, the amenity kits provided in Business Class will also be upgraded. A new kit has been developed with Samsonite and will include high-quality personal care products from the Greek premium brand Korres. Lufthansa's business lounges also offer now a new range of food, including vegetarian dishes. The breakfast menu is now expanded, and food is labelled more clearly to assist guests who have food allergies and intolerances. Also from 1 April 2014, passengers in every travel class will have a much greater choice of in-flight entertainment.

Film Noir Edition
The Phoenix Arrow Returns

A work of *Parrot*



PO 38745

parrot.com



Cruises

Fjord Line

A VALUABLE PAINTING ON A FERRY

How many ferries in the world can boast a valuable, large format canvas on board? MS Bergensfjord (whose hull was built at Gdańsk shipyard) – the newest addition to Fjord Line’s fleet, which sailed on her maiden voyage on 17 March, is the only one in this respect. What’s more the painting by Per Krohg entitled “The Dream Journey” was made in 1950s for a ship that bore the same name. However, at that time, MS Bergensfjord didn’t cruise between Denmark and Norway, but on an intercontinental route to the USA. “The Dream Journey”, which was made on a special order of Fjord Line, is 4 by 7 metres in size.

Beauty

Dr Irena Eris

BODY FIESTA SECRET GARDEN

The sensual Secret Garden series with floral fragrance is the quintessence of natural elegance. The revitalizing nectar obtained from the flowers of a tropical evergreen bush intensely nourishes the skin, enveloping the body with sensual floral notes.

The perfumed nourishing body lotion intensely nourishes the skin and gives it a sensual scent which accentuates style and elegance. Rich in valuable minerals, vitamins and sugars, it revitalizes and moisturizes the skin. This action is further enhanced by the nutritional olive wax and Shea butter. Active complex stimulating tissue repair processes, initiates the synthesis of collagen, restoring elasticity of the skin. Illuminating particles leave silvery glow on the skin. Price: PLN 109/200 ml

Perfumed body scrub with a creamy texture, intensively smoothens the skin. Rich in minerals, vitamins and sugars, perfectly nourishes and moisturizes the body. Price: PLN 105/200 ml

Scented body mist. Scent notes: lychee, bergamot, water lily, peony, rose, freesia, cedar wood, musk and amber. Price: PLN 55/150 ml



Airline

Finnair

MORE FLIGHTS TO BANGKOK

Finnair increases the frequency of its connections to Bangkok. Next December Finnair will supplement its double-daily winter service to Bangkok with three additional frequencies per week from December 30, 2014 to March 27, 2015. The extra flights bring the number of Finnair’s peak-season weekly Bangkok services to 17, the most frequencies of any European carrier.

The additional flights are scheduled to depart on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings. AY091 departs Helsinki Airport (HEL) at 8.15 pm for arrival at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) at 11.00 am local time the next day. AY092 leaves Bangkok on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays at 12.45 pm for arrival in Helsinki at 6.55 pm local time.



Restaurant

La Rotisserie

THE CHEF OF THE FUTURE

Paweł Oszczyk, the head chef of La Rotisserie restaurant at Mamaison Le Regina Warsaw hotel, has been awarded by the International Culinary Academy with the Prix du Chef de l'Avenir (Chef of the Future Award). He received this honourable award from the president and the founder of the Polish Culinary Academy – Maciej Dobrzyński and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage - Bogdan Zdrojewski. In this way, Mr Oszczyk has joined the best Polish chefs, including Karol Okrasa and Wojciech Modest Amaro, who received the award in previous years.

The Prix du Chef de l'Avenir has been awarded by the International Culinary Academy since 1996. It's presented to chefs nominated by their national academies and then distinguished by the international academy. The aim of the award is to promote exquisite dishes of national cuisines as well as those who create them.

Airline

airberlin

STRENGTHENS TOURIST DESTINATIONS

airberlin is investing in routes and its product in 2014. Through its partnership with Etihad Airways and partners in the oneworld® alliance, airberlin now offers its guests excellent worldwide connections to over 250 destinations and is thereby strengthening its global presence.

"As a full-service carrier, airberlin offers maximum comfort at attractive prices for both holiday-makers and business travellers," said Wolfgang Prock-Schauer, Chief Executive Officer airberlin at ITB 2014 in Berlin.

In 2014 airberlin is expanding its tourist offer, in particular to Mediterranean coastal resorts and to long-haul destinations in the Caribbean, the USA and Abu Dhabi. airberlin has increased frequencies to ten destinations in Greece, for instance, and is the market leader for departures from Germany, Austria and Switzerland as far as the flight offer to Greece is concerned. airberlin flies to Antalya airport from 18 airports in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. This summer airberlin is offering a wider range of flights to Turkey from Cologne/Bonn, Munich, Nuremberg, Graz, Salzburg and Vienna as well as Basel and Zurich. With Larnaca in Cyprus, airberlin has added a new destination to its offer, which will be operated by NIKI from Vienna. The connection from Vienna to Malta with NIKI to be introduced from March 2014 is also new.

From March 2014 airberlin is offering new connections from Dusseldorf and Vienna to the Spanish capital Madrid. With up to 250 flights per week in summer 2014 from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, Italy is also an established destination in the airberlin portfolio. From Dusseldorf, airberlin is clearly number one to Italian seaside resorts.

Radisson BLU

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Spain

Semana Santa

HOLY WEEK IN SEVILLE

What is Semana Santa? To say that it's a traditional celebration of Holy Week in Seville, is like calling a carnival in Rio a street party. "In the Holy Week in Seville Christ dies again on every street corner," wrote the Spanish poet Antonio Florez.

Daily ceremonial processions are held here every day since the Palm Sunday. Hooded "nazarenos" in long robes walk under the escort of "Roman soldiers" and hold holding lighted candles. Dozens of men carry on their shoulders special floats with figures depicting the events of the Passion. That is why at that time the weather seems to be the largest concern of the whole city – if it rains, the processions are called off, because rainwater can damage the historic figures. The ceremonies are attended by crowds of people, singing poignant religious songs. And although this is an unusual tourist attraction, those who see it for themselves, don't doubt that it's something truly genuine. More details at www.andalucia.com/festival/easter/home.htm

Switzerland

Green Graubunden

AMONG THE LAKES, VALLEYS AND PEAKS

A thousand mountain peaks, 150 valleys, and more than 600 lakes located near famous resorts, such as St. Moritz and Davos Klosters, and close to small and charming mountain villages – you must admit that this is quite a recommendation for the region. Tourists will not only find here peace, silence, nature and beautiful views, but also a cornucopia of attractions in every season of the year. Hiking enthusiasts can make their strolls easier with free-of-charge cable cars. Long-distance cyclists will be able to transport their luggage for free, and linguists will certainly appreciate the opportunity to listen to the melodious phrases of Romansh language spoken by 50,000 residents of the area. 10,000 km of hiking and 4,000 km of cycling trails in the Grisons Canton offer unlimited possibilities to those who visit the place. You can, for example, wander through the magnificent rock formations in the gorge of the Rhine, which is called the Swiss Grand Canyon, or take a trip to Upper Engadine Glacier. Cyclists will be delighted with a demanding route that runs through the passes in the vicinity of Arosa or trails in Val Poschiavo glacial gardens. During winter and spring ski enthusiasts can enjoy well prepared pistes in Laax and Samnaun.

More details at: www.graubuenden.ch



Hotele

Westin Warsaw

NEW MANAGER

Stefan Friedl took up the position of the Manager of Westin Warsaw. He has over twenty years of professional experience gained in the hospitality industry worldwide, and came to Warsaw from Madrid, where he spent the last three years serving as a Director of Sales and Marketing at the famous The Westin Palace hotel. Earlier he worked as the Executive Assistant Manager at St. Regis Bali Resort, and the Director of Sales and Marketing in Dubai, Frankfurt, New York, Basel, and Munich.

In his new role he will be responsible for the operating divisions of the hotel, including catering, reception, floor and technical service, and others.

"I love the hospitality industry - here every day is different. Meeting guests from all over the world and working in a team – these are the main reasons why I feel great in this industry and broaden my horizons," he said.

Stefan Friedl studied hotel management in Germany, and also attended numerous trainings and courses in the fields of sales, marketing and management. He loves reading, cooking, and sports. He is fluent in German, English and Spanish.

Tourism

France

ONLY FOR EAGLES

For the end of the ski season, Val Thorens region in the French Alps is offering a series of competitions and great fun. On 6 April the region will host the "3 Vallees Enduro" – a competition for teams of 3 in several more or less crazy ski events. For the May break (1-4 May) the French propose a skiing fun: in the morning spring skiing and sunbathing on the slopes, and later concerts and competitions taking place until late at night. You can also go for the world's longest zip-line run from a 3,230-metre high slope. This year's novelty - La Tyrolienne – offers a nearly 2-minute ride and a 1,300-metre long run with the speeds of over 100km/h. Running down the line stretched 250 metres over the ground, you can admire views which earlier were reserved only for eagles.



Airline

Emirates

MORE PASSENGERS

Only in 2013, Emirates handled over 6.3 million passengers on routes from Europe to such popular destinations as Bangkok, Colombo, Mauritius, Male in the Maldives and, of course, Dubai.

Last year, the airline added 8 new destinations (including Warsaw and Stockholm) to its route network and expanded its fleet by 23 new aircraft, including 15 Airbus A380. Currently, the carrier has 45 aircraft of this type, and another 95 are on order. The Emirates A380 fleet is connecting people and cargo through its current operations to 26 destinations worldwide, including 98 weekly services to nine destinations in Europe. Also beginning 30 March the route to Munich has been operated by the A380.

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WHAT'S ON

The most interesting cultural events

WROCLAW JAN LEBENSTEIN

2 April – 10 August 2014 – National Museum, Wrocław

A retrospective exhibition of one of the most prominent contemporary Polish artists. It will present the most well-known cycles: "Landscapes", "Figures in the Interior", "Sketch Figures", "Axial Figures", "Horrible Animals", compositions inspired by Greek and Roman mythology, "The Isle of the Dead" by Böcklin and the fin de siècle poetry. Visitors will be also able to see the illustrations to "Animal Farm" by Orwell, "Book of Job" and "Apocalypse of St. John".

National Museum in Wrocław has the biggest collection of works Jan Lebenstein in Poland – altogether 126 pieces. Among the paintings, drawings, gouaches, graphics are the best works shown at the Biennale de Paris, www.mnwr.art.pl



KEUKENHOF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GARDEN IN THE WORLD

Until 18 May, the Netherlands

The most beautiful spring garden in the world – between Leiden and Haarlem. Every spring 32 hectares of land are filled with 7 million of flowers in bloom. No wonder then that the place is one of the most frequently visited and photographed spots in the world. Each year, over 4.5 million tulips in over 100 varieties are planted in Keukenhof. The varieties include the famous black Queen of Night tulip, white-and-red Carnaval de Nice and jagged petals of Estella. Music concerts and exhibitions of paintings are also held here. The famous garden is open from 8.00 am to 7.30 pm. The ticket office is open until 6.00 pm. www.keukenhof.nl



85 YEARS OF THE HISTORY OF LOT POLISH AIRLINES ON UNIQUE PHOTOGRAPHS

6– 19 April 2014 - Wrocław Magnolia Mall; 4 – 17 May 2014 – Poznań, City Centre; 19 May – 1 June 2014 - Gdańsk Galeria Przymorze.

LOT Polish Airlines celebrates its 85 anniversary. It's the third oldest airline in Europe – and the sixth in the world – continuously flying under the same name and logo. For the anniversary, LOT has prepared a unique exhibition of photographs from its archives. „We are taking you on a journey, which, hopefully, will bring tears to your eyes,” says Barbara Pijanowska-Kuras, a spokesperson of PLL LOT. More details at: www.lot.com, www.facebook.com/PLLLOT, www.national-geographic.pl

NANTES STREET PARADES

6–12 kwietnia 2014 r.

April Carnival is a traditional even, which is celebrated in this region from 15 century. Today it is the second biggest carnival in the country. It will commence with a ceremonial parade down the streets of the city on Sunday, 6 April.

Three days later, on Wednesday 9 April there will be a special parade for children. The festivities will end on Saturday, 12 April with a unique night parade. This year, the main theme is the cinema. The organizers emphasize, however, that the topic is only a suggestion to the participants, and everyone is entitled to their own interpretation. There will also be other attractions. More details at: www.nantes-tourisme.com





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UP IN THE AIR

As the number of global travellers soars, our skies are becoming more crowded. **Jenny Southan** investigates how airspace is being redesigned to deal with demand





T

raversing the globe on the highways of the sky can inspire a passion for cloud-spotting – at least for those of us who book a window seat.

If you do happen to have taken your eyes off your entertainment screen to admire the aerial tableaux passing before you, it can be a rare sight indeed to see another plane. In “controlled airspace”, aircraft must maintain safe separation (at least three miles apart horizontally and 1,000 feet vertically) to minimise the risk of collision and wake turbulence.

And yet, in much of the world, particularly over major hubs, the wide blue yonder is becoming increasingly populated with commercial airliners. Over Europe, 27,000 aircraft pass each other every day; in the US it’s 50,000. In the UK, air navigation service provider NATS handles about 6,000 flights

a day – that’s 250 an hour – double what it was 20 years ago, despite a dip during the recent recession.

That’s a lot of planes – still, rather than working towards capping or reducing the number of jets in the skies, the authorities are developing technology and redesigning airspace to allow for even more of them.

John Grant, executive vice-president for the OAG (Official Airline Guide), says overcrowding in the skies is a misconception: “There is no parallel between air-space demand and the M25 on a Friday afternoon,” he says.

“There are peak hours of the day which, when combined with certain meteorological conditions, can put pressure on the system. But the way the space is managed and co-ordinated, and the way that traffic is allowed into airspace, ensures cus-

tomers are never placed at risk. There is space available.”

EXACT SCIENCE

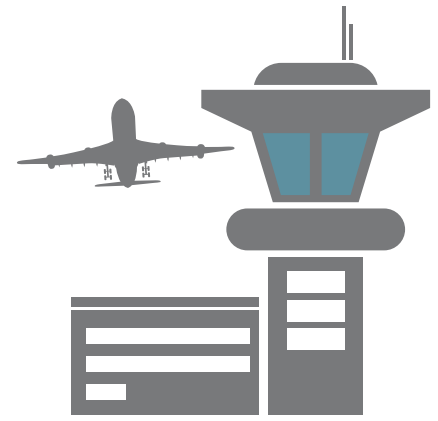
Paul Haskins, general manager of London Terminal Control at NATS’ air traffic management centre in Swanwick, Hampshire, explains how airspace is organised.

“Every sector has a scientific value that we have calculated to be a safe number for capacity,” he says. “That will differ depending on conditions – the weather, turbulence, thunderstorms and military activity. If a sector starts to get too busy, we might push you to a different one and give you a slightly different routing.”

Traffic is particularly concentrated around the south-east of England, where Heathrow averages 1,300 movements a day, and Gatwick – the world’s busiest single-runway



In the more distant future, Airbus suggests another way of fitting more planes in the sky – flocking together and flying in formation along “express skyways”.



Air traffic growth

IN NUMBERS

55% Amount air travel has grown in emerging economies since 2007

4.7% Projected average annual world air traffic growth until 2032

7.1% Projected average air traffic growth for Middle East until 2032

600,000 Annual aircraft movements in UAE

1.6 million Annual aircraft movements in UAE predicted for 2032



7.4 billion Global population in 2013

8.4 billion Global population forecast for 2032

70 Number of airports China plans to have built between 2012 and 2015

26 million Number of people travelling long-haul per month in 2012

67 million Expected number of people travelling long-haul per month in 2032

42 Number of aviation mega-cities (handling more than

10,000 long-haul passengers per day) in 2012

89 Predicted number of aviation mega-cities in 2032

1 Number of African aviation mega-cities in 2012

8 Projected number of African aviation mega-cities in 2032



airport – sees one take-off or landing roughly every 65 seconds.

Needless to say, every effort is taken to ensure the men and women working in its control tower are comfortable (no uniform required), distraction-free (visitors can only speak in hushed voices), well rested (there are breaks every 90 minutes) and drug-free (mandatory blood-alcohol tests take place randomly).

Haskins says: “At Gatwick you will see the aircraft are guided by people in the tower looking out of the window, primarily using visual control to make sure the planes are safe on the taxiway. Almost within 30 seconds of being airborne, the flight is transferred to a radar controller based at Swanwick [there is also a Prestwick centre in Scotland], and it will continue on through the sectors.”

CROWD CONTROL

European airspace covers 4.1 million square miles and is watched over by 60 air traffic control (ATC) centres with 16,900 controllers. Domestic US airspace, on the other hand, covers 3.5 million square miles (plus 24.6 million square miles of international oceanic airspace) and has just 13,000 controllers. In 2010, the European ATM system handled 33,000 flights on busy days, but by 2020 this is expected to rise to 50,000.

According to the European Commission, the cost of such fragmentation amounts to e5 billion a year. The antiquated system means airlines can't fly the most direct routes, making journey times longer, increasing fuel burn and exacerbating delays.

EU transport commissioner Siim Kallas says that if nothing is done, over the next ten to 20 years airports will become so crowded that two million flights will be unable to take off or land.

The plan, then, is to create a Single European Sky, which will mean fewer ATC centres, a threefold rise in aircraft capacity, a 10 per cent reduction in environmental impact and an increase in safety by a factor of ten.

Jonathan Nicholson, assistant director of corporate communications for the CAA, says: “Isn't it inefficient that each nation has its own ATC centres so that every time you cross a border you are talking to a different controller? Wouldn't it make more sense if we had more harmonisation?”

Haskins, however, foresees problems for the Single European Sky. “They want us to

come together and move down from 46 to ten or 11 big ATM centres that have interoperability. If I'm honest, the technology allows us to do that today but the politics don't. Nobody wants to give their airspace up. I can't imagine the Daily Mail headline ‘The French are going to take over our airspace’ would be a popular vote winner. We are moving that way, though.”

MILITARY PRECISION

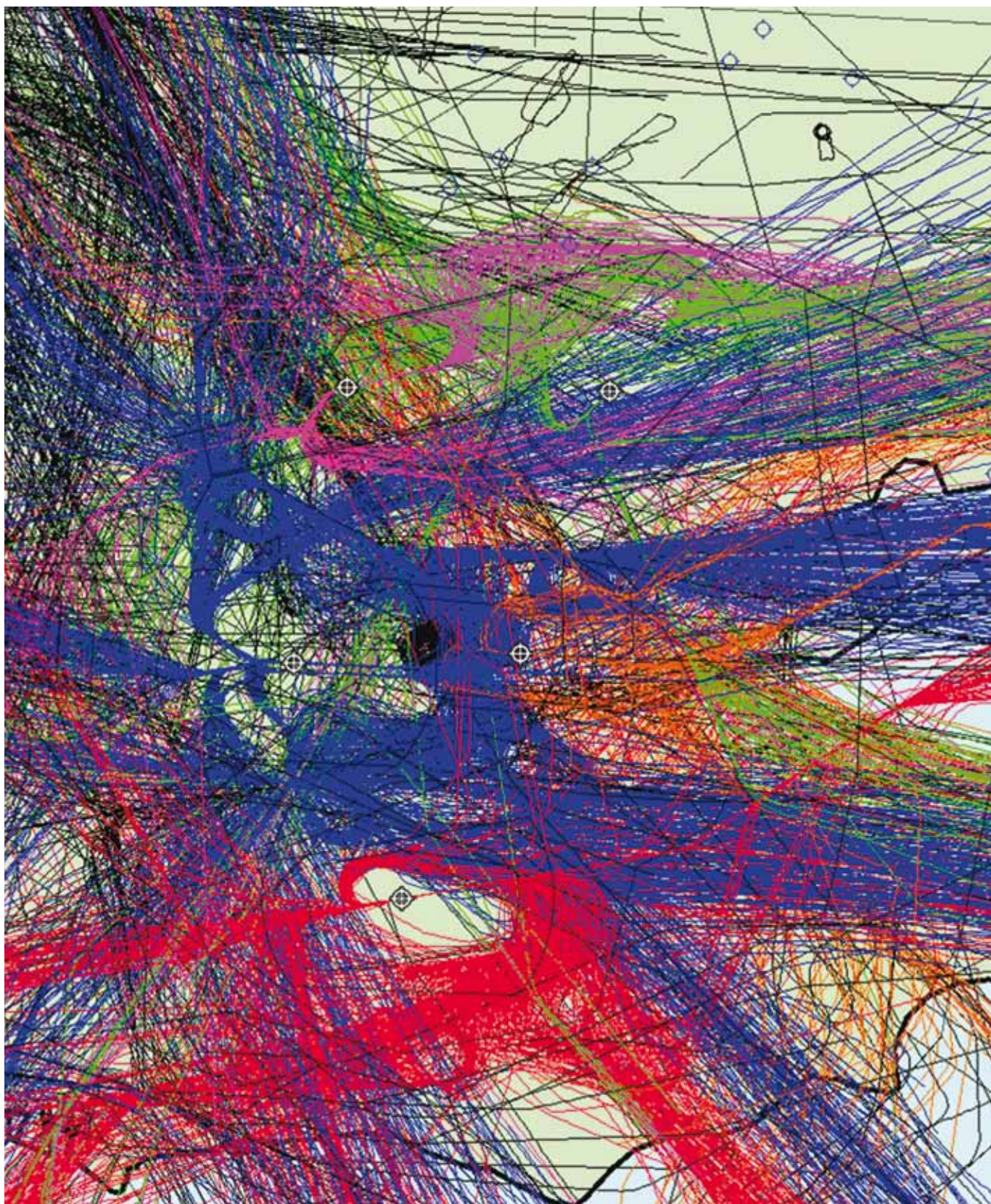
Out of a population of seven billion, 2.5 billion of us fly every year. By 2050, the world will have an extra two billion people. Airbus predicts global air traffic growth to average 4.7 per cent leading up to 2032, but markets such as the Middle East will exceed 7 per cent. When Dubai's Al Maktoum International hub – set to become the largest in the world – is operating at capacity, it will be processing 160 million passengers a year. Meanwhile, China is planning to have built 70 new airports by 2015 to cope with projected demand. Boeing recently predicted that the Asia-Pacific region will need an additional 12,820 new planes, representing 36 per cent of new deliveries over the next 20 years.

Randy Tinseth, vice-president of marketing for Boeing Commercial Airplanes, says: “The Asia-Pacific fleet will nearly triple, from 5,090 airplanes in 2012 to 14,750 airplanes in 2032, to support the increased demand.”

Whereas Europe allows for commercial and military aircraft to share airspace, for many countries, no-fly zones are a hindrance. Nicholson says: “The military has a big piece of airspace that is set aside for them to practise in – they might be sending a typhoon straight up at 3,000 feet a minute and firing live ammunition, but they may not be doing that all the time.

In China, commercial carriers are battling the military to gain a greater share of its domestic airspace – at the moment, the government has only allotted 20 per cent to civilian flights, while the UAE sees about 50 per cent given over to defence.

If this could be redrawn, the emirates could have a better chance of accommodating the anticipated 1.1 million aircraft movements it will see in 2020 (up from 741,000 in 2012) as it continues to grow as a global aviation hub. Over India, 65 per cent of the skies have been dedicated to military use, but last year an agreement was made – pending safety assessments – to unify it.



Graphic image of air traffic up to a height of 7.5 km. Arrival and departure routes from Heathrow in blue, from Gatwick in red, from Stansted in green, from Luton in purple, from London City in orange. Other flights in black.

FULL BEAM

As well as redesigning airspace, improved navigation technology will enhance airline and air traffic control performance.

The United States' Next Gen programme is leading the way with a number of procedures and technologies. These include replacing ground-based navigational radar, which date back to the Second World War and only provide updates every 4.7 to 11 seconds, with satellite-based systems that allow pilots and air traffic controllers to know the exact location of planes at all times.

Not only will this allow for more aircraft in the skies, as they are able to fly closer together, but also more direct routings, faster descents, enhanced safety and hundreds of dollars in savings per flight.

A spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration says: "By 2020, if you want to fly in controlled airspace in the US, you'll need to have the avionics on board that allow your plane to broadcast its position via satellite. The government funding estimate to the year 2025 is US\$15-22 billion. On the airline side, for the avionics, it's US\$14-20 billion."

Dave Curtis, head of stakeholder and regulatory affairs at NATS, says similar technology is being looked at in Europe: "The current route that an aircraft is required to fly is be-

tween two ground-based aids 100 miles part – the plane aims for the second one and flies towards it. Performance based [satellite] navigation is more accurate by a magnitude of about ten. Coming into Heathrow, hopefully you won't experience any holding, and arrive at a specific time and place.

"If you can streamline the routes, make them more efficient and reduce the workload on the controller, ultimately you can put more aircraft in the system and give the customer more choice."

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

In the more distant future, Airbus suggests another way of fitting more planes in the sky – flocking together and flying in formation along "express skyways". Its website reads: "In nature, large birds sometimes fly together to save energy and travel further. When flying in formation, the leading bird's wings generate whirling masses of air. The following bird benefits from this air current to get some free extra lift, which means it needs to use less energy to fly.

"Aircraft wings create the same effect, which we call 'trailing vortexes'. Military pilots often use the same formation flying techniques to reduce the amount of energy – fuel burn – that they use."

OAG's Grant compares the technology with that being trialled by Google in its self-driving cars. "They've got quite a few in San Francisco, but they're not allowed to take them on the roads publicly. However, it's estimated that they will improve capacity on the roads by up to 50 per cent because cars will be able to go so much closer to each other."

There's no need to feel nervous, though. "Travel will also be safer because you'll have all these sensors around you and the car will be taking control," Grant says. "It's the same with aircraft, which now have traffic collision avoidance systems."

Sebastien Borel, vice-president of customer affairs for Airbus ProSky, a subsidiary dedicated to improving the performance of global air traffic control, says: "It will take many years to get there but, step by step, we are working on increasing the communication between aircraft and the ground to do closer spacing. It may not be in a V shape, though it looks good, as you would have to look out for wave turbulence. But we are working on technologies to get them closer and closer." If this is the case, when you are one day gazing out of the window at the clouds, you might be able to wave to a fellow frequent traveller.



GRAND HOTEL VILLA SERBELLONI



CONTACT

Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni –
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Lake Como Italy – Via Roma
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(+39) 031 950216
fax (+39) 031 951529
nforequest@villaserbelloni.com
www.villaserbelloni.com

PRICE

single room with breakfast -
from €261

This is one of the oldest and most elegant hotels in the region of Lake Como and Bellagio's only 5-star establishment. Located on the stunning headland, it has been hosting visitors from all over the world since 19th century. From April to November its lounges and a large garden extending around the Grand Hotel, give travellers a chance to relax close to nature, among the most beautiful landscapes in the world.

HISTORY

For over a hundred years, Villa Serbelloni has been considered one of the most prestigious hotels in the world. It was founded in 1850 on the orders of Prince Frizzoli from Ber-

gamo, who dreamed of having a mansion on the shores of Como. Its neo-classical interiors are a real delight for the eyes - walls and ceilings are decorated with frescoes and paintings depicting mythological scenes, while coffered ceilings are decorated with floral motifs. There are also French-style wallpapers, antique Persian tapestries, crystal chandeliers from Murano, empire style furniture, as well as marble stairs, stucco columns, trompe d'oeil... And the salle à manger is a genuine work of art, similarly to the Royal Room illuminated in the evening with gorgeous bronze and crystal chandeliers, which reflect the light in huge mirrors.

From the very beginning, the Grand Hotel became popular among the distinguished guests seeking peace and quiet here - members of royal families, aristocracy, politicians, as well as films stars. Some of the most famous guests were the Spanish, Romanian, Albanian, and Egyptian monarchs, Sir Winston Churchill, president Roosevelt, the Rotschids, J.F. Kennedy, Mary Pickford, Maria Schell, Clark Gable, Robert Mitchum, Al Pacino. They often strolled through hotel gardens, enjoying the unique hospitality of this place.

TODAY

Guests can enjoy a luxurious spa, take a speedboat to historic gardens or admire the beauty

of the place from a small plane, which lands right at the hotel. Sports enthusiasts can use the hotel's fitness centre and tennis courts, take a long walk or a bike tour to Bellagio headland, and then swim in a pool overlooking the lake.

With a bit of luck you can meet in the area George Clooney, Madonna, or Brad Pitt, who have their summer houses here. It's also worth visiting the place in spring when the azaleas are in full bloom. How to get there? You can fly to Milan and then reach Bellagio by car. There is also the possibility of chartering a private jet.

ROOMS

The hotel offers 95 rooms and suites with views of the lake, the park, or the hills. All rooms are tastefully decorated and air-conditioned, have a flat-screen TV, a mini bar, wi-fi, a bathroom with separate shower and two sinks, as well as a separate toilet. The Classic Double is 20 sq m, Deluxe Double – 38 sq m, Executive Double 48 sq m, and Senior Suite 60 or 75 sq m. Guests can use the hotel's fitness room, sauna, hammam, pool, beach, and concierge service. Every evening there are live music concerts.

RESTAURANTS

Dinner at Mistral restaurant located on the main terrace with the extensive views of the lake, is a truly unforgettable experience. The Michelin awarded chef Ettore Bocchia never ceases to surprise. During the day you can try excellent pastes and Mediterranean snacks at La Galletta restaurant situated right to the pool and open from noon to 11 pm. Guests like to sit here particularly late in the afternoon, sipping fine Italian wine, and watching sunset.

SPA

The 300 sq m spa is a true oasis of tranquillity and harmony. All treatments performed here are inspired by the principle that well-being is possible with free



flow of energy that produces harmony between body and soul. You can order one treatment or buy one day, weekend, or weekly packages. Add to this pilates, yoga, and training in the fitness room.

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Conference rooms can accommodate up to 400 people, and feature full AV equipment. There's also a front desk and the press room. The place is a perfect venue for various conferences, art exhibitions and fashion shows with a catwalk. The Royal Room is 265 sq m, Brevia -119 sq m, Tivano – 114 sqm, Nautilus 55 sq m, and Mistral – 156 sq m. The hotel is also a perfect place for family events,

such as wedding or christening receptions, or other meetings. Dinner for several hundred people with a view of Lake Como and fireworks – can anything beat that?

VERDICT

This hotel is one of the most amazing of its kind in Europe! Immersed in the alpine waters of Lake Como and the surrounding lush vegetation, it's a magical and unique place. It's elegant, luxurious, and authentic. All antiques there are genuine. The owners care about the beauty of the place and are famous for their hospitality. It's a perfect place for any occasion, with an Italian style. I definitely recommend it!

Marzena Mróz

For over a hundred years, Villa Serbelloni has been considered one of the most prestigious hotels in the world. It was founded in 1850 on the orders of Prince Frizzoli from Bergamo, who dreamed of having a mansion on the shores of Como.

SOWA & PRZYJACIELE



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The life motto of Robert Sowa - an excellent chef and culinary expert - "Life loves to eat" is perfectly reflected in his restaurant. Simple Interior and excellent food, from international to traditional Polish dishes, prepared from the best, fresh and original products.

INTERIOR

The walls are decorated in yellow colours, and there are spacious rooms with huge windows. The place is arranged in such a way that you can organize there a small dinner, as well as a corporate event for over 100 people. There are also three VIP rooms, where you can organize a meeting, have something to eat and talk in a smaller group of 10 people. One of them is called Cygarownia (Cigar Room), because smoking is allowed there. In "lBiblioteka" the walls are covered with a wallpaper depicting volumes of books. When entering the restaurant, guests can see the kitchen separated from the main room only by glass pane, and can observe

Robert and his team at work. The wine vault is also impressive.

MENU

The festival of pleasures starts with reading the menu. What should you choose for a starter? Homemade smoked salmon with beet roasted mousse, guacamole and curry vinaigrette, milk-fed lamb carpaccio with crispy capers, olive crust, anchovy caviar and 36 months aged parmesan, or sliced roulade of Dutch maatjes herring with potato blini, sour cream and red caviar? The choice of soups includes beef consommé, aromatic cream of forest mushrooms with potato purée, 36 months old Parmesan cheese and black truffle oil, or bisque of crustaceans with king prawns and marinated meat of Alaska crab shellfish. For the main course you can choose from pan-fried sea bream with green peas purée, herb-butter sauce and caramelized baby carrots, sole Dover Meuniere, and duck breast barbarie with foie gras, Łącka slivovitz glazed pears, beetroot, parsley purée and ginger sauce.

You can also try out the meals from the Menu Przyjaciół (Friends' Menu), which includes Wiener Schnitzel with green cucumber salad, Argentine beef entrecote, and dumplings stuffed with goose. There is also a special menu by Robert Sowa called "Jak za dawnych lat" (The old times are back), where you can order Aunt Mary's vegetable salad, roasted bacon with cumin and garlic, pork chop, pork jelly or steak tartar with vodka and pickles. And last but not least - desserts. I especially recommend meringue cake with ginger ice cream and sherbet trio.

VERDICT

It's a great place for lunch as well as a formal dinner, a banquet or a cocktail party. The restaurant also specializes in interesting exhibitions and culinary workshops. Robert Sowa can also prepare custom-made exquisite tasting menus. Excellent, professional service and good recommendations from an experienced sommelier. I recommend it for any occasion.

Marzena Mróz



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STARY DOM



CONTACT

Stary Dom
Warsaw
ul. Puławska 104/106
www.restauracjastarydom.pl

Open Mon-Sun, noon–11.30 pm

Menu

- Cold Buffet - herring, steak tartar, roast meats board – PLN 19-37 (about € 5 – 9)
- Soups – homemade broth, beetroot soup, sour rye soup – PLN 15-19 (about € 4 – 5)
- Warm buffet – stuffed cabbage, dumplings, kidneys – PLN 15 – 25 (about € 4 – 6)
- Desserts – incredibly wide selection of homemade cakes: all fresh, pretty and tasty – PLN 15-25 (about € 4-6) a piece (for everyone to try).
- Liquors and Wines - all Polish liquors like vodka, mead, liqueurs. A bottle of very good, full Shirah – PLN 150 (€ 36); homemade wine – PLN 27 (about € 6) for a carafe.

T rue Polish hospitality, cosy, aged atmosphere and excellent, home-made food – Stary Dom restaurant is Poland’s best showpiece you can show off to foreign guests.

When entertaining foreign guests you want to show the best of Poland. And you don’t need to lavish hospitality beyond your means. Instead of looking for the most expensive restaurant, it’s better to find a place that will show your guests the spirit of our country – our hospitality, generosity and the ritual of feasting.

UNINHIBITED ATMOSPHERE

In Poland we often go to work dressed casually, and dress up elegantly in the evening. In the US and Western Europe it’s the other way round. In the business world there is a strict workplace dress code – a dark suit and a tie, and a two-piece dress for women. In the evening, however, people choose informal clothes. Instead of the corporate uniform, men often wear jeans and a jacket, while women – a regular dress or trousers. And that’s a perfect outfit to wear in

Stary Dom at 104/106 Puławska Street, because the place promises to give you a good time and a relaxed atmosphere.

CLASSY INTERIOR

Mariusz Diakowski, a well-known Warsaw restaurant owner, together with his famous friends and actors created a classy, ancient-looking Polish interior. There is no pomp or astronomical prices. On the contrary, the menu strikes you as... normal. Traditional Polish delicacies such as boar, duck, rabbit or veal cost about PLN 40 (about 10 euro), and the portions are large. There are also typical Polish soups, served beautifully - but in more dietary incarnations, as well as other snacks including less-traditional shrimps. The biggest hit is steak tartar (with numerous extra ingredients to choose from) prepared in front of the customers by the cook.

The staff comprises both men and women in all age categories. The service is professional, quick, English-speaking and dressed in long aprons. You don’t wait even for a moment. The menu is handed to you

right after you sit down, followed by a glass of water and fresh bread with delicious crust (the foreigners are delighted!) and various traditional toppings – such as lard and sour cucumbers.

The waiting time for the order (including hot dishes) is short, all dishes are fresh and of adequate temperature. The waiters recommend trying out Polish specialties such as traditional cakes, plum vodka or a selection of over 30 seasonal liqueurs made from pine shoots, red Mirabelle plums, quince or rowanberries.

SEE FOR YOURSELF

Even with no empty tables, there is never stuffy or noisy. Throughout the night the staff was impeccable, and when the guests were getting ready to leave they were given a surprise. Each guest received an elegant box with two pieces of a delicious cake. Everyone was surprised. It turns out that Polish hospitality is omnipresent and this is how you say goodbye to your foreign guests. Or perhaps all the guests? See for yourself

Magdalena Boratyńska



Rejsy marzeń

Ciesz się przyjemnościami na najwyższym światowym poziomie.
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RESTAURANT BIAŁA GĘŚ



CONTACT

Biała Gęś Restaurant
Warsaw
ul. Belwederska 18 A
tel. +48 22 840 50 60
e-mail: rezerwacje@bialages.pl
www.bialages.pl

It's a good place for a business lunch, a romantic dinner for two, as well as a family dinner or a corporate event. The menu combines traditional Polish cuisine, that Biała Gęś is famous for, with international dishes. What's more, the place has Michelin recommendation for 2014!

INTERIOR

Biała Gęś restaurant is housed in an atmospheric 1920s villa with a garden, located right next to the former Royal route, near the Royal Gardens of Łazienki. The building was designed by a well-known architect Marcin Weinfeld, who also created the pre-war Prudential skyscraper. You can recognize the place by its façade with a unique clock made of ceramic tiles.

Inside there are several rooms decorated with works of art, as well as a few smaller meeting-rooms/ lounges, where you can enjoy an intimate lunch or dinner. I decided to sit in the most beautiful place of the restau-

rant, which is a glass veranda. It's light-filled and spacious, surrounded by lots of shrubs and trees. In spring, summer and early autumn, you can also have your meal in the garden.

MENU

As the name of the restaurant suggests, the menu includes dishes from the world famous Polish goose. Starting from pate, steamed dumplings, and goose soup, to larger dishes such as half a goose or coated goose for 2 or 4 people. In my opinion, the best dish in the Biała Gęś is the crispy and perfectly-done foie gras served with strawberries and toasted challah. Delicious! Connoisseurs should also try Eastern style pink salmon tartar with ginger, veal brains on herb toast, lamb carpaccio on a pear mousse served with kohlrabi, green peas & amber cheese, lamb chops on baked red onion, Argentinian beef tenderloin served on hot stone, and for the dessert the famous truffle or meringue gâteau.

As for traditional dishes, the choice is also decent and includes homemade broth with noodles, highland sauerkraut soup or pork chop with beets. Children have their own menu, which includes chicken fillets served with chips.

On weekends, many people come here for a family dinner. The family sets consist a welcome glass of sparkling wine, soup, and a main course (choice of two), as well as special treats for the children.

VERDICT

An atmospheric interior, excellent dishes, and a wide choice of wines advised by a sommelier. Not surprisingly, Biała Gęś has recently received a true distinction - a recommendation of the Michelin Guide for 2014. As one of the few restaurants in the world, was once again honoured by Wine Spectator magazine for its outstanding wine list. And the foie gras with strawberries is second to none!

Agata Janicka

GALAXY S5 IS HERE

It's been designed as a response to the most important needs and expectations of customers. The new smartphone offers its users a subtle elegance combined with convenient, innovative, and indispensable functions. The GALAXY S5 proves that technological innovation can enrich our lives.

It has a cornucopia of functions and has little in common with the phones that we used just several years ago mostly for making phone calls. It's now more of a handheld office, a secret drawer in your desk where you can hide your treasures from the past, a photo album, a phone book, and much more. And if the Galaxy S5 can't do something, it's only because nobody has so far come up with such a function. Nowadays, when you leave home without a smartphone, you feel strange, even somewhat naked...

STOP THE TIME

Our precious memories stay with us forever, but who wouldn't like to re-live them not only in their minds, but also in the real world? That's why, capturing and saving precious memories is one of the most important smartphone features today. The new Galaxy S5 offers superior camera functionality, featuring a 16 megapixel camera with an enhanced menu and user interface that allow consumers to effortlessly take, edit and share photos.

The Galaxy S5 offers the world's fastest autofocus speed up to 0.3 seconds and the advanced High Dynamic Range (HDR), reproduce natural light and color with striking intensity at any circumstances.

Also new Selective Focus fea-

ture allows users to focus on a specific area of an object while simultaneously blurring out the background. With this capability, consumers no longer need a special lens kit to create a shallow depth of field (DOF) effect.

LIGHTNING-FAST

The Galaxy S5 offers the most advanced LTE experience and Wi-Fi performance available today, ensuring blazing fast data speeds for unrivalled media consumption and productivity. The Galaxy S5 supports the fifth generation Wi-Fi 802.11ac and 2X2 MIMO, and supporting the large number of LTE frequency with LTE Category 4 standard. For consumers seeking an even faster connection, the Galaxy S5 now features Download Booster, an innovative Wi-Fi technology for boosting data speed by bonding Wi-Fi and LTE simultaneously. No matter where a consumer is, the Galaxy S5 will help ensure they have the fastest available connection. No matter where a consumer is, the Galaxy S5 will help ensure they have the fastest available connection.

PERSONAL TRAINER

With the enhanced S Health 3.0, the new Galaxy S5 offers more tools to help people stay fit and well. It provides a comprehensive personal fitness tracker to help users monitor and manage their behaviour, along with additional tools including a pedometer, diet and exercise records, and a new, built-in heart rate monitor. Galaxy S5 users can further customize their experience with an enriched third party app ecosystem and the ability to pair with next generation Gear products for real-time fitness coaching.

EXPRESS MODERN, GLAM LOOK

The Galaxy S5 blends iconic Samsung design with modern trends to appeal to a range of consumer tastes and interests. Its new sleek, contoured shape comes in an array of vivid colours, including charcoal Black, shimmery White, electric Blue and copper Gold, to complement the style of the individual consumer.

Joanna Krzyczkowska

CONTACT

www.samsung.pl

PRICE

from PLN 2 999



GIFTMANIA

Spring, Easter, summer holidays just round the corner... It's a plethora of reasons to give your beloved ones something nice. And who said that you shouldn't buy something nice for yourself, as well? Here are some of our suggestions.

UN JARDIN SUR LE TOIT

This novelty is set to amaze and enchant. Never mind that other gardens are far away. This one will be right next to you. Hermes; Eau de Toilette natural spray; Price: PLN 440/100 ml

ARTIST'S PALETTE

This new palette of eye shadows is a good opportunity to experiment with the candy underground climate. Available at Sephora perfumeries. Price: PLN 69

CREME ANTI-AGE TRES GLOBALE

The most comprehensive anti-aging cream. Your skin will look more beautiful with just one use. Available at Sephora perfumeries. Price: PLN 75/50 ml

PERFECTION LUMIERE VELVET

Velvety foundation with ultra-light texture. It moisturizes, smoothens and gives a natural matt complexion effect. CHANEL; Price: PLN 189/30 ml

SAMSUNG GALAXY

Spring 2014 belongs to Samsung. The long-awaited Samsung GALAXY novelties – the 12.2-inch NotePRO, as well as 12.2, 10.1 and 8.4-inch TabPRO, are here. Prices from PLN 1,599





EISENBERG BODY SCRUB GEL The combination of exfoliating particles and microcapsules of vitamin removes dead skin, facilitating oxygenation and recovery of cells.

Available at Sephora perfumeries;
Price: PLN 289/200 ml

TAMING AFRICA A collection for great individualists of the modern civilisation. Lewanowicz Jewellery; tiger brooch-pendant;
Price: PLN 470

DIOR ADDICT FLUID STICK Neither gloss, nor lipstick... The fluid which combines colour, gloss, and "no makeup" feel. Premiere! Available in perfumeries in April.

FAHRENHEIT Composition which combines extremes, and where scent of flowers blends with the aroma of leather and wood.
Price: PLN 429/75 ml

VAN LAACK ROYAL A unique type of twill fabric which highlights its quality and gives you a unique character. The whole can be complemented with a silk tie. Price: around PLN 650, tie PLN 350

PTASIE MLECZKO Go to www.ptasiemleczko.pl and design your own package of this iconic treat.
Price: PLN 36

PARSLEY SEED ANTI-OXIDANT Hydrator – cream with a light texture, highly moisturizing and nourishing; Price: PLN 210/60 ml. Serum - contains intense anti-radical and moisturizing ingredients; Price: PLN 285/15 ml. Eye Creme – rich in antioxidants, for the delicate skin around the eyes; Price: PLN 305/10 ml



BUNKING DOWN

Many European companies reduce business travel costs. This has led businesspeople to turn to hostels, which in recent years have changed beyond recognition. *Rose Dykins* reports.

CHECK IN HOTEL



Your backpacking days are firmly in the past. The thought of sharing a room with 11 strangers, or slipping on some flip-flops and schlepping to a communal bathroom – well, you wouldn't dream of it. And if somebody suggested that you checked into a hostel for your next business trip rather than your preferred hotel brand, you would probably think they were insane.

But on the budget side of business travel, interesting changes are taking place in Europe. People are increasingly turning to hostels for business stays – but not the kind of hostels you will remember.

Forget prison-style bunk beds and mouldy shower curtains – hostels have gone upmarket. Private rooms with modern en suite bathrooms, ubiquitous free wifi and attractive public areas can be found in this new generation of hostels, and for those on a tight budget, they could be worth considering over a three-star hotel.

MORE AND MORE CUSTOMERS

Carl Michel, executive chairman of Generator hostels, says the uptake from business travellers has been gradually rising. “This is a growing trend. We're seeing that about 10 per cent of our guests are business travellers, and that's been growing at a rate of about 1 per cent per annum for the past five years.”

Generator can even be found on corporate booking systems now.

Alvaro Hinojosa, chief executive of U Hostels in Madrid, says: “Business travel occupancy is about 20 per cent but during [trade fair] FITUR, 40 per cent of guests are visiting the event.”

It's important to note the term “business traveller” is a loose one. “Our product is not intended for chairmen and chief executives, but for middle or junior managers travelling on a budget,” Michel says. “Millennials [people born in the 1980s] will dip in and out of brands and vary their tastes. One moment they might stay at a posh resort and another fly with a budget carrier. What's more, they don't see those differing behaviours as inconsistent.”

To say that luxury hostels are better value for money than budget hotels doesn't necessarily mean they are much cheaper. From an internet search conducted in early February, a midweek stay in a Double room at Generator Hamburg in April started from €76 (£62), while a night at the Ibis Hamburg Alster Centrum, a ten-minute walk away, started from €66.

A Deluxe en suite single room at U Hostels Madrid was €60, compared with €56 at the Holiday Inn Madrid. When we checked again a week later, the hostels were around £20-£40 cheaper than their budget hotel counterparts. Unique atmosphere

Rather than the price, it's the experience these properties offer that might tempt curious business travellers looking for more than a bed for the night. Kash Bhattacharya, a 34-year-old travel blogger (budgettraveller.org)

and author of free e-book *Luxury Hostels of Europe*, says: “When I'm travelling for business, I want to stay somewhere that I can walk into and have a chat and a glass of wine – I'm not someone who goes straight to my room. That social edge is the thing you get with these hostels. But at the end of the night, you have your own private space.”

Such properties also offer group activities, and the chance to soak up the city's culture. Hinojosa lists free walking tours, film screenings, flamenco shows and games nights as examples of what U Hostels offers. At the same time, the term “luxury” should not be over-exaggerated when it's applied to a hostel, as it still remains a no-frills option.

“The luxury hostel experience is very much the same as that which the low-cost airlines gave us ten or 15 years ago,” Michel says. “Look what happened with Easyjet – it started as a leisure carrier, then realised that because it was so punctual and its service so good, it would attract business travellers.”

“Similarly, we have got an exciting product that's well-priced, and would appeal to anyone. It's about offering the things that matter to people – wifi, privacy, a good bed and a long-running food and beverage offering.”

This month, Generator will extend the Premium service available in its Barcelona hotel section to the Twin rooms in its hostel, as well as to its Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin and Hamburg properties.



Extra amenities (for 15 euros) will include toiletries, food and drink vouchers, fast check-in, late check-out, and free in-room drinks and snacks.

NEW AMENITIES

So what about privacy? Is there a secure place to keep your valuables? “In terms of privacy, [a Single or Twin room] is the same as staying in a budget hotel,” Michel says. “All of our hostels have two types of safes – a large in-room one for luggage with card access and smaller boxes by the lobby for phones and laptops. The whole property operates on a card entry system.”

And what about the other clientele? Bhattacharya says: “Even among the luxury hostels, there will be some with a bit more of a party atmosphere, which might not be ideal for the business traveller. I always encourage people to tweet me for recommendations (@BudgetTraveller). It’s still a new trend, and it’s going to take time.”

Hinojosa recently visited London to source a new U Hostels location, while Generator is opening in Paris at the end of the year, and Rome the next. Michel says he is “looking aggressively at North America, particularly New York,” adding that Madrid and Amsterdam also have potential.

Still not sure whether you’d fit in? “When business people stay at U Hostels, I have seen them go to their room, put on some jeans and be like any other guest,” Hinojosa says.

Bhattacharya adds: “People have this fear that they might stand out and be surrounded by a bunch of 20-somethings getting wasted. The reality is different – the 30 and 40-year-olds have a drink with them.

“These are happy places. Being somewhere that we can meet interesting, friendly people and learn something new can make a big difference to our well-being, given the amount of time we spend on the road alone.”

TRIED AND TESTED - LUXURY HOSTELS

Generator London

A short walk from Euston station on Tavistock Place, Generator London is housed in a former police station and has 868 beds, with 22 en suite twin rooms.

I arrived in the evening to find the public area buzzing with activity. The vast ground floor is divided into several sections, with graffiti walls, pictures of London and a red bus installation emerging from the bar giving a sense of locale. It’s an inviting area, with stylish furniture arranged so you can choose to sit alone



Lisbon



London

In most of the new hostels you won’t find bunk beds and shared bathrooms. Such things are long gone – what counts today is comfort and customer satisfaction.



Rome



London



London

or join others.

People were typing away at their Apple Macs in a separate room. The atmosphere was friendly, and the clientele distinctly international – mostly young people that were travelling, but I also noticed several more mature guests relaxing with a beer. A decent burger and chips in the restaurant cost £6.

Unfortunately, I couldn't connect to the wifi in my room. Another problem was the soundproofing – while the live DJ set in the bar was great when I was downstairs, it continued until about 2am, and the persistent bass line made for a disrupted night's sleep. On the plus side, the mattress was very comfortable. There was a workdesk with a lamp and plug sockets, a clothes rail with plastic hangers, and a shelf. The rainshower in the clean en suite wetroom took about five minutes to heat up but the pressure was good. Soap and a towel was provided, and there was a hairdryer in the public bathroom on my floor. A basic continental breakfast was included.

Price- single en suite rooms from £77 midweek. 37 Tavistock Place; tel +44 (0)20 7388 7666

Safestay London

Formerly a Labour party HQ, Safestay London is a ten-minute walk from Elephant and Castle Underground station, on the Bakerloo line. The location may feel a little rough and ready for first-time Londoners, but the City can be reached in 20 minutes.

Open since 2012, Safestay has the bright, smart feel of a budget hotel rather than a hostel. The public area, with its chartreuse and magenta colour scheme, stylish armchairs and leather sofas, has a similarly corporate feel, and was a calm, peaceful space when I visited in the evening – quiet enough for me to stream an episode of *Homeland*.

It's a shame there is no in-room wifi, nor a workdesk, but the free wireless internet in the public area was fast, and there were lots of plug sockets and assorted tables for working. There are 407 beds in 74 rooms, including 11 Private en suite options. My Private room was spacious, with a bunk (the bottom bed was a double) and a wetroom – the shower worked well. I found the mattress a little hard, but I slept soundly, as the hostel was very quiet, with only occasional noise from the corridor.

There was a large Toshiba flatscreen TV with a range of channels, towels, a luggage rack, tea and coffee-making facilities, soap and coat hangers (though no wardrobe space). A hair-dryer can be rented from the 24-hour reception (£10 deposit), and the free breakfast comprises croissants and cereal.

Price- private en suite rooms from £90 per night midweek. 144-152 Walworth Road; tel +44 (0)20 7703 8000; safestay.co.uk

The Independente, Lisbon

Located near the historic Bairro Alto district, the Independente is within walking distance of Rossio station. There are 11 dormitories and four "suites", which are private king rooms with en suite bathrooms and balconies overlooking the Tagus River.

The hostel's trendy restaurant/bar, the Decadente, serves contemporary Portuguese cuisine and has a private terrace. The chic interiors sport antique furniture and distressed wood.

Price- suites from 100 euros; theindependente.pt

Plus Berlin

The newest addition to the Plus Hostel group, which has locations in Berlin, Prague and Ita-

ly, is two blocks from Warschauer Strasse station in the German city's Friedrichshain district, and one block from the River Spree. The property has a separate section with private hotel rooms, but all guests have access to free wifi and use of an indoor pool and a sauna.

Double rooms have en suite bathrooms, flatscreen TVs and desks, and there is a 242 sqm conference room and a restaurant.

Price - double rooms from 56 euros; plushostels.com

Kex Hostel, Reykjavik

Opened in 2010, Kex resides in a converted biscuit factory, a short walk from the main street of Laugavegur, and has panoramic sea views. As well as dorms, there are three hotel-style rooms with private bathrooms. Kex also offers free wifi, laundry facilities, a cinema, a meeting room, a gym, a barbershop and a lively, open-plan restaurant and bar serving tasty Icelandic food and Viking beer.

Price - double Plus rooms from 21,500 Kr (£113); kexhostel.is

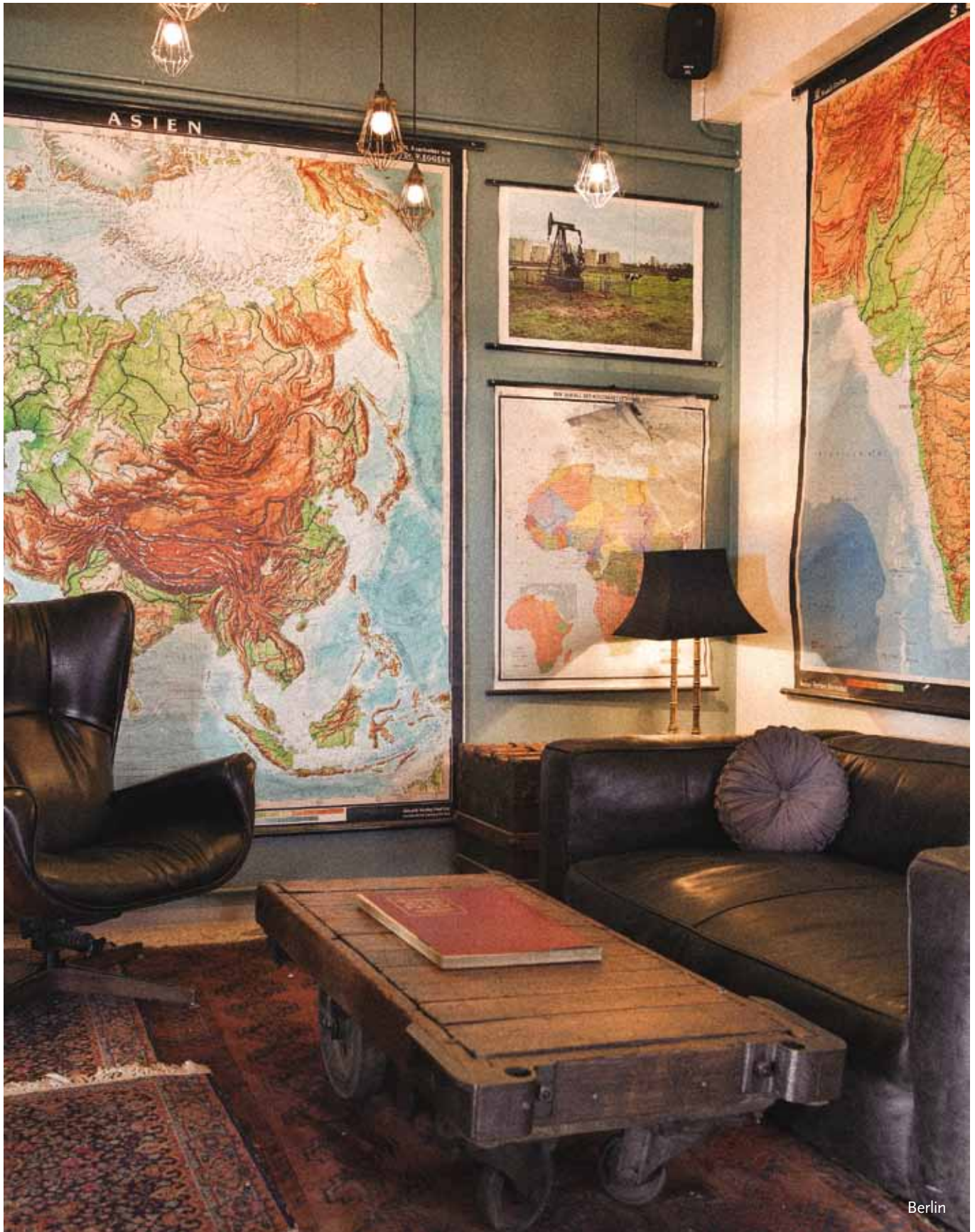
The Beehive, Rome

Not far from Termini station, this colourful hotel-hostel hybrid offers simple "Sweets" with personal bathrooms. There is free wifi, and most private rooms have a small desk.

The lounge, communal seating area – adorned with artwork – and private garden offer space for working or relaxing. The owners run a vegetarian café in the same building, and host vegan buffets three evenings a week.

Price - sweet rooms from 100 euros; the-beehive.com

Hostels are similar to budget airlines – you get a good product at a great price. It's just enough to provide guests with free wi-fi, privacy, comfortable beds, and a good selection of meals.



Berlin

Hostels tempt with private rooms with modern bathrooms, free internet, and interesting public spaces.

LUFTHANSA ANNOUNCES MORE NOVELTIES



CONTACT
www.lufthansa.com

On the first day of this year's ITB in Berlin, Lufthansa unveiled a new Premium Economy class. The new travel class can be booked from May onwards and will be available from November 2014, initially on the Boeing 747-8.

The design and features of the new seat in particular are based on extensive passenger surveys and workshops with sales partners – a process that has been successfully used at Lufthansa. Following the upgrade of the German carrier's First and Business Class, the installation of 3,600 seats on all 106 of Lufthansa's long-haul aircraft in just one year will mean another

step towards becoming a five-star airline.

ACCESS TO A GLOBAL FLIGHT NETWORK

The convenient access to the global route network and the highest quality of Lufthansa's services, are the advantages that are highly regarded by Polish passengers.

Recently, Lufthansa has observed here a growing popularity of Asian destination such as Bangkok, Singapore, Beijing, or Shanghai. In this year's summer season the German airline will launch flights to Jakarta, which will certainly please Polish passengers. Lufthansa is the only tradition-

al international air carrier in Poland that offers such an extensive flight network and comprehensive service. The newly introduced Premium Economy class will certainly be popular with Polish travellers.

50 PERCENT MORE SPACE AND GERMAN PRECISION

The new seats were designed in partnership with the company müller/romca Industrial Design in Kiel and produced by the seat manufacturer ZIM Flugsitz near Lake Constance. Depending on the aircraft type, they are up to 3 centimetres wider and provide greater privacy as well as approximately 10 centimetres more room at the

side thanks to each seat having its own wide armrest and a centre console between the seats. The backrest can be reclined further and the seat pitch is a significantly more spacious 38 inches, or 97 centimetres.

As a result, passengers have around one-and-a-half times as much room as Economy Class. The head rests can be set to the exact height desired and folded at the sides for added comfort and support. Height-adjustable foot rests from the second row back and – for technical reasons – leg supports with an integrated footrest in the first row provide extra comfort. Practical features around the seats such as a bottle holder, an electrical socket and lots of storage space for passengers' belongings also help to ensure a relaxed and pleasant journey.

ADDITIONAL PREMIUM ECONOMY SERVICE

With a baggage allowance of two items weighing up to 23 kilogrammes each, passengers can take twice as much free luggage with them compared with Economy Class. For an extra € 25, passengers can also enjoy the comfort of the Lufthansa Business Lounges before their departure. So far,

they have only been available to passengers holding a certain status in the Miles & More programme. Check-in and boarding procedures as well as hand luggage regulations are the same as in Economy Class. An enhanced service awaits Premium Economy passengers on board: they are greeted with a welcome drink and will find their own water bottle as well as a high-quality amenity kit with practical travel accessories at their seat. Meals will be served on porcelain tableware. Passengers can navigate the extensive in-flight entertainment programme using their own touchscreen monitor on the seat in front of them. The screens are 11 to 12 inches (28 to 30 centimetres). A wide selection of magazines and newspapers completes the range of entertainment on offer.

UP TO 52 SEATS AND ATTRACTIVE PRICING

Lufthansa Premium Economy Class is located within the cabin as a clearly identifiable separate compartment between Business and Economy Class. It has a high-quality design and contains between 21 and 52 seats, depending on the aircraft type. Installation of the

new travel class, which is to be carried out on a gradual basis, sub-fleet by sub-fleet, will start this autumn and finish in summer 2015.

The first sub-fleet to be fitted with the new seats will be the Boeing 747-8. Ticket prices in the new Premium Economy Class will be closer to Economy Class than Business Class – a return flight across the North Atlantic or to Asia will cost an additional €600 on average.

FIVE STARS FOR THE QUALITY OF SERVICES AND HOSPITALITY

The introduction of Premium Economy Class will complement the many improvements that Lufthansa plans to make in all classes on board and on the ground by 2015. By this point in time, the entire long-haul fleet will have the new First and Business Class – which will involve the installation of 7,000 new seats on the Company's aircraft.

Apart from the interior of the cabins, services on board and on the ground are also being enhanced. The goal is to demonstrate to an even greater degree the qualities of being a dedicated host with a keen understanding of service and hospitality.

On the first day of this year's ITB in Berlin, Lufthansa unveiled its new Premium Economy Class. The new travel class can be booked from May onwards and will be available from November 2014, initially on the Boeing 747-8.



AUSTRIAN AIRLINES EVERYTHING FOR PASSENGERS!



CONTACT
www.austrian.com

At the airport in Vienna, the transfer time between flights is just 25 minutes.

That's why transfer via Vienna Airport is quicker, easier and more convenient than at many other airports.

Austrian Airlines has introduced six additional connections a week on Cracow-Vienna route, offers its passengers the opportunity to upgrade their travel class, and improves comfort on board its intercontinental aircraft.

More connections from Cracow Austrian Airlines has just introduced six additional flights per week on Cracow-Vienna route. The extra flights integrated into the carrier's route network starting 30 March 2014, enable passengers to choose the most convenient connections among as many as 13 flights a week.

This increase in the number of flights translates into an even better access to the route network of the Austrian carrier. Transfer via Vienna Airport is quicker, easier and more convenient than at many other airports. That is probably why passengers going on business trips frequently choose Austrian Airlines.

HIGHER CLASS

If you travel with Austrian Airlines to cities within Europe, you might want to make your trip more attractive by taking advantage of an upgrade to a higher travel class. To do it, passengers with Economy Class tickets should go to austrian.com website where for mere €99 they can purchase the upgrade (one-way) and enjoy all the privileges of Business Class passengers. The benefits include: larger luggage allowance - 2 pieces of baggage (2 x 32 kg), check-in at Business Class desks, Business Class allowance for hand luggage, Business Lounge access, Fast Lane service (if available at a given airport), extra miles for Business Class flight, as well as an exquisite meal prepared by DO & CO.

A NEW CABIN

Austrian Airlines has also modernized its long-haul fleet, introducing a completely new

and modern passenger cabin. The whole intercontinental fleet (10 B777 and B767 aircraft) has received new seats in Economy Class, an enhanced in-flight entertainment system, as well as innovative Business Class seats which can be fully reclined into a flat-bed.

The unique design of the economy class cabin means an entirely new level of comfort during a long journey. The new Business Class seats offer numerous amenities, including intuitive controls, massage function and more space for hand luggage. The innovative airbag system allows you to adjust the seat to the most comfortable position. A brand new entertainment system offers a choice of the latest movies, keeping passengers entertained during even the longest journey. Also, as before, the award-winning company DO & CO is engaged in developing culinary delicacies served on board of Austrian Airlines.



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DISCOVER THE SWEET SECRET BY MERCURE



CONTACT
mercure.com
accorhotels.com

This year Mercure hotels for the second time in their history invite their guests to enjoy the perfect taste of chocolate. Sweet Secret by Mercure is a unique offer of a stay with free sweet treats available in Polish hotels of the chain. As part of the promotion, hotel guests will have an opportunity to discover a collection of hand-made chocolates that will delight your taste.

SWEET SECRET BY MERCURE

You can take advantage of this special offer, if you book at least

a two-day stay between 1 April and 31 May. The promotion includes all Mercure hotels in Poland. Guests will receive up to 30% discount on accommodation, delicious breakfast, unlimited access to wi-fi and a sweet treat at check-in - a box of chocolates with handmade chocolate pralines. An additional bonus are tripled points in Le Club Accorhotels.

CHOCOLATE MENU

Beginning 1 April 2014, all bars and restaurants Mercure hotels in Poland will feature a special menu. This will include

aromatic Gourmand coffee with three exquisite pralines, chocolate cake with ice cream, as well as a box of 11 unique chocolates. The entire range of chocolate delicacies has been prepared in Poland by Chocoffee – a well-known manufacturer of excellent and unique products, with nearly 90 years of tradition. Among the carefully selected collections of pralines, one deserves a particular attention. It has been created exclusively for the Mercure brand and is a combination of refreshing lemongrass aroma with a surprising hint of mysterious spices

dipped in white chocolate.

"Mercure has partnered with Chocoffee for over 2 years," says David Henry, SVP Sales, Marketing, Distribution and Revenue Management at Orbis S.A. "I'm happy that we were able to invite a local chocolate manufacturer to cooperate in the Sweet Secret by Mercure project". The Mercure brand stresses the connection of hotels with tradition and history of cities in which they are located. This is particularly seen in the décor and menu of hotel restaurants, which offer local specialties prepared according to original recipes. "Together with

the chocolate we want to offer our guests a moment of pleasure. I believe that thanks to the unique chocolate sensations our guests will remember us for a long time," adds Mr Henry.

MERCURE – A UNIQUE BRAND IN ITS CLASS

Both business and leisure travellers will certainly find Mercure an attractive alternative to other hotel chains and independent hotels. It's definitely one of the most recognizable brands, which is widely acclaimed and enjoys good reputation. Each of the hotels of the chain is different and has its own unique

character. The hotels are located in city centres, by the sea or in the mountains, in 50 countries worldwide.

SWEET SECRET BY MERCURE PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

The promotional campaign of Sweet Secret by Mercure offer takes place both in hotels and online. The brand has decided to focus primarily on communication with customers via social media services where competitions with prizes are organized. Additional activities are also carried out on pages www.accorhotels.com and www.mercure.com



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LUXURY HAMBURGERS

Sheraton and Westin hotels are hosting now the Festival of Burgers. Only until the end of April you can see for yourself that even a "normal" hamburger can be an unusual dish.



KONTAKT
www.sheraton.pl
www.westin.pl

Head chefs at Sheraton hotels in Warsaw, Cracow, Poznań, and Sopot and at Westin hotel in Warsaw, have decided to take on the task of creating a list of creative burgers. For several weeks they selected and composed ingredients in order to prepare a menu,

which will enable beef aficionados to enjoy a moment of true culinary pleasure. The Festival of Burgers in the five hotels will be held until 30 April, and during that time hotel guests will have an opportunity to try high quality dishes of beef combined with unusual ingredients such as duck or oriental sauces.

THE HISTORY OF A HAMBURGER

Hamburger both as a dish and as a word derives from Hamburg, even though we all know that it's an American invention. Well, it is, but not quite so. Everything started with Hamburg beefsteak, which is hand chopped beef patty. The

dish was then brought to the US by immigrants from Germany, and the whole America has gone crazy about it. But first things first ...

In 1904, a potter named Fletcher Davis, who also ran a bar in Texas, came up with an idea to serve the Hamburg beefsteak with lettuce, mustard and mayo to guests visiting pottery exhibitions. And to make it easier to eat without a plate, he served it on toast.

A TRUE HAMBURGER

A typical hamburger is a flat meat patty made of chopped or minced beef, which is then grilled or barbecued. According to the original recipe, the meat should be seasoned only with salt, pepper, and mustard, but for years the recipe has evolved, providing burger lovers with new taste sensations. What's interesting - the famous steak from Hamburg didn't include a roll.

Meat used for a perfect burger can't be too lean, because it's not fried on fat. The burger's natural fat makes it juicy, plump, and soft. The perfect meat for hamburger is entrecote.

And one last thing - a real hamburger must be cooked on a grill or barbecue - never fried in a pan.

BURGER MADNESS

Beginning 30 April, Sheraton and Westin hotels will tempt their guests with an offer of creative hamburgers where the famous beef patty is combined with numerous interesting ingredients, such as duck, oscypek cheese, carrots marinated with ginger, or lamb.

The menu will feature six types of tasty burgers, including Strong Man (beef burger with beef cheek confit and mayo BBQ sauce), Zealander (beef burger with lamb from New Zealand and roasted peppers, cream cheese, cucumber, garlic and dill).

The prices of the burgers vary from PLN 29 to PLN 39.



The hamburger menu will enable beef aficionados to enjoy a moment of true culinary pleasure.



IMAGE OF YOUR COMPANY AND PERSONAL BRANDING

How can you consciously create your success? What is a personal brand? **Konrad Wilk** tells you how you can build it effectively.



The vast majority of Polish entrepreneurs who know the importance of the brand in a company's success, are deeply devoted to its building. Many succeed in this task, and indeed it seems that they efficiently lead and coordinate the process. In this way, the image, communication with the media, corporate social responsibility, and the customer's profile seem to be consistent and adequate. Websites correspond with the company's image and fulfil their practical roles.

However, when you combine this image with the image of their personal brands, everything quickly begins to blur, colours and shapes mingle in disarray, and there is an unpleasant feeling of disharmony and chaos.

WHAT IS A PERSONAL BRAND?

A brand is something clear, solid, and distinctive. Your personal brand, on the other hand, defines you, your values, your areas of expertise and distinctive features. This is why it is so

important to stay in tune with yourself when you are creating your brand. People may want to cooperate with you, buy from you, and trust you – not some fictional entity, even if it seems to be more attractive from you. A personal brand is a promise of stability and steadiness. With it you offer customers consistent services, quality and values. A personal brand creates expectations in the minds of customers and it remains strong as long as those expectations are met. So, do your best to always fulfil this promise.

WHY A PERSONAL BRAND?

There are many reasons why you need to consciously build a personal brand. Some of them, such as improving relationships with employees, contractors, business partners and customers, can be achieved in a short period of time. This will, of course, translate into improved financial performance, better working atmosphere, efficiency of you and your employees, accurate decision-making, and effective communication both with customers and within the organization. In the long-term a consciously created personal brand will enable you to develop and strengthen your success, independently of how you choose to direct your life and what factors you may come across. Strong personal brands, similarly to huge, well-constructed ships, are not afraid to face even the wildest storms. Not only can they survive them, but also predict, detect, and avoid them, to safely head towards their destination using favourable currents and winds.

RESULTS ARE IN YOUR HANDS

An inconsistency between a company brand and a manager's personal brand may seem to be of little importance in the case of large business, which, for example, produce processed cheese or chocolates. Buyers of such products do not care much about the level of consistency between a business brand and the personal brand of the company's owner or the President, who usually has no influence on their purchasing decisions. However, for people who run their own business, for example, B2B business, where the owner usually communicates with customers, and represents the company in dealings with partners, contractors, or sub-contractors - a personal brand is critical to the company's identity, its relationship with the environment and, consequently, of course, for its image and finan-

cial performance.

Businesspeople often spend loads of money on marketing and pro-sales activities, not realizing that it is their personal brands that affect the performance in these areas. And since this factor influences the decisions of your customers, you should start with it to control the effects of the other sales activities. Your brand creates the results of your business. And who creates your brand?

MASK DOES NOT COVER THE FACE.

The owner's personal brand directly affects the value of the organization. Regardless of whether it is a large, medium-sized, or small business, whether the person is self-employed, and what profession he or she represents, customers, business partners and contractors relate to the brand of a person who represents the company. Even the most efficiently created company brand will be irrelevant if it is inconsistent with the owner's personal brand. Customers like to relate to people, the relationships they build with them, attitudes and values they represent, and how good they feel in their company. The credibility of the boss is always of primary importance. People have sensors, which easily detect phony behaviour. We can think that we are masters at creating our image, but at the non-verbal level others will sense whether it is truthful, and based on their conclusions they will build their approach towards that person and, consequently, to the company.

PASSION FUELS BUSINESS

Vision, inspiration, enthusiasm, commitment, consistency - these are other features that reflect well on the owner and their relation to what they do. If others feel your commitment, they will be willing to cooperate with you, and expand the range of activities related to your business, recommending your prod-

ucts or services to others. The most important truth that every business owner must be aware of, is that regardless of their life situation, their brand should be solid as a rock. A company's brand is perceived through its owner, not through the brand they have artificially created for their business. Strong personal brands are those where the gap between the owner's personal and professional life is as small as possible. Strong brands live with what they do, and are passionate about their work. You need to remember that the brand is built on emotions. Your personal brand and the brand of your company are defined through emotions they evoke in people. Customers do not distinguish between you as a private individual and you as a businessperson. For them, the matter is simple. You are your company.

CONFIDENCE BUILDS BONDS

Trust is one of the most important factors for success. We all want to do business with people we know, we trust, with whom we feel a kind of bond, and who we like. Times of large corporations are now gone. They are often perceived as faceless, untrustworthy organisations that do not care about their customers and do not build relationships with them. They do not have a good brand because they are impersonal. Therefore, they employ people whom their prospective customers are willing to trust. People are especially open to those individuals who care about the same values as they do. Nowadays, a logo is of no importance - what counts is the face, the attitude, and the personality of a company's owners and his employees.

ACT AMONG THOSE YOU KNOW

The primary factors in the success of your company include defining the perfect customer and your target group, based on



Konrad Wilk

MLC, GT and ICF certified coach, trainer, speaker, inspirer, mentor. He provides assistance to businesspeople and experts in business development by helping to identify, building and implementing conscious personal branding based on his own programme.

True You. Personal branding is a subject of his book entitled "True You. Your Personal Brand"✪.

Constantly present in the media, writes articles, gives interviews, takes part in seminars, and discussion panels where he serves as an expert.

www.konradwilk.pl



People do business with those with whom they feel comfortable, at ease. It is the emotions that determine whether your potential customers will want to learn about your offer. They need an impression that they share some basic values with you, and that to some extent you both are alike.

your own needs, passions, and your personal mission which is consistent with the mission of your company. People do business with those with whom they feel comfortable, at ease. It is the emotions that determine whether your potential customers will want to learn about your offer. They need an impression that they share some basic values with you, and that to some extent you both are alike.

This is why your personal brand can be extremely powerful and why it is so important to possess extensive knowledge of yourself in order to be able to identify your target group. It is important for a prospective customer to think that it is great that you both have so much in common, that he likes you and is happy to speak to you. The most important for him is to feel that you are someone who can trust.

BUILD ON SOLID GROUND

The most important factor in building trust is credibility, which is the largest possible convergence of who you are with the image that you want to build in the eyes of other people. The best you can do is to be truthful. Of course, it is worth working on your development and neutralizing the limita-

tions that may hinder building good relationships and achieving goals. Do not try to convince others that you are different than in reality. Nobody likes to be manipulated. Do not try to be someone you are not, because it is the best way to fail. Do not be afraid that others will know your weaknesses. Attempts of masking and manipulating the reality disturb the coherence and authenticity, negatively affecting trust and willingness of other people in you and what you represent. A conscious display of your own flaws is more beneficial than harmful.

THE IMAGE TELLS THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU

Everything you do and how you do affects your brand. Not only the features of character, the awareness of your mission and vision, professionalism, authenticity, uniqueness, internal consistency, but also their external manifestations create your image. What matters is what you say, how you say it and where, what messages you post in social media services, and how you behave in public space. Pay attention to how you treat other people. Also remember that what car you drive, what and how you dress, what your personal style is

– all of these add to your credibility. It is even important what and where you eat, as well as how you care about your health, and what your interests are. At each step, be yourself, take care of your personal development, and try to precisely display who you are through the messages you create about yourself.

ADVANTAGE IS A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Most brands (because everyone has one) are built randomly. However conscious personal branding means taking control of what others say you cannot control. Being in charge of how you are perceived, what they say about you, and what emotions are associated with you, enables you to make a mark, build a strong and long-lasting position on the market, and actively influence your company's performance.

Consciously and consistently implemented personal brand, which is consistent with the brand of your business starts the natural mechanisms of development, success, fulfilment, happiness, and wealth.

"Invest in building your personal brand. You are the most valuable, safest, most interest-bearing, the most precious, the most relevant investment of your life."*

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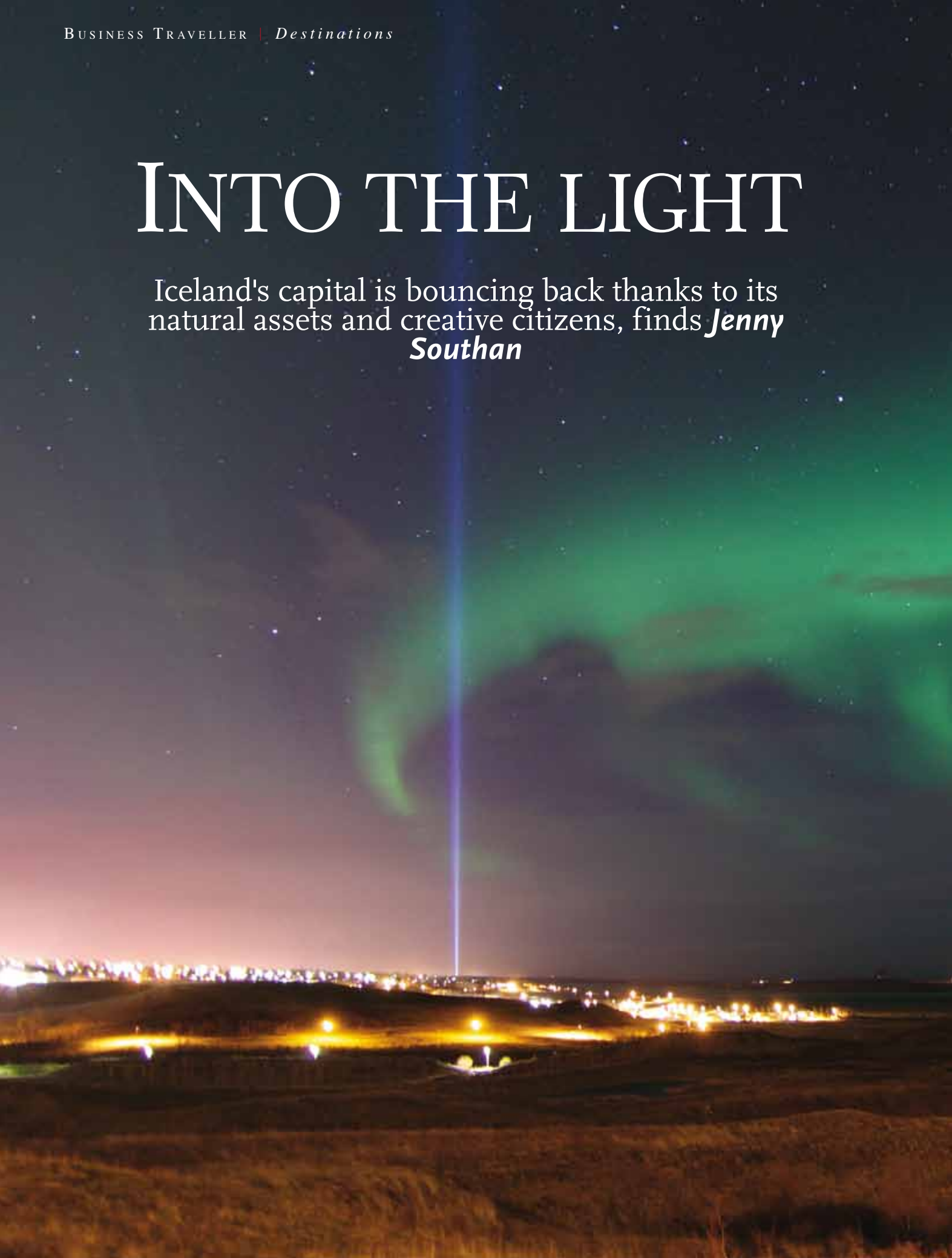
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INTO THE LIGHT

Iceland's capital is bouncing back thanks to its natural assets and creative citizens, finds **Jenny Southan**







At midnight on March 25, as if from the luminous heavens themselves, 10.5 million Auroracoins (AUR) will be “airdropped” into the virtual wallets of each of Iceland’s 330,000 citizens.

For the first time in more than a week, the meteorological conditions are right. The sky is clear and there is near pitch-blackness over the pitted surface of Thingvellir national park, a short drive from the light pollution emanating from Reykjavik city centre.

The stars are so bright I can see the Milky Way, a delicate swathe across the sky. Crunching my way through the frozen snow, neck craned, I stare at the curtains of neon green mist that shift and shimmer, then fade and reappear overhead.

At midnight on March 25, as if from the luminous heavens themselves, 10.5 million Auroracoins (AUR) will be “airdropped” into the virtual wallets of each of Iceland’s 330,000 citizens.

Thanks to the ability to peg the payments to national ID numbers, along with 96 per cent internet penetration across the island, residents will receive an AUR 31.8 share of the crypto-currency (the equivalent of about 200 euros), to be saved or spent much as they would their own Icelandic krona.

DIGITAL MONEY

Auroracoin founder Baldur Odinson hopes the digital money will help to restore value to the country’s real-world currency, which has lost more than 99.5 per cent of its value since 1960. The 2008 banking collapse didn’t help, with a drop of more than 50 per cent recorded in just one week.

As a result, the government has enforced strict controls over the past five years that have meant a ban on movements of capital to and from the country, and limited foreign exchange – locals have had to hand over foreign currency to the Central Bank of Iceland and there is a shrinking amount of krona available at bureaux de change overseas. AUR is a descendent of the more widely known Bitcoin and it is hoped that tech-savvy, smartphone-equipped Icelanders will be receptive to this new form of payment as they rarely deal in cash anyway.

“Everyone uses credit and debit cards,” says Bryndis Pjetursdottir, marketing and PR manager for Visit Reykjavik. “We couldn’t understand when we heard about people in the UK storming Northern Rock to take out all their money.”

In the warm café-bar of Hotel Borg, in the centre of the small-scale capital, Pjetursdottir and I are sipping tea. We are joined by Georg Ludviksson, co-founder and chief executive of tech company Meniga, who tells



us about the white-label online banking software he launched in 2009.

He says: “We were a child of the Icelandic crash – we help people manage their money and I got a lot of talent from the fallen Icelandic banks that had large IT departments.” He explains that for the same reasons that it’s hoped Auroracoin will catch on, Iceland has proved a great pilot market for Meniga as it is a “low cash society with high internet usage”, which is perfect as every purchase shows up in your personal finance diagnostics. The firm now has 60 employees and has sold its solution to banks in Scandinavia, Russia, Spain, Germany and the UAE. It has an annual turnover of 4.5 million euros.

ANTI-AGEING SERUM

By the time we are on to our second cup of tea, Ludviksson has left and Jon Bjornsson, chief executive of Sif Cosmetics, has sat down in his place. Again founded at the time of the crisis, it made its first sale of Bio-effect anti-ageing serum – made from nine ingredients including Icelandic water, volcanic ash and “transgenic” barley – in 2010. “We are now sold in 450 stores around Europe, Asia and Canada, and our retail value is about €17 million.” What’s crucial, though, Bjornsson explains, is that Sif brings money into the country. “That’s what creates value – 70 per cent of our turnover is export, and not many companies have that.” As we talk, he looks at his iPhone and says: “Oh, I just realised I forgot to pay my parking.” It’s another example of just how

wired the local population is – with a quick tap of the Leggia app, he has bought himself some time.

Other apps that have been adopted by Icelanders include one that helps them to determine how closely related they are (a genuine problem for singletons in a country with so few people).

In the evening, I go for dinner at Fish Market restaurant (fiskmarkadurinn.is), which has come highly recommended. “Ten years ago it was lamb, lamb, lamb and, of course, fish. Always fish,” Pjetursdottir says. That has all changed now, with eateries diversifying imaginatively – there’s New Nordic, Icelandic-Mediterranean, rustic Italian, raw vegetarian and South American.

As I tuck into my crispy wasabi salad, I can’t help overhearing the two men at the next table giving the young waiter a bit of a hard time. It’s jovial banter – slightly drunken, slightly confrontational.

The mood softens, though, when the waiter asks what they do for a living. “We live in Denmark but come over here to consult on prosthetic limbs,” the more boisterous one says.

He then proudly pulls up his trouser leg to reveal a terminator-style robot shin, a slender metal bone mounted on a bionic foot in his trainer. He gets up to demonstrate how he can walk on it. The company, it turns out, is Ossur, Reykjavik’s world-leading developer of prosthetic limbs – double amputee Oscar Pistorius ran wearing its blades during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Biotech and health tourism (the latter frequently taking advantage of the healing properties of the Blue Lagoon, 50km from the city) are a growing sector in Iceland’s economy, while the main export industries are hydroelectric and geothermal power (it is the largest producer per capita on the planet), aluminium smelting, and ocean-related fishing, tech and transport.

Finance used to be big, but after the boom years of 2001 to 2007 it spectacularly crashed – the banks were nationalised and billions of pounds of emergency funding handed over by neighbouring governments and the International Monetary Fund.

It was a monumental fall for a country that had only recently achieved great wealth.

What went wrong? Eiriksson says: “The banks collapsed under their own weight – the debts they defaulted on were 11 times the GDP so the government had no chance of bailing them out. People were setting off fires outside the parliament because they had negative equity on their houses.

“When you take a loan for your house, it is pegged to the Consumer Price Index, so if the CPI goes up 3 per cent per year, your mortgage goes up 3 per cent. In the long term, normally this is not a problem because your wages will also go up by around 3 per cent, but following the crash, the CPI went up 20 per cent in one year, wages stayed the same or people lost their jobs or got pay cuts, and housing prices stayed still so the loans went up.”



To make matters worse, Eiriksson explains that vicious bankruptcy legislation meant “you could be chased to the end of your days”, with debts potentially passed down from generation to generation.

POTS AND PANS REVOLUTION

This led to the Pots and Pans revolution, whereby local Icelanders took to the streets banging saucepans with spoons – anything to make noise.

Sometimes, it got violent, and for the first time since 1949, when Iceland joined NATO and became party to the Cold War, the authorities diffused the protestors with tear gas. In the end, they had to give in. “The [new coalition] government changed the law so if you are bankrupt, after two years the bank can’t follow you,” Eiriksson says.

A couple of years after the crash, in spring 2010 – as every traveller will remember – the volcano with the unpronounceable name (Eyjafjallajökull) erupted, filling the skies with ash for several weeks and causing the cancellation of 100,000 flights. This resulted in a loss of US\$1.6 billion in airline revenues, and five million passengers stranded around the world. Ironically, in Reykjavik, 120km from the volcano, it wasn’t such a problem – Keflavik International only closed for one day, on April 22. Robyn Mitchell, sales and marketing manager at the Radisson Blu 1919 hotel, actually witnessed a positive effect: “The eruption

was good news as it put Iceland on the map. People knew where we were. And since, we have experienced a huge boost in occupancy and revenue.”

VIEWS, THE GLACIER AND THE WHALES

Tourism is an important pillar of the economy, with people coming to experience not only the city’s vibrant nightlife but also the spectacular land and seascapes – be it snowmobiling on a glacier or whale watching in the North Atlantic. The annual number of holidaymakers has doubled since 2000, with 673,000 visitors in 2012. In January, British tourists were up 65.2 per cent, to 16,576. By 2020, Iceland hopes to welcome two million visitors a year.

Keflavik airport, 40 minutes’ drive from the city, had a record year in 2013, with 2.7 million passengers. Flag carrier Icelandair, Easyjet

and Wow all fly from the UK, while Canada and the US are also key markets, with a flight time of just six hours to New York. Icelandair has doubled the number of destinations it serves since 2009, to 38 direct routes.

For business travellers coming for meetings and events, the Harpa concert hall and conference centre on the waterfront is a desirable addition. Opened in 2011, it’s an eye-catching piece of architecture, with a honeycomb façade of pale turquoise, green and yellow glass, and sweeping minimalist interiors looking out on to the sea. It has four state-of-the-art concert halls, numerous meeting rooms and open-plan exhibition space.

Next door, a couple of minutes’ walk from the main street of Laugavegur, is an area of desolate land. For several years there have been plans to build Reykjavik’s first five-star hotel on the lot, but Marriott pulled out during the crisis and a decision hasn’t been made.

There have since been rumours that Starwood could come in, with an opening date of 2016 or 2017 contemplated, but local hoteliers are sceptical.

“I’m not going to hold my breath,” says Mitchell, who cites the cost of filling rooms during the winter a hurdle. “June, July and August are no problem but the staffing is incredibly expensive in Iceland. Many hotels have 24-hour receptions but none have round-the-clock room service, for example. Everyone is unionised here – you have to pay the salaries they demand. If you work after

Contacts

- Visit Reykjavik visitreykjavik.is
- Meet in Reykjavik meetinreykjavik.is
- Promote Iceland islandsstofa.is
- Harpa en.harpa.is
- Blue Lagoon bluelagoon.com
- Whale Watching specialtours.is
- Northern Lights (Reykjavik Excursions re.is)
- Golden Circle Tour (Mountaineers of Iceland mountaineers.is)

5pm you get your wage plus 33 per cent, and after midnight to 8am it is plus 45 per cent. 'Red Days' like Christmas are 90 per cent." At the moment, the Radisson Blu 1919, Hotel Borg and 101 (a Design Hotel) are probably the most superior places to stay, but there are seven more projects, adding 1,100 rooms to the existing 4,000, to come over the next five years. "We need one big hotel with 200-400 rooms every year," Eiriksson says. The lower end of the market is doing particularly well, with a slew of trendy designer hostels such as Kex (see "Bunking down") adding not only bunks to the city's inventory but double rooms for the budget-minded entrepreneur.

"Things are gradually improving," says Eiriksson, who cites 3 per cent GDP growth last year. "Our goal is to diversify the industrial base – we want companies that are doing something different, and preferably linked to our resources."

EU MEMBER?

Whether Iceland joins the EU remains to be seen – formal talks began in 2010 – but it's unlikely to happen until agreements about fishing quotas have been made. In September, the government announced it had suspended discussions indefinitely.

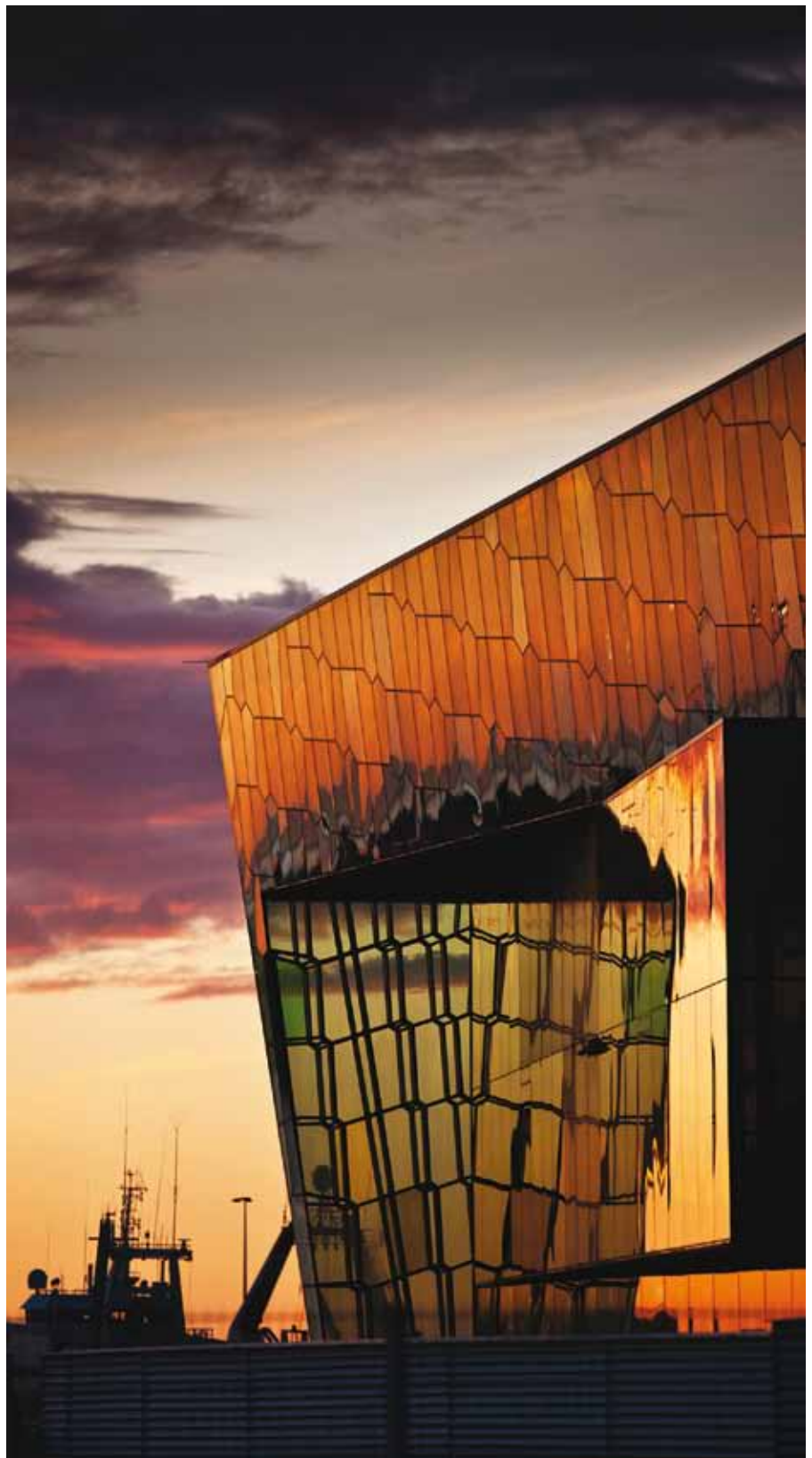
The people of Reykjavik are, after all, proud of their country and its roots, and after a serious knock to its confidence, are re-evaluating its identity and ambitions.

Pjetursdottir says: "After the financial crisis a lot of small boutiques opened selling clothes, jewellery and handmade things. A lot of people lost their jobs so maybe realised they could let their dreams come true. We went back to our roots."

Aside from the national pastime of knitting, which has had a revival, it is technology that is taking the country forward, hand in hand with its natural assets. As the world becomes ever more reliant on computers, millions of servers are required to store the uncountable number of terabytes of data coming into existence. With its perfect combination of untouched landscape, cool climate, abundant icy water and cheap, renewable, geothermal energy, Iceland is the ideal place to build power-hungry server farms.

Not far from Keflavik airport, in a former NATO base, Verne Global is leading the way with zero-carbon online storage, while Reykjavik-based GreenQloud provides consumers with 100 per cent eco-friendly back-up and web hosting.

"Since launching in 2010, it has seen continuous 15 per cent month-on-month growth," Eiriksson says. "In the pipeline, we can see it accelerating." If all goes well, Iceland could once again be a Northern Light.



Whether Iceland joins the EU remains to be seen – formal talks began in 2010 – but it's unlikely to happen until agreements about fishing quotas have been made.



IN THE KINGDOM OF THE MAYAS

in the Caribbean. There are several hundred years old pyramids, romantic colonial towns, a green jungle, wide beaches covered with white sand, and above all, friendly people – the short descendants of the Mayans.

Mexican Yucatan Peninsula is one of the most interesting places

The Mayan civilization flourished on the Yucatan in the years 300-900 AD. These brave people erected buildings of harmonious proportions, usually based on a broader basis and subtle crowning, decorated with

bas-reliefs and ornaments made of stucco. Up to this day we can admire well-preserved pyramids, on Yucatan they are much steeper than those in other parts of Mexico. On their tops there used to be temples with intricate bas-reliefs and sloping roofs. The

Mayans worshiped 166 gods, each of which had four incarnations, corresponding to the four sides of the world. The most important one in the pantheon was Itzamna – the god of fire. Mayans considered themselves to be the descendants of the people of corn,



The Mystery

OF THE CALENDAR

The intelligent Mayans knew a lot about mathematics and astrology, but most of all, were fascinated by the mystery of time. In order to record every moment of it, they created a complicated calendar, necessary to calculate the position of the planets. The basis for the calculations for almost all the peoples of Mesoamerica was the 260-day cycle, while at the same time, they used a different calendar, called haab, according to which, a year had 365 days (18 months of 20 days each and 5 extra days). Those two cycles lasted simultaneously, and together constituted the so-called The Calendar Round. You had to wait 52 years for a date to be repeated, and each such event was celebrated with revelry. The Mayans were counting time following the zero date, which for them was 3113 BC.



therefore, an important deity was Yum Kaax - the god of corn, and Chac – the god of rain. During the post-classical period, the Toltec people from the central Yucatan introduced here the cult of feathered serpent, worshipped by the Mayans under the name of Kukulkan. The attack of the Spanish inquisition ended this civilization.

PYRAMIDS AT CHICHEN ITZA

Chichen Itza is the most popular archaeological site in all of Mexico. The highest building is the pyramid-temple erected in honour of the god Kukulkan. Its design hides a mystery of the time measuring method developed by the Mayans: 4 rows of stairs, 91 degrees each, which, when summarised with the platform on top, gives the number 365. There are two days, when Chichen Itza is especially besieged by tour-

ists. On 21 March and 21 September you can observe the light and shadow effects on the northern balustrade over the stairs. It looks as if a luminous snake crawled down to the base of the pyramid (in spring), and all the way back during the autumn equinox in September to indicate the time of the harvest. Another great thing to see in Chichen Itza is The Temple of Warriors, which is supposed to remind you of the solitude of human existence. You can easily get lost among the columns. On its top, between the stone towers, you can see the most frequently photographed statue in both Americas – Chacmool. On his knees there is a bowl, which used to be filled with blood for hundreds of years. It received heart sacrifices from victims killed in honour of the gods. Another intriguing place in Chichen Itza is the biggest and best-preserved pitch in the

South America. The rules of this ancient game aren't entirely clear. We know the players could hit the ball with shoulders and hips. Each team tried to "score a goal", that is place the ball in one of two stone rings on both ends of the pitch. According to old records, the losers were beheaded.

THE CATHEDRAL AND FLAMINGOS

When driving from Chichen Itza to the coast, it's worth stopping by the picturesque town of Valladolid, which hasn't changed for decades. In the centre of this colonial "pearl" there is a small square surrounded with colourful houses, by which the female descendants of the Mayan people sell embroidered tablecloths, skirts and curtains. Next to the square, you will find San Servacio Cathedral, Valladolid is also famous

Cuisine

THE TASTE OF LIFE

Food in Yucatan is a great complement to all the travel experience and a meal can be a nice culmination of an eventful day. When travelling you can forget about all your preferences and the flavours you already know, and try out the local delicacies. Besides chili, beans, and corn – the ingredients always associated with Mexican cuisine – you will find numerous salads containing avocado, green tomatoes, delicious nopal cactus, pumpkin, fish, shrimps, squids, tropical fruit like pineapple, papayas and desserts with vanilla and cocoa.

Spanish conquistadors brought to the New World Mediterranean food products: chickens, beef, cheese, wheat, olive oil, onion and garlic. But mixing Mexican, Spanish and Italian cuisines has gone beyond the wildest expectations. The most popular dish in the country – tacos, that is different types of stuffing wrapped in warm cake (tortilla) is the soul of today's Mexican cuisine, and a fusion of the most popular flavours from Europe and South America.

for Rio Lagartos – a sanctuary for flamingos gathering at the lagoons. You might want to know that in the Valladolid area there are heavy showers even during the dry season.

GOLDEN LAGOON

Cancun in the Mayan language means “a bowl full of gold”. It stretches along 23-kilometre beaches and is an ideal place for enthusiasts of sunshine, snorkelling, windsurfing, kitesurfing and water skiing. The resort was built in 1970's, and since then, the lagoon has been packed with hotels, shops, restaurants and... tourists. They all get together in the evening at Kukulcan Boulevard or Caracol Square, where there are over 200 shops and cafes. From hotels belonging to the best groups to small guesthouses offering simply furnished rooms with breakfast. One of the best locations in Cancun is Club Med, located at the end of the peninsula. It offers excellent cuisine and all kinds of water sports.

BEAUTIFUL CARMEN'S BEACH

Much smaller than Cancun, Playa del Carmen also managed to preserve its charm of a small Mexican town and has numerous enthusiasts. It features everything you need

during a beach holiday – clear water, where you may not only bathe, but also do snorkelling and fishing, numerous bars serving popular cocktails, but also national liquor like tequila, mescal and pulque.

Tequila is made from blue agave, mezcal is a hard liquor with an over taste of smoked wood, while pulque, with its strong flavour and sharp aroma, is supposed to have hallucinogenic properties. The famous Bourbon Street is a perfect place for shopping. The choice is astounding: hand-woven hammocks, embroidered blouses with flower patterns, wooden altars with Virgin Mary, especially worshipped in Mexico, or equally popular painter Frida Kahlo, fake watches of brand designers, the latest Converse shoes, and Cuban cigars.

When leaving Playa del Carmen, it's worth going to the Cozumel island, also called Island of the Swallows by the Mayans, 19 kilometres away. Apparently, it's surrounded by the clearest waters on Earth, with water transparency of 70 metres.

TURTLES, TAPIRS AND DOLPHINS

In Yucatan, there are two well-known organized theme parks: Xcaret and Xel-Ha. You can spend there a whole day observing





Chichen Itza is the most popular archaeological site in Mexico. But apart from temples, pyramids or ancient fields, you will find here such miracles of nature as Ik-Kil Cenote.



Trained dolphins, lavishly rewarded by their caregivers with fish, carry on their backs tourists from all over the world, dance, sing and even kiss the visitors to their sheer delight.



huge sea turtles, flocks of a few hundreds flamingos, beautiful butterflies living in small sanctuaries or wild pumas and tapirs – from a safe distance of course.

A great attraction is also snorkelling in several-kilometres-long underground rivers flowing under the Xcaret park. Their waters are cold, but the possibility to dive underground and coming out to the surface in numerous caves is a unique experience.

Yet, the greatest must for all visitors is a chance to swim with dolphins. Every half an hour a group of volunteers can enter the huge pools, where these intelligent and joyful creatures swim. Trained dolphins, lavishly rewarded by their caregivers with fish, carry on their backs tourists from all over the world, dance, sing and even kiss the visitors to their sheer delight. The possibility of such close contact with those extraordinary mammals is a unforgettable experience which is difficult to describe. Dolphins are very delicate, their behaviour is guided by intuition and the

touch of their skin feels a lot like rubber – the experience is unforgettable.

TULUM - TEMPLES ON A CLIFF

There is no more beautiful view in Yucatan than what you can see in Tulum – a complex of temples, a castle and a lighthouse built by the Mayans around 900 AD by the very sea. Tulum was probably both a harbour and a fortress protecting Yucatan from the sea. Its location – right over a cliff, amid turquoise waves and by a beautiful beach – indicated the Mayans had a great sense of aesthetics and fantasy. Today, among the well-preserved monuments you can spot iguanas. In the glitter of the sun, the tourists can visit, among others, the Temple of the Frescoes to see old painting depicting Chaca, the god of rain, the Temple of the Descending God with a mysterious bas-relief of Ab Muxen Caba, the god of bees, and finally get down to the beach and have a swim in the foaming waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Marzena Mróz

MATCH FOR THE OPPONENT'S HEAD

Ball games were a diligently cultivated ritual in all pre-Columbian civilizations. Recent research has shown that prisoners of war were forced to play with a rubber ball at numerous pitches in Mexico. It so happened that they usually lost the game, and then their heads were given to gods as a sacrifice. It's also said that ball games were treated as a form of entertainment to settle disputes, among other things, over politics. But the party who got beaten, not only lost the influences, but also their lives... The rules of this game aren't entirely clear. The scientists speculate that the players could hit the ball with elbows, shoulders and hips, trying to put it inside stone rings placed upright on the sloping walls. The rules of modern football are entirely different, but one thing hasn't changed – the strong emotions the game evokes.



The stone rings placed on the walls are pre-Columbian versions of... goals. The ball could only be hit using elboes, shoulders and hips. And the stakes were higher than World Championship.



Transit

BEIJING BITES

A new wave of upmarket restaurants and buzzing bars are out to prove there's more to the Chinese capital than Peking duck. Mark Graham tries ten of the best

BRIAN MCKENNA @ THE COURTYARD

Burly Brian McKenna is one of the biggest noises on the Beijing dining scene, but the chef's imposing physical size belies his delicate touch in the kitchen, as he prepares dishes known for their sensitive pairing of ingredients and flavours.

The Irishman's latest venture has revitalised a restaurant that formerly had a prime location but a so-so culinary reputation. The Courtyard now has a classy menu to match its exquisite setting overlooking the Forbidden City. If you're not adventurous enough for McKenna's molecular creations, other options include steak and chips.

● **The neighbourhood:** The best postcode in the city, or at least it was for 500 years, when the Ming and Qing emperors lived in the

Forbidden City.

● **The crowd:** Rich. It's aimed squarely at Beijing's movers and shakers.

● **Must try:** Tempura of crab with lemon-grass bubbles; pan-roasted salmon with ginger scented lentils and grilled foie gras; and the chocolate dessert in the shape of a terracotta warrior.

● **Average cost per head:** ¥700/£70

● **Contact:** 95 Donghuamen Avenue, East Gate of the Forbidden City; tel +86 10 6526 8883; bmktc.com

THE BIG SMOKE

A homely and welcoming spot that's equal parts pub and rib joint, the Big Smoke authentically recreates North American comfort fare at decent prices.

Its location is what might politely be de-

scribed as unprepossessing, being down a scruffy back alley lined with hole-in-the-wall bars. The exposed-brick interiors are somewhat classier.

The business model for ale supplier Capital Brewing Company, run by pals Kristian Li and Alex Acker, is unusual – they operate inside the Big Smoke, which is also their main client. Their beers include Workers Pale Ale, with its raised-fist revolutionary logo.

● **The neighbourhood:** Scruffy and chaotic but becoming increasingly gentrified with a cluster of decent restaurants and bars.

● **The crowd:** A mixture of expats craving the food of home, Beijingers who have lived overseas, and curious locals.

● **Must try:** The slow-cooked ribs and lamb, and the burgers – all washed down with Workers Pale Ale.



S.T.A.Y.

- **Average cost per head:** ¥200/£20
- **Contact:** Lee World Building, 57 Xingfucun Zhonglu, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 6416 5195

JANES AND HOOCH

Arguably Beijing's classiest cocktail bar, Janes and Hooch offers a sassy alternative to hotel lounges.

The owners went to extremes to ensure it had the verisimilitude of a 1920s Chicago speakeasy by locating it in a dark backstreet with a difficult-to-discern entrance. Al Capone and his fellow bootleggers would have felt right at home in this late-night lounge, with its dark lighting, tuxedoed waiting staff and carefully selected mood music.

Order a bottle of liquor, ice and mixers, and trade stories – or toast the success of a deal – until the wee small hours.

- **The neighbourhood:** A warren of backstreets, so make sure you have detailed directions written down in Chinese for the taxi driver. The bar is hidden among a cluster of restaurants and bars on the south side of the Sanlitun nightlife zone.
- **The crowd:** Sanlitun's well-heeled, late-night bar-hopping set.



Jing Yaa Tang

- **Must try:** Earl Grey gin fizz and a Fernet and Coke, a bitter pre-Prohibition Argentinian tippie.
- **Average cost per head:** ¥200 /£20
- **Contact:** Gong Ti Bei Lu, Courtyard 4, Sanlitun, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 6503 2757; janeshooch.com

JING YAA TANG

The latest contender for the coveted "best Peking duck in town" title is this fabulous newly opened restaurant located in the basement of the Opposite House hotel.

It competes for the same discerning customers as the three existing prime Peking duck restaurants, the nearby Duck de Chine, Made in China in the Grand Hyatt, and 19492 Jin Bao Jie.

All four use ovens fired by the local fruit tree wood that gives the bird its distinctive taste and is never quite replicated in other parts of China, and these restaurants also offer a range of the nation's greatest hits on the menu.

- **The neighbourhood:** Its immediate neighbour is Sureno, the Opposite House's prime Western restaurant; upstairs is the achingly trendy Mesh bar. The property is located in

lively Sanlitun.

- **The crowd:** The hotel's outlets generally attract creative types such as models, designers and artists.
- **Must try:** The duck, and the steamed scallops on a bed of beancurd.
- **Average cost per head:** ¥300/£30
- **Contact:** Building 1, Taikoo Li Sanlitun North, 11 Sanlitun Road, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 6417 6688; theoppositehouse.com

OPERA BOMBANA

The latest, and grandest, upscale western restaurant in the city, this is a new venture from Hong Kong-based Michelin-starred Italian chef Umberto Bombana. It's a big, splashy place that more than lives up to the pre-opening hype.

The chef's eateries in Hong Kong and Shanghai are adored by lovers of authentic Italian food, and with Opera Bombana he has raised the bar to new heights.

- **The neighbourhood:** The restaurant is located in the Parkview Green shopping mall. It's worth a wander around the mall itself, which has a cool collection of art including contemporary Chinese works and Salvador Dali sculptures.



The extensive menu - from the classic Chinese cuisine to specialties from around the world - this is the culinary Beijing today.



- **The crowd:** Expect to see executives, diplomats, gourmands, couples on special-occasion dates, and nouveau riche Chinese.
- **Must try:** Speciality dishes include tagliatelle with sea urchin, seared tuna and steaks – all at prices that reflect the opulent surroundings.
- **Average cost per head:** ¥600/£60
- **Contact:** LG2-21 Parkview Green Fang Cao Di, 9 Dongdaqiao Road, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 5690 7177; operabombana.com

PINOTAGE

Young chef Amber Deetlefs cut her culinary teeth at the original branch of this South African restaurant in suburban Beijing before deciding to open a downtown branch to the south of the Sanlitun nightlife zone. So keen was she to improve her skills that she also trained in the UK with Gordon Ramsay.

The menu is big on meat and tailored towards the Chinese preference for sharing dishes, making it a perfect option for entertaining clients for lunch or dinner.

- **The neighbourhood:** The wrong side of the Sanlitun tracks – to the south – but, nevertheless, it's only a two-minute stroll away from the most buzzy part of the city.
- **The crowd:** Mostly business types, foodies keen to sample the cuisine of South Africa, and curious Chinese who appreciate the sharing-style menu.
- **Must try:** The steaks and South African dishes such as biltong carpaccio – basically beef jerky given the gourmet treatment – and chicken with apricots.
- **Average cost per head:** ¥300/£30
- **Contact:** Building 2, 2-105, First Floor Sanlitun SOHO, 8 Gongti Beilu, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 5785 3538; pinotage.me

S.T.A.Y.

Three-star Michelin chef Yannick Alléno operates this French fine-dining restaurant in the Shangri-La Beijing.

This is among the furthest flung of his 14 eateries and Alléno visits it regularly to ensure the food meets his impeccably high standards.

“I think people in Beijing understand what we are trying to do and appreciate that we’re introducing food they may not have tried before,” he says. “I was surprised to find good vegetables and fish – and the caviar is exceptional.”

- **The neighbourhood:** Rather a long way out in the dull suburbs of Beijing, but worth the trek.
- **The crowd:** People out to impress, particularly businessmen splashing the cash.
- **Must try:** The menu changes regularly

and includes standouts such as mussel ravioli with saffron, steamed codfish with seaweed butter and pan-seared wagyu beef.

● **Average cost per head:** ¥600/£60

● **Contact:** 29 Zizhuyuan Road, Haidian District; tel +86 10 6841 2211; shangri-la.com

TEMPLE RESTAURANT BEIJING

Temple encapsulates the essence of Beijing – an ultra-modern place in a deeply historic setting.

Located in a compound where monks once produced Tibetan Buddhist texts for Ming emperors 500 years ago, it has become a must-visit spot for lovers of fine food and impeccable service.

Belgian proprietor Ignace Leclair took a gamble in opening an upscale restaurant in a hard-to-find alleyway close to the Forbidden City, but it has paid off, with local gourmants enchanted by the food and unusual location. It's the place to go to see the revitalised Beijing.

● **The neighbourhood:** Down a tricky-to-find, rough and ready hutong.

● **The crowd:** Sophisticated local foodies and curious tourists.

● **Must try:** The eight-course degustation menu, or à la carte specials such as olive oil poached cod with a black truffle crust.

● **Average cost per head:** ¥600/£60

● **Contact:** 23 Songzhushi, Shatan Beijie, Dongcheng District; tel +86 10 8400 2232; temple-restaurant.com

TRANSIT

Usually found in fairly basic establishments in Beijing, Sichuan cuisine is taken to a new level at this sleek mall restaurant.

The place has a quirky, Philippe Starck feel to it – there is a pre-dinner lounge with sofas, then guests are led through to the purple-themed main room, passing a giraffe sculpture along the way.

Heat is a fundamental component of Sichuan food, especially its fiery chillies, so be prepared for the burn.

● **The neighbourhood:** Swire Properties rebranded the mall as Taikoo Li, hoping to attract more custom, but it's still a bit on the bland side.

● **The crowd:** A mix of trendy locals and expats ready and willing to feel the heat.

● **Must try:** The enticing takes on Sichuan dishes such as mao pao dao fu (beancurd) and beef in Sichuan peppers. Also try the sea bass, spicy chicken summer roll and red-cooked pork.

● **Average cost per head:** ¥500/£50

● **Contact:** N4-36, Taikoo Li North, 11 Sanlitun Road, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 6417 9090

XIAN

A moodily lit basement venue with alcoves galore – there are various bars, a live music zone and even a pool table – Xian is perfect for quietly winding down with a cocktail. It's located in East, a funky business hotel on the fringes of the 798 art district.

The food is basic – think pizzas, chicken wings and the like – with more detailed attention given to the extensive drinks list, which features vintage whiskies from Auchentoshan, Glenfarclas, Arran, Jura and Talisker.

● **The neighbourhood:** Xian is near all the art zones of Beijing, including 798, a series of Bauhaus-designed buildings now serving as galleries and boutiques.

● **The crowd:** Travelling corporate types and creatively minded locals – patrons include rebel artist Ai Wei Wei, whose studio is close by.

● **Must try:** The malt whiskies or the special cocktails such as Basic Temptation, containing lemongrass-infused vodka, Amaretto and fresh lime.

● **Average cost per head:** ¥200/£20

● **Contact:** East Beijing, Jiuxianqiao Road, Chaoyang District; tel +86 10 8414 9810; xian-bar.com





THE DREAM SERIES

Dynamics, comfort, efficiency, aesthetics and whole lot of innovation - BMW 5-Series has everything that needs the world's most popular executive car from high-end premium segment.



Indeed, consistently rising sales figures have fortified its position as a global leader in its class. More than a million units of this model in Saloon, Touring and Gran Turismo body styles, have already found their customers. Now, for the 2014 model year, another new chapter in this success story is poised to begin. Precise modifications to the design, the addition of a new inline-6 BMW Advanced Diesel engine for the Sedan, and even more of available equipment all raise the appeal of the BMW 5 Series family a notch higher.

ATTRACTIVE DESIGN

Let's face it – appearance does matter, and BMW knows it, as well. Fresh contour lines for the surround of the BMW kidney grille and redesigned lower air intakes reinforce the sporty appearance of the 2014 BMW 5 Series Sedan and Touring. The accentuated width of the rear end is underlined by an extra crease in the apron, as well as slim, sharply contoured and therefore more striking rear lights.

The 2014 BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo receives a modified front apron exuding presence and solidity. Its redesigned rear end creates a longer and lower visual impression. A three-dimensional surface design for the area around the license plate holder and a chrome strip in the rear apron add further depth to its dynamic character.

Xenon Adaptive headlights are fitted as standard on all 5 Series models, while Adaptive LED Headlights join the options list for 2014. Elsewhere, the side indicator lights are now integrated into the exterior mirrors. Also new in the BMW 5 Series are the Luxury Line and Modern Line, in addition to the popular M Sport choice, each containing select design and equipment features.

FUNCTIONALITY AT NEW LEVELS

New details lend further refinement to the premium impression of the new BMW 5 Series' interior and a new layer of functionality. The Central Display of the standard iDrive operating system is now bordered in the Sedan by chrome trim. The storage compart-

ments and cup holders in the centre console of these models now have increased capacity. A revised rear section increases the luggage capacity of the new BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo by 60 litres to 500 litre (European figures, preliminary). New exterior paint colours, light-alloy wheels, upholstery colours and interior trim elements for all BMW 5 Series models enhance their appeal and increase the scope for individualization.

EVEN FASTER AND FARTHER

Faster, more economical, cleaner: all the variants of the BMW 5 Series come with a raft of optimised details. The result is reduced fuel consumption (in some cases significantly), yet with no drop-off in sporting ability. Indeed, some models actually offer improved performance. Plus, all the engine variants already meet the stipulations of the EU6 exhaust gas standard not due to come into force until September 2014. To this end, the diesel models come with nitrogen oxide-reducing BMW BluePerformance technology as standard.



Electric Power Steering with standard Servotronic function – has been further honed to deliver an unrivalled balance between sporting performance and ride comfort.

In addition to Brake Energy Regeneration, the Auto Start-Stop function (also fitted in conjunction with the eight-speed automatic gearbox), Optimum Shift Indicator and ECO PRO mode, the suite of standard-fitted BMW EfficientDynamics technology now also includes a coasting mode (which disengages the powertrain), Proactive Driving Assistant to adjust the car's speed ahead of a change in speed limit, and the ECO PRO Route function, which can be selected via the optional Navigation system Professional. Meanwhile, extensive optimisation of the cars' aerodynamics – the drag coefficient (Cd factor) of the BMW 520d Sedan, for example, has been reduced to 0.25 – is one of the key factors in the latest advances made by the engineers in the area of efficiency.

POWER UNITS

The market launch of the new BMW 5 Series model family also heralds an expansion of its engine range. For instance, the BMW 518d has been added to the line-up as a new entry-level diesel variant. Its four-cylinder diesel with BMW TwinPower Turbo technology and 105 kW/143 hp can be ordered for both the new BMW 5 Series Sedan and the new BMW 5 Series Touring. Like the BMW 520d Sedan, the BMW 518d Sedan records impressive average fuel economy in the EU test cycle of 4.5 litres per 100 kilometres (62.8 mpg imp) and CO2 emissions of 119 grams per kilometre. And the model range now also includes the BMW 520d xDrive in both Sedan and Touring guises. This increases the number of models equipped with the intelligent all-wheel-drive system to seven (in the case of the BMW 5 Series Touring) and eight (for the BMW 5 Series Sedan). Four engine variants of the new BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo can likewise be combined with xDrive.

The top-of-the-line engine available for all members of the new BMW 5 Series model family is a new V8 unit with BMW TwinPower Turbo technology developing 330 kW/450 hp. The range of power plants available for the new BMW 5 Series Sedan and new BMW 5 Series Touring now comprises four petrol and six diesel units, and also encompasses two BMW M Performance Automobiles – the BMW M550d xDrive Sedan and BMW M550d xDrive Touring. Customers opting for the new BMW 5 Series Gran Turismo can choose from two petrol power plants and three diesels.

Joanna Krzyczkowska



The BMW 5 Series enables a scope of intelligent connectivity unique in the marketplace, allowing it to set the benchmark for in-car use of office applications.





WATCH AND LEARN

Put your Rolex back in its box. Caramel Quin reveals ten futuristic smart watches that are capable of so much more than keeping track of time.

Are you wearing a watch right now? Perhaps not, as since the birth of smartphones, timepieces have stopped being essential. And yet, over the next year or two, the same companies who brought us smartphones – with features we didn't know we needed –

want to transform our wrist-wear. The gadget industry has declared 2014 to be the year of wearable technology. Few normal people would want to go around in funny-looking specs such as Google Glass or Oculus Rift, but give them an elegant watch that can be customised at the touch of a button to suit

their style, and the trend becomes much more interesting.

All the watches featured here offer notifications of some sort – so you can leave your phone in your pocket or bag and still know who's calling, and often receive text messages, emails and social media updates too.

If you travel for business, notifications are great for keeping in touch discreetly. For example, you might not look at your phone in the middle of a meeting but you can glance at your watch for just long enough to read important news from a colleague. At home, the feature is equally important – if you've been away all week, it's best to avoid the modern tendency of staring at your smartphone over breakfast.

Motion-tracking features that monitor your fitness and sleep are good too – you don't need to pack a separate wristband if you want to track your runs. And it's worth considering one of the larger smart watches for the extra apps, which allow you to do things such as navigate new cities using maps directly on your wrist.

When choosing a smart watch, there are two key factors to consider. The first is the operating system – will it work with your Apple (iOS) or Android smartphone? The second is whether you'd like one that's elegant and stylish, or feature-packed but bulky and pricey.

Right now, you can't have both. Watches like the Samsung Galaxy Gear and Neptune Pine are impressive but they're large and have a "beam me up Scotty" sci-fi feel. On the other hand, fashion smart watches like Cookoo, Martian Notifier and MyKronoz ZeBracelet look great but their capabilities are much more basic. The Pebble is arguably the first smart watch to balance form and function.

Looking forward, all eyes are on Apple and Google to see if they enter the market. There's nothing yet from HTC and Nokia. Are these big players sitting back and waiting for the dust to settle before launching superb smart watches of their own? Or will the best ones come from brands that have been in this new product category from the beginning, such as Sony?

Innovations to watch include energy-efficient displays like Mirasol, seen in the Qualcomm Toq, and band-to-band communication spotted in the upcoming Razer Nabu. What's more, there's huge app potential for business – for example, you could automatically connect on LinkedIn when you shake someone's hand.

For now, buy a smart watch if you're a technophile, an early adopter or you simply like the idea of staying in touch without staring at your smartphone all the time. And if there isn't one that takes your fancy yet, just wait. There soon will be.



Something for the agent 007

SAMSUNG GALAXY GEAR

£299

samsung.com/uk

The most feature-packed smart watch you can buy in the UK today, the Galaxy Gear has the feel of a spy gadget. Unusually, it has a built-in 1.9-megapixel camera, as well as a 1.6-inch touchscreen, a speaker and a microphone. These let you make Dick Tracy-style phone calls from your wrist. On-screen notifications, voice control, activity tracking and device location are all there too, plus good apps such as RunKeeper and Evernote. Downsides are that it's bulky, battery life is short (about a day) and it's only compatible with specific Samsung devices – Galaxy Note tablets and Galaxy S4 smartphones. It's available in six colours – black, bronze, grey, neon, orange and white.



Analogue but good

COOKOO

£110

cookoowatch.com

Instead of a chunky touchscreen, Cookoo takes an analogue watch face and adds simple icons for smartphone notifications – incoming or missed calls, texts, Facebook messages and posts, Twitter mentions, calendar reminders and posts. Available in six colours (black, blue, pink, silver and white, plus limited edition green). It can also control your music, trigger

your phone camera, find your phone and warn you if your device is low on battery (iPhone or iPad only).

Cookoo works with all the latest Apple (OS 7) devices and select Android 4.3 devices from Samsung and HTC. The benefit of simplicity? It's waterproof and its battery life is measured in months, not hours.

Good price

SONY SMARTWATCH 2

£150

sony.co.uk

Most smart watches are either very basic or cost a fortune, but the Sony 2 is relatively affordable for a serious piece of wrist-wear. The features are impressive – it's splashproof, has a 1.6-inch touchscreen, battery life of three to four days, is compatible with most Android smartphones and tablets, and has NFC (near-field communication) for easy pairing with devices. There are lots of apps, including maps and notifications from Facebook and Twitter. The user interface also feels a lot like Android, so it's easy to get to grips with. Available in black with two wristband options.



Sports watch

I'M WATCH

£299

imsmart.com/en

This ambitious Italian-designed smart watch looks good and is compatible with numerous operating systems – iOS 4 and above, Android 4.0 and above and, unusually, Blackberry 10. It can also be paired with Zephyr HxM heart rate monitors to complement its activity tracking features. As you'd expect for the price, it boasts a 1.5-inch touchscreen. Apps include weather, stock markets, news, calculator, time zones and a compass, plus Facebook, Twitter and Instagram notifications. In theory, then, it's well featured, but in practice users have found its Bluetooth connection unreliable – and without reliable connectivity. It's not so smart. Available in black, blue, pink, red, yellow and white.



Open to collaboration

MYKRONOZ ZEBRACELET

€69

mykronoz.com

This is a Swiss fashion watch that keeps the smart stuff simple – so don't expect apps. Instead, ZeBracelet rings or vibrates when you receive a call and lets you answer or reject it. The watch's small, bright OLED display shows the caller's number and, if you're using an iPhone, their name. A built-in microphone and speaker lets you use ZeBracelet as a speakerphone and you can also stream music from a paired device. Its battery life is respectable, at three days, and it works with pretty much any phone (Bluetooth 2.1 or higher). Available in black, gold and white, it's basic but elegant and affordable.



Gorgeous looks

PEBBLE STEEL

US\$249

getpebble.com

The Pebble Steel is the best-looking of today's larger smart watches. The 1.3-inch display is ePaper, so it's pin sharp but monochrome like Kindle. And it's not a touchscreen – you navigate using its chunky buttons. Apps can be downloaded from Pebble's own store on Android or iOS, and range from email and social media notifications to one that tells you your Mercedes' tyre pressure. It's waterproof, and can go five to seven days between charges, but there's no mic or speaker for making calls. It is available in stainless steel and matte black.



Power of tradition

MARTIAN NOTIFIER

US\$129

martiannotifier.com

This is an attractive analogue watch with a few key smart features that work with both iOS and Android. Its small OLED display notifies you of calls (with caller ID), emails, texts, Facebook and Twitter. You can also programme different watch vibration patterns for each type of alert. The notifier doesn't have a built-in mic or speaker, but a watch button triggers your smartphone's speakerphone or voice control. The smart features have a battery life of five days, but the watch itself is powered separately with a conventional battery, so it will keep on ticking for two years. Available in black, red or white, it will be on the market within the next few months.



In the sun and the shade

QUALCOMM TOQ

US\$350

toq.qualcomm.com

Presented in either black or white, the Toq is both a savvy, waterproof smart watch and a showcase for Qualcomm's new Mirasol displays. The 1.6-inch colour touchscreen is reflective, not backlit. Bright sunlight is no problem – in fact, it makes easier to read, and there's a front light for use in the dark. Most displays use energy constantly – it requires energy just to bring up an image on the screen – but ePaper works differently. Once the image is there, it takes no power for it to stay there, so the Toq is very efficient. In fact, the battery lasts up to a week. It works with Android (4.0.3 and up). There are apps for clock faces, notifications, stock reports and weather updates, and clever features include wireless charging and optional wireless stereo headsets. But the screen is the star.



Discreet

RAZER NABU

Price TBC

razerzone.com/nabu

Coming soon, this innovative smart watch looks like a fitness band but secretly sports two displays and some interesting features. A small OLED "public icon screen" faces outwards and shows simple notifications as symbols. A larger OLED "private message screen" on the opposite side means only you can read the actual messages and alerts. Nabu also tracks fitness and sleep patterns and band-to-band communication offers social possibilities, like shaking hand to connect online. Nabu has a seven-day battery life and works with Android and iOS. Its price is to be confirmed, but early samples for app developers are only US\$49, so it shouldn't cost a fortune. Available in black, green, orange and white.



Instead of a smartphone

NEPTUNE PINE

US\$335

neptunepine.com

The other upcoming device to keep a look out for is this large, standalone smart watch from Canada that takes a SIM card and wants to replace your smartphone. Its 2.4-inch colour touchscreen is big enough to be fully functional – pop it off the wrist strap to type two-handed using the on-screen keyboard. It's a full Android Jelly Bean (4.1.2) smartphone in miniature, with two cameras for photos and video calls, plus it has GPS, an accelerometer, a gyroscope, a pedometer, and a digital compass (for activity tracking, maps and apps). The battery lasts five days on standby or for a day of heavy use. Available in black or white.



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4 HOURS IN... GLASGOW

This Scottish city offers not only interesting monuments, but also original restaurants and bars. **Rose Dykins** invites you to Glasgow.



At the Victorian Glasgow Necropolis you can admire the magnificent graves of Glasgow's most distinguished 19th-century citizens.

EAST END

Begin your tour just outside the city centre, at medieval clock tower Tolbooth Steeple. Walk eastwards on Gallowgate past Glasgow's Oldest Chippie (established in 1884) at number 161 – where you can pick up a deep-fried Mars bar – and a Celtic FC paraphernalia store that blares Irish folk music. This part of town is gritty, and a far cry from the historical tenement buildings of the centre, but it gives you a taste of the city's authentic character.

At 244 Gallowgate is the Barrowland Ballroom, with its iconic neon sign fringed with stars. Originally opened in 1934, it was severely damaged by a fire in 1958 before reopening in 1960, becoming the city's premier music venue, hosting everyone from Bob Dylan and David Bowie to Oasis and the Proclaimers. Its floor is said to be sprung on thousands of tennis balls cut in half to cushion the heels of twirling dancers – now a great surface for impassioned audiences to jump up and down on.

Beside Barrowland is the arched gateway to Barras market, which takes place on weekends from 10am to 5pm. Wares include vinyl records and bric-a-brac.

GLASGOW NECROPOLIS

Head back to Tolbooth Steeple and brace yourself for a steep, ten-minute walk up the High Street. Turn right on to John Knox Street, and stroll a short way down until you reach the cast-iron gates of the city's Victorian burial ground.

Follow the winding path to the top of the grassy mound, stopping to admire the magnificent graves of Glasgow's most distinguished 19th-century citizens.

The towering obelisks, giant stone angels and mausoleums reflect the social standing of those in the ground below, particularly the merchants who were revered at a time when Glasgow was a global centre of trade, the Second City of the British Empire.

At the top of the pile is the John Knox monument – an 18-metre-tall sandstone column topped off with a statue of the Protestant

leader clutching a bible. Keep your eye out for the resting place of Andrew McCall – though little is known about him, his grave is marked with a Celtic cross designed by Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (more on him later). Open daily 7am until dusk. glasgowcneopolis.org

TELLERS BAR AND BRASSERIE

Walk down the hill and turn right on to Ingram Street – at number 191 you'll find the Corinthian Club. Architect David Hamilton designed the building's lavish classical features in 1842, when it opened as the Glasgow and Ship bank.

Since then, the edifice has served as the Union Bank of Scotland and judiciary courts, before becoming the Corinthian in 1999, a venue with bars, event space, a restaurant and a casino.

The Tellers Bar and Brasserie is looked down upon by the eight-metre-wide glass Corinthian dome, surrounded by opulent ceiling panels. It's an elegant space to dine in, with plenty of things to cast your eye over – including chandeliers modelled on the original ones from its days as a banking hall, a long bar adorned in mirrored tiles and intricate gold-leaf plasterwork.

The international cuisine is very good (with dishes such as shellfish, sandwiches, steaks and salads) but it's the setting that you'll remember. Open daily around the clock; tel +44 (0)141 552 1101; thecorinthian-club.co.uk

CITY CHAMBERS

Turn right on to Frederick Street and walk straight on to George Square, where you'll find a monument of civic pride.

Wandering through the 120 rooms of Glasgow City Chambers, you will discover clues about the city's past – in the banqueting hall, for example, oil-painted murals of young men working at the docks on the River Clyde illustrate the city's status as an international shipbuilding hub in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Queen Victoria opened the City Chambers in 1888 and it has been the headquarters of the council ever since. The building boasts one of the largest marble staircases in Europe – a stunning feature that winds up to the third floor.

The warm sepia colours of the Carrara marble arches, thick leather wall coverings and brass chandeliers distinguish the interiors from other British institutions by giving it a European feel – London-based architect William Young was influenced by his time spent in Italy.



City Chambers, which is the headquarters of the city council, and the Mackintosh House, are the architectural symbols of Glasgow.



Open Monday to Friday 9am-5pm; free entry; complimentary tours twice daily at 10.30am and 2.30pm. glasgow.gov.uk

MACKINTOSH HOUSE

Hop in a taxi and ask for the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, which you'll reach in 15-20 minutes.

Next door is a narrow, concrete house – you will have seen Charles Rennie Mackintosh's art nouveau designs somewhere before, but coming face-to-face with the designer's house makes you realise how his work was light years ahead of his time.

Reassembled in 1981 by an expert team, the house contains original furniture, fixtures

and interiors that were designed by Rennie and his wife (and fellow artist) Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh, arranged exactly as they were in the original building, at 78 Southpark Avenue.

It's difficult to believe you're seeing a room from 1906, with its ultra-white interiors, minimalist feel and sleek lines that are modern even by today's standards. Mackintosh and McDonald would invite potential clients to the house for consultations and to showcase their work.

Open Tues-Sat 10am-5pm (last tour of house at 4pm), Sun 11am-4pm (last tour 3pm); free entry. University of Glasgow, 82 Hillhead Street; gla.ac.uk



ASK PETER

Letters

Piotr Kalita is related with air transport market for almost 20 years. He is specializing in corporate and diplomatic travel segment. Have a question? - ask Piotr. Mail your question to: redakcja@businessstraveller.pl

Where can I collect a rented car?

My boss is flying to London to the headquarters of the company. He is having a few meetings in England and France and is going to need a car. He wants the car to wait for him at the hotel on the outskirts of London. But the travel agent says the car can be rented at the airport or at the rental place in the city centre. Is it possible to arrange it in such a way that my boss will pick up the car and drop it off at the hotel? He has a busy schedule and not too much time.

Justyna

Dear Justyna,

It's true that the booking system in travel agencies and online reservations do not have extensive option allowing to provide the pick-up location for a rented car. Usually the pick-up and drop-off locations are limited to car rental stops at the airport and a few other places within the city centre. In some countries, including in Britain, there is a possibility to rent a car and get it delivered to a given address. Similarly it can also be collected from a specific address. Such services are provided, for instance, by AVIS. All your agent has to do is to make one additional phone call and give the required details to the company.

And while standard car reservations rarely involves a credit card backup, when a car is delivered to a given location, a credit card is required. The company needs to hire additional drivers (two cars get delivered to every location), that's why the costs of such rental are usually higher. Consequently, if you want to change the drop-off location for the car, the costs go up again. The car rental agreement is prepared ahead of time, and that's why providing the credit card number is required.

I highly recommend setting the drop-off date very carefully with the local branch of the rental company. Usually the exact hour isn't set, but the car is collected in a specific time interval, for instance 2.00 pm - 6.00 pm. The person renting the car has to be present at the time. You can also leave the keys at the reception desk in a hotel, but hotels may refuse to be an intermediary in such transactions.

Be sure to notify the agency of the fact that the car is to be taken to France, as it requires an additional insurance policy. You might also want to get satellite navigation with French road maps.

How to get an upgrade in BA?

I have a problem with my upgrade in British Airways. A while ago there was a promotion for a free-of-charge upgrade from business to first class. My company bought me a ticket, I checked that I had the good J class, but I wasn't upgraded. Two months ago, I wanted to get the upgrade for points from economy to business class, but the ticket was too cheap, and I wasn't upgraded either. What tickets should I buy to be upgraded in the future?

Łukasz

Dear Łukasz,

I have checked your tickets and indeed in both cases you weren't entitled to the upgrade (a change to the higher class of service). Your tickets were issued on special rates, which didn't allow to change the reservation.

The first ticket was issued in business J class. Until 21 March indeed there was a seasonal offer in BA allowing for a free-of-charge upgrade to first class (only one-way) with standard business class (booking code "J" and "Fully-flex" rate). However, in your case, it was a special business rate dedicated only for the employee from your corporation. The booking code (J) is the same, but the prices are lower, and the rates have restrictions when it comes to changes and returns, and so it's not fully flexible. That's why the ticket isn't eligible for an upgrade.

The second ticket was issued in economy class, also in promotional rate. The principle is the same. You can use the Avios points collected in the frequent flyer programme to get the upgrade, but only if the economy class ticket is fully flexible. This applies to rates with "H" booking code or higher. Your rate was much lower (the lowest booking code - "O"), so the upgrade was not possible.

I recommend buying ticket in higher rates and notify the staff of the fact that you want to make an upgrade when booking the ticket. You also need to take into account the fact that you need to comply with your corporate business travel policy, which requires you to use the special, negotiated rates. That's why a similar situation may happen to you in the future.

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