

Business Traveller ^{Poland}

DECEMBER 2019 / JANUARY 2020 N°12/2019-1/2020 (109) 9,60 PLN (8% VAT included)

NAIROBI

*Why it's worth investing
in the capital of Kenya*

THE MALDIVES

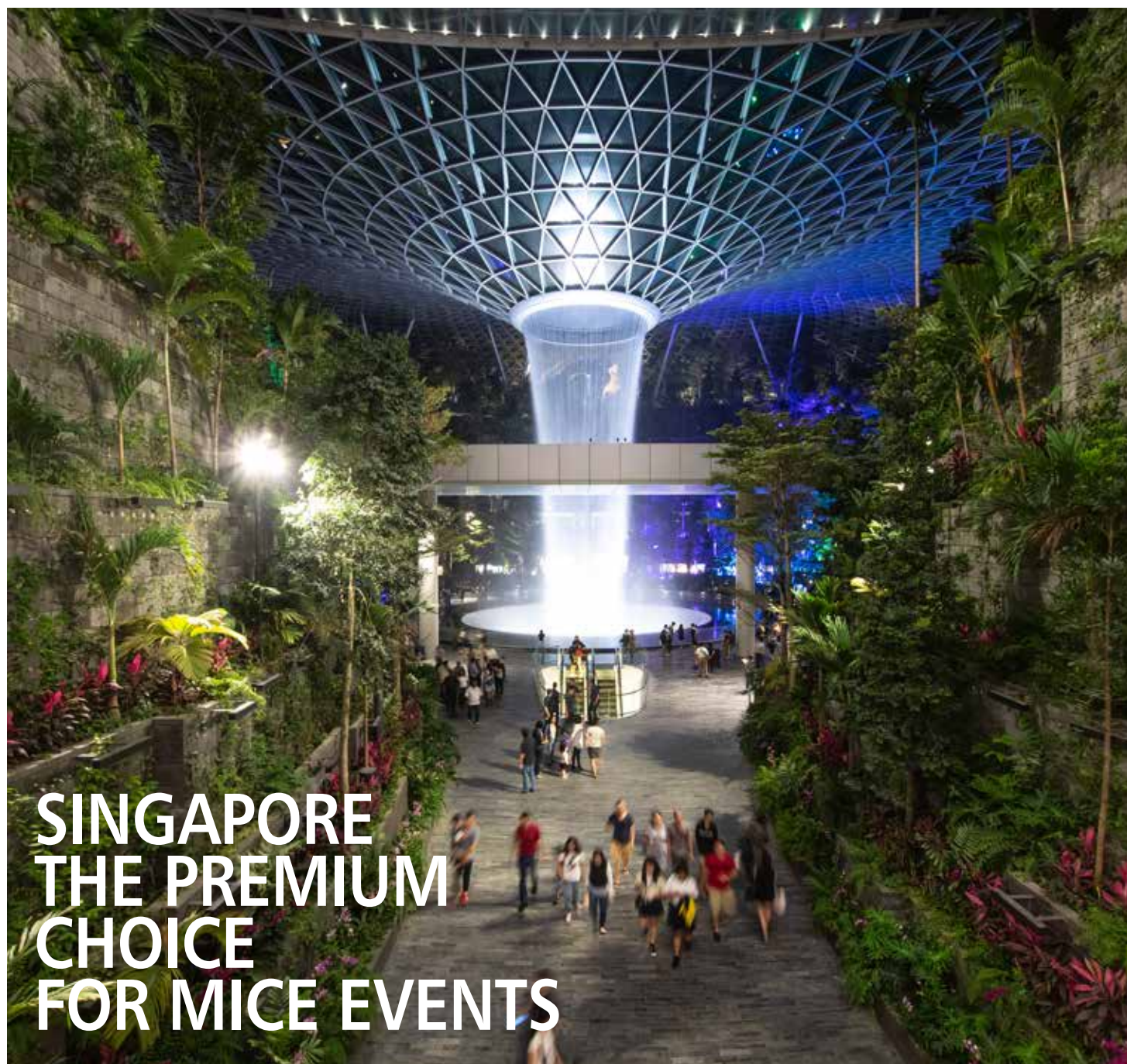
*The islands
with hotels aplenty*

VIENNA

*The best destination
of 2020!*

PLUS

*Hotel, restaurant,
and airline news*



**SINGAPORE
THE PREMIUM
CHOICE
FOR MICE EVENTS**

unlimited

SKIING

SKI PLUS CITY PASS STUBAI INNSBRUCK:
13 OŚRODKÓW NARCIARSKICH PLUS CITY
Z JEDNĄ KARTĄ



DESTINATIONS

18 ISLANDS OF PLENTY

The Maldives - the islands of numerous top-notch resorts

22 VIENNA FOR THE NEW YEAR

Austrian capital attracts fans of music, painting and design

28 PASTURES NEW

Is the capital of Kenya a land of new business opportunities?

64 NEW YORK: SEAPORT DISTRICT

The charming Big Apple's district where history coexists with modern shopping and dining spots



COVER STORY

12

Singapore - a premium business tourism destination



4 EDITORIAL

6 IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Hotel, restaurant, and airline news

34 NEW INCARNATION OF SHERATON GRAND WARSAW

The largest brand of Marriott International Group, has unveiled Sheraton Warsaw hotel following its major refurbishment

36 LOT AND ECO-SOLUTIONS

The Polish carrier upgrades its fleet and implements eco-friendly solutions

38 INTERVIEW

Freestyle Cruises with Norwegian Cruise Line Interview with Kevin Bubolz

TRIED AND TESTED

52 Mai House Saigon

56 Hotel Shinta Mani Shack, Siem Reap

60 Victoria Xiangthong Palace

66 ASK PETER

Piotr Kalita answers readers' questions



47

A MILESTONE YEAR

Anniversary editions, playful creations and innovative designs characterise 2019's best watches



40

START-UP CAPITAL

Paris is becoming increasingly appealing as a location for innovation



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tel.: +44 20 7821 2700
www.panaceapublishing.com
www.businesstraveller.com

In the US "Business Traveller" is published at 303 Fifth Avenue, 1308, NY 10016, tel.: 1 212 725 3500.
In Germany "Business Traveller" is published at Schulstrasse 34, 80634 Munich, tel.: 89 167 9971, fax: 89 167 9937. In Denmark "Business Traveller" is published at Rymarksvej 46, 2900 Hellerup, tel.: 45 3311 4413, fax: 45 3311 4414. In Hungary "Business Traveller" is published at 1074 Budapest, Munkas utca 9, tel.: 36 1266 5853. In Hong Kong "Business Traveller Asia-Pacific and China" are published at Suite 405 4/F Chinachem Exchange Square, 1 Hoi Wan Street, Quarry Bay, tel.: 852 2594 9300, fax: 852 2519 6846.
In the Middle East "Business Traveller Middle East" is published jointly by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dubai UAE, tel.: 9714 282 4060, and Perry Publications. In Africa "Business Traveller Africa" is published by Future Publishing (Pty) Ltd, PO Box 3355, Rivonia 2128, South Africa, tel.: 27 11 803 2040.

© 2009 Perry Publications Ltd – a subsidiary of Panacea Publishing International Ltd, United Kingdom



LET'S MEET IN THE LION CITY

Where can you organize a business meeting that will be remembered by its participants for a long time? Where would you take your employees for a team-building trip, a conference or an important seminar? Singapore continues to enjoy its status as a choice destination for quality events, incentive travel and team-building experiences. The city-state has it all for MICE organizers, from premium event venues and top notch hotels to an array of attractions, city tours and other experiences. Not to mention a wide choice of great restaurants and the fine weather all year round to top it all.

With a long history of hosting Asia's major events, as well as world-class facilities, Singapore delivers numerous innovative solutions, as well as exciting experiences for delegates of corporate meetings and incentive trips. Since 2012, Singapore has been continuously named "Best BTMICE City" at the prestigious TTG Travel Awards.

Singapore's heritage and rich culture is also reflected in the sophisticated accommodation standards offered by some of the best hotels in the city. The iconic Raffles Singapore I, the exquisite The Fullerton, the luxurious Shangri-La Hotel or Four Seasons with its superb location and Michelin-starred dining options, are a guarantee of a unique stay in the Lion City. It's impossible not to mention the iconic Marina Bay Sands with 2560 rooms, shopping arcades, extensive event venues, restaurants, as well as a spectacular infinity pool, viewing deck and rooftop bar at 57 floors high. Wishing you wonderful journey in the coming year, I do hope you will find time to visit the exciting Lion City.

Marzena Mróz

MARZENA MRÓZ
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



HOTEL & SPA

NOSALOWY PARK

ZAKOPANE



A new hotel in the center of Zakopane
with a restaurant by **Wojciech Modest Amaro**



HEART

by AMARO

GRAND OPENING IN MARCH 2020

www.nosalowypark.pl

www.heartbyamaro.pl



New KLM lounge in Amsterdam

Five different "Dutch landscapes" on the area of 6,800 sqm, culinary demonstrations, drinks inspired by KLM's history, sleeping cabins, showers, a terrace overlooking the runway, personal and virtual assistants, as well as sensory reality cabins - these are just some of the attractions awaiting guests at the Dutch carrier's new lounge.

The Non-Schengen Crown Lounge in Amsterdam aims to become the best airport lounge in the world. Accommodating up to 1500 guests, the lounge caters to KLM's most important customers travelling on intercontinental flights or other flights outside the Schengen area. The space features numerous personalized servi-

NOSALOWY PARK HOTEL & SPA ZAKOPANE

Wojciech Modest Amaro, the first Michelin-starred chef in Poland, will soon open Heart by Amaro - his own signature restaurant, this time located in Zakopane. This joint project of the world's most renowned Polish chef and Zakopane-based Nosalowy Group, will be part of the new five-star Nosalowy Park Hotel & SPA Zakopane. The opening of the hotel and restaurant is planned for the 2019/2020 winter season. Heart by Amaro is the heart of unique modern gastronomy immersed in the nature of Podhale region. According to Amaro, with this project he is fulfilling his dream of going back to the nature and Polish hospitality. The restaurant will be an open house to anyone, but especially to those wishing to explore Modest Amaro's personal recipes for dishes he has perfected over the years with one goal in mind: to make them as delicious as possible. To make sure that everyone feels at ease in the restaurant, Amaro proposes both share dishes and those ordered individually from the menu. For the young gourmets, the renowned Polish chef has prepared a special menu called "Palce Lizać" (Yum-Yum), based exclusively on organic ingredients. Heart by Amaro is a cuisine created out of love for people, respect for high quality ingredients and passion in discovering the regional wealth of the Tatra Mountains. heartbyamaro.pl; nosalowypark.pl





ces, technological innovations, as well as a brand new catering concept. The was put into service only a few weeks ago as part of the celebrations of KLM's 100th anniversary.

KLM's ambition is to create the most attractive airport lounge in the world; one that brings the brand to life. The new lounge concept ties in seamlessly with KLM's strategy which is to provide the ultimate hospitality experience, innovation and perfect customer service. The new lounge greatly contributes to maintaining long-term relationships with its customers, while providing a unique opportunity to welcome new customers.

One of the new changes customers notice is the relocation of the entrance to the 'Holland Boulevard' – between E and F piers – instead of the former location one level up. Thanks to its impressive entrance, the lounge is very easy to find. An impressive glass, illuminated window features nearly 5,000 miniature Dutch Delft porcelain houses that the airline has been offering to its business class passengers as a 'thank you' gift for many years now.



AURORA BOREALIS

The Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis is a light phenomenon observed in the upper atmosphere near the Earth's magnetic poles. It occurs at high latitudes, mainly behind the arctic circles, although in favourable conditions it can be visible even around the 50th parallel. In the northern hemisphere, the phenomenon is called Aurora Borealis, while the southern aurora is called Aurora Australis. Winter months are the best time to see this unique light spectacle in the night sky. To have the best chance to observe the Northern Lights, you should visit Norway, Sweden, Finland or Iceland.

PRESS MATERIALS

WITH LOT TO OSTRAVA

The upcoming year will bring new direct flights to the schedule of LOT Polish Airlines. On 30 March, the Polish national airline will be launching a new service from Warsaw to Ostrava, Czechia. In this way, LOT will be the only traditional air carrier to fly to and from Czechia's third largest city. LOT's new offer includes five flights a week offering convenient connections to other destinations in Europe, Asia and North America. With the connection to the Warsaw hub, passengers travelling from Ostrava will gain access to more than 111 destinations across several continents. The flights on this route will be operated by Bombardier Q400 and Embraer 170/175 aircraft offering 70-82 seats in three cabin classes. Tickets are now on sale; lot.com





Sephora on the go

Sephora starts the 2020 carnival season with new palettes of eye shadows - a perfect Christmas gift, especially for those ladies who travel a lot. Huda Beauty Mercury Retrograde (PLN299) palette will take you to infinity and beyond with 18 incredible galactic inspired colours and textures to deliver infinite possibilities. Available exclusively at Sephora stores. The set features 9 buttery mattes, 6 high-shine creamy metallics saturated with electrifying pearls, 1 glitter powder charged with glass pearls and silver sparkles and 2 sheer multi-reflective shadows for a multidimensional glow. You can choose among such inspiring names as Cosmic, Utopia, Ultraviolet, Mercury, Galaxy, Supermoon, Supernova or Karma.

Sephora also offers colour palettes by a renowned Nars beauty company, inspired by the iconic Studio 54 club. The limited edition contains 12 highly pigmented eye shadows in shades ranging from neutral to more bold ones with matte, satin and metallic finish. Their names: We are Family, Shake Shake Shake, Doctor Love, Ring my Bell, Love Train, Last Party, Hot Stuff, will certainly leave no lady indifferent.

Sephora perfumeries also offer products by Natasha Denona brand. The Mini Gold palette (PLN109) products featuring gold and green matte finish, as well as metallic and duo chrome finish, will certainly satisfy the tastes of chic ladies. "Shadows should be applied to eyelids with a brush or fingertips," advises Sergiusz Osmański, the artistic and PR director at Sephora Poland. To enhance the effect of metallic shadows you can also use a damp brush; sephora.pl



LEONARDO HOTELS

HIGH POTENTIAL

The Leonardo Hotels Group is growing fast. In 2019, the group has significantly expanded its portfolio, offering its guests over 200 hotels in Europe, the British Isles and Israel. The last few months have been exceptionally fruitful, starting with the acquisition of the Jurys Inn (the UK and Czech Republic) and Apollo (Netherlands) hotel chains and ending with taking over four London hotels and one Rome property - all situated in prime locations.

Warsaw is still the easternmost city, where the group has decided to actively promote its product. It has been the third and once again a very successful year for the Leonardo Royal Warsaw Hotel located at 45 Grzybowska Street, in the very centre of the Polish capital city. Analysing the current state of the hospitality industry in Poland, the significant growth in the number of hotel rooms, as well as the ongoing price war, Leonardo Hotels is proud to have a solidly built portfolio of regular customers as well as higher than expected revenues. Therefore, it seems justified to launch in Warsaw the 9th hotel owned by Fattal Properties under the NYX brand in the prestigious Varso Place building. The ambitious hotel group is clearly planning to expand further. Where in Poland will Leonardo Hotels invest next? We are waiting on our toes for this information.




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Next generation is here

It's no use wasting your time on inefficient cleaning, and nowadays we seem to demand more from our equipment than ever before. All the specs need to be excellent, while the comfort of use as high as possible. We are ready to shell out more for a smartphone or laptop, if promised it won't need an upgrade soon. You can also demand more from a vacuum cleaner, especially now with Christmas round the corner.

A vacuum cleaner should be a handy device, so why does it need a power cord? What's more, it should easily reach inaccessible spots and under low furniture. A good one will also be able to move backwards instead of sticking up into the carpet. The perfect one will illuminate the darkest and hard to reach nooks and crannies. Note that raw power isn't enough. What counts is durability. Philips SpeedPro Max Aqua 8000 can operate in Turbo mode for 28 minutes. For a cordless vacuum cle-

10



aner, that is a very long time. What is more, in a normal mode this unique vacuum cleaner can operate for as many as 80 minutes on one charge, which means that it can vacuum about 125 sqm of floor. SpeedPro Max Aqua 8000 vacuums and cleans the floor at the same time. One water tank is enough to clean up to 60 sqm of floor space; www.philips.pl



WINTER HOLIDAYS AT ARIES HOTEL & SPA WISŁA

Built at the source of the Vistula River and surrounded by lush nature of the Beskid mountains, the luxury Aries Hotel & Spa Wisla offers stylish and extremely comfortable rooms whose design is inspired by work of local craftsmen. Here, modernity combines with folklore, creating a unique space for relaxation. In the hotel's Polka restaurant, every meal turns into a small celebration and all flavours, aromas and colours please your senses. Meanwhile, the Aries Spa is a perfect spot for those wishing to rejuvenate their body and mind. With treatments and massages based on natural products by prestigious Polish brands you will soon feel refreshed and reinvigorated. Add to this the spa area with thermal pool, saunas, gym and outdoor jacuzzi overlooking the forest to guarantee ultimate relaxation. The hotel has two playrooms for the youngest guests and offers a number of activities performed under the watchful eye of fun promoters. Note that Aries Hotel & Spa Wisla is located very close to ski slopes, making it the perfect choice for an active winter holiday in the mountains. Fans of good hotels may have heard of Aries brand thanks to its other outstanding property located in Zakopane. This alone seems to be the best recommendation for the new Aries hotel, this time situated in the charming town of Wisla. Aries Hotel & Spa Wisla, ul. Czarne 3; AriesWisla.pl

MAGIC FOAM IN YOUR HAND LUGGAGE

Splat oral care foam 2in1 is a brand new product for the teeth and gums, which can be especially useful while on the go. With its foamy texture, the product easily and effectively removes soft bacterial plaque and food residues from the enamel surface, even in places inaccessible to the toothbrush. Splat 2in1 foams help keep the pH of the oral cavity within the optimum range for up to four hours, while the small 50ml bottle is perfectly suitable for the hand baggage. The product doesn't take up much space, so you can take it with you anywhere: to work, school or on the plane. The foam gently cleanses your mouth, is safe even for the most sensitive teeth, and contains no abrasive substances.



PRESS MATERIALS

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COVER STORY

12

SINGAPORE THE PREMIUM CHOICE FOR MICE EVENTS



Singapore's presence on the global business stage makes it a very attractive business tourism destination. Without a doubt a leading, world-class business city and MICE destination, the Lion City offers extensive infrastructure, multicultural experiences and world-class entertainment

Where can you organize a business meeting that will be remembered by its participants for a long time? Where would you take your employees for a team-building trip, a conference or an important seminar? Singapore continues to enjoy its status as a choice destination for quality events, incentive travel and team-building experiences, offering a wide choice of options: from premium event venues and top notch hotels to an array of attractions, city tours and other experiences. Not to mention a wide choice of great restaurants and fine weather all year round, to top it all.

LET'S MEET IN THE LION CITY

With a long history of hosting Asia's major events, as well as world-class facilities, Singapore delivers numerous innovative solutions, as well as exciting experiences for delegates of corporate meetings and incentive trips. Since 2012, Singapore has been continuously named "Best BTMICE City" at the prestigious TTG Travel Awards.

The city-state offers over 1,000 venues, unique event spaces and green venues with versatile facilities. Among the most popular are the Marina Bay Sands® Expo & Convention Centre, Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre and the Singapore EXPO. All of them are suitable for large-scale international exhibitions and conferences, featuring state-of-the-art technology, as well as unique solutions, such as the ImmersiveAV Suite at Suntec, which features holograms and 360 degree projection screens.

Event organizers can also choose from a wide range of unique venues, including ArtScience Museum, Gardens by the Bay, Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore, Night Safari (one-of-the-kind 'Evening in the Wild' programme), Royal Albatross four-masted ship, Singapore Flyer observation wheel and Singapore Sports Hub. Then, there is the Resorts World Sentosa Singapore, Asia's ultimate leisure and MICE destination, which offers delegates unforgettable experiences at S.E.A. Aquarium, one of the world's largest aquariums, the Maritime Experiential Museum, →

Singapore's only maritime heritage museum, and Universal Studios Singapore.

QUALITY HOTELS

With more than 400 hotels and nearly 67,000 rooms, Singapore caters to every budget and preference – from no-frills accommodation to boutique hotels, modern business hotels and luxury beach resorts.

The city's largest hotel, the Marina Bay Sands, offers 2,561 rooms. The complex is known for its spectacular infinity pool, viewing deck and rooftop bar at 57 floors high. The second largest – Swissotel The Stamford, has 1,261 rooms, while Mandarin Orchard Singapore, the third largest hotel in Singapore, offers 1,077 rooms. One of the latest additions to Singapore's hotel portfolio is the 654-room JW Marriott Hotel Singapore South Beach with a grand ballroom available for various large-scale events. Another one is the Park Hotel Alexandra, offering 442 botanical themed rooms and four meeting spaces for up to 150 guests.

Singapore's heritage and rich culture is also reflected in the sophisticated accommodation standards offered by some of the best hotels in the city. The iconic Raffles Singapore, the exquisite The Fullerton, the luxurious Shangri-La Hotel or Four Seasons with its superb location and Michelin-starred dining options, are a guarantee of a unique stay in the Lion City.

FUN AND LEISURE

Singapore offers a wide range of unconventional tours and picturesque meeting spots for team building exercises, group experiences and leisure trips. For an unforgettable and memorable experience for delegates and incentive group, you can plan a day of fun in the sun at Sentosa, a popular island resort off Singapore. The island also offers thrilling team-building activities such as an amazing race around Universal Studios theme park, daring obstacle courses at Megazip Adventure Park as well as an indoor skydiving at iFly Singapore. For the less active groups,

Singapore is also a major venue for important and widely acclaimed global business events.





visit the magical S.E.A. Aquarium with the world's largest acrylic panel in its Ocean Gallery or sip a cocktail with stunning views at Tanjong Beach Club.

For groups interested in a unique dining experience, you can hop onto a GOURMETbus to sample Michelin Bib Gourmand fare while enjoying the sights of the city in a luxury coach tour. Do leave some time for your group to pick up some interesting local finds at Design Orchard complex, which houses over 60 stores of local brands. Make sure to also experience multi-cultural Singapore by exploring the various cultural neighbourhoods such as Little India, Chinatown and Joo Chiat. Explore the local Southeast Asia arts scene by going on the "Highlights of the Gallery Tour", which

**The Lion City
is the world-class
business city and
MICE destination.**

takes you through collections and exhibitions of DBS Singapore Gallery and UOB Southeast Asia Gallery.

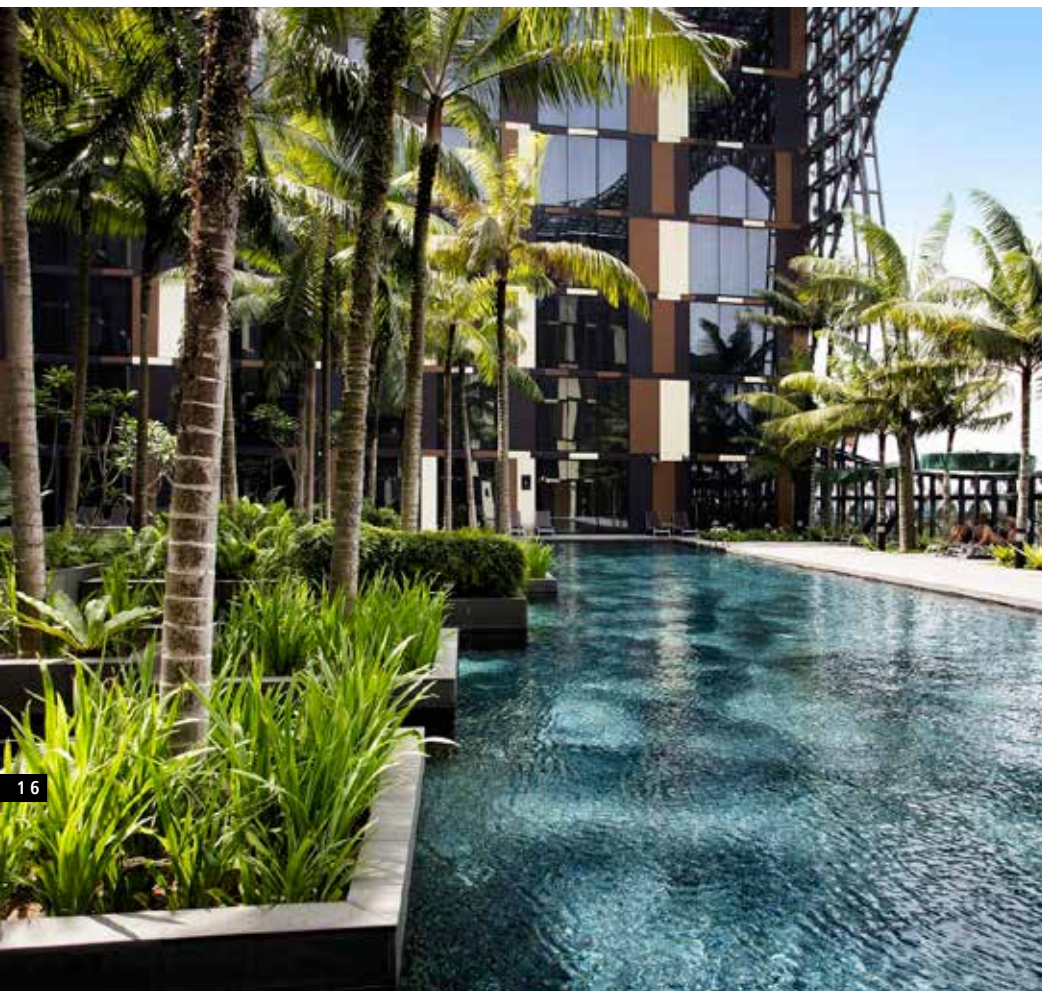
PASSAGE TO ASIA

One of the main reasons why Singapore is the world's premium MICE destination is that it's conveniently located at the centre of Southeast Asia's air and sea lanes and naturally positioned as a gateway between Eastern and Western cultures, making it an ideal home to many of the world's leading companies. The island's extensive global trade and communica-

tions networks provide market access to the region of Asia Pacific and the rest of the world. Singapore is Asia's most competitive country according to World Economic Forum's Global Competiveness Report 2018. Within a 3 to 4-hour flight radius, businesses operating from Singapore can gain access to a pool of more than 600 million consumers living in Southeast Asia.

JEWEL CHANGI AIRPORT

Singapore Changi Airport, the multi-time winner of the Skytrax Award for the world's best airport, plays a crucial role here, linking Singapore to some 400 cities in more than 100 countries by 300 airlines, and providing global connectivity and unique convenience for MICE attendees. →



You can also fly directly to Singapore from Poland with LOT Polish Airlines. The flight takes less than 10 hours and is operated by comfortable B787 Dreamliner aircraft.

One of the major Singapore novelties this year was the launch of a mixed-use development called Jewel Changi Airport. The complex includes gardens and attractions, a hotel, aviation facilities and 300 retail and dining facilities. Covering a total gross floor area of 134,000 sqm and spanning 10 storeys, the Jewel also includes the Rain Vortex, the world's largest indoor waterfall; the Forest Valley, an indoor garden spanning five storeys; and Canopy Park at the topmost level, featuring gardens and leisure facilities.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Singapore's success has been enhanced by its willingness to embrace

One of the major Singapore novelties this year was the launch of a mixed-use development called Jewel Changi Airport.

emerging technologies. A super-fast, next-generation broadband network already reaches 99 per cent of homes and businesses in Singapore. Ranked by the World Economic Forum as Asia's first and world's second most "network ready" country, Singapore enables the innovative use of technologies across the event life cycle, from planning and on-site discussions, to networking and sharing information to create awe-inspiring experiences.

SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE

MICE organisers can plan with peace of mind knowing Singapore is one of the world's safest cities. Singapore

has an unswerving commitment to digital security, health security, personal and infrastructural safety, and provides a safe and secure foundation for MICE events.

In fact, Singapore is the third safest country in Asia, according to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2019. With a Mass Rapid Transit subway system and bus system connecting places islandwide, and close to 30,000 official taxis servicing a population of fewer than 5.5 million people, business visitors can easily travel from place to place within the island state.

Offering a wide choice of options for MICE sector, the world's latest technologies, centuries-old traditions, as well as the world's best luxury hotels and top-notch entertainment options, one can say without a doubt that the Lion City is the world's premium hub for MICE events.



INSPIRE Global Programme

The Singapore Tourism Board recently launched INSPIRE Global aimed at attracting potential visitors from the MICE sector. INSPIRE Global offers a selection of over 60 complimentary experiences for MICE groups visiting Singapore.

The complimentary group experiences were specially curated and tailored with the MICE visitors' profile in mind. It ranges from dining to social networking, from attractions to thematic tours, as well as team building experiences. These incentives were designed to complement groups' itineraries and provide exclusive experiences that showcase the best of what Singapore has to offer.

Some examples include visitors getting to create their own bespoke cocktail using herbs and spices found in Singapore, right in the heart of a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Botanic Gardens. Or groups keen on discovering Singapore's Silicon Valley can get to enjoy an insider's tour of the One North vicinity, with exclusive fireside sharing sessions by founders and start-ups of successful businesses.

MICE groups that are travelling to Singapore from now until 31 December 2021 can apply for the INSPIRE programme. These groups should have a minimum of 20 foreign attendees and stay for at least three days in Singapore. Interested groups should register their interest by 31 March 2021.

For more details, please visit www.VisitSingapore.com/mice.



WORDS APRIL HUTCHINSON

BELOW: Cheval Blanc Randheli;
Intercontinental Maldives
Maamunagau Resort



When it comes to sheer escapism, it's hard to beat the Maldives.

But with so many resorts to choose from, how do you decide the right one for you? Here are some suggestions, whether you are planning a family holiday, a pampering break or even a corporate gathering.

BEST FOR... SPA LOVERS

In terms of wellness, it's hard to match Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru (fourseasons.com), set in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Landaa's Spa and Ayurvedic Retreat is one of the most comprehensive spas in the country and offers Anti Gravity yoga, a Yoga Energy Trail, and Panchakarma, an ayurvedic cleansing programme. Request one of the redesigned and extended over-water villas, each with a 12-metre private pool, and sign up to Manta on Call so the resort team can contact you as soon as these graceful creatures are spotted.

Part of the exclusive LVMH hotel group, Cheval Blanc Randheli (chevalblanc.com) comes with an entire spa island, accessible only by boat and featuring Guerlain treatments, its own pool, hammam and Spa Bar. Elsewhere, Huvaafen Fushi (huvaafenfushi.com) features the world's first-ever underwater spa, with treatments that match the location in their brilliance.

BEST FOR... FAMILIES

With its Explorers Kids Club – a circus-themed area with trampoline, splash park, gourmet kitchen and a stage for performances – Niyama (niyama.com) has one of the most comprehensive family offerings. Four different “tribes” are welcomed at its kids' clubs: Globetrotters (12-24 months), Adventurers (three- to four-year-olds), Voyagers (five- to



JW Marriott
Maldives Resort
and Spa

Islands of plenty

There's more to the Maldives than honeymoons – here are our resort picks to suit all types of travellers

DESTINATIONS



seven-year-olds) and Pioneers (eight to 12), with activities ranging from lullabies in Dhivehi, the local language, to dolphin spotting and cookery lessons.

Another option is the Residence Maldives at Dhigurah (cenizaro.com), a new 173-villa resort linked to a sister island by a 1km bridge. The Turtle Kids Club has a raft of daily activities, there's movie time daily at 4pm and a Bubblemaker Dive programme (eight years and up).

Another child-friendly option is the Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort and Spa on Furanafushi Island, North Malé Atoll, a 15- to 20-minute speed-boat ride from the international airport. It recently completed a US\$20 million renovation and has cottage accommodation designed for families, plus the Sheraton Adventure Club for kids.

Look for resorts offering all-inclusive packages to help manage the budget – Angsana Velavaru (angsana.com) offers Live for Family Fun, which includes daily breakfast, lunch and dinner (free meals for kids under 12), ice cream and snorkelling lessons, among other things.

BEST FOR... PARTY LOVERS

Not all resorts in the Maldives are full of honeymooners. With its contemporary style, Amilla Fushi (amilla.mv) has always set out to be a place where groups of friends and families can hang out together. The focus is on combining toes-in-the-sand relaxation alongside DJs, live acts and the best parties in the Maldives – last year's festivities included Rita Ora appearing on New Year's Eve with Nick Grimshaw DJing.

Finolhu (finolhu.com) is another equally sociable island choice, with regular events encouraging guests to gather, such as pool parties, movie nights and the weekly White Party, where all guests dress in white, enjoy sunset drinks and dance into the early hours.

If a group of friends want space to spread out – and splash out – try the Rock Star Villa at the Hard Rock Hotel Maldives (hardrockhotelmaldives.com), which has its own infinity pool, a tuk-tuk bar on the terrace and, via the Sound of Your Stay, the chance to curate your own soundtrack.

20



FROM TOP: Niyama; Hard Rock Hotel Maldives; Finolhu



DESTINATIONS

FROM TOP:
Crossroads
event hall;
surfing
at Como
Maalifushi



BEST FOR... MEETINGS

A country made up of small islands, space is at a premium in the Maldives, so don't expect to be able to hold a huge conference here. However, new on the scene is Crossroads (crossroadsmaldives.com), the country's first integrated resort development and one of its most ambitious projects to date. Close to the capital, Malé, and the international airport, the project includes easily one of the largest rentable spaces in the country, the Crossroads Event Hall, a state-of-the-art, multipurpose 326 sqm venue that can hold 400 delegates. Also part of the nine-island development are newcomers the Hard Rock Hotel and SAii Lagoon Maldives Curio Collection by Hilton (saiiresorts.com), which are both connected to the main Crossroads island by bridge or the inter-island water transportation system. Dining venues at both hotels can host large group dinners and the Hard Rock also has 1,300 sqm of indoor and outdoor event space, including a poolside terrace and function lawn.

A ten-minute speedboat ride from the airport is the long-established Kurumba Maldives (kurumba.com), a 180-room resort with eight restaurants, three bars, and Bougainvillea Hall, holding 200 guests.

BEST FOR... SURFERS

The Maldives might not be the first place you think of for big surf breaks, but it's gathered quite a

21

NEW PROPERTIES

Intercontinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort

This 81-villa property opened in September close to the Baa Atoll, classified as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, which means more opportunity to enjoy the incredibly rich marine life. Facilities include a six-room over-water spa and six restaurants and bars, including the Retreat, an adults-only venue with an infinity pool. maldives.intercontinental.com

Baglioni Resort Maldives

Bringing Italian flair to an island idyll, Baglioni opened its 96-villa tropical escape last month. Expect bed linens by Frette, sparkling wine by Ferrari Trento, and spa treatments by Insium, an Italian vegan spa brand. Hang out at the pool bar, enjoy three restaurants and explore the beautiful waters of the surrounding Dhaalu Atoll. Diving and snorkelling are among the activities offered. baglionihotels.com

Hard Rock Hotel Maldives

Open since September, this hotel is so close to Malé that you could be on the beach within 15 minutes of leaving the airport. Part of the Crossroads integrated resort, the 178-room property aims to keep you busy with the Hard Rock Cafe, Body Rock gym, Rock Spa, Hard Rock Roxity Kids Club and Teen Spirit Club. You can even order a Crosley turntable to play records in your room, or borrow a Fender guitar. hardrockhotelmaldives.com

JW Marriott Maldives Resort and Spa

Opening on the island of Vagaru, Shaviyani Atoll, this month, JW Marriott's Maldives property will wow with impressive gourmet offerings across six restaurants, including one in a treetop setting, Kaashi. The property comprises 60 villas – the largest is 234 sqm – all with their own pools, plus a wine room housing 300 labels, an open-air cinema, an adults-only pool and club, a kids' club and spa. marriott.co.uk

DESTINATIONS

partner with Tropicsurf, whose team can take you out to tackle the mighty Yin Yang, one of the country's most famous breaks.

BEST FOR... GOING GREEN

Eco-minded travellers should head for Soneva Fushi (soneva.com), where sustainability and ethical practices are core values, from auditing its impact on the environment and counter-balancing this via a carbon tax, to teaching local children to swim. Soneva Fushi has its own glass factory, which takes in glass from neighbouring resorts and upcycles it into attractive tableware, ornaments and pieces of art.

Gili Lankanfushi (gili-lankanfushi.com) is one of the country's other best-loved eco-resorts, and is set to reopen on December 1, with ten of its 45 villas having been totally recreated and accredited to silver standard by Earth Check.

A newer contender for the eco crown is Joali (joali.com), which opened last year and offsets all carbon emission from guests' stays with tree planting on local islands.

BEST FOR... FOODIES

The days of the Maldives being stuck in a culinary cul-de-sac are long gone; top island resorts come with top dining concepts. The St Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort (stregismaldives.com) has six restaurants but is bringing a global roster of gourmet chefs to the island to make it even more of a foodie haven. Chefs booked to visit between November and March include David Gil Rovira from Tickets in Barcelona, Dutch Michelin-starred chef Jonathan Zandbergen and French two-star chef Guillaume Bracaval.

Elsewhere, vegans are increasingly being catered for. Amilla Fushi (amilla.mv) has paired up with chef Tora Olsson to launch dishes combining molecular gastronomy and organic plant-based ingredients, while the little resort island of Mirihi (mirihi.com) now has vegan cookery classes.

For authentic local food, head to Milaidhoo Island (milaidhoo.com), where Ba'theli serves only Maldivian dishes, including curries of lobster, slow-braised beef and chicken.



reputation for it in recent years. Como Maalifushi (comohotels.com) has embraced the trend, offering one of the country's most comprehensive and geographically diverse surfing programmes. The only resort in the entire Thaa Atoll, its Surf Pass sees surfers travel between three atolls in a speedboat in search of breaks such

as "Surf Machines" at Laamu, "Kasabu" at Dhaalu, and "Farms" at Thaa. A full-time guide from high-end surf brand Tropicsurf is based at the resort from April to October, when the biggest swells come through.

Also worth a look is Six Senses Laamu (sixsenses.com/laamu), the only resort in the Laamu Atoll and also a

FROM TOP:
Joali, St Regis
Vommuli Resort



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Known for its excellent coffee and the legendary Sacher cake, the capital of Austria is home to numerous excellent cafes. Rumour says, the tradition of drinking coffee was started in Vienna by Polish diplomat Jerzy Kulczycki. Opera music lovers love visiting this remarkable city for the excellent repertoire of the Vienna Opera, while the admirers of “highbrow” art come here to see the vast collections of Albertina or The Leopold museums, as well as the highly valued Art History Museum. Here are some of the trendies venues you need to see when visiting Vienna in 2020.

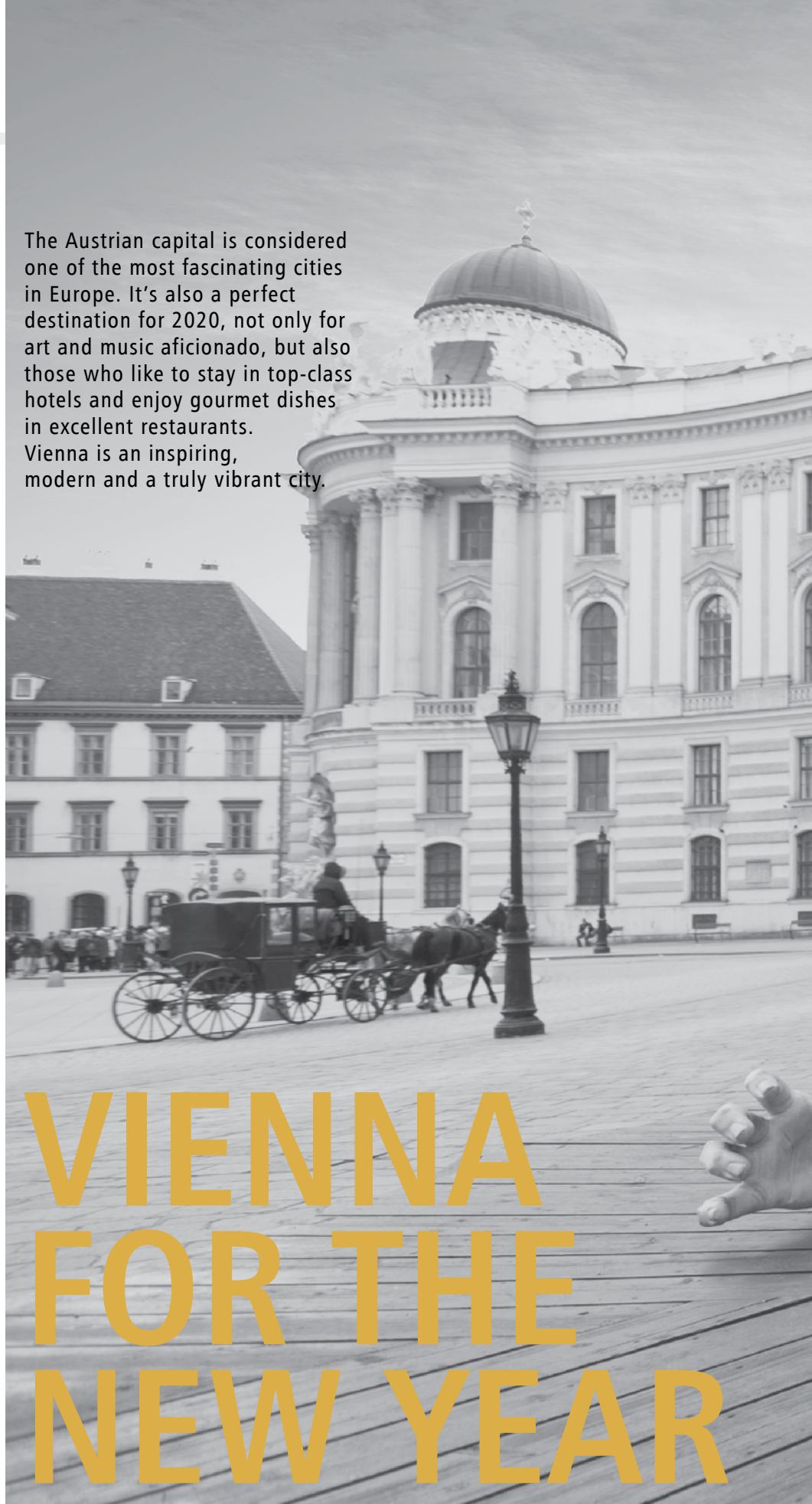
VIENNA STATE OPERA

In the 2019/20 season, this one of the world's most prominent opera houses will present 58 different operas and 21 ballet productions. In February, it will stage “Fidelia” - the only opera composed by Ludwig van Beethoven, in May “Cosi fan tutte” by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and in June “A Masked Ball” by Giuseppe Verdi. Some of the most renowned principal conductors of the Vienna State Opera included Gustav Mahler (1897-1907), Richard Strauss (1919-1924), Herbert von Karajan (1956-1964) and Claudio Abbado (1986-1991).

The Opera House was the first public building to be built on the Ringstrasse in 1869. Designed by architects August Sicard von Sicard and Edward van der Null, it features impressive marble floors, as well as sculptures and frescoes made by Moritz von Schwind. Once a year, the audience and the stage are transformed into a huge dance hall for the grand debutante ball held in the presence of the President of the Republic.

Tickets to shows stages at the Vienna State Opera are best purchased online. Those less interested in music, but more in architecture can take a guided tour of this magnificent building. In April, May, June and September, opera and ballet performances can also be watched live in the open air. Broadcast on a 50sqm screen on Herbert von Karajan's square in front of the opera, they allow you to experience the best pieces of classical music for free.

The Austrian capital is considered one of the most fascinating cities in Europe. It's also a perfect destination for 2020, not only for art and music aficionados, but also those who like to stay in top-class hotels and enjoy gourmet dishes in excellent restaurants. Vienna is an inspiring, modern and a truly vibrant city.



**VIENNA
FOR THE
NEW YEAR**



WORDS MARZENA MRÓZ

SECESSION BUILDING

This majestic building with a distinct golden dome and intricate decorations, was built in 1897 on the initiative of a group of young Viennese artists who founded the Vienna Secession art movement. Those included such prominent names as Gustav Klimt, Josef Hofmann, Koloman Moser and Joseph Maria Olbrich. The building became one of the symbols of the later trend in art called Art Nouveau and has since been quoted as a model example of its architecture. Today, you can visit this unique place and, among others, see the beautiful frieze painted by Klimt in 1902 for an exhibition dedicated to Beethoven. Under the characteristic golden dome adorned with laurel leaves, several exhibitions of contemporary art are held every year, as planned by its founders. The shape of the building is very original and the Art Nouveau characteristic floral and animal motifs intertwine in a stunning way.

ART HISTORY MUSEUM

One of the world's largest galleries and home to an invaluable collection of European paintings, the building of Art History Museum was commissioned by Emperor Franz Joseph I himself and opened in 1891. The huge collection includes a number of masterpieces belonging to the Habsburg family. You can find here, among others, such great works as "The Tower of Babel" by Peter Bruegel, "The Allegory of Painting" by Johannes Vermeer, "Madonna of the Meadow" by Raphael or a self-portrait by Rembrandt.

Until 19 January 2020, the museum holds an interesting exhibition entitled "Caravaggio & Bernini", which presents the revolutionary art of 17th century Rome. Nearly 70 masterpieces, mostly paintings and sculptures, are presented here in spacious rooms according to a certain scenario, highlighting the uniqueness and cohesion of the work of those two great artists. What unites the two world-famous masters is their realistic representation of nature. Both Caravaggio and Bernini combined reality and feelings, which at that time was a real novelty and later became a distinct feature of the Baroque. Among

Admirers of "highbrow" art come to Vienna to see the vast collections of the city's excellent museums.

numerous works loaned from museums worldwide you can find those that have never been publicly displayed before. Some of the most impressive works exhibited include Caravaggio's "David with the head of Goliath", "John the Baptist", "Narcissus" and "Boy Bitten by a Lizard". Admission to the exhibition must be booked in advance.

Das Loft restaurant / SO Vienna
One of the trendiest restaurants in Vienna recently, Das Loft is a perfect venue for delicious breakfast, lunch or

dinner, with exceptional views of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Located on the 18th floor of SO Vienna hotel, the restaurant boasts a Michelin star awarded for its exceptional gourmet cuisine and a great selection of wines. However, this place attracts not only food aficionados, but also those interested in modern art. This is because in addition to the exquisite menu, the restaurant features unique décor, part of which is an extraordinarily colourful ceiling by Pipilotti Rist. Also the modern and recently refurbished SO Vienna hotel is a perfect place for a weekend stay in the capital of Austria.

ALBERTINA

This largest residential palace of the Habsburg family, erected on one of the





last remaining sections of the fortifications of Vienna, the Augustinian Bastion, is now home to yet another museum.

The collection was started in 1776 by Duke Albert of Saxen-Teschen, the son-in-law of Empress Maria Theresa. At present, it encompasses over 60,000 works by 5,000 artists. Famous works such as Dürer's "Young Hare" and "Praying Hands", sketches for children's portraits by Rubens or masterpieces by Schiele, Cézanne, Klimt, Kokoschka, Picasso and Rauschenberg, are exhibited here as part of temporary exhibitions.

At permanent exhibitions, Albertina presents the most interesting art trends of the last 130 years:

from French Impressionism through German Expressionism and Russian Avant-garde to the present day. Monet's "Pond of Water Lilies", Degas's "Dancers" and "The Portrait of a Girl" by Renoir, are exhibited here along paintings by Beckmann, Macke, Chagall, Malewitsch, Rothka, Rainer and Katz.

In Albertina you can also admire new collections of photographs (including those taken by Helmut Newton and Lisette Model), presented at temporary exhibitions.

BEST CAFES

A Viennese café is like an extension of a living room. It's no longer home, but also far from a typical

street establishment. It's also a perfect place for people who like to be alone, though surrounded by other people; a stage which provides privacy, but at the same time lets you participate in the joys of everyday life.

It's also worth taking a tour of cafés, once frequented by famous artists. There, they would have long discussions on life and art, but also often use those establishments as their workplaces. One of them, Peter Altenberg, went even further, putting the address of his favourite Café Central on his business card, as both his home and correspondence address. As a tribute to the great writer, after Altenberg's death, the café commissioned making his life-size statue seating at his regular table. But before cafés became popular with writers, they were discovered by numerous composers, including Johannes Strauss (both father and son), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Service in Vienna's cafés has been unique to this day, with working hours ranging from early morning until midnight - a thing rarely seen anywhere else in Europe. Add to this excellent staff (mostly men), who quickly gain trust of guest with their perfect service, but also witty sense of humour and truly Viennese charm. Not to mention comfortable chairs and delicious sweet and savoury snacks, which make a visit to a Viennese café even more enjoyable. In addition to the typical menu of a café, you can order there scrumptious sausages served with mustard and a wide choice of sandwiches.

Each café has its own dessert specialty. Desserts are almost everywhere made on site according to closely guarded recipes. These include mouth-watering walnut Sperrl-Schnitte cake served in Café Sperl or the homemade layer cake you can order at Café Alte-Wien. Café Korb with its distinct 1950s style décor, serves the best apple strudel in the city. Café Hawelka, on the other hand, featuring beautiful Art Nouveau décor is known for its delicious Bucheln (yeast dough sweet rolls) with plum jam, served every day at 10 pm.

PASTURES NEW

Nairobi is branching out of the
city centre and into new industries

28

WORDS JENNI REID



It's rush hour but nobody's rushing, chuckles Godfrey, a Nairobi-based Uber driver, as we sit static at a roundabout on a Wednesday morning, only motorbikes managing to wind their way through. On either side of us, the brightly decorated matatu buses each filled with dozens of commuters certainly aren't going anywhere fast.

Gridlocked roads are a stereotype that still rings true about the Kenyan capital, although Godfrey insists – perhaps a touch optimistically – that in five years' time the jams will be a thing of the past. He says that the past half-decade has seen a big improvement thanks to new roads and bypasses. Out of 17 years as a driver, he's spent the last one working for Uber and is full of praise for the company.

It's standard back-of-the-taxi chat, but as such conversations are prone to do, it reveals a lot about the changes this city of 4.5 million people is in the midst of. For one, there's the rise of ride-hailing. Ubiquitous mobile phones and fast internet speeds make this a big convenience for many in Nairobi. For foreigners, it negates the need to carry extra cash or haggle prices. Uber has been in the market since 2015, and in 2018 had 216,000 active riders and 6,000 drivers split between the capital and the coastal city of Mombasa.

Alon Lits, Uber's general manager for Sub-Saharan Africa, says the company has found that Kenyan cities are “defined by agility, creativity and adaptability”. It has introduced features such as Uber Chapchap, a lower-priced option served by a fleet of budget vehicles, and Uber Lite, a simpler version of the app designed to work in low-connectivity areas and on any Android model. It's competing with local players such

LEFT: A giraffe surveys the view on the city outskirts above: Improvements to roads will hopefully make Nairobi's jams a thing of the past

as Bebabeba, which was launched last year by an association of drivers, and Little, which is backed by Kenyan telecoms giant Safaricom.

Then there's the technology factor. Kenya has its own version of the overused “Silicon” moniker, in this case Silicon Savannah, and national statistics put the ICT sector's contribution to the economy at US\$1 billion in 2017. Nairobi's popularity as a regional base for international firms is well established, with high-rise offices housing multinationals such as IBM, Cisco, Oracle, Google and Visa.

The country has long been a leader in mobile payments thanks to the popularity of M-Pesa, a money transfer and microfinancing service run by Safaricom, which is used by tens of millions to pay for everything from cars to morning coffees. Kenyans moved the equivalent of almost half of the country's GDP through their mobiles last year.

The start-up and SME scene is also vibrant. “Agri-tech” is one notable sub-sector – news site Disrupt Africa says the number of start-ups in the market has increased by 110 per cent over the past two years, with apps such as Farmers Pride, M-shamba and Taimba finding innovative ways to connect farmers with agricultural suppliers and use data to improve their yields. Other start-ups attracting international attention include BRCK, which makes solar-powered, waterproof modems and routers; AB3D, which uses waste electronics to build 3D printers; and Twiga, →

The start-up and SME scene is vibrant, while ‘agri-tech’ is one notable sector



LEFT AND BELOW: Ikigai co-working space was founded by sisters Nyambura and Wachuka Gichohi

a food delivery app that raised more than US\$10 million in seed funding last year.

This culture has led to a rise in the number of innovation labs and incubators here, such as i-Hub, FabLab and NaiLab, as well as co-working spaces, some of which look like they've come straight out of Shoreditch or Brooklyn. Their numbers are "growing rapidly", according to Nyambura Gichohi, who set up office brand Ikigai with her sister Wachuka in 2016. They now have two venues, in the leafy suburbs of Westlands and Lavington, and have had little issue filling more than 100 desks as well as several private offices in each.

The Westlands branch has a hectare of garden space with desks, terraces and even old shipping containers where events can be held. It's popular with development consultants and NGO workers, as well as global companies that want to host gatherings in a more unusual setting. The Lavington one is more traditionally corporate and is mainly used by start-ups and venture capitalists, Gichohi says. Still, it is furnished with locally crafted pieces, has views of lush greenery, and offers flexible spaces such as a silent room and a room for breastfeeding mothers, plus an excellent coffee shop serving Kenyan roasts.

INVESTMENT POTENTIAL

Back on my ride with Godfrey, heading out towards Lavington, a roundabout emblazoned with a large 3D logo of Chinese telecoms behemoth Huawei gave an indication of who was paying for a lot of these roads. Loans from Chinese banks, contractors and the government to Kenya amounted to US\$9.8 billion between 2000 and 2017, according to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University in the US. Further big projects are on the horizon – Huawei has promised US\$170 million to revive stalled plans for a data and media hub called the Konza Technopolis on the outskirts of Nairobi, while the Chinese government will provide an additional US\$500 million for a new expressway between Jomo Kenyatta International airport and the suburbs.

As with much Chinese investment in Africa and Asia, this has raised eyebrows, with accusations that it is a tool of so-called "debt-trap diplomacy". Kenya's debts are rising, and there are doubts that it will ever be able to pay back a



US\$3.6 billion loan from China Eximbank, which funded a new standard gauge railway along the old colonial line from Nairobi to Mombasa (by most accounts a lovely new way to travel from capital to coast). Other concerns surround these companies' low rates of hiring domestic labour and tensions between the new workforce and locals.

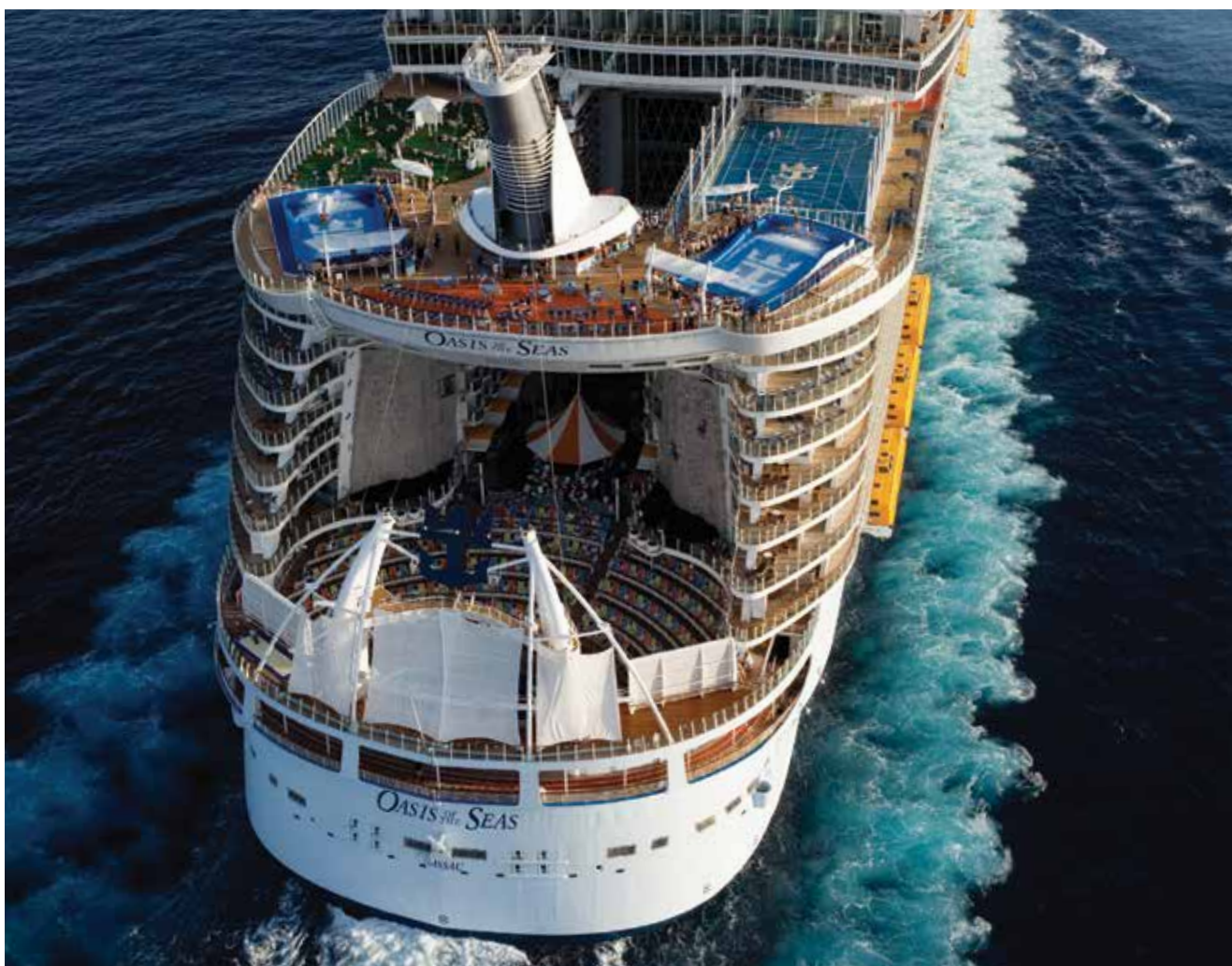
At the same time, the local government is funding civic improvements, and at the popular Crowne Plaza hotel in the skyscraper-filled Upper Hill district, staff are excited about a new road being built up to their front entrance. This area has long been a hub for corporate HQs, as well as organisations including the World Bank and African Development Bank.

Still, activity is spreading outwards, and some feel Upper Hill is losing its appeal. Local investment analysis firm Cytonn blames a lack of retail and residential space as well as insufficient infrastructure (something the new road is a bid to change).

"The city is expanding," says Joyce Ann Wangui, sales director at the Sankara Nairobi hotel in Westlands. "It used to be much more about the central business district; now there are smaller commercial centres on the outskirts and lots of construction there." KPMG, PwC, Barclays and even the European Commission have all moved their offices to Westlands, while Coca-Cola has moved from its sprawling Upper Hill complex to Lavington.

Another suburb growing in popularity is Karen. Once considered more of a residential enclave with a colonial feel (it's a common misconception that it takes its name from the Karen Blixen portrayed in *Out of Africa*; in fact, it's named after her cousin, Karen Melchior, whose father owned the Karen Coffee Company), better roads have attracted nume-

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DESTINATIONS

EXPLORING THE CITY

WHAT TO SEE: The best-known of Nairobi's must-visit attractions is its national park, which provides the chance to see wild lions, rhinos and cheetahs only 7km south of the city. Nearby is the Karen Blixen Museum, located in the former home of the Out of Africa author; the Giraffe Centre, where you can feed the long-legged creatures from an observation tower; and the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (above), which helps to raise orphaned elephants and other animals. For an inner-city refresh, stroll in the Nairobi Arboretum or Karuka Forest. kws.go.ke, giraffecentre.org, sheldrickwildlifetrust.org

WHERE TO EAT: Nyama Mama (left) is an affordable restaurant and bar with four branches that by day offer stylish meeting rooms and by night are about barbecued meats, beers and live music. Nairobi's large Indian-heritage population means the cuisine is well represented – try Tandoori Patio in Westlands. For a daytime meeting or coffee, head for one of the numerous branches of regional chain Java House,

with air con and wifi. Le Grenier à Pain on Riverside Drive and Boho Eatery in Karen are also great daytime spots. thegoodearthgroup.com, tandooripatio.co.ke, javahouseafrica.com, legrenierapain.co.ke

WHERE TO STAY: Crowne Plaza Nairobi and Sankara Nairobi (right) are excellent for business. For leisure, Fairmont the Norfolk, in the heart of the city, is steeped in history. Visit businessstraveller.com/tried-and-tested for reviews of all three. ihg.com, sankara.com, fairmont.com



rous local businesses, trendy office spaces such as 45 Karen Road, and shopping centres containing international brands such as Carrefour and Yves Rocher.

This is having a knock-on effect on the hotel scene. “There wasn’t much competition in Westlands when we opened nine years ago,” says Krishna Unni, Sankara’s group general manager. Conceived as a “boutique business hotel”, it was independently owned and managed until it joined Marriott International’s Autograph Collection this year. Recent arrivals to the suburb include the Villa Rosa by Geneva-based Kempinski; Pullman, Movenpick and Ibis Styles properties from Accor; and a Park Inn by Radisson.

BOUNCING BACK

Westlands is also home to the Dusit D2 hotel, which reopened in August following the January terror attack by al-Shabab militants that killed 21 people. It came just after Kenya reported a 37 per cent increase in visitor numbers for 2018, raising questions about what the impact would be. Tourism is vital to the economy, contributing US\$7.9 billion last year and accounting for 8.3 per cent of jobs.

While a PwC report predicted a temporary dip in visitors of about 13 per cent, the African Travel and Tourism Association reported that the market was “booming” by the busy summer season. Michael Metaxas, the Dusit D2’s general manager, is now optimistic, promising a new “positive energy” as well as “enhanced security” certified by international bodies. Tight security is part of the experience at any quality Nairobi



hotel, with arriving cars subject to thorough searches of boots and undersides, and guests passing through airport-style scanners.

This is even the case at the bucolic Hemingways hotel out in Karen, which has views over the Ngong Hills. “We call them the giant hills because the ridges look like they were pressed by the knuckles of a giant,” says Richard Kimenyi, the hotel’s general manager, over a delicious lunch of ostrich carpaccio and Creole-style red snapper in a curry sauce. Guests at the five-star property range from tourists who stay for a few days before flying from the small Wilson airport to Hemingways’ other outposts in the Masai Mara and Mombasa, to business travellers who will sometimes book the entire 45-suite property for an event.

The serviced apartment sector is continuing to grow, with investment firm Cytonn expecting more than 1,000 additional units to enter the market by 2020. Nairobi also has top-quality airport hotels at last, with a Crowne Plaza, Four Points by Sheraton and Hilton Garden Inn all opening in the past two years.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

For many foreign investors, there is a sense of calm after the storm this year. Tensions flared during the 2017 national election, which saw the

ABOVE: Nairobi’s urban sprawl is spreading out to the Ngong Hills, immortalised in *Out of Africa*

GDP rebounded last year to 6.3 per cent while foreign direct investment rose to a record high

supreme court overturn the victory of incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. A second vote several months later turned out the same decision, and almost 100 people are estimated to have died in election-related violence.

In March 2018, Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga reached an uneasy truce, restoring stability and improving business confidence. GDP growth, which had dipped from 5.8 per cent in 2016 to 4.8 per cent in 2017, rebounded last year to 6.3 per cent. Foreign direct investment (FDI) rose 27 per cent to a record high of US\$1.6 billion, into industries including manufacturing, oil and gas, chemicals and hospitality. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics says the number of international conferences rose by 6.8 per cent.

Long the de facto centre of East African business and development, Kenya is facing competition from a northern neighbour. Ethiopia is now the greater FDI recipient, attracting US\$3.3 billion last year. And while Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways are both leading carriers, the former is now the continent’s most profitable, while the latter is being nationalised to rescue it from a debt crisis.

Kenya maintains a clear lead in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business ranking, where it has jumped from 129th place to 61st in five years. However, corruption still “penetrates every sector of the economy”, according to anti-corruption portal GAN. Kenya was the first country to ratify the UN’s Convention Against Corruption under former president Mwai Kibaki, with the struggles of Kibaki’s first anti-corruption chief, John Githongo, chronicled in Michela Wrong’s book *It’s Our Turn To Eat*. This summer saw the arrest of finance minister Henry Rotich on corruption charges with allegations that his ouster was politically motivated.

Keeping up with the rollercoaster of Kenyan politics and business is made easier through the tenacious local press, with frank coverage appearing in Nation Media Group’s Business Daily and Daily Nation, as well as magazines such as the Nairobi Law Monthly and the East African Business Times. Even so, with Kenya placing 100th in the annual World Press Freedom ranking from Reporters Without Borders, there are clearly issues at play here, too.

Driving along the city’s smooth new roads, stark reminders remain of inequality amid the rapid development. On the way to Hemingways, you pass the Kibera slum and its hundreds of thousands of residents. Asked about the biggest issues facing Kenya, many locals will mention youth unemployment, which stands at 18.4 per cent.

Still, this is also a city of creative young people. One night in Westlands, watching local band Switcharoo perform ahead of a European tour, an audience member tells me that the live music scene here is the best in Africa. Add this to the launch of art collectives such as Brush Tu and the Nest, plus a nascent local film industry, and you can’t help but feel that Kenya – and Nairobi in particular – is ready to capitalise on its many multi-faceted talents.

New Incarnation of Sheraton Grand Warsaw

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts, the largest brand of Marriott International Group, has unveiled Sheraton Warsaw hotel following its major refurbishment.

The relaunched five-star property also now boasts the prestigious “Grand” status. The hotel offers 350 guest rooms and is now a state-of-the-art meeting venue located in the very heart of the capital.

IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

A city full of contrasts and unique solutions, Warsaw attracts visitors with its unique energy and cultural heritage: from the ubiquitous genius of Frederic Chopin to fascinating museums, the unique atmosphere of the Stara Praga district and the beautiful, thoroughly

revitalized Old Town. Just a few steps away from the National Museum and the picturesque Vistula Boulevards, the Sheraton offers its guests the capital city at their fingertips with a convenient 20-minute drive to the airport.

DESIGN AND HERITAGE

“We’re delighted to unveil the new look for the Sheraton Grand Warsaw,” said John Licence, vice president of premium and select brands for Marriott International in Europe. “The property is one of Sheraton’s first hotels to exhibit some of the brand’s newly-announced design and guest experience elements, notably, the stunning lobby which is designed to harness Sheraton’s legacy as a gathering place in the community,” he added.

The Warsaw property is one of Sheraton’s first hotels to exhibit some of the brand’s newly-announced design.

MEETING SPACE

The new lobby of the hotel now acts as a space for inspiring meetings, which perfectly reflects the history of contrasts so omnipresent in the capital in Poland. The original décor of the lobby is a creative combination of various materials and textures. The timeless interiors decorated in shades of blue and beige are accentuated with specially selected works of art.

NEW RESTAURANTS

Apart from the acclaimed and popular inAzia restaurant, the hotel now

BELOW:
New lobby at
Sheraton Grand
Warsaw



has two more culinary venues run by the outstanding chef Marcin Sasin. At the spacious Cucina Mia restaurant filled with lots of natural light, guests can enjoy top-notch Italian cuisine. A subtle mosaic of green, red and beige highlights the unique atmosphere of the place, while a mural by the local artist Agata Czeremuszkin-Chrut gives the restaurant a truly Italian character. Traditional Italian dishes are prepared here with the highest quality ingredients. These combined with the renowned Polish hospitality is a guarantee of a culinary feast at the highest level.

Asian cuisine aficionado will most likely want to visit InAzia - a truly elegant venue and the Sheraton's flagship restaurant. With his vast experience chef Marcin Sasin was able to create here a real paradise of genuine Asian flavours. Meat and seafood prepared on a special Japanese robata grill, will certainly delight even the most discerning palates. The sublime interiors decorated in coral and sea colours highlight the oriental atmosphere of InAzia, while built-in windows with a view on a lively kitchen allow guests to watch the restaurant's excellent chefs at work.

STYLE AND ELEGANCE

"The timeless elegance designed with a modern flair." This is the main concept that the designer Alex Kravetz followed while designing the hotel's suites. The guestrooms are filled with natural light with views across the city and aim to provide a contemporary, residential feel and offer high-tech amenities as well as a work desk. The hotel also features a Sheraton Club Lounge, an executive space available to Marriott Bonvoy Elite and Sheraton Club level guests, while 11 flexible meeting rooms spanning 1,125sq m are available for meetings and large-scale events.

Fitness and spa aficionado will find at Sheraton Grand Warsaw a wide range of amenities, including extensive spa and fitness facilities, dedicated space for exercise classes, three massage rooms, a sauna and steam room.

[sheraton.pl](https://www.sheraton.pl)



Apart from the acclaimed and popular inAzia restaurant, the hotel now has two more culinary venues.



LOT is committed to eco solutions

According to Reuters, commercial flights account for nearly 2.5 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. The press agency has also reported that the aviation industry had halved emissions per passenger since 1990, mainly due to the use of more efficient aircraft. Nowadays, companies intend to reduce their net emissions by 2050, and to develop carbon-neutral growth from 2020 onwards. LOT Polish Airlines has introduced a voluntary surcharge for passenger tickets. The Polish national carrier intends to allocate those funds to various environmental activities.

PAY FOR YOUR FOOTPRINT

LOT has decided to extend its existing pro-environmental activities to include a carbon footprint compensation programme. By purchasing a ticket on lot.com, each passenger can pay a voluntary fee, which will help to implement projects aimed at compensating CO₂ emissions and environmental activities. The idea is interesting because the passenger will also be able to calculate the carbon footprint of their flight using a special calculator on the airline's website. The voluntary environmental fee is intended to reduce the greenhouse gas impact of aircraft on this route.

"The CO₂ compensation programme for passengers is yet another response of LOT Polish Airlines to the climate challenges that the aviation industry is facing today. We consistently introduce environmentally friendly solutions aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions, not only by investing in a modern fleet. Over the last two years, only with appropriate changes to our internal procedures, including the introduction of taxiing on one engine after landing or optimizing our flight routes, we have reduced the level of carbon dioxide emissions by 7 percent," says Maciej Wilk, Member of the Management Board of the LOT Polish Airlines for Operational Issues. "The environmental measures that minimize our impact on the ecosystem are carried out together with our employees, contractors and suppliers. Thanks to the "DestinationECO" programme, we will be able to involve our passengers even more," he adds.

ECO-DESTINATIONS

As part of "DestinationECO", LOT passengers will be able to support, for example, the Carbon Forest Project, and thus partially offset the carbon footprint of their flight. Using the CO₂ calculator, passengers buying a ticket on lot.com will be able to additionally calculate the carbon footprint of their flight

LOT Polish Airlines is constantly improving the procedures of its air operations, implementing environmentally friendly technologies.

ght (i.e. the sum of greenhouse gas emissions calculated at a distance, which they will cover on a given route), find out how they can reduce it, and allocate a selected amount of money to pro-environmental activities carried out under the programme.

The Carbon Forest Project, which aims to increase the amount of carbon dioxide captured and stored by Polish forests, has been supported by LOT since October 2019. Currently, one hectare of forest can absorb on average 5 tons of CO₂ per year. Scientists calculate that within 30 years, each hectare of forest currently covered by the CFP will absorb additional 37 tons of CO₂ – in total, 1 million ton more than what they would absorb without the conducting the said activities.

LESS CO₂

This is another pro-environmental initiative of the Polish national air carrier. LOT is successively reducing CO₂ emissions by means of a multitude of initiatives, such as optimization of routes, a precise selection of both lifting and landing speed, exact calculations of the centre of gravity of a plane, regular cleaning of the fuselage and engine or decreasing the weight of planes. Whenever possible, the airline also utilizes external





electrical power supply (GPU) instead of fuel supply (APU) at the airports, and invests in new software for flight planning and data analysis, which allows the carrier to operate in a more sustainable and efficient manner.

LESS PLASTIC ON BOARD

As part of the “DestinationECO” project, the Polish air carrier is reducing plastic items on board its aircraft. These include straws, plastic bags and plastic-coated paper. The airline is constantly improving the procedures of its air operations, modernizing its fleet and implementing environmentally friendly technologies. These activities are also carried out outside aircraft. In September 2018, the airline obtained the Green Office certificate, which confirmed proper environmental management in the company’s HQs. LOT Polish Airlines also pays a lot of attention to proper waste management and solutions allowing us to save water, energy and paper. When selecting suppliers, we pay close attention to their environmental policies.

GREEN EUROPE

LOT also actively supports European initiatives aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions into the atmosphere, including

Destination ECO

actions aimed at introducing a uniform management system for the European Airspace as soon as possible. The improvement of capacity of the European airspace and airports would allow for significant optimisation of routes and shortening the flight time. This, in turn, according to the estimations, would be connected with the reduction of CO₂ by approximately 16 million ton annually on a European scale. Details of the *DestinationECO* project; *apps*. lot.com/destinationeco

FROM TOP:
Embraer 190;
Dreamliner

Freestyle Cruises with Norwegian Cruise Line

RAFAŁ SOBIECH talks to KEVIN BUBOLZ, Managing Director Europe at Norwegian Cruise Line

Could you tell us in what way your cruise line is different from its competitors? What's your differentiator?

The most important thing that has made our product different from others is our "freestyle cruising" concept. Basically, we have decided to do away with the old limitations associated with traditional cruising, where you had fixed meal arrangements, which meant you had to eat at the same times of the day, at the same table and in the same restaurant. We wanted to give people as much choice as possible so that they could design their cruise individually. That is why, our ships are slightly bigger to provide more space for as many choices as possible. Of course, this wide choice of options applies not only to restaurants, but also, for example, to entertainment. The "freestyle cruising" concept is one of the key elements that helped us win the World Travel Award in "Europe's Leading Cruise Line" category for 12 years in a row. The average age of passengers on our ships is around 45, and overall, I would say that our cruises are aimed at slightly younger, or "young at heart" guests.

In July 2018, Norwegian Cruise Line launched Norwegian Bliss and the new ship named Norwegian Encore is going to hit the waters this autumn. Is this the natural frequency for your company to launch a new ship every year or every other year?

In recent years, the whole industry has been enjoying a considerable growth and we have been growing at the pace that enables us to launch one ship per year. After launching Norwegian Encore we will take a small break, followed by a new series of ships to be launched in 2022. Norwegian Encore is the last in the Breakaway-plus class of ships, which has been our most successful ship classes so far. However, beginning 2022, we will focus on a new ship class, project Leonardo, building one unit per year until 2027.

Cruise lines worldwide are doing their best trying to offer new, exciting attractions aboard their ships. On Norwegian Bliss one of the greatest attractions is a go-kart track. Does Norwegian Encore have it as well have it on Encore as well, or is there be any other equally thrilling attractions?

We will definitely have a go-kart track, because it has been very popular with our passengers. Another extremely popular attraction is a laser-tag course held in an arena themed to look like the lost city of Atlantis. On Norwegian Encore we also have a Galaxy Pavillion – an indoor virtual reality playground with several "rides" that require you to put on



special goggles. With the goggles on, riders can feel like they were actually hang gliding, racing a Formula One car or ride a Jeep through a Jurassic Park-like scenery.

You have mentioned that following the launch of Norwegian Encore there will be a few-years' break in new launches. As I understand, 2022 is going to be the year when the mysterious Project Leonardo comes to play.

I must say that I'm also extremely curious about it, because I don't know too many details, either. The idea behind the Leonardo class is that we are not in the business to simply build big ships. We build them big to offer a vast choice of options on them. Currently, half of our fleet are ships accommodating up to 2000 passengers and we have also a ships for up to 4000 guests. Contrary to what you might think though, with the Leonardo class we won't be building even larger, say 6000-passenger ships, but medium-sized vessels accommodating up to 3000 passengers.

Norwegian Cruise Line is also known for its two private islands for the sole use of the passengers of your ships. Is it a successful part of your business?

It's a very interesting and successful part of our business. We first acquired the Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas and then we purchased the Harvest Caye in southern Belize. Interestingly, they have become the highest-rated ports in the region for us, providing the perfect Caribbean experience for our guests. We will certainly be continuing to develop this concept.

Which part of the world will Norwegian Cruise Line focus more in 2020?

At present, we are almost everywhere in the world. Our ships sail around all continents except Antarctica. In Europe we will have six ships in 2020 and in Alaska 4, making these our most important summertime destinations.

Outside the summer season we have a vast programme in the Caribbean with lots of different ports of departure and a great deal of itineraries in the Caribbean. A few years ago we started to explore the regions of Asia and Australia, which are also popular destinations with Poles. We have recently expanded our cruise offering for Alaska tours aboard our new ships Norwegian Bliss Norwegian Joy. We also have a unique product in Hawaii with the Pride of America, which is the only ship in the world that can do the inter-island cruises, because she sails under the US flag and only then are you allowed to stay within US territories.

Apart from Europe and the US, which is the next most important market for you as a revenue-driver?

This would definitely be Australia. That is a very fast-growing market for us and the Australians especially like to visit Europe and the Hawaii with us. Another promising market for us is Latin America with passengers from that region mostly visiting the Caribbean and Europe.

How do you perceive the Polish market for you in the future. Are you planning to invest here in marketing to get more revenue?

It's a very interesting market for us and we have made a decision this year to start focusing more on Poland. Obviously we can see it's growing continuously and we have a few good partners here that have been with us for years. We think there is a lot of potential there, as it's a big market in general.

Our freestyle cruising concept, the wide product choice and the high quality – all this sits very well with the demands of the Polish market. Our additional advantage is that we have American background, which seems to be an appealing feature for Polish travellers. As we have seen growth here, we have decided to fuel it a little bit more, which is why we have started our PR activities here and we will also invest more in marketing. This year as part of those activities Norwegian Getaway visited the port of Gdynia. All in all, it's a very interesting market and we have been observing it for quite some time.

With the growing purchase power of an average Pole, the imminent inclusion of Poland to the US Visa Waiver programme (crucial from the perspective of cruises to the Caribbean region), as well as the fact that since June this year Poles can fly non-stop to Miami on-board the Dreamliners operated by LOT Polish Airlines, you Norwegian Cruise Line looks all set to win the hearts of Polish travellers. We are looking forward to that and we think this is the right time for this market to thrive. Polish passengers are especially



interested in the Caribbean region, but also in Hawaii, where our product is truly unique. However, we have observed the strongest growth in the segment of slightly more exotic products, such as Australia and South America.

Thank you for the interview.

Start-up capital

Paris is becoming increasingly appealing as a location for innovation

40



WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER

My arrival in Paris was well timed, it being the first cool evening after the capital's record-breaking 42-degree heatwave – a godsend for the Tour de France cyclists making their final sprint to the Champs-Élysées. There was barely a bike to be seen, though – instead, what caught my eye was the vast number of trottinettes (electric scooters) propped up along the city's boulevards.

It's estimated that there will be about 40,000 of these vehicles in the city by the end of the year, thanks to companies such as Bird setting up here. This is just one sign of Paris's new chapter as a start-up capital, with the city currently ranked as the ninth start-up ecosystem in the world, according to Startup Genome, up from 11th place in 2017.

LOOK OUT, LONDON

It was in 2017, shortly after he won the election, that President Emmanuel Macron spelled out his vision for France's tech future to a room full of start-ups and digital professionals at the Viva Technology conference. Macron urged the country to "think and move like a start-up", concluding with the rousing statement: "Entrepreneur is the new France." This year's event attracted 124,000 people, playing host to 450 speakers and almost 13,000 start-ups, a 24 per cent increase on last year.

To take the title of European tech capital from London, Paris will rely on poaching foreign talent – a task arguably being made easier by the Brexit saga. Julie Ranty, managing director of Viva Technology, stresses that Brexit won't be "a game changer" but "might represent an advantage".

Start-up accelerators are already seeing a growth in UK applicants owing to projects such as the recently revamped French Tech Visa – a fast-track procedure open to start-up founders, employees and investors – and the Join the Game



ABOVE: Electric scooters have proliferated in the city over recent years

campaign. The latter targets British tech firms through an online English-language guide to business and residency laws, tax rates and available funding.

Macron is not the reason for the growth in the sector. Many point to the public investment bank Bpifrance as a vital player. At the start of this year, the bank launched 25 SME accelerator programmes and aims to accelerate 4,000 companies by 2021. "It encouraged people to take the risk and [provided] the first access to capital. This was a

real trigger in the acceleration and emergence of the French start-up ecosystem," Ranty says.

Nonetheless, Macron has improved the perception of France globally, helping to transform Paris into a welcoming city for start-ups. Ukrainian entrepreneur Leonid Goncharov tells me that he "was absolutely convinced that [France] was not a start-up country". Yet, nine years since he launched his co-working venture, Anticafé, located in eight sites across Paris, it is a huge hit – it has become a franchise and there are now 13 venues, including one in Rome, Italy.

"Macron has definitely contributed to this [over the past couple of years] from a perception point of view," Goncharov says. A survey conducted last year by Paris start-up campus Station F found that 86 per cent of its residents agreed Macron had changed France's image. Entrepreneurship, according to Goncharov, "is something cool, something people strive for, something the best schools teach".

In 2016, billionaire businessman Xavier Niel, the founder of mobile operator Free, set up Ecole 42 for this reason. The free computer coding university, housed in a 17th arrondissement building referred to as the "Heart of Code", has been so successful that there are now campuses in Silicon Valley, Madrid and Lyon, as well as partnerships with schools in Belgium, Morocco, Finland, the Netherlands and Russia. Ecole 42 expects to have 18 campuses worldwide by the end of next year.



ACTION STATION

Still, funding is a bugbear for the city. Ranty says: “Our main challenge is to create more digital giants, more unicorns.” Whereas money once came from the public sector, Macron is now making inroads into the private realm, securing €5 billion from investors to boost tech companies over the next three years, with the aim of reaching 25 unicorns (privately held start-ups valued at more than €1 billion) by 2025.

For this to succeed, the country is reliant on independent ventures such as Station F, a €250 million project launched by Niel last year. The campus offers accelerator schemes for early-stage businesses, from its “Founders” and “Fighters” programmes to 29 others from the likes of Facebook and Microsoft. The 34,000 sqm space in the 13th arrondissement on the Left Bank is the base for 1,200 start-ups, 3,000 workstations, eight event spaces and 60 meeting rooms.

The best way to appreciate its huge size is to approach it from the opposite end, as I did, and walk its 310-metre length, the equivalent of the Eiffel Tower laid flat, to reach the entrance. To make life easier for those who use the place, there are “public streets” for shortcuts between the three zones – “Share”, “Create” and “Chill”. The reception sets the tone for the design of the space, with a hologram projected overhead. It’s rather futuristic, and security is high, with a badge needed to access every zone apart from Chill. This area houses La Felicità, a colourful 1,000-seat food court from the Big Mamma Group – a burgeoning dining start-up that recently expanded into London with its restaurants Gloria in Shoreditch and Circolo Popolare in Fitzrovia. Other on-site benefits include a lab with 3D printers and laser cutters, and



ABOVE: Pod-style meeting rooms at Station F; Wilov is the first pay-when-you-drive car insurance app

more than 40 venture capital firms to whom entrepreneurs can pitch.

When I visited at the end of July, young entrepreneurs were hard at work in the pod-like meeting rooms, which jut over the vast central area. According to Station F, 42 per cent of them come in on weekends and 18 per cent have spent a night on campus. It seems as if their work ethic is paying off – between June 2018 and June 2019, Station F’s start-ups collectively raised €317 million.

Once signed up to a programme, you can still apply to the other schemes on offer. Take Wilov, the first pay-when-you-drive car insurance app. Initially on the Founders scheme, it was later selected by Startup Garage from Facebook, a six-month programme for data-driven start-ups. Wilov’s chief executive, Pierre Stanislas, and chief technology officer, Philippe Breuils, were thrilled. “The team facilitate interactions with people you would never have been able to access previously,” says Breuils, citing senior people in Silicon Valley as an example. Wilov has since featured as an “Editor’s Choice” on the Apple App Store, the only insurance app to receive the accolade.

The monthly desk price is €195, or free in the case of the Fighters programme – a considerable selling point given that the average price of a desk in Paris is €703 per person per month, according to Instant Offices.

In June the company moved into the co-living sphere with the 100-apartment housing extension “Flatmates”. Rent starts at €399 per month for a standard room with shared bathroom. “Housing is a main pain point for people coming from outside Paris,” says Grégoire Martinez, head of community and communications; a third of its start-ups come from outside of France. Other ideas in the



pipeline include a five-star hotel for visiting venture capital firms and high-profile people – there are few large hotels in the area.

THE FEMALE FACTOR

Throughout the city, there is also a strong focus on promoting women in tech, given that globally only 14.1 per cent of tech founders are women, according to Startup Genome. An Ipsos survey for Viva Technology found that 63 per cent of young women expressed interest in working for a start-up, only 1 per cent less than men. For this year's conference, Ranty implemented a quota so that 40 per cent of speakers were women, while a "Female Founder Challenge" event comprised meetings between venture capital firms and female-led start-ups, and a pitch contest. Some 45 per cent of Station F's companies are female-founded, while the campus is run by director Ro-

ABOVE: La Felicità food court in Station F; the Viva Technology conference takes place each year

START-UP SUCCESS STORIES

DOCTOLIB

Set up five years ago, Doctolib is the largest digital health start-up in Europe and recently became one of France's unicorns after securing an additional €150 million funding in a round led by General Atlantic. The medical appointment service connects patients and healthcare professionals, with 30 million monthly online visits. doctolib.fr

MEERO

Founded in 2016, this is a platform for freelance photographers to offer their services. Companies can source photographers and get professional images within 24 hours. The platform has 58,000 members and joined the unicorn community earlier this year. meero.com

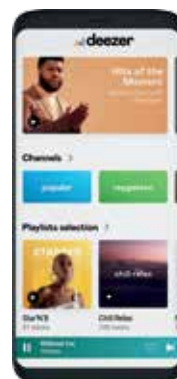
ALAN

This start-up is the first licensed digital health insurance company in France since 1986. It aims to provide more transparent services and help its user base of 27,000 to find and book doctors. alan.com



DEEZER

France's music streaming service allows people to listen to more than 56 million songs online and offline. Active in more than 180 countries, with 14 million users, it became a unicorn last year. deezer.com



BLABLACAR

Launched in Paris back in 2006, this carpooling platform connects people heading in the same direction, saving costs and carbon fuel. The unicorn now has a community of 80 million drivers and passengers in 22 countries, and recently launched BlaBlaBus in five European countries. blablacar.co.uk





xanne Varza. Last month, Station F held an all-female conference, and has banned all-male panels on campus.

Willa, formerly Paris Pionnières, takes it one step further. Defining itself as an accélérateur de mixité (an incubator for equality), it is dedicated to female-founded businesses; men are allowed, but start-ups must have at least one female founder. Why Willa? “‘Will’ is an expression of the future and the ‘a’ brings a feminine note. W also stands for women, winners, and so on,” says head of operations Erwan Peron-Kergourlay. The three-floor space lies in the buzzy second arrondissement, with meeting rooms named after successful women – I spotted the likes of Sheryl (Sandberg, Facebook’s chief operating officer) and Oprah (Winfrey). There’s a lot of work to be done, however, with only 8 per cent of Paris start-ups having been founded by women, joint lowest with Seattle in the top 15 global start-up ecosystems, according to Startup Genome.

RED TAPE CHALLENGE

It won’t come as a shock to those with business dealings here that France’s complicated bureaucracy hinders growth, a reason for its lack of unicorns – it currently only has five. Goncharov argues that, despite Macron’s efforts, the main challenge still lies in people’s perception of start-ups. “In France particularly, people are so used to comfort, protection and security [in their work contracts], that they’re not striving to go further and take risks... This is changing but far slower than I would like it to,” he says.

Start-up guarantor service Unkle sets out to circumvent French bureaucracy by guaranteeing the solidity of a rental application to landlords, paying the owner if the tenant cannot. To rent in France, you need a permanent work contract, a strong guarantor, a bank account, and a salary three times the rent. “The four requirements are totally inappropriate,” says co-founder Matthieu Luneau. I can relate – as a former

Throughout the city, there is a strong focus on promoting women in tech

foreign student in Paris, I was faced with the nightmarish task of finding a decent flat and ended up sub-letting.

“The Paris property market is very competitive so the best apartments go quickly,” Luneau says. “[We] allow people to have the same chance as others.” Users have to provide an identity card and a work contract (or bank account details for students), and pay 3.5 per cent on top of the rent each month to have the guarantor.

Station F offers lots of support for its users. Entrepreneurs can have one-to-one meetings with representatives of more than 30 public administrations to get advice on French laws and regulation. Amazon Web Services, Google and OVH also offer workshops on building and scaling businesses. Macron has promised to reform labour regulations and cut taxes to boost innovation.

It’s tempting to see Paris as the driving force for change, but Breuils makes the case that the rest of France is just as important. “What happens in Paris does tend to hide what’s going on in the regions... We believe that we have a strong hub in Paris from a European perspective, but having [start-ups] in the regions is also instrumental [in transforming France into] a start-up nation.” The city’s ecosystem value currently stands at US\$19 billion, so still hasn’t made Startup Genome’s Leaders category needing to generate at least US\$30 billion.

Yet Paris is on the path to success. As well as the initiatives covered above, UK incubator Founders Factory has launched in Paris in partnership with insurance firm Aviva France, and plans to design, build and scale more than 140 tech start-ups over the next five years. The prospect of more unicorns doesn’t sound quite so mythical anymore.

ABOVE: Willa is dedicated to female-founded businesses

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A MILESTONE YEAR

Anniversary editions, playful creations and innovative designs characterise 2019's best watches



WORDS CHRIS HALL

I suppose it isn't really surprising that a business whose stock-in-trade is marking the passage of time should be so charmingly, hopelessly addicted to celebrating anniversaries. While some can be tenuous in the extreme, 2019 has seen a flurry of major milestones.

There must have been something in the air in 1969, because this year marks the half-century of the automatic chronograph (and that of influential models such as TAG Heuer Monaco and Zenith El Primero), as well as 50 years since the commercial launch of the quartz watch by Seiko, a development that would send shockwaves through the industry.

In a sense, we are still feeling the ramifications of that invention; the balance of power shifted from west to east, particularly in consumer electronics. More than 90 per cent of all watches are made in Asia, and while they are overwhelmingly at the lower end of the market price-wise, many parts in a "Swiss Made" watch also come from factories in China.

This change forced the Swiss to make their watch industry into a luxury business (so successful that, ironically, Japan's Seiko is now equipping its premium brand Grand Seiko to go toe-to-toe with the major Swiss firms), and to invest heavily in a continuous cycle of mechanical innovation that regularly injects the fundamentally anachronistic device that is the wristwatch with new appeal.

This explains why we have seen carbon nanotechnology deployed at TAG Heuer, advanced silicon-based mechanisms used at Zenith, and brands exploring new materials and techniques. Unlike some of the whizz-bang watches from five or six years ago, the big bucks are now spent on measures that make a watch better at its basic function. Slowly, the big luxury brands are making their sales pitch more about efficiency, longevity and reliability rather than show-stopping complexity.

The difficulty is that their core audiences still want watches that look like the old ones. Some, like Omega and Rolex, focus on improving their

movements without drastically updating the looks of hero pieces such as the Speedmaster or GMT-Master II, but others are insistent that their clever new watches exhibit a suitably sci-fi aesthetic, banking on it appealing to a younger generation.

I see no sign that audiences are so easily divided up; twenty-somethings with the watch bug are just as likely to go straight into vintage pieces, and I am often left cold by new designs even though I firmly agree that if the watch industry is to reach 2069 in rude health, it will need to do more than relentlessly excavate its glorious past – big birthdays aside, the returns are definitely diminishing.

This tension – what does a "modern" mechanical watch look like, and do we really need such a thing? – will continue to dominate the conversation as watchmakers plan for a time when few people remember the moon landings first hand, but jolly well haven't forgotten which watch Armstrong and Aldrin were wearing (and if you really don't know the answer, turn the page).

TOP:
Zenith El Primero
A384 Revival

2019's

Another year reporting on the wondrous, idiosyncratic and sometimes downright odd world of luxury watches; another impossible task whittling the hundreds of dazzling, clever and finely crafted new models down to just 12. With the usual caveats – personal taste plays a huge part, just as it does when buying a watch – these are my very own awards for the watches of the year.

BEST TRIBUTE TO THE GLORIOUS PAST, PART ONE:

Omega Speedmaster Moonwatch 50th anniversary

As already discussed, it was a bumper year for notable anniversaries. No one embraced this with as much verve and energy as Omega, which went to town on the 50th birthday of the moon landings (as the maker of NASA's chosen watches) with two commemorative Speedmasters. My pick is the more affordable and attainable of the pair, a stainless steel 42mm hand-wound chronograph with a dark-grey dial and lashings of gold trim. Bringing home the Apollo 11 connection is a delicate rendering of Buzz Aldrin descending from the lunar lander in the 9 o'clock subdial. Among watch nerds, Omega takes some flak for its near-constant procession of limited-edition Speedmasters, but whatever your thoughts on that, this is a watch that harks back to the core of the Speedmaster's appeal and celebrates a genuine milestone with taste and style. £7,370;

omegawatches.com



BEST TRIBUTE TO THE GLORIOUS PAST, PART TWO:

TAG Heuer Monaco 1980s

Another brand celebrating an icon of 1969 is TAG Heuer, which has decided to mark the 50th birthday of the Monaco with five separate limited-edition timepieces, one for each decade. Each is markedly different, and I've selected the 1980s model for its big, bold, glorious red dial. £5,350;

tagheuer.com



BEST VISION OF THE FUTURE:

Ressence Type 2

The Belgian luxury brand's Type 2 uses a solar-powered Bluetooth module to "remember" the time when the mechanical parts run down (and adjust it automatically when you travel) – simply tap the dial and it syncs. A marvellous example of how the traditional watch can still evolve. £38,860;

ressencewatches.com



FINEST

BEST INVESTMENT:

Patek Philippe Aquanaut

For a lot of people, the mere use of the word “investment” around watches is contentious – we don’t buy watches to make money, and you can never count on them to hold their value. So why is this award even here, you might ask? Because despite all that, the market around Patek Philippe Nautilus and Aquanaut models is currently red hot, and if you are able to get your hands on this year’s 5168G, a 42mm white-gold Aquanaut with an automatic movement and a military green rubber strap, you could certainly realise a tidy profit, with examples currently listed for more than double the retail price. If you could bring yourself to part with it, that is: as many of us know, what’s bought as an “investment” can very quickly find a place in your heart. £30,390; patek.com



49

BEST VALUE:

Seiko Presage arita SPB095

Photographs don’t do justice to Seiko’s mid-level Presage range, which appears similar to its cheaper pieces at first glance. Up close, however, the porcelain dial shimmers and shines, and beneath it beats a movement with 70 hours of power; materials and mechanics that aren’t normally found at this price. £1,560; seikowatches.com



MOST OUTRAGEOUS:

Richard Mille bonbon

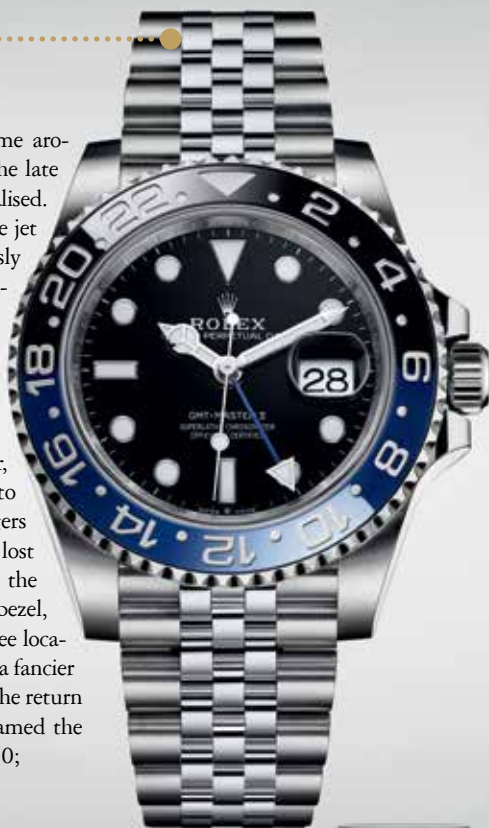
When your normal watches are seven-figure creations crafted from sapphire and carbon nanotubes, it takes a lot to raise eyebrows. But a ten-piece range resembling liquorice, marshmallows and candied fruits ought to do it. Priced between £113,500 and £147,000 (cheap by Richard Mille’s standards), they are, needless to say, all sold out. richardmille.com



BEST FOR TRAVELLING:

Rolex GMT-Master II

Watches that could display the time around the world have existed since the late 1800s, when time zones were formalised. But it wasn't until the advent of the jet age that the idea of simultaneously tracking time in more than one place became a practical concern, and while it wasn't the first, Rolex's GMT-Master (a response to a direct commission from Pan Am pilots) was the watch that epitomised the new trend. Some 65 years later, the GMT-Master II is more likely to be on the wrists of first class passengers than those in the cockpit, but it has lost none of its steadfast usability (with the arrow-head hand and the 24-hour bezel, you can actually keep an eye on three locations at once), even as it has gained a fancier "jubilee" bracelet. New for 2019 is the return of the black and blue bezel, nicknamed the "Batman" by Rolex devotees. £7,150; rolex.com



OVERALL WATCH OF THE YEAR:

Bulgari Octo Finissimo Chronograph

The matt, muted, monochrome colour palette adopted by Bulgari isn't for everyone; neither is the multifaceted case shape. I think the Octo Finissimo is one of very few designs of the past 20 years to have really added anything to the watch world, however, and the way that Bulgari keeps developing record-breaking versions deserves applause. This watch is the thinnest mechanical chronograph ever made. If you need context for that achievement, the next time you see an Omega Speedmaster, Rolex Daytona or pretty much any regular chronograph from a mainstream brand, imagine squashing it down to approximately half of its thickness (but around the same diameter) and it still working – with the capacity to tell the time in a second time zone for good measure. It's a watch you can wear every day that looks like nothing else out there, and also happens to be a work of borderline genius, and that's why it's my watch of the year. £15,200; bulgari.com

BEST FIRST WATCH:

Hamilton Khaki Pilot Pioneer Mechanical

What better way to mark your arrival among us hopeless watch addicts than with a 36mm hand-wound tribute to a 1970s model made for the RAF? Forget any ideas you might have had about playing it safe; it's never too soon to start showing a bit of personality on your wrist. £720; hamiltonwatch.com



MOST INGENIOUS:

Vacheron Constantin Twin Beat perpetual calendar

Delivering improvements you never knew you needed is what the top brands live for. In creating a perpetual calendar that can run for a huge 65 days (not hours) thanks to a switchable dual-frequency of devilish complexity, Vacheron Constantin scored the cleverest watch of the year. £195,000; vacheron-constantin.com



MOST SURPRISING:

Hublot Ferrari GT

Car-branded watches aren't usually of interest to anyone other than die-hard fans, and Hublot's prolific volume of special editions means single watches struggle to stand out. But in allowing Ferrari's design team to have a genuine input, it has produced a striking new shape that turns heads even among automotive agnostics. £18,200; hublot.com





2020

PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEAR TO COME...

Service standards

For some time, the watch industry has neglected the ownership side of the business, preferring to focus on sales. The cost and frequency of servicing your timepiece (upwards of £500; roughly once every five years) is rarely discussed and hasn't improved in years; as more watches have been pumped into the world, services have taken longer to carry out. The answer is to make watches capable of going longer without maintenance, and to increase manufacturer's warranties. Some of the recent technological advances should yield progress on this front, and it was encouraging to see Jaeger-LeCoultre (above) increase its warranty to eight years. I hope others follow suit; the warranty should cover the first regular service.



Smartwatch slide

Since its introduction in 2014, the Apple Watch (pictured) has not had the destructive impact on the Swiss watch industry that many predicted. But it has been a phenomenal success, and 2019 looks like it will be the year that Apple Watch sales outperform the entire Swiss watch industry by value. At the same time, I predict that Swiss firms will quietly drop their own smartwatches; the initial enthusiasm for TAG Heuer's Connected and Montblanc's Summit seems muted at best. It's hard to get excited about chunky, short-lived designs with unremarkable specs when brands want to build their reputations on peerless quality and craft.



51

MOST OTHERWORLDLY:

HYT Soonow

Pioneering Swiss brand HYT uses liquids in tiny glass tubes to mark the literal flow of time, here doubling down with a skull-shaped play on the notion of time's inexorable passage.

The left eye houses the words "soon" and "now", which alternate every 30 seconds. It's one for the sci-fi fans and philosophers.

£68,000;

hyt.com



Rolex will be Rolex

Taking a broad view, the past few years in watches can be characterised thus: most brands have hugely diversified their ranges, offering more metals, colours, shapes and sizes than ever and numerous new designs. A few – Rolex, Patek Philippe – have offered the same limited selection of models with subtle upgrades and variations. Which approach has been more successful? I predict that Rolex will continue to frustrate and titillate buyers with its Henry Ford attitude to choice and Machiavellian limits on production, shrugging off its critics in the way that only the world's most trusted brand (according to Forbes magazine) can. Oh, and I foresee a new Submariner. Because one of these years I will actually be right.

Mai House Saigon



Whether for business or pleasure, the five-star Mai House Saigon located in the very centre of Ho Chi Minh (formerly known as Saigon) should be your first choice accommodation in this fascinating city.

Lying on the western bank of the Saigon River, the historical city of Saigon boasts a truly interesting, though rather turbulent history. Almost 9 million people live here, including a large Chinese minority. Until 1976 Ho Chi Minh was called Saigon. From the middle of the 19th century it was a French colony and the administrative centre of Cochinchina. Be-

tween 1954 and 1975 Saigon was the capital of the Republic of Vietnam. The present name (Ho Chi Minh) was given to the metropolis after the Vietnam War and the fall of South Vietnam, to honour the leader of the North Vietnamese Communists Hồ Chí Minh.

WHERE IS IT?

Mai House Saigon is located in the most prestigious district of Ho Chi Minh City known as District 3, opposite the 100-year-old Marie Curie School and approximately 6 kilometres from Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport. The

easiest way to get here is to order the hotel limo service, where you are picked up from the airport by a chauffeur and driven to the property in the nick of time. The price for such a service ranges from US\$64-79. Alternatively, you can take a taxi. If you do so, choose one from a reliable and trusted taxi company, such as Mai Linh or Vina Sun. Importantly, fares in those taxis are based on the taximeter, which isn't a common practice in Vietnam and can be a source of a potential problem.

Mai House Saigon is a relatively new property, housed in a modern office building with free indoor parking for the guests of the hotel.

ROOMS

The hotel offers five different room types: Deluxe Room, Premium Room, Junior Suite, Mai Suite and the Presidential Suite. All the rooms and the hotel interiors are decorated in colonial style, with vintage wooden furniture, beautiful, colourful carpets and marble bathrooms with richly decorated bathtubs. The colour palette throughout the hotel includes the shades of brown and natural wood.





Mai House Saigon is located in the most prestigious district of Ho Chi Minh City known as District 3. It's a relatively new property, housed in a modern office building.

Naturally, as you might expect it from a top-class property, it's packed with all the latest technology and numerous amenities. Some of them include free broadband Wi-Fi, minibar replenished daily with complimentary snacks, as well as the facilities to brew your own Vietnamese coffee in the room. Rooms also come with bathrobes and

slippers (on one of the upper floors there is a large swimming pool with panoramic views of the city), hairdryer, safe with a digital lock, iron and ironing board, air conditioning, and a 42-inch flat-screen TV.

The smallest and most affordable Deluxe Room is 30 sqm and can accommodate up to two guests. It can be booked in both king and

twin bed configuration. Premium rooms offer the same amenities as Deluxe ones, but are slightly larger at 35sqm, making it suitable for up to 3 guests.

The next three types of rooms are an offer for the most discerning guests. Junior Suites offer 55sqm of floor space with an additional relaxation zone and the cityscape view from the windows. The rooms come with additional benefits, such as free access to Sky's Sky Club and the VIP Executive Lounge.

The flagship product of the Mai House Saigon is the luxury 70sqm Mai Suite that can comfortably accommodate up to three guests.

However if you are looking for even more luxury, go for the Presidential Suite, which offers nearly 140sqm of space. In addition to the bedroom, the suite comes with a spacious living room, dining room, study and a double shower. Naturally, the guests booking this suite also obtain free access to Sky's Sky Club and the VIP Executive Lounge, as well as the services of a dedicated butler.

BARS AND RESTAURANTS

The hotel's main restaurant is C'est La Vie, serving delicious French cuisine. The menu includes typical rustic dishes from the south of France, as well as genuine Vietnamese fare. All dishes are prepared using only the freshest seasonal ingredients. C'est La Vie is located on the 2nd floor of the building and serves break-



fast from 6am to 10pm, followed by other meals served throughout the day until 10.30pm.

In the lobby of the hotel there is Lounge Tea, where you can try various blends of tea, including premium and bespoke ones. In addition to traditional teas, you can also enjoy here delicious tea-based cocktails.

Mai's Sky Club Lounge is a special place for Sky's Mai club members (and suite guests). The lounge is located on the 14th floor and is open from 6am to 9pm. You can work here, use the meeting room and order complimentary laundry service. Throughout the day the lounge served fresh juices, soft drinks, mineral water, tea and light snacks. Between 5 and 7pm you can also come here for wine or a special cocktail.

LEISURE

The hotel's main relaxation venue is its Four Elements Spa open every day from 9am to 9pm. It's situated on the 5th floor of the building and offers a wide range of treatments based on traditional Asian techniques, combined with modern western procedures. Experienced masseurs will take care of every part of your body here.

Just next to the Four Element Spa there is an outdoor swimming pool overlooking the city. Here you can take a nap on the deckchair or enjoy healthy snacks and drinks at The Fifth Element bar.

Of course, there is also a fitness room, as well as a spacious gym opened 24/7 and equipped with Life Fitness treadmills, cross trainers, bikes and weights. Finally, there are two saunas, separate for each sex.



The hotel's main relaxation venue is its Four Elements Spa.

EXPLORE SAIGON

A visit to the Mai House Saigon is also a great opportunity to get to know the historical Saigon. The hotel stands right next to the historic Marie Curie School, surrounded by picturesque alleys, charming boutiques and cosy local cafes. Beautiful colonial houses shine brightly in the shadow of Vietnamese historical treasures, and some of the city's most famous attractions are just a short walk away. These include:

The Independence Palace, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, the old Central Post Office and Tao Dan Park.

It's also worth visiting the Ong Khoi, a historic street with beautifully restored colonial buildings transformed into elegant restaurants and boutiques. Ong Khoi is one of the most popular venues for evening parties or meetings with friends in Saigon.

VERDICT

The Mai House Saigon is a good five-star hotel, ideally located in the very heart of Ho Chi Minh City. It's a perfect venue for both a business visit and a city break in this historic Vietnamese city. *Rafal Sobiech*



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► WSTĘP TYLKO DLA OSÓB PEŁNOLETNICH ◀

Shinta Mani Shack, Siem Reap



architect, described by Time magazine as “the king of exotic luxury resorts”. His company Bensley Design Studios is well-known worldwide for transforming wild landscapes into sophisticated environments. Bensley seeks to change the way people perceive hotels and likes to defy the regular ways modern hotel properties are built. In Angkor Wat, this unconventional approach has led him to design a unique hotel complex comprising 62 rooms, most of which are adjacent to the pool courtyard and tropical garden. Shinta Mani Shack is decorated in retro style with such distinct features as a functional mirror wall, a specially designed king size bed and hand-made lighting fixtures.

ROOMS

Shinta Mani Shack offers its guests four types of rooms. Located on the second floor of the building are the most impressive, 94sqm Executive Suites with a separate bedroom and a living area. All come with such amenities as a flatscreen TV with Bluetooth connectivity and fast wifi. They also have beautiful wooden furniture designed by Bensley Design Studios.

At 78sqm, Junior Suites are slightly smaller, but still spacious, and come with a balcony overlooking the courtyard, garden and the pool. Designed in retro style, they also feature both a separate bedroom and living area.

The hotel has also slightly more affordable rooms in its offer. Those are 40sqm Poolview Rooms and 44sqm Poolside Garden Rooms, which (as their names suggest) overlook the pool and the garden respectively. The latter are located literally a few meters from the pool's edge, close to lush tropical vegetation.

Are you in Cambodia for a small conference in Siem Reap, one of the most fascinating cities of the country? Or perhaps you have come here purely as a tourist looking forward to explore the famous Angkor Wat temple complex? Either way, you won't find a better accommodation in the city than Shinta Mani Shack.

The Cambodian city of Siem Reap is known to lovers of Asian culture and history mainly because of the Angkor Wat temple complex, which is the best preserved example of Khmer architecture. Originally dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, Angkor Wat became a Buddhist temple by the end of the 12th century.

Located less than 7 kilometres from this fascinating wonder of architecture is Shinta Mani Shack hotel.

The property first launched in June 2003 as an 18-room guesthouse, as part of the Hospitality Training School where underprivileged Cambodians learnt the tricks of the hotel trade. Following a renovation in 2012, Shinta Mani Siem Reap was opened again, this time as a 39-room luxury boutique hotel. Finally, in 2013, Shinta Mani Shack was built on the neighbouring plot of land.

WHERE IS IT?

Shinta Mani Shack is a boutique hotel located in the green French quarter, between the Royal Gardens and the Old Market Square, just a 15-minute drive from Angkor Wat. Its building was designed by Bill Bensley, a Bangkok-based





Shinta Mani Shack is a boutique hotel located in the green French quarter, between the Royal Gardens.

BARS AND RESTAURANTS

Guests at Shinta Mani Shack can enjoy a very varied menu. The hotel's main restaurant Baitong offers meals throughout the day. You can choose from an international menu as well as Khmer street dishes. Buffet breakfast is served here from 6am until 10am; between 11.30am and 2.30pm you can order lunch, while after 6pm (until 10.30pm) dinner a la carte. The restaurant is also known for its exquisite signature cocktails, including Mango-Rita punch, Ginger Khmer and Open Heart.

Kroya restaurant (which in Khmer language means simply "food") specializes traditional Cambodian fare, such as seven-course Khast Tasting Menu or fried fish with watermelon and papaya fruit. The local cuisine is full of local spices and flavours. You can enjoy your meal at Kroya either in a spacious air-conditioned room or on a beautiful terrace overlooking the neighbourhood. The working hours here are the same as at Baitong. Kroya's signature drink is delicious Khmer Gin Cooler.

Shinta Mani Shack is also a real paradise for fans of American steaks, served here at The Steakhouse Siem Reap. You will find here a classic steakhouse menu, including the Master's Cut or special Wagyu sirloin - so soft that you can cut it with a fork. Don't forget to



TRIED AND TESTED

order the appetizers, especially fried mozzarella with Sicilian tomato salsa, crispy buns with shrimps and fried raisin bread stuffed with gorgonzola cheese.

Finally, Bensley's Bar named after the hotel's architect, is the place to go for the best cocktails in the city.

The hotel has also prepared a special offer for those eager to try their hand at preparing Khmer dishes. If you feel up to it, you can take part here in cooking classes led by a professional chef. The training starts with an early morning visit to one of the city's markets called Psa Chas. The chef will show you around the place, telling you about local products and herbs. The typical spices used in Khmer cuisine are turmeric, kaffir lime leaves, ginger, lemon grass, dried chilli and galangal.

After the visit to the market, guests return to the hotel to try their hand at local fare. Each participant receives a cookbook with four traditional Khmer dishes: mango salad, fish amok, beef soup and sticky rice dumplings. After preparing and cooking the meal, the dishes are then served for lunch.

SPA AND MEETING FACILITIES

Comprising a large relaxation area and three treatment rooms, Shinta Mani Spa is a perfect choice for all those looking forward to pampering their bodies. All treatments are based on traditional Khmer rituals and proven modern therapies to reduce stress and restore internal balance. The most popular is the Khmer scrub, which utilizes white clay and organic Cambodian seeds sourced from the mountain province of Rattanakiri. At



This unique hotel complex comprises 62 rooms, most of which are adjacent to the pool courtyard and tropical garden.

Shinta Mani you can also organize a small business meeting or conference. For this purpose you can use the 47sqm Blackboard room located on the first floor and equipped with state-of-the-art technology. Depending on the configuration, it can accommodate from 14 to 30 people. All corporate events are personally supervised by the hotel manager.

VERDICT

Shinta Mani Shack in Siem Reap is one of the best addresses in the city. It's an ideal starting point for exploring the Angkor Wat complex, and at the same time a very good venue to organize a small business meeting. The opportunity to taste and learn about the local cuisine is also something you won't find in many hotels in the region. *Rafal Sobiech*



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Victoria Xiangthong Palace



It's a quiet, charming and Asian through and through. The journey to the former capital of Laos - Luang Prabang - is simply pure pleasure. If you go there, it's a good idea to book your stay at Victoria Xiangthong Palace Hotel, which used to be the residence of the king and queen of Laos.

If you have never been to Laos, you should do it - whether for business or sheer pleasure - starting your journey from the former capital of this country Luang Prabang. Located at the confluence of the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers, surrounded by limestone hills covered with jungle, Luang Prabang is one of the most popular destinations in Southeast Asia.

Suffice it to say that since 1995 it has been on UNESCO World Heritage List. The city is renowned for its beautiful fusion of traditional architecture and urban infrastructure of 19th century Laos with the 20th century buildings from colonial times when the country was a European colony. On the streets you can see

an interesting mix of amber-robed monks and women selling baguettes.

Luang Prabang lies on the right bank of the Mekong, at the mouth of the Nam Khan River. Just before merging with its larger sister, the Nam Khan turns sharply to the east, creating a sort of peninsula with a breathtaking panorama of the city. In the centre of Luang Prabang is Phu Si Hill. The city is surrounded by limestone hills reaching 600 metres above sea level.

WHERE IS IT?

Victoria Xiangthong Palace is situated around a 15-minute drive from Luang Prabang International Airport. Transfers to and from the airport can be organized on request by the hotel. A one-way ride by a comfortable Hyundai Starex minivan costs US\$15. If you opt to get to the hotel by a ferry, you will need to get off at the Xiangthong Pier, which is very close to the property.

CONTACT:

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www.victoriahotels.asia/en/hotels-resorts/xiangthong/



Victoria Xiangthong Palace is located in a quiet alley of the old town.



Victoria Xiangthong Palace is located in a quiet alley of the old town, a short walk from the famous night market, as well as restaurants and boutiques of the city centre. It's also close to the bank of the Mekong River and the city's most famous temple Wat Xiangthong, making it a perfect starting point to explore the former capital of the country.

ROOMS

Victoria Xiangthong Palace offers five types of accommodation with different standards and services. These are: Palace Twin, Palace Double, Victoria Suite, Xiangthong Villa i Mekong Double Suite. All are decorated in a palace style, and feature air conditioning, as well as free Wi-Fi. The rooms also come with coffee and tea making facilities and, importantly, separate baths and showers.

The smallest Twin Palace rooms offer 28sqm of space. Palace Double rooms are slightly more spacious (40sqm) and have beautiful rosewood furniture. Some of them are situated in the new wing of the hotel overlooking the tropical garden and the Mekong River.

Another category are 50sqm Victoria Suites with windows and a balcony overlooking the local pond, garden and nearby hills.

Then there are six 60sqm Xiangthong Villas, each with a separate bedroom, comfortable living room, balcony and a private Jacuzzi on the ground floor.

The last category of accommodation at Victoria Xiangthong Palace are four



The hotel offers five types of accommodation with different standards and services. These are: Palace Twin, Palace Double, Victoria Suite, Xiangthong Villa i Mekong Double Suite.

Mekong Double Suites - King Sisavang, housed in the last royal residence of Laos. Each offers 56sqm of floor area, a separate bedroom, living room and large terrace overlooking the Mekong.

RESTAURANTS

During your stay at the Victoria Xiangthong Palace, your palates will be pampered by the chef of Alamea Restaurant situated on the banks of the Mekong River. The menu comprises a vast selection of local Laotian specialties, but also international dishes. The wine list is equally extensive, making Alamea a perfect choice for lunch or exquisite dinner. The restaurant is open daily from 7am to 10pm. It's worth noting that every day at 7pm movie fans hold silent cinema shows right outside the establishment. On special request, the restaurant staff can organize a private dinner in your hotel room.

The local menu is simply delicious. For an appetizer I recommend smoked duck breast with a poached egg, diced potatoes, fried onion, and tomato, served with salad, Italian sauce and bread. Equally tasty is the chicken breast stew with aubergine, beans, Lao basil and lemon grass.

When by the Mekong River, you simply must try another local delicacy called Sousi Pa Sa Sa Gnuu, which is fish soup with chili paste, coconut milk, garlic and steamed rice. To properly finish your meal, order the typical Lao dessert comprising sweet milk with tapioka, banana and coconut milk.



SPA

A journey to Asia would be incomplete without a visit to a real spa. Victoria Spa is located on the first floor of the hotel building, which once was the residence of the king and queen of Laos. The facility features a spacious terrace overlooking the Mekong and the mountains in the backdrop. There are three well equipped treatment rooms, including two with a private steam bath. Victoria Spa offers a wide range of treatments, such as full body massages, nourishing body scrubs and various facial treatments.

TRIPS

One of the obligatory stops on your itinerary should be a visit to the complex of gilded temples, as well as a stroll around the whitewashed postcolonial French residences. You should also reserve some time to participate in the morning Buddhist almsgiving ceremony, when monks take to the streets of the city to collect alms from the local people. The offered food comprises mostly rice, food and vegetables. Special hotel guides can take you on a tour round the city, telling you about the history and significance of this ritual for Buddhist believers.

It's also worth learning how to prepare traditional Lao dishes. You can participate in such cooking classes e.g. while visiting the local market.

Don't forget to visit the Kuang Si waterfall located nearly 30 kilometres from Luang Prabang. It's a real three-level wonder of nature! On the entire height of the waterfalls there are numerous ponds and cascades, some of them you can bathe in. Next to the entrance to the waterfall complex there is the Bear Rescue



Victoria Xiangthong Palace Hotel is the perfect place to relax and an ideal starting point to explore the Luang Prabang area.

Centre - home to several black Asian bears saved from poachers and smugglers. Each animal has its own name and is quite tame.

Another nearby attraction is the Kuang Si Butterfly Park, created by two Dutch passionates of Asian flora and fauna. The hotel can also organize cruises down the Mekong River, e.g. to Pak Ou caves. Lastly, don't forget to visit the Victoria Open Air cinema located on site the hotel, which stages regular film screenings.

VERDICT

Victoria Xiangthong Palace Hotel is the perfect place to relax and an ideal starting point to explore the Luang Prabang area. As the former capital of the country, Luang Prabang is also a favourable environment for business. The surroundings of the hotel and the immediate vicinity of Mekong guarantees a genuine feel of the local Asian climate.

Rafal Sobiech





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New York: Seaport District

Stroll the cobblestones of this waterfront area, where history coexists with modern shopping and dining spots

1 Titanic Memorial Lighthouse

The Seaport District at the south-eastern tip of Manhattan is one of New York's most historic districts, and yet is overlooked by most tourist itineraries, and overshadowed (literally) by some of its modern developments. Located between Brooklyn Bridge to the north-east and Maiden Lane to the south-east, it is a series of streets running parallel to the water's edge – Front Street, Water Street and South Street. Reaching it is easy. Use Fulton Street station and walk down the road of the same name until you see the Titanic Memorial Lighthouse, which sat on top of the 12-storey Seamen's Church Institute on South Street until its demolition in the late 1960s. From this point, you can spot buildings from the early 19th century

and appreciate a history dating back to the Dutch West India Company of 1625. Walk to the right – the buildings here (numbered 2-18 Fulton Street) are called the Schermerhorn Row Block, designed in the Federal style of the late 18th and early 19th century.

2 South Street Seaport Museum

This museum on Schermerhorn Row is where you can learn more about the district, especially if you pre-book a walking tour. This will explain how the marshy eastern shoreline – which is still vulnerable to flooding, as was shown in 2012 with Hurricane Sandy – was once a series of coves that gradually had their banks strengthened to create wharves and piers known as "Slips", areas where boats arrived from the East River to load

and unload. The slips were filled in but are recognisable by the width of the streets – check out nearby Peck Slip, which is wider than neighbouring roads. It's a fascinating exercise strolling around the area and spotting them – Coenties Slip (mentioned in chapter one of *Moby Dick*), Old Slip, Catherine Slip, Market Slip and Burling Slip. If you're interested in the conservation of the area, see Save Our Seaport (saveourseaport.org). Museum open 11am-5pm Wed-Sun; entry US\$20.

southstreetseaportmuseum.org

3 Shopping

The area has certainly gone upmarket since the late New Yorker writer Joseph Mitchell described its fascinating but down-at-heel cafés and bars and, most famously, the oystermen of Fulton Fish Market (see below).



Today, alongside well-known brands such as Scotch and Soda and Guess, you'll find an interesting mix of boutiques including Cynthia Rowley and Lee Lee's Forest. For shoes there's SJP by Sarah Jessica Parker, while 10 Corso Como is a fashion, art, design, food and lifestyle store curated by Milan's Carla Sozzani. After visiting the South Street Seaport Museum, pop into the adjoining Bowne and Co Stationers, owned by the museum, to view its unusual notebooks, quirky hand-printed greeting cards and 19th-century letterpress machinery.

seaportdistrict.nyc

4 Fulton Fish Market

The Fulton Fish Market was located in the Seaport District from 1822, originally in a wooden shed and then in several other buildings before in

1907 being housed in what became known as the Tin Building because of its corrugated metal façade. In 2005 the market moved to the Bronx and is still here today. The Tin Building was damaged by flooding in 2012 and has been rebuilt about ten metres away, further from the FDR Drive. It will house a seafood-themed food hall by acclaimed chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, set to open in 2022.

4 Food and drink

There's plenty of choice, from an outpost of vegan chain By Chloe (eatbychloe.com) to the Big Gay Ice Cream parlour (biggayicecream.com). Pier 17 has several options, including Bar Wayo (wayo.momofuku.com) for Asian fusion food and craft ales, and Vongerichten's the Fulton for seafood (jean-georges.com; pictured above). There are lots of good bars but

perhaps for a taste of earlier, less gentrified times, you should try Jeremy's Ale House (jeremysalehouse.com). Its current location on Front Street is one of several it has had in the area over the years, but the vibe of seafood and beers remains the same, as do the women's bras hanging from the ceiling. It prides itself on having discounted drinks for breakfast, if you find the jet lag has really messed up your body clock.

For something more sophisticated, the Garden Bar is a great choice (bzpnyc.com/garden-bar), but also try R17, a rooftop bar at the top of Pier 17 (pictured top right) overlooking the East River. It is open throughout the day for drinks and food although is occasionally closed for concerts or private events (see r17nyc.com). For more information on the area visit seaportdistrict.nyc

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MENU ON BOARD

My boss often travels with his wife and they often fly business class. I've never ordered any special food for her before, but now she asked me to order different types of meals. She just wants to try various options. I know you can ask for vegetarian meals, but are there any other options? Do I need to call the agent specifically in this case? Will it involve any additional costs? They usually fly with LOT Polish Airlines.

Magda

Dear Magda,

Almost all good airlines offer a wide range of special meals for their passengers. While the offer in economy class cabin can be very limited and usually paid, business class passengers enjoy a wealth of options in this aspect. This is true especially on long-haul flights where you can try numerous delicious dishes at no extra cost.

Indeed, vegetarian meals are the most popular. The basic offer usually covers two different types of meals: strictly vegan (VGML code) and lacto-ovo containing milk products and eggs (VLML code). Note that Asian airlines often offer a wider choice of vegetarian dishes (e.g. without specific types of vegetables).

Examples of other special meals are low-fat (LFML), gluten-free (GFML), low-salt (LSML), fibre-rich (HFML), or calorie-limited (LCML). Diabetic travellers can order a meal prepared with their condition in mind, that is without simple sugars (DBML code). Lactose-intolerant passengers have the option to order a meal without dairy products (NLML code).

A separate group are the meals prepared according to various religious specifications. Airlines provide meals made according to the rules of specific religions: kosher (KSML code), Indian (HNML code) and Muslim (MLML code).

All meals should be booked at least 24 hours before departure (sometimes 48 hours in advance) and may not be available on all routes. Please make sure that your travel agency has confirmed your meal in the booking system with the airline.

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 Peter.



MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE

I've booked a cruise in the Mediterranean Sea with guaranteed two exterior staterooms with a balcony and one interior stateroom. Is it enough to take only our ID cards, or is it better to take our passports with us? I've received an e-mail saying I need to check in. What is the deadline for this procedure? What information do I need to provide? I don't have the stateroom number yet, as I booked the cruise in promotion. Is there Internet access aboard the ship?

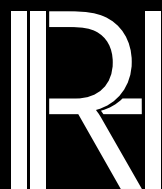
Andrzej

Dear Andrzej,

I do recommend taking your passports with you, even if the planned itinerary only covers the countries of the European Union. Please note that the route may be unexpectedly changed for various reasons (e.g. weather conditions or medical evacuation). The likelihood and ease of re-routing are much higher than in case of air travel. It may happen that a ship is forced to call at a port in Turkey instead of the originally planned port on one of the Greek islands.

Check-in can be done 90 days before departure, but not later than 3-4 days prior to the ship leaving the port. You must provide the following passport data: document number, date of issue, expiry date, issuing authority and the date of birth. It's also necessary to provide contact details and additionally the personal details of a person not traveling with you, who may be notified in an emergency. The system should generate a confirmation that needs to be printed and displayed at the port terminal.

In your case, the final document will be generated in the booking system after the allocation of specific staterooms. In case of promotional offers the cabin number is provided closer to the departure date, usually about a week in advance. After you have received the notification, print out the confirmation and luggage tags. There is usually Internet access on most cruise ships, but the cost is quite high. If the ship is sailing along the shore, it gets access to transmitters from the mainland. On the high seas, the Internet is available only via satellite. You can buy different packages for a certain amount of data.



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