

Business Traveller ^{Poland}

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JAPAN

*Okinawa - a Cultural Paradise
in the Pacific*

HOTELS

*Best Airport Hotels
in Poland*

GREEK ISLANDS

*Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes,
Crete, Corfu*

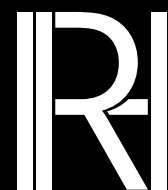
PLUS

*Hotel, restaurant,
and airline news*



WAITING GAME

*African aviation is ripe
for expansion.*



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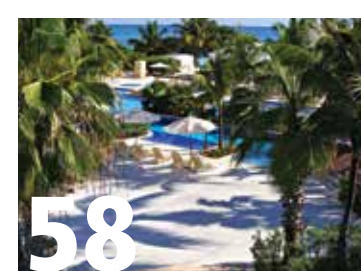
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THINKING ABOUT SUMMER

In this issue I would like to particularly recommend articles that I hope will inspire you to spend your summer weeks away from work.

Greek islands are a great idea for a holiday. In spite of the financial difficulties Greece has faced in recent years, travellers continue to visit its sandy beaches, cosy coves and verdant olive groves. Island hopping presents the opportunity to enjoy several islands in one trip. We present here our subjective list of the five most beautiful of the Greek islands: Santorini, Mykonos, Rhodes, Crete and Corfu, which can be accessed by air or one of the many ferries departing from the port of Piraeus.

Another destination we recommend in this issue is surrounded by turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea, Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula - one of the most fascinating places in the Caribbean. Perfectly preserved monuments of ancient Mayan and Toltec civilizations, ubiquitous cacti, pelicans and flamingos, as well as the famous tequila sipped in this climate from the very morning - all of this makes up a fantastic place for a memorable holiday. Cancún, Playa del Carmen, Tulum and pyramids in Chichén Itzá are particularly worth checking.

Thinking intensely about the coming summer months myself, I do hope you will enjoy this month's issue of Business Traveller Poland.

Marzena Mróz

MARZENA MRÓZ
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ZWIEDZAJ ŚWIAT WYGODNIE



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SEMANA SANTA

Seville is believed to have more churches than Rome and during the period that extends from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, the city witnesses as many as 70 religious processions. Every day, there are 5 to 7 of “marchas procesionales” during that time. The first procession starts at 3 am, while the last one ends 24 hours later. Each one lasts at least nine hours. In the meantime, casual viewers, take short breaks to drink coffee or pop into the nearby tapas bars. At night when the crowd moves forward among the intense scent of incense, people refresh themselves with a glass of wine. Processions often compete against each other. They are attended by the members of hooded brotherhoods, carrying relics of saints, holy books, as well as medieval statues crying with diamond tears. It’s also worth going to Semana Santa in Andalusia, to see the annual paschal mystery. Easter celebrations there involve numerous ancient rituals.



NATIONAL MUSEUM IN PRAGUE

The National Museum, the oldest museum institution in the Czech Republic, was founded 200 years ago. In April this year, for the first time in history, the dome on the top of the hill was opened to the public, offering sweeping views of the city. The exhibition called “2x100” presents the history of this place. Featuring 200 most valuable historical, natural scientific and artistic exhibits, the event organizers aim to present them in a completely new context reflecting their diversity.



LIGHTING DESIGN - THE PROFESSION OF THE FUTURE?

It highlights the character of a space, improves the mood, and can even... give you a boost to work. Consciously designed lighting can work wonders. Architects are increasingly inclined to collaborate with lighting system designers. How does this collaboration work? We asked about this Radoslaw Zaccheja, the CEO at Bright Lights. What exactly is lighting design? It is a multidisciplinary area of design connected with technology, aesthetics, creation and art. It’s all about designing artificial lighting that meets functional requirements and at the same is aesthetically pleasing. It’s usually an area related to architecture and urban planning, but also to artistic performance, theatre, television and music scene. The lighting designer operates in two main areas: architecture and spectacle. They are people who work with the architect during the design process to highlight the building’s qualities and guarantee its proper functionality, as well as to ensure compliance of the property with appropriate performance standards lighting wise. More and more such a person is a specialist involved in the development of visual identification of a property.

Air France/KLM - new destinations



For the 2019 summer season (March 31 to October 27, 2019), Air France-KLM will be offering 58 new routes. On its long-haul network, Air France-KLM will operate 4 new routes: 2 destinations on departure from Paris-Charles de Gaulle: Dallas (USA) and Quito (Ecuador) with Air France, and 2 destinations on departure from Amsterdam-Schiphol - Boston and Las Vegas (USA) with KLM. The group will launch a total of 26 new European routes, including flights from regional and inland airports in France. The most important change for the Polish market is the launch of a new, daily KLM Wrocław-Amsterdam service from 6 May 2019. This summer will also see continuation of services on Cracow-Eindhoven route launched last winter and operated by Transavia. In the upcoming season, Air France-KLM Group will also launch a number of other attractive connections from its two main base airports in Paris and Amsterdam. From 31 March, Air France will offer services to Belgrade



(Serbia), Tbilisi (Georgia) and Lorient (France) departing from Paris-Charles de Gaulle, as well as spring/summer seasonal flights (from 21 April) to Heraklion (Crete, Greece), Olbia (Sardinia, Italy), Palermo (Sicily, Italy) and Split (Croatia). In addition, the group's offer will include many new European routes departing from regional ports, mainly in France. In Japan, the Air France-KLM group is significantly increasing its service to Tokyo - 2 additional flights to Tokyo-Haneda on departure from Paris and 3 additional flights to Tokyo-Narita.



INTERNET OUTSIDE THE EU

A young Łódź start-up has come up with a brilliant idea on how to free tourists and business travellers from dangers of expensive roaming calls outside the EU, risky public hotspots or having to use extra SIM cards. The idea is a brainchild of Kasia Banasiak who for years has been fascinated with new technologies for business. This is how XOXO WiFi came to existence. The device is a portable router, which after starting up connects with the best cellular operator in the location. The small start-up has already signed agreements with over 300 mobile phone operators and its services are available in 130 countries. Rental prices start at €6.9 per day and are up to 95 per cent lower than typical roaming rates.



LUFTHANSA GROUP

In 2018, the Lufthansa Group, which includes Lufthansa, Austrian Airlines, SWISS, Eurowings and Brussels Airlines, handled a record 2,852,019 passengers in Poland. The global financial results of the group were presented at a press conference by Carsten Spohr, CEO of Deutsche Lufthansa AG, and Ulrik Svensson, Chief Financial Officer of Deutsche Lufthansa AG. The new figures show that last year the number of passengers who opted to travel with Lufthansa Group from Polish airports rose by 10.7 percent compared with the year before. The airlines also launched two new services: to Munich from Katowice and Łódź. In 2018, Lufthansa served 2,210,189 passengers travelling from and to Poland, up 11.8% than in the previous year.



NEW THULE REVOLVE SERIES

Thule's novelties are designed for frequent travellers. The Thule Revolve series consists of four models, including a carry-on and a registered suitcase. Their main features include extremely durable polycarbonate impact-resistant shell, over-sized rear wheels for greater control over rough terrain, as well as built-in save lock, and tough telescopic handles. Felt liner contours the case and absorbs vibrations in transit. Adjustable, internal compression system stabilizes load during travel, while integrated feet allow the bag to rest on its side without tipping. Thule Revolve series also features built-in Travel Sentry TSA accepted 3-digit lock.

The series consists of four models with different capacities, available in three colour versions: black, grey and navy blue. Thule Revolve Carry On Spinner, capacity: 33l, size: 55 x 35 x 23cm, weight: 3.8kg; price: PLN1699. Wide-body Carry On Spinner, capacity: 39l, size: 55 x 40 x 23cm, weight: 4.1kg; price: PLN1849. Thule Revolve Spinner 68cm/27" – capacity: 63l, size: 68 x 45 x 28cm, weight: 5.3kg; price: PLN2049. Thule Revolve Spinner. 75cm/30", capacity: 97l, size: 75 x 51 x 31cm, weight 6.4kg; price: PLN2349. All products from the series are covered by a five-year warranty.



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

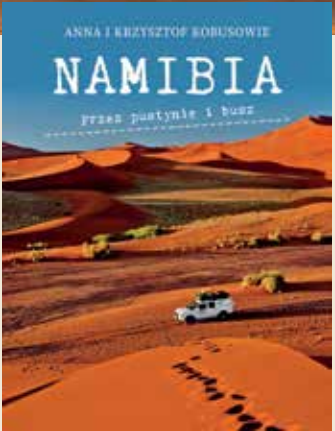
Airbus and Dassault Systèmes signed a five-year agreement to co-operate on what the companies describe as collaborative 3D design, engineering, manufacturing, simulation and intelligence applications. Airbus expects the deal to boost its digital transformation and, ultimately, lay the foundation for a new European industrial ecosystem in aviation. Dassault Systèmes explains DDMS paves the way for breakthroughs in new product design, operational performance, support and maintenance, customer satisfaction and new business models, as it represents a move from sequential to parallel development processes. The company continues to explain, that instead of first focusing on product performance, Airbus will be able to co-design and develop the next generation of aircraft with the manufacturing facilities that will produce them, reducing costs and time to market. "DDMS is a catalyst for change and with it we are building a new model for the European aerospace industry with state-of-the-art technology," said Guillaume Faury, president, Airbus Commercial Aircraft.

PRESS MATERIALS, FOTOLIA



A GOOD READ

A great book about Namibia written by a couple of travellers. Anna Olej-Kobus and Krzysztof Kobus describe this remarkable African country, using their knowledge and experience. They have visited Namibia many times. They traversed its deserts, met extraordinary people and unique animals, saw the country's largest baobab and the smallest city. They travelled with cameras and with... children. We recommend this book to all those who are considering going on a real African expedition; przewodniknamibia.pl

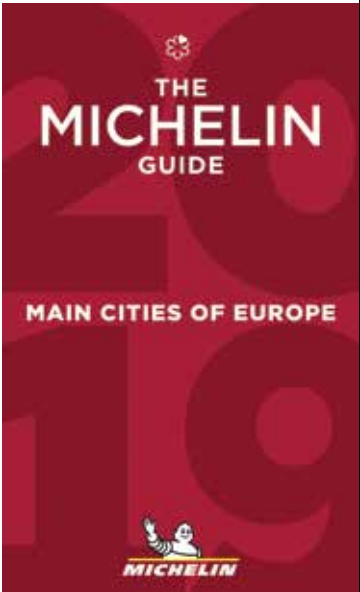


THE FIRST EVER MOTOR VALLEY FESTIVAL IN MODENA

Modena is preparing for the first ever Motor Valley Festi, which will start on 16 May and will last until 19 May 2019. Why is Modena a perfect choice for the event? There are many reasons for this, but the most significant is that Modena is home to such automotive legends as Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini and Ducati. During the four-day festival you will be able to feast your eyes with the best cars manufactured solely in the Emilia Romagna region. Guests attending this one-of-a-kind celebration of Italian four-wheelers will also have the opportunity to taste the delicacies produced by local artists, get to know Italian culture and art, as well as take part in legendary car races.

Best restaurants

This year, three new Warsaw eateries (Chłodna 15 by Wilmowski, Europejski Grill and Bez Gwiazdek) have been added to the list of restaurants distinguished by "MICHELIN Guide Main Cities of Europe 2019" book. At the same time six restaurants have disappeared from this prestigious list. In total, Michelin inspectors have distinguished 27 establishments from the Polish capital city, two of which (Atelier Amaro and Senses) have



maintained the Michelin star, which for many years has been considered to be the highest distinction in the culinary world and, at the same time, every chef's dream. Additionally, Kieliszki na Hożej restaurant has received the Bib Gourmand rating, awarded for offering good food at moderate prices. In Cracow, which boasts 25 restaurants listed in Michelin Guide, only one restaurant hasn't been able to retain its high rating. It's also worth noting that this year for the first time in history "MICHELIN Guide Main Cities of Europe 2019" includes establishments from Croatia and Iceland.

Waiting game

African aviation is ripe for expansion
– now policymakers need to make it happen

PICTURED:
Passengers wait at Jomo
Kenyatta International
airport in Nairobi

When Alex Dichter, now a senior partner at McKinsey & Company in London, tried to go to war-torn Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in the late 1990s to do voluntary work, the first problem was getting in. There was no functioning government and no official flights. The only solution at Kigali airport in neighbouring Rwanda was for Dichter to go over to the cargo area with a couple of bottles of vodka in his rucksack and use it to “hitch a ride” with one of the mercenary Russian and Ukrainian aircraft that were ferrying arms into the DRC.

There are usually more conventional ways to get a flight within Africa. But it can mean flying out to Europe and then back into Africa again. Why, for example, is it impossible to fly direct between Kinshasa in the DRC and Nigeria’s commercial capital, Lagos? These are already huge cities and will become megalopolises in the future.

African aviation policymakers understand the potential of greater competition and increased direct services, but have multiple and conflicting objectives and constraints, Dichter notes. They may want to increase aviation services, and also need to protect domestic aviation jobs, “but they can’t have both. The desire to protect is politically powerful.” Many countries suspect that if exposed to real competition, their own national carrier might struggle to survive.

To state the obvious, Africa is a growth market for aviation. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) forecasts 5.9 per cent year-on-year growth in African aviation over the next 20 years, with passenger numbers expected to increase from 100 million to more than 300 million by 2026. That suggests the possibility of Africa becoming a less fragmented continent with greater air connectivity, opening up economic benefits across the board.

An IATA survey in 2014 suggested that if 12 key African countries opened their markets and increased connectivity, an extra 155,000 jobs and US\$1.3 billion in annual GDP would be created in those countries.

Much remains to be done if that potential is to be realised. “Too many African governments view aviation as a luxury rather than →



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a necessity,” argues Katherine Kaczynska, IATA’s corporate communications manager for the Middle East and Africa. “That perception needs to change. The value of aviation for governments is not in the tax receipts that can be squeezed from it. It is in the economic growth and job creation that aviation supports.”

Kaczynska points out that the global average profit per passenger is US\$7.80. But airlines in Africa on average lose US\$1.55 for every passenger carried. There are many reasons for the disparity. Jet fuel costs in Africa are 35 per cent higher than the rest of the world. User charges – paid by airlines and passengers for the use of aviation infrastructure – make up 11.4 per cent of airlines’ operating costs in Africa; four times that of North America.

Taxes and fees are among the highest in the world. In Niger, US\$80 from each ticket is paid to the government in fees, taxes and charges. Cameroon recently added a US\$37 development tax per passenger. The DRC charges every arriving passenger US\$15 to promote tourism, while Ethiopia’s US\$24 departure tax undermines the hub’s competitiveness.

A further challenge for airlines in Africa is the ability to reliably repatriate ticket revenues generated in other countries in line with international treaty obligations, Kaczynska says. Currently, ten African countries have blocked funds worth a total US\$670 million. Blocking airline funds puts connectivity at risk, and invites broader economic problems. “Urgent dialogue is the first step, with creative and proactive mitigation plans following closely behind,” Kaczynska argues.

COLONIAL ROOTS

Rapid economic growth is stoking demand for business travel in many sub-Saharan economies. But, according to



Another challenge is the ability to reliably repatriate ticket revenues generated in other countries. Currently, ten African countries have blocked funds worth a total US\$670 million.



Taxes and fees in Africa are among the highest in the world

COVER STORY

AIRLINES IN AFRICA

5 MAJOR PLAYERS...

South African Airways

A Star Alliance member, South African Airways has been in operation since 1934 and flies to 57 destinations around the world. Its newest aircraft, the A330-300, was placed on the London-Johannesburg route last year. flysaa.com

Ethiopian Airlines

Founded in 1945, this Star Alliance carrier flies to more than 119 international destinations. The airline opened a new terminal and own-brand hotel at its Addis Ababa hub in January. The B787-9 was introduced to its fleet in 2017. ethiopianairlines.com

Kenya Airways

From its Nairobi hub at Jomo Kenyatta International, Kenya Airways flies to 43 destinations in Africa and 14 outside the continent, including London Heathrow. A Skyteam member, its fleet includes the B787 Dreamliner. kenya-airways.com

Egyptair

Egyptair was established in 1932 and now flies to more than 75 global destinations. Operating from Cairo International airport, the Star Alliance carrier launched a twice-weekly service to Hong Kong in September last year. egyptair.com

Rwandair

Rwanda’s national airline flies out of Kigali International airport to 26 cities in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, including London Gatwick. Next month, it will launch direct services to Addis Ababa, and there’s talk of flights to New York and China in the future. rwandair.com

... AND 5 TO WATCH

Green Africa Airways

This low-cost Nigerian carrier based in Lagos has not yet begun commercial operations but it has big plans. The airline recently announced a commitment to 100 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, with the goal of building a pan-African network. greenafrica.com

Kulula

Owned by Comair, this South African budget airline connects cities including Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban within South Africa. It also serves Nairobi via a codeshare with Kenya Airways, and interlines on the domestic and regional network Comair operates for British Airways. kulula.com

Jambojet

A subsidiary of Kenya Airways, this low-cost carrier flies from Nairobi to six Kenyan and Ugandan destinations. Founded in 2013, it will add two Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 aircraft to its fleet later this year. jambojet.com

FlySafair

Based at Johannesburg OR Tambo International, FlySafair took its maiden flight in 2014. The low-cost airline flies to seven airports in South Africa, including Cape Town and Durban, using B737 aircraft. flysafair.com

Air Senegal

Senegal’s national airline flies to four African cities, including Banjul in the Gambia and Praia in Cape Verde, from its Dakar base. Not even a year old, it launched flights to Paris in February (see our feature on new airlines on page 62). flyairsenegal.com

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ABOVE:
The Okavango Delta,
Botswana

BCD Travel's 2019 forecast, supply is unable to respond fully, owing to regulation and high airport taxes, so regional business fares are set to increase. Many direct routes that business needs don't yet exist and won't any time soon.

As a result, non-African carriers cover 80 per cent of the African market. While there is an increase in African carriers such as Ethiopian Airlines, South African Airways, Kenya Airways, Air Cote d'Ivoire, Royal Air Maroc and Egyptair, they cannot fully compete with European or Middle Eastern airlines that have broader global long-haul coverage with which to subsidise African routes.

Intra-region visa restrictions are another major impediment. According to the Africa Visa Openness Index, Africans on average need visas to enter 55 per cent of states within the continent.

Anthony Chibo-Christopher, chief executive of Sun Business Strategies and Research in Nigeria, claims that he can fly to New York for about US\$500 but it costs him US\$1,200 to fly to Dakar, Senegal. There is a tendency, he says, to think of Africa as one. In fact, prior to colonialism, Africa was made up of a wide variety of kingdoms, most of which did not know much about each other.

The result, he says, was that trade was defined by the

colonial relationship with Britain and France. African countries did not develop their own trading relationships. "Travel follows trade," Chibo-Christopher says – Nigerians now want to go to London, and Ivorians to Paris.

Dichter at McKinsey says that the amount of trade, and therefore business travel, between Anglophone and Francophone Africa remains limited.

The problem that bedevils African air travel now is a lack of public and private investment.

The problem that bedevils African air travel now, Chibo-Christopher says, is a lack of public and private investment. The result is that Kenya Airways and Ethiopian Airlines are criss-crossing Africa with few rivals. Competition is needed to bring prices down. Destination taxes are high, he adds, as high as at Heathrow, but without the infrastructure to match.

Governments need to cut taxes and regulation, Chibo-Christopher says. Demand for air travel in Africa is growing, he points out – there is, for example, a lot of demand to fly to Kigali because of its international status. But only state-controlled airlines are benefiting, he says; new airlines are needed. And yet it's hard to start up as an airline, making deregulation essential.

He points to Air Peace in Nigeria as an airline that provides a good service but faces political and regulatory pressures, and no government subsidies. "They're not getting a fair deal," he says.

OPENING THE SKIES

The launch last year of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) initiative by the African Union to open up Africa's skies and improve intra-African air connectivity is "cause for optimism", argues IATA's Kaczynska. "Every open air service arrangement around the world has boosted traffic, lifted economies and created jobs," she says.

This dates from 1988, when some African countries agreed to liberalise the aviation sector, and was formalised in the 1999 Yamoussoukro Decision, in which 44 states agreed to start liberalising air transport, but it was not implemented until 2018.

Still, research from Deloitte published in May last year, Single African Air Transport Market: Is Africa Ready?, argues that low commitment from African Union member states is a likely result of the treaty's lack of a proper implementation framework. Deloitte says that Nigeria has backtracked on the agreement after signing, complaining that Ethiopian Airlines makes 45 per cent of its income from Nigeria, yet has not employed Nigerians as air crew or ground technical staff.

According to Deloitte, a lack of a proper consumer protection mechanism will reduce the effectiveness of SAATM as passengers do not have a platform for seeking redress. All signatory member states will need to "adopt and enforce harmonised consumer protection regulations to give consumers across the continent a level playing field." Only then will SAATM be able to achieve its objectives.

"Making it a reality requires governments to move promptly in creating the enabling regulatory framework and for the airlines currently sheltering behind their protection to become competitive," Kaczynska says.

Africa is home to 16 per cent of the world's population and yet only has a share of 2.2 per cent of global air passenger traffic.

POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

Deloitte points out that Africa is home to 16 per cent of the world's population and yet only has a share of 2.2 per cent of global air passenger traffic. Can such a glaring disparity be sustained? "Africa has the necessary elements to become an aviation success story – a growing middle class, favourable demographics and a geography that necessitates travel by air," Kaczynska says. "However, many of the region's governments are not treating air carriers as partners that drive social and economic development."

Dichter at McKinsey believes that the African business air travel market is "starting to mature" and that a quality short- to medium-haul airline can emerge, provided there develops a hub that can generate sufficient passenger scale.

There are signs of such an airline emerging – in December last year Green Africa Airways, a Lagos start-up, placed an order for up to 100 B737 Max 8 aircraft. The list price of US\$11.7 billion is the largest order ever placed by an African aviation firm. The plan is to attack the Nigerian market and then expand into African routes.



African business air travel market is starting to mature and a quality short- to medium-haul airline can soon emerge, provided there develops a hub that can generate sufficient passenger scale.

THE STUFF OF LEGEND

With their rich history, unrivalled beauty and sparkling seas, Greece's islands are rightly mythologised

Greece has attracted visitors since antiquity — even the citizens of the Roman Empire were not immune to the charms of this cradle of Western civilisation. Great weather, diverse landscapes, a rich history, delicious food and a coastline lapped by the Aegean, Mediterranean and Ionian seas all add to the draw. The big mainland destinations of Halkidiki, Thessaloniki and the capital, Athens, take some beating, but the 200-plus inhabited islands in the archipelago are unique and each has its own distinctive character.

In spite of the financial difficulties Greece has faced in recent years, travellers continue to visit its sandy beaches, cosy coves and verdant olive groves. And there is no need to fix on →

WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER,
ROSE DYKINS, JENNY SOUTHAN



one destination. Island hopping presents the opportunity to enjoy several islands in one trip. Here are five of our favourites, accessible by air and inter-island ferries.

SANTORINI

Santorini's show-stopping sunsets are something to behold. Each day at dusk, people flock to the island's west coast and perch along cliff sides to watch the sky explode into vibrant sherbet hues, with its volcanic crater, Nea Kameni, casting a dramatic silhouette.

A magnet for honeymooners and Instagram bloggers, Santorini is one of the Cyclades islands. Thanks to its distinctive volcanic environment, the island is full of intriguing places to explore: black sandy beaches, the sulphur hot springs that fizz at the foot of the Nea Kameni, and the craggy, molten surface of the crater itself.

A word of warning: the compact capital, Fira, is a popular cruise stop, and its cobbled streets can become crowded with tourists. As for those sunsets, Oia, the blue-domed town to

Mykonos is known for its beach parties, expensive restaurants and general hedonistic vibe

the north of the island, gets packed full of people eager to witness the spectacle.

Fortunately, the island is brimming with boutique boltholes that allow for escape. Recent additions include Istoria Santorini, a contemporary 12-suite retreat set along the black sands of Perivolos Beach, and Canaves Oia Epitome, a secluded luxury resort just outside of Oia.

MYKONOS

This 90 sq km island in the Cyclades is known for its beach parties, expensive restaurants and general hedonistic vibe (it's a favourite among the yacht crowd, celebs and the gay community).

There are only a handful of taxis on this barren rock, which has little in the way of greenery in summer, but those who feel daring can rent a quad bike.

Mykonos Town is movie-set beautiful with cascading pink bougainvillea, blue-and-white painted streets, and

FOTOLIA

little bars and tavernas that look over the sea. Opened in 2018, Kensho Psarou hotel has 29 rooms with terraces and hot tubs or plunge pools. Last year, Small Luxury Hotels of the World added the new Mykonos Riviera hotel to its collection. The Grace Mykonos, Bill and Co, and Mykonos Blu are other noteworthy boutique options.

If you want to sunbathe peacefully on the beach all day, choose another island. Mykonos is the place to come for dancing in the sea after lunch at Nammós, ordering oversized bottles of Belvedere vodka at Scorpios beach club, and sunset drag shows at Jackie O'. Everywhere serves incredible food. Outside of April to October it becomes a lot quieter, with many places shutting down for the winter.

RHODES

The largest of the Dodecanese islands, at about 1,400 sq km, Rhodes' medieval city achieved UNESCO status in 1988. A labyrinth of cobbled alleyways, the Old Town is home to Gothic architectural gems such as the Palace of the Grand

Santorini;
Mykonos;
Rhodes;
Crete

Masters, and the Street of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, who formerly ruled the city.

Rhodes' complex history – it also spent time under the rule of the Turks and Italians – means the island is also home to Byzantine churches and Roman ruins as well as Venetian forts and buildings from the Ottoman period. The New Town caters to those looking for beaches, bars and shopping, and the east coast is well known for the cliff-top acropolis at Lindos. The countryside around Archangelos and the ruins of Ancient Kameiros are also worth exploring.

In May, the all-inclusive Grecotel resort on Kallithea beach will become the Grecotel LUX ME Rhodes, with its 276 rooms and 46 bungalows receiving a deluxe makeover.

CRETE

The largest of the Greek islands, as you might expect, is also one of the most diverse. Across 8,336 sq km on the southern side of the Aegean Sea, quaint inland villages are →



Greek mythology holds that a shipwrecked Odysseus washed up on Corfu's shores.

sandwiched between turquoise beaches to the north, and coves, cliffs and canyons to the south. Myth and legend are the stuff on which Greece is built and the island can claim more than its share of evocative tales and classical history – the Ideon Cave is believed to be the birthplace of Zeus, while the vestiges of the Minoan civilisation, which ruled about 4,000 years ago, are peppered all over the island.

Crete is a hit with hikers throughout the year thanks to its mountainous terrain and mild winters. A popular route is the 16km Samaria Gorge, a seven-hour walk that ends at the coastal village of Agia Roumeli. Finish that and you'll be in need of a good meal – rest assured that the island's cuisine is thought to be one of the healthiest in the world, with an emphasis on nutrient-packed organic produce, lashings of olive oil and little meat.

New openings this season include the 311-room Wyndham Grand Mirabello Bay in the coastal town of Agios Nikolaos. The Nana Princess hotel and its state-of-the-art spa opened in Hersonissos in June last year, while those looking for beachfront villas can now stay at Elounda Mare Hotel's Minoan Palace, launched in August last year.

CORFU

Part of the Ionian Islands, the "emerald isle" has a more European character than the rest of the archipelago. It has

Corfu

long been popular with travellers for its beaches, pastel-hued villages and lush olive groves.

The UNESCO-listed Corfu Old Town bears physical reminders of the island's military history. Exploration of the town's sea-facing fortresses, which protected the Venetian-ruled island from Ottoman sieges over four centuries, are highly recommended and bring an extra dimension to the postcard-pretty looks.

Elsewhere, you'll spot the unmistakable influence of 19th-century British rule – cricket is a popular sport here – while Greek mythology holds that a shipwrecked Odysseus washed up on Corfu's shores.

For a luxury all-inclusive stay, the Ikos Dassia resort, which opened in May last year, has views of the Ionian Sea and a 600-metre private sandy beach. Travelling without kids? Adults-only options include the luxurious Marbella Nido Suite Hotel and Villas in Agios Ioannis Peristeron, which also opened in May.

British Airways and Easyjet fly direct to all five islands from London between April and October.

FOTOLIA



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CULTURAL PARADISE

Beauty and heritage combine on Japan's subtropical Okinawa island

WORDS JEREMY TREDINNICK

There are many places to see a breathtaking sunset, and I've been lucky enough to experience more than my fair share – almost to the point of indifference. Almost. In Okinawa, the largest of Japan's subtropical Ryukyu island chain, surrounded by pollution-free sky and the deep, clear waters of the Pacific, I was treated to a truly memorable ten minutes on aptly named Sunset Beach, a short stroll from my plush lodgings at the Hilton Okinawa Chatan Resort. This particular sunset had me mesmerised, my gaze fixed – like the 100-plus people around me – on a horizon of low purple-black storm clouds (which had drenched us earlier in the day), a thin strip of azure sky, and an ocean of deep blue, from which emerged the silhouetted peaks of the distant Kerama Islands.

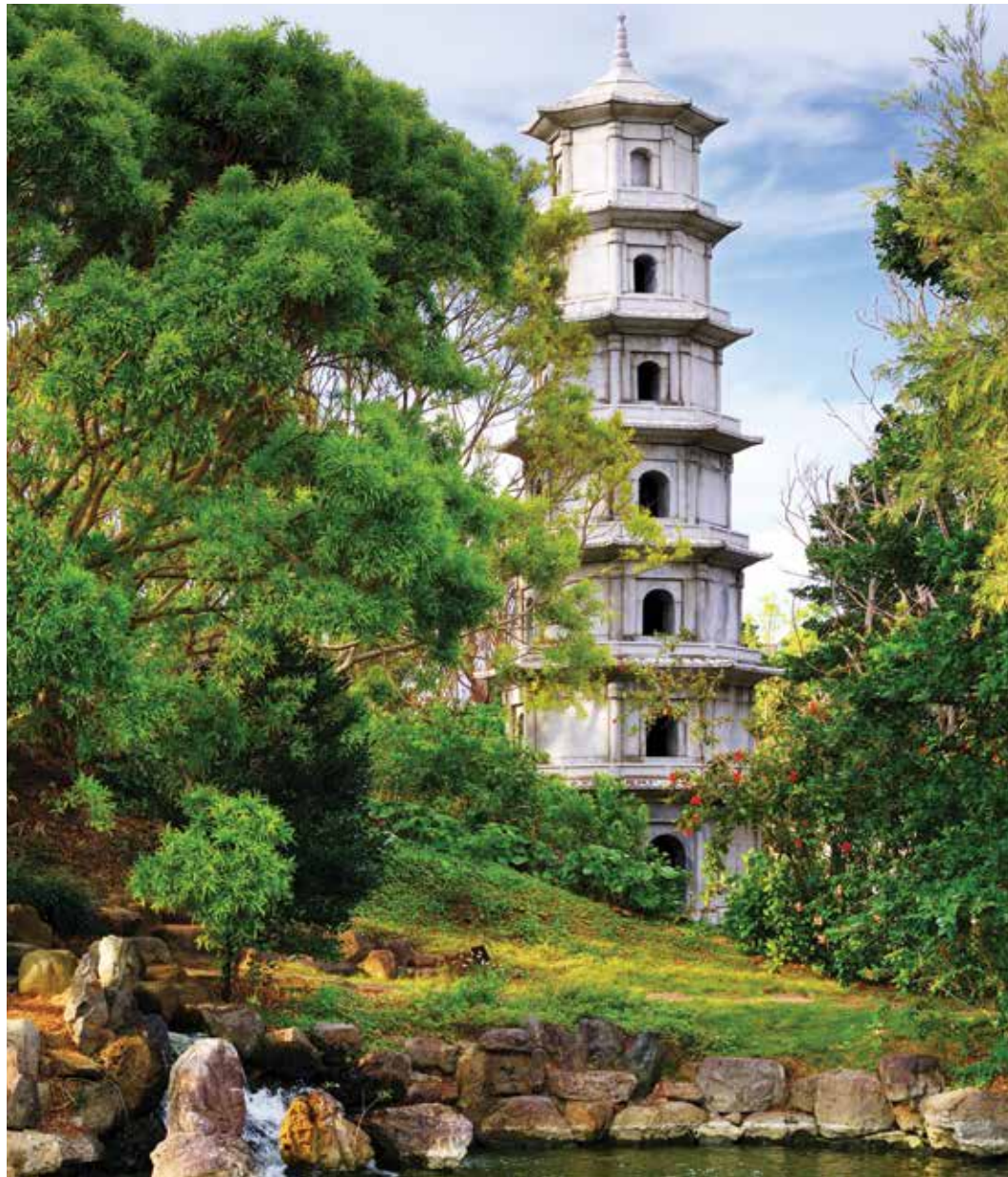
Behind the clouds, the sky glowed bright orange and rich gold before the fiery sun emerged and then quickly dipped below the waterline. It's a deeply satisfying feeling, seeing Mother Nature put on a show like that.

SHAPED BY HISTORY

Okinawa – about a two-hour flight from Tokyo – is an intriguing island of many faces. Centuries-old castle ruins with walls of coral limestone serve as a fascinating reminder of the Ryukyu Kingdom, whose rulers oversaw a dynasty that lasted almost 500 years, from the early 15th to late 19th centuries. Its success was built on the sea trade between Japan, Korea, China and South East Asia, its strategic location on the main sailing routes bringing wealth and power.

In the latter part of the Second World War, it was this strategic location that made it the focus of imperial Japan's final defence against the advancing US naval forces. The Battle of Okinawa involved three months of fierce fighting from April to June 1945, claiming the lives of more than 100,000 Japanese soldiers and native Okinawans.

After the war, Okinawa was the site of a large US military base and under



the control of the US government. It was only in 1972 that it was finally returned to Japan. Since then, it has slowly developed into a tropical holiday hotspot for Japanese, Koreans and, increasingly, mainland Chinese, who come for the sun, sea, sand... and shopping.

The hub for serious retail enthusiasts is in Naha, Okinawa's main city in the southern part of the island, where the airport is also located. The efficient Yui monorail transit system curls right through Naha; get off at Makashi station and you're at the northern end of a long, straight street running right through the downtown area all the way to City Hall. This is the famous Kokusai Dori, a mecca for shopaholics with bulk-buying on their minds.

Kokusai Dori is lined with duty-free stores fronted by oversized models of all descriptions, from six-foot-high anthropomorphic hot dogs to great white sharks and anime characters; souvenir shops; cafés (serving both homegrown and imported coffee) and fast-food outlets; and restaurants with faux limestone-walled booths where you can sample shabu-shabu (Japanese hotpots), Okinawan pork and the island's distinctive purple sweet potato, while being entertained by traditional song-and-dance acts.

Branching off Kokusai Dori is a series of covered market streets collectively known as Heiwadori, where you'll find stalls selling arts and crafts, brightly coloured clothing, noodles, cheap souvenirs and cosmetics.

FIT FOR A KING

On the largest hill overlooking Naha is Shuri Castle, home of the Ryukyu kings. Almost completely destroyed during the Battle of Okinawa, as well as on a number of occasions in previous centuries, Shuri was carefully restored from the 1950s on, and in 2000 was named a World Heritage site.

The castle and its grounds are surrounded by impressive three-metre-thick walls. Its architecture, open squares, immaculate gardens and decorative themes are a curious blend of cultural traditions influenced by the surrounding kingdoms with which

Okinawa
has many cultural
highlights.

the Ryukyus traded. The emblem of the Ryukyu kings was the dragon – a symbol appropriated from the Chinese and displayed on the roof of the main castle building and on pillars, murals and carvings throughout the complex. Vibrant red paint and lacquer covers almost everything.

The tour is relatively short and very interesting, and you're free to wander Shurijo Castle Park afterwards, which offers panoramic views across the city and out to sea.

Okinawa has many more cultural highlights, but if you simply need some relaxation between meetings, the Hilton Okinawa Chatan Resort's adult-only outdoor pool is a good place to while away a couple of hours. In a stroke of genius, the hotel created this and a shallow family pool just far enough apart (over a walking bridge) to keep everyone happy. Sipping a cocktail, I admired the long sweep of the property's west-facing façade, designed like a wave and offering sea views from almost all 346 rooms.

In summer last year Hilton opened another property next door under its Doubletree brand, keen to benefit from Chatan district's status as a major tourist destination on the island. As well as being close to Sunset Beach and Okinawa's remaining US air base, Chatan is also home to Mihama American Village, four blocks of land devoted to a Japanese rendering of leisure-lifestyle Americana that's rooted in Okinawa's large US military population of decades ago, and now teems with tourists by day and night. It's gaudy and gauche, but fun if you're in the holiday spirit. A ferris wheel stands over one "Carnival" mall; an American Depot store boasts pirate statues and convertible cars on the walls; and there's a multiplex cinema, and colourful Tex-Mex style buildings filled with pizza and taco joints, fashion stores and ice-cream parlours – be sure to try Okinawa's famed salted flavour.

There are plenty of other tourist districts on the west coast. South of Chatan is Arah Beach and Ginowan, where the Okinawa Convention Centre and neighbouring Laguna Garden



Mihama American Village is gaudy and gauche but it's fun if you're in the holiday spirit

Hotel are situated in an expansive green space (with its own baseball park) next to a marina.

North of Chatan in the central part of the island is Onna Village, a laid-back enclave that has seen a number of resort openings in recent years, such as Hotel Monterey, Moon Beach, the ANA Intercontinental Manza Beach and properties from Renaissance, Sheraton, Marriott and Ritz-Carlton. The new Hyatt Regency Seragaki Island was added to the mix in summer last year.

FISHY BUSINESS

In all of these areas – Naha included – day trips around the island are available, with a particular focus on the many water activities possible in this pristine marine environment. With deep marine trenches nearby, and carefully managed



reefs that flourish on warm currents and plentiful nutrients, Okinawa and the nearby collection of islands called the Kermas are blessed with wonderful snorkelling and diving potential.

Dive thrills just off the central Okinawan shoreline include feeding batfish off Maeda Point, swimming with sea life off Sunabe Seawall, marvelling at the rock formations of the Blue Cave, or playing peekaboo with garden eels at Manza Dream Hole. In the north, just off Kouri Island, is the wreck of the USS Emmons. This is a deep but fascinating dive on the ill-fated American destroyer, which was sunk by multiple kamikaze planes during the Second World War.

Only 45 minutes away by boat, the beautiful Kerama Islands offer shallow diving and snorkelling on colourful reefs that teem with life. Over the course of a few dives I spent quality time with hawksbill turtles, watched eagle rays soar past, explored underwater canyons and had a tête-à-tête (of sorts) with a very large spotted moray eel.

My most inspiring sealife encounter came – surprisingly – on land, when I visited the Churaumi Aquarium on Okinawa's northern Motobu Peninsula. Japan's largest aquarium is part of the Ocean Expo Park, which also includes an arboretum and tropical flower garden, a recreated traditional Okinawan native village, and the fascinating Oceanic Culture Museum, filled with all manner of Polynesian outriggers and seafaring craft.

Most people head straight for the aquarium, though, and it's easy to see why – there is a host of captivating displays – but when I arrived at the enormous main tank, I was gobsmacked by the sight of two gigantic whale sharks, four manta rays, numerous other sharks and rays, giant trevally and schooling fish, all moving in graceful splendour around their man-made marine habitat.

I stood and watched for half an hour, then sat in the café on a table next to the glass for another 30 minutes, as mesmerised as I had been on Sunset Beach. There's no doubt about it – nature in the Pacific sure knows how to put on a show.

WORDS JENNY SOUTHAN

FLYING START

Despite recent failures, the aviation industry looks set for several new launches this year

Sir Richard Branson relishes telling the story of the birth of Virgin Atlantic. On virgin.com he recalls what happened in the early 1980s when his flight from Puerto Rico to the British Virgin Islands was cancelled: “I had a beautiful lady waiting for me in BVI and I hired a plane and borrowed a blackboard and as a joke I wrote

‘Virgin Airlines’ on the top of the blackboard, ‘US\$39 one way to BVI’. I went around all the passengers who had been bumped and I filled up my first plane.” After that he bought a second-hand B747 and “made it that much more special than all the other airlines we were competing with”.

Unfortunately, many new airlines end in failure within months – be they wholesale start-ups, rebrands or offshoots of existing carriers – proving that it isn’t as easy as Branson made it look. There are all sorts of factors involved, but if an airline isn’t making money fast, it won’t be able to keep flying. The cost of fuel is a huge overhead, so if tickets aren’t being sold, funds soon run dry.

Sometimes airlines are trying something different, such as operating with all-business class layouts, but as we have seen from the historical failures of Maxjet, Eos and Silverjet when they tried this, as well as La Compagnie’s all-business New York JFK route out of London Luton (the French airline is hanging on to Paris Orly), taking chances isn’t often rewarded.



ABOVE: Richard Branson’s Virgin Atlantic was launched in 1984



Early last year, for example, budget airline Primera Air took a gamble in expanding its business out of Scandinavia to include long-haul routes from London Stansted and Birmingham to the US. However, by October it had collapsed entirely, leaving passengers stranded because it hadn't secured long-term financing. Fierce competition in the transatlantic market proved too tough for the airline, despite the success it had observed its low-cost competitor Norwegian having in this arena.

Other airlines that met their end recently include Russia's Saratov Airlines, Cypriot low-cost start-up Cobalt, regional airline Jet Go Australia, US regional carrier California Pacific Airlines and Nigerian flag carrier Nigeria Air, the last of these after only a few months.

Then, in January, it was announced that, at just over a year old, Air France's "millennial-oriented" subsidiary, Joon, would be shut down. "The brand was difficult to understand from the outset for customers, for employees, for markets and for investors," Air France stated.

Still, not everyone is being put off. Japan Airlines (JAL) is setting up an as-yet-unnamed low-cost airline for 2020 that will be based out of Tokyo Narita and will ply medium- and long-haul routes to Asia, the Americas and Europe. Two B787-8s are being assigned to the carrier, which will receive 10-20 billion yen (£71 million-£141 million) in funding from JAL. Japan Airlines has also invested US\$10 million in a new supersonic airline called Overture, which is being developed by Boom Supersonic in the US. (Branson

is backing it, too.) If that gets off the ground, it really will be something special.

Here are a dozen new and forthcoming airlines (including one all-business class endeavour) that are attempting to capture their own corner of the skies...

1. BAMBOO AIRWAYS

This Vietnamese airline, which started operations in January, wants to be a "five-star airline operating both domestic and international routes". This year it will have 20 A320s – next year these will be joined by 20 A321 Neos and 20 B787-9s. Three fare classes – Eco, Plus and Business – offer varying degrees of generosity in regard to luggage allowance, seat selection and booking changes. Initially it is flying domestic routes, connecting Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang with other leisure destinations in the country, but from 2021 Bamboo hopes to add flights to the US and Europe. bambooairways.com

2. AIR ITALY

Founded in February last year, this private Italian airline is owned by AQA Holding, in which Qatar Airways recently bought a 49 per cent stake. Formerly known as Meridiana, of which the original Air Italy was a subsidiary (the two merged in 2013), it was rebranded as Air Italy last year, debuting new domestic routes from Milan to Rome and Naples, as well as long-haul services to New York and Miami. From next month it will serve Los Angeles and San Francisco, and from May Toronto. Its fleet features three B737 MAXs, seven B737 NGs and five A330-200s. Travellers will find 24 angled lie-flat business class seats on board. airitaly.com

3. FRENCH BEE

Based at Paris Orly, this low-cost long-haul carrier takes passengers to Réunion island, Tahiti, San Francisco and the Dominican Republic. It offers economy and Premium classes, the latter of which is essentially an economy seat with lumbar support, two extra inches of width and four extra inches of legroom. One for holidaymakers rather than business travellers. frenchbee.com

4. SWOOP

A low-cost subsidiary of Canada's Westjet, Swoop began flying last year out of cities such as Winnipeg, Halifax and Edmonton to Las Vegas, Phoenix and Oakland. Swoop operates on the build-your-own-flight model so starting fares can be very low but quickly add up once hold luggage and so on are added. Services are operated by 189-seat B737-800s. flyswoop.com

5. AIR SENEGAL

Less than a year old, the new national airline of Senegal is based out of Blaise Diagne International, and flies from Dakar to African cities such as Abidjan (Ivory Coast) and Banjul (Gambia). Paris and Sao Paulo will come soon. This year it will receive a new A330-900 that it wants to deploy

on routes to Brazil and North America. Tickets cannot be purchased online – only at sales agencies. Cash is accepted. flyairsenegal.com

6. SWISS SKIES

Tipped to make its debut this year (although the website is very minimal as we go to press), Swiss Skies will be a low-cost start-up based out of Basel, with routes to the US planned for its fleet of A321 Neo aircraft. Last autumn it announced that it was seeking to fundraise US\$100 million to get the project off the ground. According to the Financial Times, the business plan foresees the need for 16 aircraft by the second year of operations, and 38 by the fourth. ch-airways.com

7. FLY ARYSTAN

Kazakhstan's Air Astana is planning to launch Fly Arystan as a new low-cost subsidiary by this summer, with plans to have 15 aircraft flying by 2022. It will begin with four A320s that will initially fly domestically. There is a possibility that it will also start flights to Russia, the Caucasus and Ukraine. flyarystan.com

8. GENGHIS KHAN AIRLINES

This Chinese start-up is owned by government enterprise Inner Mongolia Aviation Tourism Investment, and will begin domestic services out of Hohhot Baita International airport in Inner Mongolia over the coming months. It has been given approval for the purchase of three Comac ARJ21 regional jets but hopes to have 25 aircraft by 2024.

9. WORLD AIRWAYS

Originally an airline that flew from 1948 to 2014, World Airways is being reborn this year as "the only low-cost long-haul carrier based in the US". According to the website,



it will serve "under-penetrated routes between the US and far-off destinations around the world". The endeavour is being spearheaded by airline executive Ed Wegel, who plans to use a fleet of up to ten B787s. worldairways.com

10. STARLUX AIRLINES

Headquartered in Taipei, this new full-service carrier is to start flights in January 2020, and has orders for ten A321 Neos (due for delivery in October this year), five A350-900s and 12 A350-1000s. At the moment it is awaiting an operator certificate from Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration. Reports suggest that it intends to be flying to Japan, Hong Kong and North America by 2024. starlux-airlines.com

11. AURA

This ambitious all-business class start-up wants to introduce a fleet of futuristic CRJ700s this year, configured with just 29 deep reclining seats (normally this aircraft type would be fitted with 75 seats), with pre-ordered meals cooked on board, a full bar and wifi. City pairs connected by this private jet-style service will include Atlanta-Miami and Los Angeles-Chicago. zedaerospace.com

12. MOXY

From the founder of Jetblue, David Neeleman, US low-cost airline Moxy (this name will likely change and it has no connection to Marriott International's Moxy hotel brand) will arrive in 2021. The airline has ordered a fleet of 60 A220s, chosen for their flexibility, and aims to fly routes on which it will be the only carrier to fly nonstop, and thus face zero competition. Possible routes would be from Florida to northern Brazil.

WORDS AGATA JANICKA

AIRPORT HOTEL

A good airport hotel can make your journey much easier. In addition to high standards offered by such properties, an important advantage is their location - as the name suggests, an airport hotel should be located as close to the airport as possible.

One of the most popular and busiest Polish airports is Katowice Airport, located in the south of Poland, near the crossroads of the main European transport routes. Approximately 13 million people live within a radius of 2-hour drive from airport. As regards traffic statistics, 2018 was the best year in the history of Katowice Airport, when it handled a record 4.8 million passengers. The highest quality of services, professional approach, friendly atmosphere and discretion - all of these are crucial conditions for a successful air travel, and the staff of Katowice Airport go to any length to make your journey a pleasant one. Knowing how invaluable is the time of passengers, Katowice Airport offers a number of services designed to meet the expectations of every traveller. There are two on-site Business Lounges: one in Terminal B for passengers travelling within Schengen zone, and the other in Terminal A for those →

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HOTELS

travelling to non-Schengen destinations. Fast Track service is available in Terminal B, on the first floor for the Schengen area. The improvement of service standards is made possible with numerous investments made by the management of the airport. Since 2007 it has been implementing the largest ever infrastructure development programme in the history of the facility. The most significant projects complete within the programme include building a new 3200-metre runway and a new arrivals hall, as well as the extension of Terminal A. Currently, the second stage of the investment programme is being implemented, with the predicted budget of PLN 900 million. In 2019, the expansion of passenger terminal B will begin. The number of aircraft parking spaces also increases year by year.

Formal preparations are underway to begin the construction of the central passenger terminal with multi-storey and off-site car parks, two hangars for aircraft maintenance, a second cargo terminal, a fuel base, a new watchtower of the Airport Rescue and Fire Service, as well as the facilities of the departments responsible for the airport operations. All these projects are due to be completed by 2025.

FOR BUSINESS

For years Kraków International Airport has contributed to development of business opportunities across the whole region. The airport is situated just 11 kilometres from the city centre and has very good prospects for the future, as it lies on important European transport routes with more than 8 million people living within the radius of 100 kilometres. Investment plans approved by the Kraków Airport Management Board in 2016 include construction of a new runway scheduled to be open by 2021. It's worth noting that 2018 was yet another record year for the airport, which handled 6.7 million passengers.

Passengers departing from Kraków have access to the airport's convenient Business Lounge, fast track lane and many other amenities making their journey more enjoyable.



Katowice Airport is one of the most cutting-edge airports in Poland. It features two on-site Business Lounges: one in Terminal B for passengers travelling within Schengen zone, and the other in Terminal A for those travelling to non-Schengen destinations.



One of the biggest advantages of Kraków International Airport is its closeness to Hilton Garden Inn Kraków Airport hotel. The property is renowned for its excellent restaurant, modern conference spaces and tastefully decorated rooms with numerous amenities. Importantly, the hotel's location allows for direct access of the airport terminal. It's also close to the station of fast suburban trains and the motorway - all this within less than a 20-minute drive from the centre of Kraków. The hotel's meeting centre comprises nine fully equipped conference rooms. There is also a spacious ballroom. One of the highlights of the hotel is its L'Atmosphere Restaurant, which in 2018 was awarded two chef's toques by the prestigious culinary guide Gault&Millau. This means that L'Atmosphere is one of the best restaurants in the city, offering excellent menu of varied and delicious dishes, as well as beautiful interiors.



BEST-CONNECTED PLACE FOR BUSINESS IN POLAND

Excellent restaurant, well-equipped meeting rooms, rooms with a wide array of amenities, direct access to the airport terminal and the station of fast suburban trains, as well as nearby motorway... all of this within less than a 20-minute drive from the centre of Kraków. These are just a few of advantages of one of the most attractive places on the business map of Europe.

Nowadays, it's not distance, but time that defines how far away we are from each other, says Grzegorz Gogola, the CEO of Kraków Airport Hotel. "Despite the development of new technologies, direct meetings are still extremely important when doing business. Excellently communicated Hilton Garden Inn Kraków Airport is simply a perfect venue for various business events. No wonder that with professional staff, first-rate meeting facilities and fine cuisine, we are the first choice for organizers of international board meetings, industry conferences and job interviews from the world's largest corporations. The hotel's conference centre comprises 9 fully equipped rooms, as well as a separate boardroom. One of the highlights of the hotel is its L'Atmosphere Restaurant, which in 2018 was awarded two chefs' toques by the prestigious culinary guide Gault&Millau. This means that L'Atmosphere is one of the best restaurants in the city, offering excellent menu of varied and delicious dishes, as well as beautiful interiors."

Hilton Garden Inn Kraków Airport, ul. Medweckiego 3 32-083 Balice tel. 12 340 00 00
www.hiltonhotels.com konferencje@krakowairporthotel.pl



Sheraton Hotel Warsaw welcomes Marriott Bonvoy

This innovative global initiative integrates three existing loyalty programmes.

In mid-February, Marriott International launched its new loyalty programme called Marriott Bonvoy.

This innovative global initiative unifies benefits under the company's three loyalty brands — Marriott Rewards, The Ritz-Carlton Rewards and Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG), providing access to a number of benefits in more than 6,700 hotels and resorts in 129 countries and territories. One of the largest hotels in Poland, which has joined the new loyalty scheme, is the Sheraton Warsaw Hotel.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST

Marriott Bonvoy has a total of 120 million members — which makes it the largest loyalty programme for a single hotel company. The programme, which has integrated the former sche-

mes, enables its members to collect points via the Marriott Bonvoy app and redeem them in any hotel across the world, e.g. for a free room upgrade or access to the club lounge.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

Programme members can also exchange their accrued points for exclusive additional services offered by hotels, for example spa treatments. You can also exchange your points for unique experiences, such as concerts, culinary events, or even a hot-air balloon flight.

The new programme has also unified the names of member statuses.

50 NIGHTS IN A HOTEL

To be eligible for Marriott Bonvoy Platinum Elite status, you need to stay at least 50 nights



With Marriott Bonvoy, the world's largest hotel chain shows how much it appreciates and cares for its customers.

a year in Marriott International properties, while 75 nights earns you the Marriott Bonvoy Titanium Elite status. The highest status in the programme is called Marriott Bonvoy Ambassador Elite reserved for guests who spend a minimum of 100 nights in hotels included in the programme.

INTEGRATE THE WORLD

In line with the company philosophy that emphasizes values such as striving for perfection and the integration of the world, people and experiences, the programme will significantly increase the scale of benefits associated with travel. In this way, Marriott International confirms its unquestionable position as a leader and innovator in the hospitality market. With Marriott Bonvoy, the world's largest hotel chain demonstrates how it appreciates and cares for its loyal customers and, most importantly, supports them in discovering the world and broadening their professional horizons.

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WORDS MARZENA MRÓZ

EUROPE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

Keukenhof is a famous Dutch garden stretching between the cities of Leiden and Haarlem. Each spring, 32 acres of the garden are filled with over 7 million flowers - tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and jonquils. No wonder then that the place is one of the most frequently visited and photographed spots in the world.

If you decide to pay a visit to Keukenhof between mid-March to mid-May, you will certainly notice colourful fields of red, blue and yellow on your way there. The main actors in this symphony of colours are tulips, muscari and daffodils, blending into a sea of flowers, or sort of a flowery carpet. Keukenhof is a unique garden. It presents the world's largest collection of bulbous plants, gathered in one place. This is probably the most popular attraction of the Netherlands and Europe.

A FLOWER OF THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

Like almost everything that is beautiful, ephemeral and volatile, tulips, along with marijuana, silk, curry and cardamom, came to our continent from the East. Their name derives from the Persian language and means a turban. The flower also had sexual connotations, as it was considered to be one of the flowers of the Thousand and One Nights. Sultans would organize in their harems an annual spring tulip festival, and poets would praise the flower in their poems. Tulips appeared in the Netherlands in the 17th century, immediately gaining popularity and admiration by the inhabitants of →

Like almost everything that is beautiful, ephemeral and volatile, tulips came to Europe from the East.



this small, Protestant country. The Dutch imported them from Turkey, where they were considered as elegant, sophisticated and valuable. Tulip bulb trade flourished, reaching its zenith with the famous Tulip Fever in 1636. The most valuable varieties were the ones with large crimson petals accented with white stripes. At that time, one bulb was worth 36 bushels of wheat, 72 bushels of rice, 4 oxen, 12 sheep, 8 pigs, 2 barrels of wine, 4 barrels of beer, 2 tons of butter, 1,000 pounds of cheese, a bed and a silver cup. Several months later, the market collapsed and the prices of tulip bulbs fell so dramatically that many traders lost their entire life possessions. In today's Netherlands tulips are again very popular, but relatively cheap. They have also become an important export product and a symbol of this country.

QUEEN OF NIGHT I MONA LISA

Each year, over 4.5 million tulips are planted in Keukenhof in over 100 varieties. These include such famous ones as the black Queen of the Night, the white and red Carnaval de Nice, the scarlet Mona Lisa with yellow edges, or the mysterious Aladdin. In autumn garden workers manually plant over seven million bulbs. They are supplied by 93 companies that possess a so-called royal guarantee. Keu-

HOW TO GET THERE?

On reaching Lisse, you will easily find your way to the Keukenhof - you just need to follow the signposts. Public transport: Keukenhof can be easily reached by bus No. 54, which leaves from a stop at Leiden train station, by bus No. 58 from Schiphol airport, as well as by buses No. 50 and No. 51 which run in both directions on Leiden Haarlem route (departing from the railway station), passing Lisse on their way. Lisse can also be reached by trains e.g. the one departing from Amsterdam Central Railway Station.

kenhof also features 2500 trees of 87 species, and visitors to the park can take a walk along the alleys whose total length is 15 kilometres. In 2009, a new species of tulip called Maria Kaczyńska appeared in Keukenhof.

A Kitchen Garden with a History

Keukenhof has a very rich history. In the 15th century the area of today's flower garden belonged to the Dutch Princess Jakoba of Bavaria, who would come here to hunt. The garden was also a source of herbs for the castle's kitchen, hence its current name, as Keukenhof means "The kitchen garden." The garden as we know today, was founded in 1949, by the then mayor of Leiden. He was persuaded by growers and exporters of bulbs, who thought it would be a good form of promotion for their products. Over the years, perennial plants, shrubs and new trees also appeared in the garden. The original layout of the Keukenhof estate was turned into an English-style landscape garden in 1850 by Jan David Zocher and his son Louis Paul Zocher, who also designed Amsterdam's Vondelpark. At that time the estate was owned by a wealthy merchant family Van Pallandt. In 1999 the garden was expanded by 4 hectares, where a fan-shaped Conventional Garden was created (it's connected with the old part of Keukenhof). The area also features a walled Castle Garden where the oldest varieties of tulips are

grown, as well as a herb garden and a mysterious Labyrinth. Each year Keukenhof prepares new surprises - flowerbeds are rearranged, new secluded spots are created, as well as places where you can simply sit on the grass and just relax.

THE POLISH THEME

For several years the major exhibition in the garden has been devoted to various themes. Four years ago, the biggest attraction was a huge x15 metre flower mosaic, representing a traditional Chinese dragon. The following spring the garden celebrated its 60th birthday, and the 400th anniversary of the establishment of American-Dutch relations. On that occasion, visitors to the garden could admire a unique mosaic made up of a record 25,000 flowers and depicting the Statue of Liberty. A few years ago, the theme was "Poland - the heart of Europe". In line with the theme, several alleys in the garden were shaped like a stave, while the most conspicuous place in Keukenhof features a giant flower portrait of Frederic Chopin (12x20 m). It was made up of over 50,000 bulbs.

THE KING OF FLOWERS

The tulip - an inconspicuous, scentless flower, which is far more modest than lilies, orchids, or even roses, in the past

WHEN TO VISIT?

This year, the world's most beautiful spring garden will be open from 21 March to 19 May, from 8.00 am to 7.20 pm. Ticket offices are open until 6.00 pm.

was regarded as the king of flowers. Once closely guarded and cultivated at the courts of Turkey and Persia, shrouded in mystery and legend, and desired by European rulers - today it's one of the most popular and most commonly cultivated flowers in the world. The peak of its popularity came in the 17th century in the Netherlands, where today you can admire hundreds of its varieties. Spring is the best time to visit the European homeland of tulips, whose gardens feature the most beautiful flowers in the world.

SHOWS IN THE PAVILIONS

Each year Keukenhof hosts over 20 exhibitions of flowers in the pavilions, including the world's largest Lily Exhibition, as well as Orchid Exhibition.

WORDS MARZENA MRÓZ

DESTINATIONS

THE BLUE KINGDOM OF MEXICO

Surrounded by turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea, Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is one of the most fascinating places in the Caribbean.

Perfectly preserved monuments of ancient Mayan and Toltec civilizations, ubiquitous cacti, pelicans and flamingos, as well as the famous tequila sipped in this climate from the very morning - all of this makes up a fantastic place for a memorable holiday. The Mayan civilization developed in Yucatan between 300-900 AD. In their conquests, fearless Maya warriors reached the areas of today's Guatemala and Honduras. They erected buildings characterized by harmonious proportions, usually featuring a wide base and intricate stone carvings, stucco statues, and paint on their finials. To this day you can admire perfectly preserved Maya pyramids, much steeper on the Yucatán than their counterparts in other regions of Mexico. The Maya worshipped 166 deities, all of whom had four incarnations corresponding to four corners of the world. There were also equivalents of the opposite sex, and each astral god had its own underground incarnation. The most important in the pantheon of the gods was Itzamna - the God of Fire.

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FOTOLIA

PYRAMIDS IN CHICHÉN ITZÁ

Chichén Itzá is today the most popular archaeological site not only in the Yucatán but also in the whole of Mexico. The highest structure is the temple pyramid built in honour of god Kukulcan. Its design hides the secret of how the Maya would measure time. The temple has 365 steps—one for each day of the year. Each of the temple's four sides has 91 steps, and the top platform makes the 365th. Chichén Itzá is literally besieged by tourists for two days of the year. Kukulcán's pyramid is notable for the fact that at the spring and fall equinoxes (March 21 and September 22) the sun projects an undulating pattern of light on the northern stairway for a few hours in the late afternoon a pattern caused by the angle of the sun and the edge of the nine steps that define the pyramid's construction. These triangles of light link up with the massive stone carvings of snake heads at the base of the stairs, suggesting a massive serpent snaking down the structure.

GOLDEN LAGOON

There are two possible translations of Cancún, based on the Mayan pronunciation kaan kun. The first one is "nest of snakes", while the second less accepted translation is "place of the gold snake". The city stretches along 23 kilometres of beaches and is ideal for sunbathers, scuba diving and snorkelling aficionado, as well as windsurfers, kite-surfers, fans of water scooters and water skis. The turquoise sea is hypnotizing and with white fine sand Cancún beaches are, no doubt, some of the most beautiful in Mexico. The city, or rather a seaside resort, was founded in the 1970s and since then, the lagoon has seen an immense growth of luxury hotels, shops, designer stores, restaurants and, of course, tourists. In the evening many of them come to Kukulcan Boulevard or Caracol Square with more than 200 shops and cafés. Everyone will find in Cancún something to their tastes, including the most exquisite luxuries. From top international brands such as the Ritz Carlton to small hotels offering modestly furnished rooms with breakfast.

There's no more beautiful view from the Yucatán than the one offered by Tulum, a complex of temples, a castle and a lighthouse.



The Riviera Maya is famous for its breathtaking landscapes: the crystal clear sea, Sian Ka'an jungle and the ruins of the Mayan civilization.

LEFT: Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal hotel complex situated in the eastern part of the Yucatan Peninsula, in the town of Akumal, which is part of the Riviera Maya.

BEACH OF THE BEAUTIFUL CARMEN

Much smaller than Cancún, but still retaining the charm of a Mexican town from the past, Playa del Carmen has its die-hard admirers. In addition to wide beaches, where you can not only swim, dive and fish, there are many bars serving local drinks such as tequila, mezcal and pulque, as well as a great choice of classic cocktails. Tequila is made only from a specific cultivar of Agave tequilana called 'Weber Azul', mezcal is a high-percentage with a smoked wood aftertaste, while pulque has a sharp, distinct taste. If drunk in large quantities, it can (reportedly) propel you into a hallucinogenic state. On the famous Bourbon Street in Playa del Carmen, you can enjoy the taste of those drinks and forget about the world around you. It's also a perfect place for shopping. From Playa del Carmen you can head to Cozumel, 19 kilometres away, known by the Maya as the Island of Swallows. It's believed that the island is surrounded by the cleanest waters in the world, with transparency of up to 70 meters.

TULUM - TEMPLES ON A CLIFF

There's no more beautiful view from the Yucatán than the one offered by Tulum, a complex of temples, a castle and a lighthouse built on the seashore by the Maya around 900 AD. Tulum was reportedly a port, but it also served as a fortified stronghold to protect the Yucatán from sea-side invaders. It's very location - just above a rocky cliff, surrounded by turquoise waves, at the beautiful beach - testifies to the rich sense of aesthetics and unlimited fantasy, which were undoubtedly characteristics of the Maya. Today, among well-preserved historic buildings, surrounded by palm trees, you can come across iguanas. In the blazing Mexican sun tourists visit here the Fresco Temple, where old paintings depict the god of rain - Chaca, then go to the Temple of Descending God with a mysterious relief of the god of bees Ab Muxen Caba, to finally finish their tour of this charming place by heading down to the beach and bathing in the gracious waters of the Caribbean Sea.

GOLFING AROUND MADRID

Four courses to
finesse your swing
within striking
distance of the
Spanish capital



The contoured
fairways of
the Centro
Nacional de
Golf

CENTRO NACIONAL DE GOLF

WHERE IS IT? 10km north of Madrid

WHAT'S IT LIKE? This state-owned facility is built on a landfill site, the same concept as Paris National, the venue for Europe's Ryder Cup victory last year. The home of the Royal Spanish Golf Federation opened in 2006 as an all-comer's pay and play. It's tight for an 18-hole layout but architect Dave Thomas used judicious landscaping to create a course worthy of the 2018 Spanish Open.

To everyone's delight, the Open was won by Jon Rahm, Spain's world number eight. The 24-year-old Basque was among the first pupils to establish his credentials at the Centro Nacional Academy, which provides young talent from all over the country with the ingredients for success.

The course is designed to encourage rather than hinder at every level of expertise. The rough is natural, which means fairly sparse during long dry summers. Fairways are contoured to draw in balls as they run off the slopes. Water features attract flocks of large brown birds from the moorhen family, known locally as swamp chickens. Wild boar are also present, although generally unseen.

CONTACT Arroyo del Monte 5, 28036 Madrid; tel +34 (0) 91 376 9060; centronacionalgolf.com

PRICE Visitors €80, Spanish Federation members €40-€50. Buggy €35; club hire €35 (Srixon).

CLUB HOURS From 8am summer, 8.30am winter; driving range floodlit until 11pm.

MAXIMUM HANDICAP 36 recommended. On all courses, foreigners must have a handicap at home but certificates are not usually requested.

FACILITIES 18-hole championship course, 6,504m, par 72. Covered floodlit driving range. Centre of excellence for the Spanish national team, with extensive pitching and putting areas. Academy with 1,800 students.

AFTER THE GOLF The low ranch-style clubhouse blends into a fold in the countryside. Three-course lunch menu with coffee and drink €14.50 Mon-Fri, €25 Sat-Sun. A la carte dinner under the stars €25-€35.

WORDS MINTY CLINCH



FROM LEFT:
Club de
Golf La
Dehesa; Real
Sociedad
Hípica
Española
FAR RIGHT,
TOP: ANaD
BOTTOM:
Golf
Santander

CLUB DE GOLF LA DEHESA

WHERE IS IT? 30km west of Madrid

WHAT'S IT LIKE? For a British club golfer, this is the perfect home from home. The relaxed members' club welcomes strangers with an absence of airs and graces – by no means always the case in a country where protocol can prevail. The walkable layout rambles across open countryside, the stands of pines interspersed with deciduous trees. For the first-timer, hole 1, a short downhill par-4 with card-wrecking potential in the form of an angled blind shot across a ravine to the green, comes as a bit of a shock. Negotiate it and the way is clear for the rest of a benign front nine along the river.

The fairways are wide, the water fowl at peace and the views of the snowy Sierra de Guadarrama outstanding. Beware complacency: Manuel Pinero, one of Spain's leading golf architects, ramps up the technical challenge on the back nine. A horseshoe lake provides a spectacular climax to both loops, although the tee shot to the island green at the 18th is more likely to end up in the water.

CONTACT Avenida Universidad 10, 28691 Villanueva de la Canada, Madrid; tel +34 (0) 91 815 7022; golfdehesa.es
PRICE 18 holes weekdays €50, weekends €85, with member €27/€45. Buggy €28; club hire €35 (Callaway).

CLUB HOURS Weekdays from 9am summer, 9.30am winter; weekends 7am summer, 8am winter. Maximum handicap 36 recommended.

FACILITIES 18 holes, 6,037m, par 72. Driving range, practice area and putting green.

AFTER THE GOLF La Dehesa has a traditional 19th hole in the form of a semicircular bar with high stools and zinc-topped tables. Breakfast from 9am; three-course lunch with drink and coffee €25. Restaurant open until 9.30pm. La Dehesa has tennis, squash and padel courts, a football pitch, kids' play areas and a pool.

REAL SOCIEDAD HIPICA ESPANOLA

WHERE IS IT? 30km north of Madrid

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The Sociedad Hípica Club de Campo opened as an equestrian centre in 1901, attaining royal status when golf was incorporated seven years later. At the end of the Spanish Civil War, the clubs merged, eventually finding a permanent home near the Escorial in 1990. US architect Robert von Hagge used every trick in the design book to devise two superb courses on hilly terrain. The snow-capped sierra provides a magnificent backdrop to multi-level fairways and tight, hostile greens.

Campo Norte, host to the Spanish Open in 2007, is the more prestigious. Laid out in two loops of nine with long walks from green to tee, it is a buggy must for all but the most resolute pedestrians. Doglegs dominate, putting a premium on club selection and strategy. There are four large lakes on the back nine, but the front nine sets more subtle traps, notably on the 4th, where a creek snagging down the middle of the fairway drains into the pond in front of the green. Campo Sur, completed in 2000, is shorter, hillier and trickier.

CONTACT San Sebastian de los Reyes, 28709 Madrid; tel +34 (0) 91 657 1018; rshecc.es



US architect Robert von Hagge used every trick in the design book to devise two superb courses on hilly terrain

PRICE Visitors (Mon-Fri only) 18 holes €75; buggy €25; club hire €40 (Taylormade).

CLUB HOURS From 9am summer, 9.30am winter.

Maximum handicap 36 recommended.

FACILITIES Norte 6,501m, par 72; Sud 6,121m, par 72.

Driving range, practice area, putting green.

AFTER THE GOLF The traditionally mellow clubhouse serves a three-course lunch menu (€17.50), plus tortillas, sandwiches and burgers. Dine outdoors until 2am Fri-Sat.

GOLF SANTANDER

WHERE IS IT? 23km west of Madrid

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Funded by the bank of the same name, Santander is a gruelling challenge. The plan was to provide a world-class facility for the employees in their "Financial City" on the outskirts of Madrid. Most may not find time to develop the skill set required for one of Spain's longest tracks, but six tees on each hole give a glimmer of hope. Designed by Rees Jones, with help from Seve Ballesteros, it opened in 2005. Big earth moving transformed a rubbish dump into "18 highly versatile holes", as Ballesteros put it. Big bucks also supplied assorted water hazards, 5,000 trees and myriad shrubs and eco-charter prioritised a wildlife-friendly environment so look out for hares and red partridge.

Hardest of all is finding the correct closely guarded entry portal – one of three – to access the club. If you don't have a reservation or take your passport, you have no chance. If you do, officials phone the number through

LUIS CORRALO



to the pro shop, where it's checked against the document before you play.

CONTACT Avenida de Cantabria s/n, 28660 Boadilla del Monte, Madrid; tel +34 (0) 91 257 3929/30; golfssantander.es

PRICE €110 weekdays, €146 weekends; with member €45/€68; buggy €30; club hire €35 (Taylormade).

CLUB HOURS From 8am summer, 9am winter.

Maximum handicap 36 recommended.

FACILITIES 18-hole championship course, 6,856m, par 72. Driving range, practice area, putting green, Jim McLean golf academy.

AFTER THE GOLF An imposing two-storey clubhouse in marble and glass with a vine-shaded terrace. The restaurant specialises in international golf fare.

■ Your Golf Travel
organises tee times
and golf holidays:
+44 (0)800 043 6644;
yourgolftravel.com

WORDS CHRIS HALL

TIME FOR ACTION

Channel your inner James Bond with the daredevil experiences included when you buy one of Panerai's new limited editions

What links a two-day training programme with the Italian navy's elite commando squad, a guided expedition in the Arctic wilderness with a world-renowned explorer, and a trip to French Polynesia with a world-champion freediver?

To most people, the answer lies in their inaccessibility. These are not the types of things you'll find in the brochures of even the world's more luxurious travel agencies; a better definition of "money can't buy" experiences is hard to imagine.

Except that, thanks to the continued munificence of the Swiss watch industry – in particular, Panerai, which has always had a high daredevil quotient in its blood – they are now "money can buy" experiences. Specifically, £34,000-can-buy. Put your name down for one of three new limited-edition Submersible dive watches, released at January's SIHH watch fair in Geneva, and you will also be invited to take part in one of the aforementioned adventures (health and fitness permitting, of course). Each watch now comes with a side order of danger and excitement – a literal invitation to live out the marketing campaign of your dreams.

The three initiatives have been announced as Panerai reorganises its range slightly; →

Guillaume Néry and the Submersible Chrono named after him; £33,900



Submersible
Marina Militare
Carbotech,
£34,800

Each watch comes with a side order of danger and excitement

whereas previously the Submersible line existed within the Luminor family of watches, now it becomes its own thing, with a greater sense of identity. That comes hand-in-hand with a few aesthetic tweaks – bolder luminous markings on the dials; bezels with relief-etched numerals; chunkier, more cartoonish hands; and a smattering of fresh colours and textures throughout, from sailcloth to “sharkskin”.

One change that may irk devotees of the brand – and they are legion – is the absence on many models of “sandwich” dials, but they have been replaced by some impressively three-dimensional luminous numerals and hour markers.

Alongside some handsome base models – the royal blue and pale grey combination of reference PAM00959 (£8,300) is a particular highlight – Panerai has made three special-edition watches, and it’s these that come with the high-energy holidays attached. Let’s start with the Submersible Marina Militare Carbotech. As the name suggests,

this watch pays homage to Panerai’s beginnings as a supplier to Italian frogmen in the Second World War, and its dusky green and carbon stylings have more than a hint of the armed forces about them.

The 33 buyers will be dispatched on a two-day training session with “Comsubin”, the Italian navy’s elite special forces commando unit. Based in La Spezia in north-west Italy, the group numbers roughly 700 men and has been deployed in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan

and Libya in recent years. Details on the two-day programme are scant (it is a secretive unit, after all) but one can assume that the 33 will at the very least be required to pass a medical.

stan and Libya in recent years. Details on the two-day programme are scant (it is a secretive unit, after all) but one can assume that the 33 will at the very least be required to pass a medical.

If being shouted at by an Italian sergeant major isn’t your thing, allow me to draw your attention to the Submersible Mike Horn edition. Mr Horn is a South African-born explorer and adventurer with solo expeditions across South America and around the Arctic Circle to

his name, as well as the world’s only winter expedition to the North Pole.

And, yes, you guessed it – 19 lucky Panerai customers will be able to join him on a trip to Svalbard, in northern Norway, to “put themselves to the test and to confront nature and its challenges, but also to become personally aware of the dangers to our ecosystem caused by the impact of humans”.

In keeping with the environmentally aware ethos, these watches have been made from reclaimed titanium and recycled PET plastic (in the cases and straps respectively). With their laser-cut bezels and “Arctic blue” detailing, these are my favourite watches from the 2019 range, but I’m not sure dodging polar bears and crevasses is really for me. I fancy something a bit more... tropical.

Thankfully, Panerai has me covered with its most exclusive experience of all. It’s included with every purchase of the Submersible Chrono Guillaume Néry edition, an all-black titanium chronograph with a blue-black dial and turquoise accents redolent of equatorial waters. Just 15 individuals will be travelling to Tahiti for a chance to dive (and watch whales) with the eponymous French freediving champion, who set four consecutive world records between 2002 and 2008, and once reached 126 metres on a single reath. Happily, on this trip everyone gets to use scuba gear and, unlike the other two, a five-star après-swim is guaranteed.

Although you don’t have to take part in any of these add-ons, if you think that skipping them is your path to a cut-price Panerai, think again – the brand has confirmed that the price remains the same regardless of whether you choose to dive, trek or train with the best. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to buy a couple of scratchcards and a wetsuit.



Mike Horn and the Submersible edition named after him. £34,800; panerai.com

RARE ESSENTIAL

Oud is difficult to source with an esoteric fragrance, but that hasn't deterred perfumers from reviving it with a modern update

Here's a quick perfume history lesson for you. In 2002, Yves Saint Laurent launched a men's fragrance called M7. One of its selling points was that it was the first "Western" scent to contain oud. This near-mythical substance had been used in Asian perfumes and incense for centuries but was little known west of the Arabian Gulf.

Produced by certain varieties of the aquilaria tree in response to a fungal infection, it is overwhelmingly pungent, displaying an astonishing range of olfactory facets, from spicy to petroleum-like, fecal to medicinal and woody to leathery. To say that it's an acquired taste would be an understatement, but, according to James Craven of London specialist perfumery Les Senteurs, those who fall under its spell liken it to "something drifting down from the gates to Paradise".

As the formation of oud is difficult to control and its supply severely limited – its "host tree" is listed as an endangered species – the extreme odour is matched by the price tag, with some qualities fetching in the region of £30,000 per kilo and beyond.

Its inclusion in a mainstream European product at the start of the century was down in no small part to the fact that chemists had successfully created cheaper – and, according to some, inferior – synthetic substitutes, thereby prompting one of the fragrance industry's most lucrative and influential trends of the past decade.

The YSL release was followed by countless others and now very few brands don't feature an oud scent of some form in their collections. Even Lynx, that perennial favourite of teenage boys, launched an oud product in 2016.

So ubiquitous has the smell of the ingredient become – or, at least, the smell of its synthetic versions – that many

fragrance aficionados believe it is now an olfactory cliché. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that Middle Eastern customers – the target of many oud creations – are actively seeking scents that don't feature its unmistakable odour.

Now that the novelty of the substance has worn off, a handful of scent makers are attempting to present it in more innovative ways; the past few months have seen the appearance of several striking oud-based creations.

The latest among these is Opus XI from the house of Amouage (see box opposite). Its creative director, Christopher Chong, was struck by the notion that the over-use of lab-made oud means that few ordinary shoppers know what the real McCoy smells like. Since synthetic

ouds "have been accepted by the public as real", he explains, "I decided to combine the real with the illusion. I felt that would make an interesting twist."

For his creation L'Oudh, award-winning Zurich-based perfumer Andy Tauer decided that the best way to create a truly original oud perfume was to adopt a back-to-basics approach and just use the genuine article. "By using real oud in substantial quantities, you do what 99 per cent of all others have not dared to do," he says. "I used a natural oud from Laos, got it imported under CITES [the body that oversees the trade of protected plants] and composed a fragrance that brings out the facets of the essential oil."

Craven recommends Anima Vinci's Oud Delight (£170 for 100ml of eau de parfum; lessenteurs.com), in which the ingredient is "lifted and lightened". He says: "The scent lives up to its name with the brightness of ginger, saffron and coriander. Freshness, not fustiness."

It is perfumers' willingness to be more daring in their use of the material – perhaps by making it sweeter, cleaner, more floral or more "authentic" – that is allowing oud to enjoy a new-found respect among both experts and casual shoppers. "And through these qualities," Craven says, "people will come to see oud differently."

The extreme odour is matched by the price – some qualities fetch in the region of £30,000 per kilo and beyond



FOUR MODERN OUDS

OPUS XI, Amouage
£300 for 100ml eau de parfum
Oud linked with bitter herbs and tannery notes. Tremendously long-lasting.
amouage.com



L'OU DH, Tauer Perfumes
£238 for 50ml eau de parfum
A no-holds-barred showcase of all of oud's most prominent features.
lessenteurs.com



DAWN, Frédéric Malle
£580 for 50ml eau de parfum
Weighty, leather-entwined oud on a powerful, woody-amber base.
fredericmalle.co.uk



AGAR EBENE, Hermès
£185 for 100ml eau de toilette
The scent of burning oud chips is combined with the bracing qualities of fir balsam.
hermes.com



Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal



BACKGROUND

“Luxury Baha Principe” is a brand created by Spanish hotel group Grupo Piñero with an aim to cater to the needs of most demanding guests. Launched in 2001, the Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal resort is situated in the eastern part of the Yucatan Peninsula, just a 60-minute drive from Cancun International Airport, 25 minutes from Playa del Carmen, and 20 minutes from the popular tourist town of Tulum. The property stands on a long stretch of beach and is partially protected by a coral reef, as well as surrounded by 1,1 million square metres of lush, tropical vegetation.

RIVIERA MAYA

Lying on the Caribbean Sea, Riviera Maya is a place of incomparable natural beauty and pic-

turesque landscapes. With the remarkable jungle of Sian Ka'an, the Mayan ruins, the unique natural wealth of fauna and flora, as well as a vast biosphere reserve, the region is a true paradise on Earth and a real treat for nature aficionados. Without a doubt, some of the biggest attractions of Riviera Maya include the varied culture of its people, customs, unique cuisine, and rich architectural heritage.

APARTMENTS

Luxury Baha Principe Akumal offers comfortable and spacious suites in two categories: Junior Suite Superior and Junior Suite Deluxe. Each category is also available with the “ocean view” option. All come with air conditioning, wifi, satellite TV, bathrobes and slippers, minibar, coffee making facilities, and a set of luxury bathroom amenities. In addition, Junior Suites

CONTACT

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Deluxe and Junior Suites Deluxe Ocean Front come with a hydro-massage bathtub.

RESTAURANTS

The hotel complex boasts a wide range of catering options for all tastes. Rivera Restaurant offers buffet-style meals and international cuisine. As the names suggest, Pool Restaurant and Beach Restaurant are situated by the pool and the beach. For this reason, they are one of the few eateries in Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal with a much less formal atmosphere. Other on-site restaurants specialize mainly in a la carte dishes. These include: Gourmet Arlequin (modern cuisine for gourmets), Dolce Vita (Italian fare), Maiko (Japanese fusion cuisine), Rodizio (Brazilian dishes), Tequila (Tex-Mex cuisine), Mashua Nikkei (Asian and Peruvian cuisine), Le Gourmet (exquisite French fare) and Alux (international cuisine plus picturesque views from the windows).

The property also has several excellent bars, including pool-side and beach-side ones.

LEISURE

The property's Bahia Spa offers a wide range of mind and body treatment to refresh your skin and rejuvenate your energy. Performed in beautifully designed and decorated facilities, all procedures are inspired by ancient Mayan recipes with the use of the highest quality products from the region. All are worth a try, but don't miss on the Agave Treatment and the unique Bahia Spa Mayan Massage.

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal is the ideal partner to hold all corporate events, whether



Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal stands on a long stretch of the beach and is partially protected by a coral reef. It is surrounded by 1,1 million square metres of lush, tropical vegetation.

for incentive tourism, congresses, conferences, product presentations, business meetings or conventions. The hotels has a dedicated team of professionals to provide assistance and take care of all the details of the event.

The offer of the complex includes organizing events tailored to the needs of clients, spacious and well-equipped rooms, team-building and special activities for groups of delegates, private check-ins, private transfer services, the on-site destination management company, as well as access to a luxury golf course.



RIVIERA MAYA GOLF CLUB

Built in 2010 in line with the unique design by Robert Trent Jones II, the Riviera Maya Golf Club comes with a spectacular 18-hole golf course with numerous natural features, such as lakes, cenotes and the native jungle. Another 9-hole course is located near the Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal hotel complex, which has been recognized by Golf Digest magazine as one of the best holiday resorts in the Americas.

All the 27 holes were cut deep into a limestone quarry so that their fairways emerge from the natural contours of a dense jungle combined with mangroves. Thanks to their environmental awareness and the use of state-of-the-art technology, the architects of the Robert Trent Jones team managed to efficiently integrate the natural wonders of the area into the design of the course, creating this wonderful piece of landscaping.

VERDICT

Luxury Bahia Principe Akumal is an excellent spot for a holiday, a short getaway, or a business trip. It's also an ideal venue for a conference or a corporate team-building event. The property is modern, luxury and very well equipped. The turquoise shade of the Caribbean Sea and the white sand of the beaches of Riviera Maya are second to none. The highest note from me. *Marzena Mróz.*

Bankside Hotel, Autograph Collection

BACKGROUND Open since October last year, this new-build property is located on the south side of the Thames, close to the Sea Containers hotel (formerly the Mondrian). It is part of a development that includes the striking 50-storey One Blackfriars and is a member of Marriott International's Autograph Collection, which comprises more than 150 hotels around the world.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The hotel has gone big on art under interior designer Dayna Lee, who has partnered with Contemporary Collective in filling the property with modern and recycled pieces; there is even an artist in residence who produces works inspired by the area. Walk through to the lifts and you'll see portraits by Helen Gorrill of Sir Christopher Wren, the Mona Lisa and Shakespeare with a skateboard. The public areas have handcrafted furniture by Galvin Brothers, and corridors feature Cy Twombly-inspired prints.

WHERE IS IT? Just next to Blackfriars Bridge, opposite the Thameslink station and a short walk from Southwark Underground station.

ROOMS The 161 rooms come in nine categories and are set over five floors. Entry-level Modest Doubles are 21 sqm. All rooms feature amenities including luxury robes, fabulous 300 thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets on very comfortable beds, Grown Alchemist bathroom products in large

dispensers, remote-controlled blackout blinds and Nespresso machines. Suites start at 41 sqm. Bear in mind that while one category of room contains the word "View", this is a relatively low-rise property and the buildings around it are higher.

Ceilings are in polished concrete, and I liked the wooden floor with the faded colourful rugs. On the glass table was an artist's box of coloured pencils. There were some expensive-looking desk lamps, a huge amount of plugs around the room, USB charging by the bed, free and fast wifi, and large TVs with Google Chromecast. Weirdly, this didn't work with my Google phone (Pixel 3), but a helpful staff member came up and showed that it worked successfully with every other form of device,

There is even an artist in residence who produces works inspired by the area

including my laptop. Instead of a minibar there is a vending machine on each floor containing everything from small bottles of good (but expensive) wine to "adult packs". Each room also has a fridge containing bottled water and fresh milk.

FOOD AND DRINK Art Yard Kitchen and Bar is an attractive ground-floor space featuring, among other works, hand-painted tiles by Laura Carlin. Open all day, it offers a short but



delicious menu in the evenings. I had a small pizza of buffalo ricotta, artichokes and tomatoes (£6) and a main course of sea bass with cavolo nero pesto and horseradish (£16.50), with side orders of roasted sweet potatoes with harissa and pomegranate molasses, and carrot with tahini and linseeds; just right for a freezing cold January night. A small bar is planned for the mezzanine floor this year.

MEETINGS The event spaces are split across the lower and mezzanine floors with the largest being the art gallery-like White Box, which holds 132 guests for a banquet.

LEISURE There is a fair-sized gym, or you can run along the Thames.

VERDICT If you're not bothered about views, these are large, luxurious rooms with fantastic soundproofing, technology and service. Highly recommended. *Tom Otley*

BEST FOR

Quirky design with all the mod cons of a top-class hotel

DON'T MISS

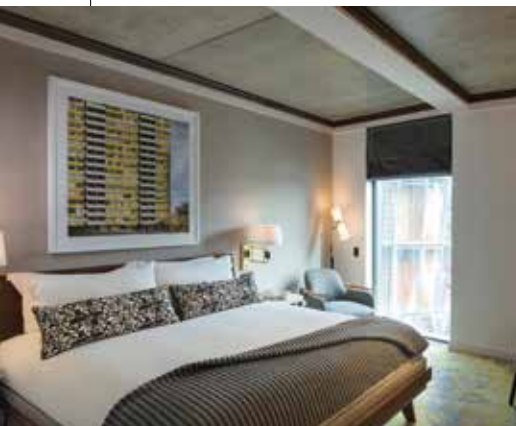
A drink and then dinner in the Art Yard

PRICE

Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in April started from £293 for a Modest Double room

CONTACT

Bankside Hotel, 2 Blackfriars Road, Upper Ground; tel +44 (0)20 3319 5988; banksidehotel.com



Kimpton Fitzroy London

BACKGROUND This striking Grade II-listed building, which first opened as the Hotel Russell in 1900, recently had a £75 million renovation and opened under the Principal brand in April last year. That identity proved short-lived, with Intercontinental Hotels Group and joint venture partners Fonciere des Regions buying Principal and reopening the property under upscale brand Kimpton. They have undertaken "light renovations" to put a new stamp on it. It is the first UK property for Kimpton, although this year will see openings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? After arriving through large wooden doors on Russell Square, the foyer is an imposing sight, with marble walls, pillars and a marble mosaic floor. The hotel is softly lit and tastefully decorated throughout. Features include free bike use, a promise to provide any toiletries or other items you may have forgotten, and a daily "social hour" with complimentary wine and beer served from 5pm to 6pm. Pets can stay for free.

WHERE IS IT? In Bloomsbury, two minutes' walk from Russell Square Tube station (useful for the Piccadilly line to Heathrow) or ten minutes' walk from Euston (for the Victoria and Northern lines).

ROOMS The property has 334 rooms, which range from 11 sqm singles and 22-32 sqm doubles to 68 sqm suites. The design in all is similar, simple but inviting, with a colour scheme of cream and taupe with dark detailing. All rooms come with free wifi, Nespresso machines (except for City Singles), Perfumer's Story bathroom amenities, Bluetooth speakers, mini fridges and smart TVs. Business travellers should note that many rooms lack desks, including the one-bedroom suite I stayed in. The stand-out facility in my suite was the large bathroom, which was finished in marble. With its two sinks and big freestanding tub, it was so inviting I could have happily spent a whole day in it.



I did at some point leave, and happily found the bed to be extremely comfortable, with 300 thread-count linens and a mound of pillows. Copies of classic books were a nice touch. However, one gripe was that the many light switches weren't very intuitive. It seemed that not all could be controlled from the bed, and I had to scour the room to work out how to turn off one particularly persistent light coming from the wardrobe.

FOOD AND DRINK Fitz's Bar is a dimly lit ground-floor hideaway that seemingly wants to attract a cool crowd (as well as City types in suits, I'm pretty sure I spotted a very famous actor). On a dark velvet sofa beneath a disco

The foyer is an imposing sight, with marble walls, pillars and a mosaic floor

ball and silk-tented ceiling, I tried a tasty and fairly lethal Negroni, as well as the delicious salmon Tolstoy and croquettes from the snack menu. Tragically, I arrived too late for social hour.

On the other side of the building is Burr and Co café, where a breakfast buffet is served. This is fairly standard but will cater to all tastes, with "health shot" mini juices and chia puddings as well as pastries, cheese and cold cuts, and hot options. The vibe is somewhere between a hipster coffee shop and a farmhouse. Guests who buy bed and breakfast packages can choose between this and an à la carte breakfast at Neptune, which for lunch and dinner becomes a seafood restaurant. I didn't try a meal there, but its pink and cream décor (plus more marble) looks like something out of a Wes Anderson movie. There is also the impressive Palm Court, which serves drinks, an all-day dining menu and afternoon tea in a bright, plant-filled space in the centre of the hotel.



MEETINGS The ballroom has been restored and fits 400 people for a banquet, while eight additional event spaces can accommodate gatherings of eight to 80.

LEISURE There is a 24-hour gym and complimentary bike hire.

VERDICT The hotel meets its aim of laid-back, unpretentious luxury. The design is classic and tasteful, and the staff young and friendly.

Jenni Reid

BEST FOR

Events – the meeting rooms and public spaces have been beautifully done up – or a luxurious bath in a Corner suite

DON'T MISS

Celeb-spotting over free drinks during social hour at Fitz's

PRICE

Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in April started from £299 for an Urban Double room

CONTACT

Kimpton Fitzroy London, 1-8 Russell Square; tel +44 (0)20 7123 5000; kimptonfitzroylondon.co.uk

How to deal with back pain

There are 16 million cases of lower back pain experienced in the UK each year. These include sciatica, often caused by a “slipped disc”. Low back pain, with or without sciatica, is widely recognised as one of the most severe sources of chronic pain a person can suffer from.

Factors such as bad posture, elevated stress levels, cigarette smoking, a sedentary lifestyle and weight are all known to contribute to the onset of back pain and sciatica.

Sciatica is the collective name for a set of symptoms (including pain, weakness/numbness in the buttocks or leg, and a burning/tingling sensation down the leg) caused by a disc bulge (also called a prolapsed, herniated or slipped disc). The predisposition to this disc bulge is genetic but the event of “slipped disc” itself can be caused by lifestyle or injury: any sudden jerking movements – from a car accident, for example – can place too much pressure on the disc, causing it to bulge. Most get better, over about three months, but some disc bulges cause longer-term pain.

CORE OF THE ISSUE

Dr Ben Huntley is a consultant in pain management from London Sports Orthopaedics and London Bridge Hospital, part of HCA Healthcare UK. He says: “Posture and preparation are the most important ways of avoiding back pain. What we mean by preparation is maintaining general fitness and, through exercise, working on strengthening the core muscles and gluteals.

“We tend to think of the problem as being to do with the bony part or the disc parts of the spine and we neglect the muscle.” And yet, when travelling, it is muscular support for the spine that is particularly important.

“Travelling for prolonged periods in an upright position is not ideal, and

a reclined position is better,” he says. “For those likely to suffer from back pain, long periods sitting can both cause and aggravate the problem.”

So what to do? Well, avoidance is the first aim, by maintaining that general fitness. Make sure you have a strong core, as well as maintaining flexibility. Both yoga and pilates can play a part in this. A good physiotherapist can offer specific advice tailored to the individual.

Huntley says: “If you are already suffering from either back pain or sciatica, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen can help, but tend to provide a modest degree of pain relief. Drugs such as ibuprofen can also come as a cream or gel and can work just as well in this way. Co-codamol can be helpful, too, but beware constipation, and avoid taking for a prolonged period of time, as you will tolerate to this.”

FLIGHT TIPS

For severe cases of sciatica, pain management interventions such as an epidural steroid injection can help. A spinal injection, it must be performed at least two days before a flight. It “accurately targets and deposits an anti-inflammatory steroid in the relevant part of the back to treat sciatica”, he says.

During a long-haul flight, Huntley advises standing up and moving around. “The worst position for your back is to sit at 90 degrees, so standing and walking to offload your back is important at regular intervals.”

He adds that meditation can also play a role, especially in dealing with pain: “Mindfulness-based meditation can be part of a healthy lifestyle and a strategy to manage any given pain. Most people experience back pain at some time in their lives and back pain is an extra stress. The key is to prepare, to manage that extra stress, and to keep that core strong.”



FIVE WAYS TO RELIEVE THE PAIN

- Strengthen the core muscles and gluteals
- Maintain flexibility through yoga and pilates
- Take anti-inflammatory drugs or painkillers such as ibuprofen or co-codamol
- Stand up and move around at regular intervals
- Practise mindfulness meditation



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WORDS BECKY AMBURY

Berlin Kreuzberg

A meander through one of Berlin's most compelling areas, taking in important museums, lush green spaces and cutting-edge art

1 Jewish Museum

Berlin's tumultuous history is easily traceable in Kreuzberg, a large, diverse area south of the River Spree. Start at Checkpoint Charlie, the former border crossing between East and West before the Wall came down in 1989, and head towards the Jewish Museum on Lindenstrasse. Even from the outside, the Daniel Libeskind building is haunting, with its angular, zigzagging structure bringing a sense of disorientation. Inside, the story of the Jewish contribution to the city and the impact of the Holocaust, symbolised by towering empty spaces within the building's architecture and personalised by the poignant belongings of the victims, is a stark, upsetting and very necessary reminder of this period of history. Open 10am-8pm daily, €8; jmb Berlin.de/en

2 Viktoriapark

For the highest natural elevation in the city, with views to match, head south to Viktoriapark, a 16-hectare green space

on the slopes of the Tempelhof hills. This area became a park in 1894, but the extravagant Neoclassical monument at the summit dates back further still, to 1821. It was erected to celebrate a victory during the Napoleonic Wars and the cross at the top is from where Kreuzberg, meaning cross hill, takes its name. Adding to the bucolic charm is an impressive manmade waterfall, modelled on one from the Krkonoše mountain range on the border of Poland and the Czech Republic, a favoured getaway for Berlin notables in the 19th century. The Golgatha biergarten at the foot of the park is a lovely spot for a refreshing beverage.

3 Curry 36

Two of Berlin's most renowned dining options are cheap, delicious takeaway joints and near-neighbours on Mehringdamm, the wide thoroughfare that heads south out of the city. Curry 36 vends Berlin's best-known fast food of choice, currywurst – pork sausage doused in spiced ketchup, usually with

a side of chips. Mustafa's, meanwhile, is the place to go for doner kebab, the other contender for the city's most beloved snack on the hoof – before you curl your lip, forget the British version: according to legend, Berlin is where the Turkish-influenced dish was created in the seventies. Join the snaking queue that leads to the unassuming cabin and grab a soft pitta piled high with tender grilled meat, crisp pickles and moreish sauces. curry36.de; mustafas.de

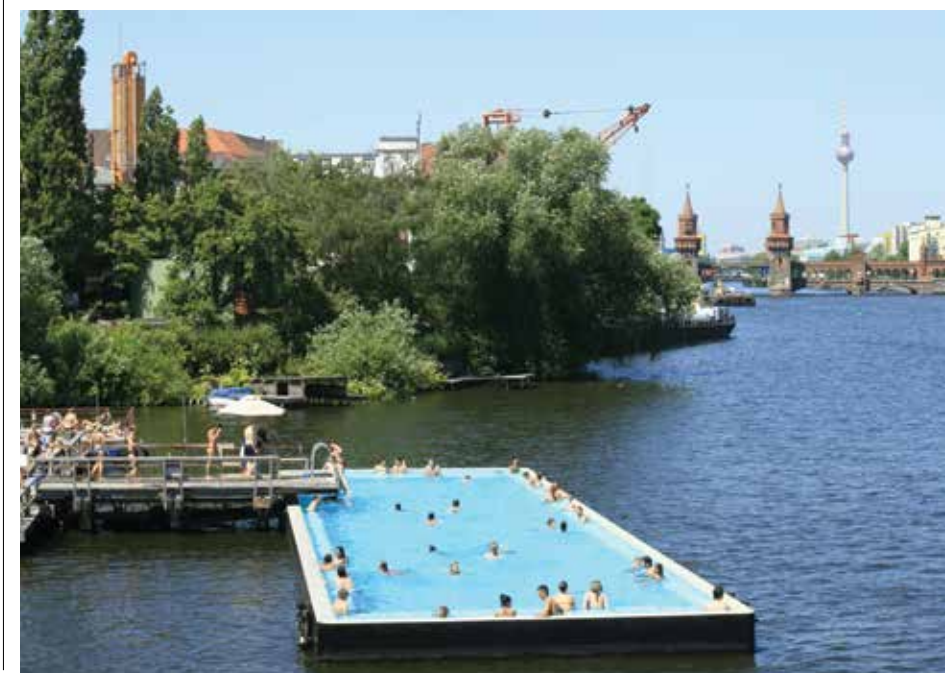
4 Street art

From Mehringdamm, get the U-Bahn to Goritzer Bahnhof. In the east of the area towards the River Spree, which separates Kreuzberg from the equally animated neighbourhood of Friedrichshagen, is some of the city's best street art. Look out for the vast Astronaut Cosmonaut by French artist Victor Ash adorning the side of a building on Marianenstrasse, which was partly inspired by David Bowie's music. On Oranienstrasse you'll spy a mural by Belgian artist ROA, which features animals such as

a deer and a stork in reference to the fauna that once roamed the area. On a smaller, more temporary scale, and thus less liable to a hefty fine from the authorities, are intricate sticker works and other removable pieces. Guided walks are available from Alternative Berlin Tours. alternativeberlin.com

5 Markthalle Neun

Don't miss the nearby Markthalle Neun (closed Sundays). This covered market reopened in 2011 after an absence of 120 years and is home to dozens of stalls selling local and international specialities. Not only is it a way to indulge your inner glutton, but the market is also a great place to get to grips with the character of Kreuzberg. So, too, is the Turkish Market to the south, where you can find a taste of Istanbul, complete with haggling, on Tuesdays and Fridays. If it's summer, carry on to Badeschiff, a floating outdoor pool on the Spree that has excellent riverside views and plenty of options for an alfresco drink.



VISIT BERLIN/WOLFGANG SCHOLWIEN, FOTOLIA

APPS ON THE GO

I had booked a flight from Cracow to Frankfurt with Lufthansa and then with BA to London, UK. On my return trip I took a BA flight to Munich and a Lufthansa connection to Warsaw. I changed the reservation twice, as some of my meetings had been postponed. Each time I had a problem with the boarding pass on the mobile application, and I had to enter the number of the reservation manually, as the flight info didn't display automatically. Because of this on each flight I had to go to the check-in counter to receive a paper boarding pass. Is this normal?

Marek

Dear Marek,
Mobile apps are a relatively new product, but they are continuously being improved. They usually work flawlessly when the reservation is made through an application or directly on the airline's website and when no further changes are made.

In the case of a complex journey involving different airlines and more than one ticket number, there may be errors in the processing and recognition of too much data. British Airways and Lufthansa used the same reservation system for your journey. The system recognized the same booking number for all flights, but the error occurred at the moment when it had to recognize and match ticket numbers assigned to the individual legs of the journey.

If you make changes to your journey, tickets must be exchanged and then the system generates all new document numbers. Not all systems are fully compatible, agents use other systems than carriers and data transfer may be delayed.

In such situations, the mobile application may be unable to load new data and, in consequence, can't automatically generate a boarding pass.

You can always try to check in on the carrier's website or get a boarding pass at the check-in counters at the airport. Mobile applications are very popular and promoted by airlines, but may have limited functionality. Another common problem is that mobile apps often show a reservation as active, even if it has been cancelled earlier in the booking system.

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.



POINTS FOR MILES

We always use services of a travel agency when booking our tickets. Unfortunately, there is often a problem with my number in the Miles and More scheme. I completed the profile, but when I checked the printout from my account, it didn't show any accrued points for my four previous flights. The system displays only the points I was able to claim at the ticket counter at the airport. Why didn't my loyalty number appear on my ticket? Can I recover points that haven't been registered?

Antoni

Dear Antoni,
I've read the documents that you've sent me and from what I can see, the problem was caused by different spelling of your name. Your surname in Miles and More database differs in one letter than the one that appears in your booking. That's why, the system couldn't automatically synchronize the card number with your profile due to data discrepancy. As a result, the Miles and More number wasn't recognised and transferred to the carriers.

An airline employee at the airport had the opportunity to overwrite your number in the booking and thus bypass system restrictions. This is only possible in the airline's own system, but not in systems of all travel agencies. That's why only the points for this particular flight were credited to your account.

Additionally, due to the change of your membership status in the programme to a higher one, your card number has also changed.

During the transitional period, when you didn't complete your profile, miles weren't credited at all because the previous number was no longer active. The new card is issued to the correct name, so you should no longer have any problems with accruing points for your flights.

Of course, it's possible to add missing miles to your account even for the last 6 months. To do so, simply fill in the form available on the programme's website or send an e-mail with copies of your boarding passes if you were travelling with partner airlines. Please note that you can also earn airline loyalty points for hotel or car bookings, shopping at airports, magazine subscriptions or payments with credit cards. It's a good idea to regularly check promotional offers sent by airlines.



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