

Business Traveller ^{Poland}

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HANOI

*New major player
in Asia*

GEORGIA

*Economic revival
and fine wine*

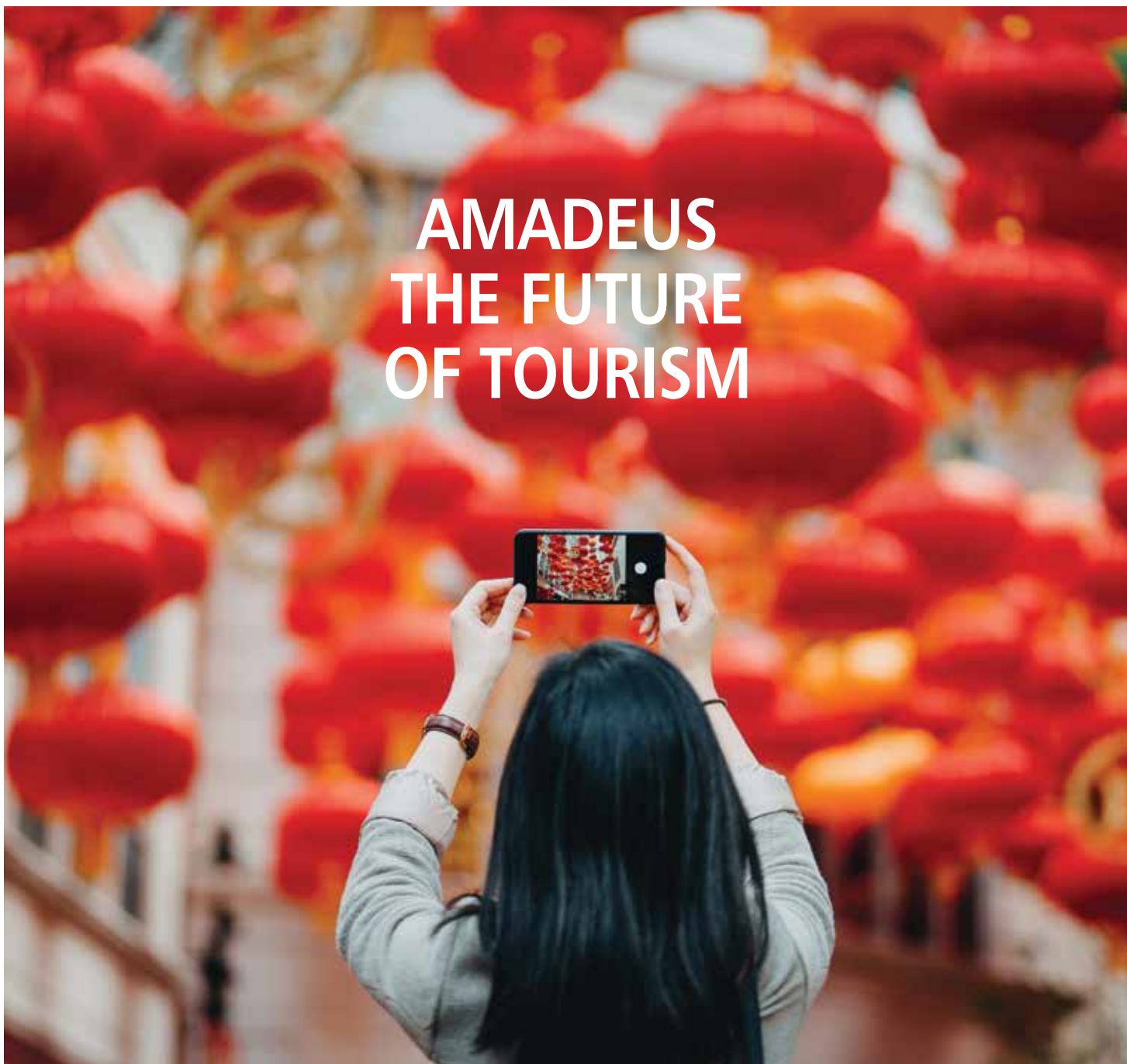
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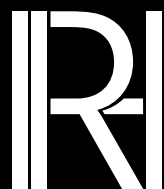
*Skiing weekend
in Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis*

PLUS

*Hotel, restaurant,
and airline news*

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BUSINESS DESTINATIONS

In this issue of BT, we focus on business destinations such as Vietnam and Georgia. In recent years Hanoi has been developing very rapidly, fighting for the name of a new Asian tiger. In addition to the climate of the old Vietnam, the capital city offers business development opportunities, following the example of Samsung, which has invested here billions of dollars in smart-phone factories. Hanoi is developing so quickly that some streets are being constructed before they can be officially named.

Georgia is also enjoying a renaissance, helped along by its outstanding wines. Located in the South Caucasus, along with its westerly neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan, it has always been a crossing place. Lying between Europe and Asia, and between the Caspian and Black Seas, with a distance of only 700 miles between the two, makes it a natural transit point. It was once on the Silk Route, but with the discovery of the oil fields around Baku in Azerbaijan, oil was transported by rail over to the Black Sea.

Since 2014, Georgia has been part of the European Union's Free Trade Area, with the EU continuing to be the country's largest trading partner, accounting for more than a quarter of Georgia's total trade turnover. No wonder that the country's development prospects have never been as optimistic as today.

Enjoy your reading!

Marzena Mróz

MARZENA MRÓZ
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Konferencje nad Bałtykiem i w górach

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LOT LAUNCHES NEW ROUTES



FROM CRACOW TO NY AND CHICAGO

LOT to launch a new direct connection to New York City (JFK) and increase the frequency of weekly flight to Chicago.

This summer, LOT Polish Airlines will offer a wider range of flights on Cracow-USA routes. This means that the residents of the region of Lesser Poland will have an easier access to two major American airports served by LOT's Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

North America has an important place in LOT's development strategy.

At present, the Polish carrier offers as many as 20 intercontinental services from Warsaw to: New York (JFK/EWR), Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco (SFO from 5 August 2020), Washington (IAD from 2 June 2020), Toronto, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing (PEK/PKX), Singapore, Delhi and to Colombo. In addition, LOT flies from Cracow to Chicago and New York (JFK from 3 May 2020), from Rzeszów to New York (EWR) and from Budapest to New York (JFK) and Seoul. Flights from Cracow to New York will be operated four times weekly (starting on 3 May 2020), according to the following schedule: LO19 KRK-JFK 18:45-22:30 Sunday, and LO20 JFK-KRK 00:20-14:55 (take-off on Saturday/Sunday night).

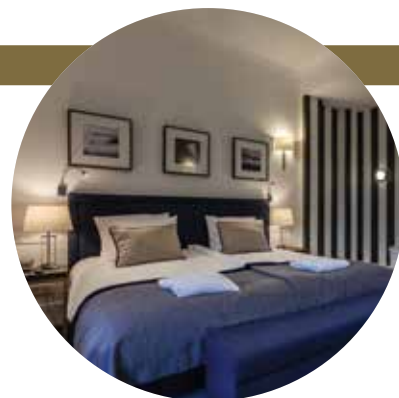
Tickets are available at lot.com.



Komierowo: relaxation, business, health



Located near Sępólno Krajeńskie, in close proximity to the Tuchola Forest, Komierowo Palace is a place where the beauty of architecture and surroundings goes hand in hand with the multifunctional solutions and comprehensive offer. You can regenerate here, improving your mental and physical condition, as well as lose some excess we-



ight. All of this in truly luxury conditions. This is an incredibly charming spot. The palace is surrounded by a park with old trees and five ponds. The path network has been designed not only for cyclists and runners, but also for fans of Nordic walking. Komierowo Palace is a perfect venue for a business or team-building meeting, a conference, a romantic



IN THE SHADOW OF MATTERHORN

The unique location of Zermatt - at the foot of the Matterhorn, in the middle of a huge ski area - makes it one of the most attractive mountain resorts in the world. The area offers 54 cable cars and ski lifts, as well as more than 360 kilometres of well-groomed pistes suitable both for skiers and snowboarders. Interestingly, the town is completely pedestrianized. The ski arena called "Matterhorn glacier paradise" is considered to be the largest and the highest located summer ski area in Europe. Numerous national teams train here throughout the summer. This Swiss region has also become a true legend among mountaineers: the Haute Route, a demanding international scouting route, leads from Mont Blanc to Zermatt, and takes at least a few days to complete.



getaway for two, as well as an ideal spot for active leisure aficionado. Komierowo offers two exceptionally attractive signature programs. The four-day Yoga Retreatment program is run by a yogi from India. In addition to numerous asan exercises, it includes acupuncture, massages and meditation.



In turn, slim-fit-vit stays (in winter also offered for skiers) are based on specially designed fitness classes and a balanced protein-carbohydrate-fat diet. The program's motto is: "Return to good health, joy and full strength!" Classes are tailored to the individual abilities of each participant; palackomierowo.pl



Lavidó for travellers

Lavidó is an Israeli brand of natural cosmetics that has devout fans worldwide. The list of its customers includes Gwyneth Paltrow, an actress and founder of the GOOP platform dedicated to a healthy lifestyle. Lavidó is one of the leading brands offering a wide range of skin and body care products that fit into the global trend dubbed "clean beauty." The brand's cosmetics have a rejuvenating effect - they are distinguished by a high concentration of active ingredients contained in natural essential oils and organic plant extracts. What's more, their natural and beautiful scents have an aroma-therapeutic effect. Lavidó guarantees that all its products are not only safe, but above all effective, as has been proved by tests of an independent German laboratory. Since January, Lavidó cosmetics have also been available in Poland; lavidop.pl



Stryjeńska for the 21st century

Zofia Stryjeńska became known primarily as a painter and illustrator. However, few people realize that she was also a talented writer. Her recently published "Code of savoir-vivre" is a testimony to a versatile talent and unusual sense of humour of the "princess of the Polish painting." The book, though written in the first half of the 20th century, includes many valid principles of good manners and etiquette, which Zofia Stryjeńska presented in a matter-of-fact, humorous way, sometimes with her own illustrations.

It's a must-have title for all enthusiasts of Stryjeńska's work, those who are fond of witty sense of humour, as well as those wishing to explore the art of savoir-vivre. Apart from the wonderful drawings by Stryjeńska, which in recent years have gained popularity and become more valuable, the book contains photos from the artist's family album, as well as many interesting pieces of advice on social life. The chapters on fashion, prosperity and weekends are second to none. At the end, Stryjeńska's living grandchildren speak about her, adding lots of facts about the author that have been passed on in the family from generation to generation. The book was published by Bosz Publishing House and the graphic design was made by Lech Majewski; bosz.com.pl



EVEN MORE SUNNY DESTINATIONS ON AIR FRANCE'S SUMMER SCHEDULE

Air France has announced the launch of five new seasonal routes. There will be three Greek destinations on offer: Thessaloniki (served three times a week), Santorini (once a week) and Mykonos (twice a week).

With its myriad shades of black, Santorini never fails to charm. Famous for its nightlife and beaches, Mykonos with its cascading whitewashed houses is comfortably nestled between blue skies and the turquoise sea. Thessaloniki, on the other hand, is the second largest city of Greece, where the traces of ancient Greek and Byzantine cultures intersect. It's also a perfect starting point for exploring northern Greece with its Meteora and Mount Olympus.

In addition, in summer Air France will also fly to the Tunisian island of Djerba (four times a week). Note that all of those new destinations will only be served during the high season between 13 July and 30 August 2020, with Air France aircraft departing from Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris.

This summer Air France passengers will also have a chance to use the new regional route in France between Brest (Brittany) and Calvi (Corsica). The connection will be operated from 20 June to 26 September 2020. In total, during the summer season, Air France aircraft will reach 16 new destinations. Among them is the long-awaited connection between Cracow and Paris, due to be launched on 29 March 2020. The services will be operated daily; airfrance.com



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Open, dynamic,
connected: the business
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of tomorrow.

AMADEUS THE FUTURE OF TOURISM



12 In the world of digital communications, where meetings are held over a laptop screen, plans are made via text or WhatsApp and deals can be signed virtually by parties that have never met in person, it can be challenging to understand what the role is for business travel in this modern, technology-driven world.

HANDSHAKE COUNTS MORE THAN EMAIL

However, despite technology improving functionality across our lives by automating processes and simplifying tasks, it is obvious that it will never replace the human touch. People will always value face-to-face meeting more than talking on the phone or over the Internet. It will always be necessary for people to come together in-person, especially as we live in an increasingly globalized world where business has fewer geographical borders.

A study, published by Harvard Business Review revealed that a face-to-face request was 34 times more successful than asking for something by email, ratifying the clear business value of a meeting, handshake and personal relationship being formed.

VALUE OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL

Business travel also represents an opportunity for corporations, beyond the purely commercial. Smart companies recognize the role of an enticing business travel program as a tool to attract the best and brightest pool of talent to their organization. As a workforce, we are now more well-travelled than ever before, and successful corporations understand that workers today are highly motivated by the opportunity to go overseas with work. They wish to provide an easy-to-manage business travel



Bleisure travel, where work meets play and adventure, has been steadily rising with now 75% of business travellers incorporating leisure time into their work trips.





Overall, it is clear most corporate employers recognize the of the huge value of corporate travel.

program that enables their workforce to travel with independence and confidence.

THE FUTURE OF “BLEISURE” TRAVEL

Bleisure travel, where work meets play and adventure, has been steadily rising with now 75% of business travellers incorporating leisure time into their work trips. This is challenging for business travel agents to both manage and sell, and also presents budgeting and management challenges for corporations, which require appropriate business tools in order to facilitate these trips.

THE MILLENNIALS COME INTO PLAY

The rise of home working has also led to an increase in business travel, as millennial workers who make up the largest proportion of the workforce, demand a better work/life balance than the previous generation experienced. While this would have once been challenging to accommodate, modern technology means that it is easier than ever for staff to work from wherever there is a stable internet connection, but it also means that more people are travelling to specific meetings and commitments on the company dime.

TRAVEL AS A KEY TO SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

Overall, it is clear most corporate employers recognize the of the huge value of corporate travel, as the business travel industry is expected to grow to \$1.6 trillion in annual spend in 2020 according to the Global Business Travel Association. It remains true that traveling for work remains a critical driver for success for business the world over, but as the world becomes more connected, it is shifting and changing to suit the needs of travellers today. The industry now needs greater support in order to keep up with the shifting market dynamics caused by greater expectations from travellers; a rise in mobile connectivity and an increased focus on personalized experiences.

CONNECTED TRAVELLERS NEED CONNECTED TRAVEL PROVIDERS

It is unquestionable that mobile connectivity has had one of the greatest influences on our lives in recent times. It has changed the way we shop, book and experience almost all activities in our lives. We can do our grocery shopping from bed, file our tax returns on our commute and reach customer service teams 24/7 for any help and assistance we require. Travel is in no way immune to its influence, which has meant that both travel providers and sellers have had to adapt how they service passengers in order to meet their needs.

Travellers expect to receive instant results to their queries and booking requests, no matter which channel they are using. They won't accept only being able to book their travel while they are in the office, even if it is a business trip for multiple colleagues which must fit within parameters set by their employers. This has put pressure on corporate travel agents, as they seek the ability to service their customers in the way that leisure travellers demand.



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Amadeus is present in 190 countries with almost 19,000 creative, committed and experienced people.

AMADEUS LIVE TRAVEL SPACE

Amadeus is evolving towards a Live Travel Space where all industry players connect and collaborate with each other to meet the needs of travellers and offer a wide range of options to their customers at any time. It is open, dynamic and connected to the needs of the travel industry. Made up of a combination of technology solutions and Amadeus' highly skilled team, the Live Travel Space exists to serve the evolving needs of the traveller.

The Amadeus Travel Platform is the technology layer that sits within the Live Travel Space. This platform brings travel sellers unlimited possibilities with a world of content integrated from any source. It's through this platform that travel sellers can offer travellers the most personalized experiences so they can explore the world in their own unique way. Whether it's booking air travel, hotel accom-

modation, rail journeys or other travel services such as ground transportation, the Amadeus Travel Platform seamlessly integrates multiple sources of content and makes it available to agencies to sell through multiple devices and channels, taking a truly omni-channel approach.

So, whether a business traveller wants to book their flights on a mobile phone, upgrade their hotel room from their desk, or speak to an agent on-trip for advice and support, Amadeus' technology can enable travel agencies and corporations to deliver that level of service. In a world where so much content is available, this innovative technology provides an efficient way for business travellers to book the journeys that are right for them. It also helps to ensure that the corporation itself benefits from return on investment of the trips their employees take, as price sensitivity remains paramount. So, as well as enabling omni-channel distribution, the Live Travel Space also helps business travel agents to ensure they are consistently offering competitively priced products which suit the travellers' individual needs, and the company's business goals.

FUELLING CHANGE FOR THE INDUSTRY OF TOMORROW

Modern travellers expect the same level of personalization and service during their business trips, as they do in every other aspect of their life. People are no longer motivated to purchase or experience off the shelf products. Instead, they want something that is tailored to their needs and have become accustomed to this thanks to the level of personalization available through streaming services and in retail stores.

PEOPLE, TECHNOLOGY AND PASSION

Amadeus operates in more than 190 countries and is fuelled by a global network of over 19,000 professionals, 5,600 in the Travel Channels division. It's our people and their expertise that make our technology strong and reliable. As we sit at the heart of the travel industry, we believe that Amadeus is well-placed to help ensure that business travel agencies are able to provide a service which meets the individual business needs of their clients.

Over the last few years, we have invested more than \$5 billion in research and development in order to further the industry in many areas, which corresponds to on average 16% of our annual revenue. Our technology is built on advanced open source systems, harnessing the power of with big data analytics and cloud-based architecture, which we believe are the tools needed to propel the industry to the next level and continue to meet the needs of the traveller in the future.

The Amadeus team has one thing in common; our passion for travel and technology, our renowned expertise and our desire to understand complex challenges to deliver the best service to our customers.



Modern travellers expect the same level of personalization and service during their business trips, as they do in every other aspect of their life.



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GEORGIA'S GROWTH

The Caucasus country is
enjoying a renaissance, helped
along by its outstanding wines

WORDS TOM OTLEY



Rows of vines stretch across the valley, grapes ready for harvest in the early autumn sun. In the distance are hills, and, beyond that, the Caucasus Mountains, still clear of snow, a shimmering painterly backdrop to an age-old agricultural scene. From this organic vineyard, free of pesticides and herbicides, these grapes will be hand-harvested and fermented in clay jars buried in the ground with minimal intervention. The result is a white wine that is, in fact, amber, the taste of which is unique, and which in each glass provides a way of understanding not only the past of the country but its possible future.

If this seems to exaggerate the significance of a glass of wine, the vineyard, or even wine production as a whole, consider first that some of the earliest archaeological evidence of wine fermentation is to be found in Georgia. It has been making wine for some 8,000 years and is still doing so today. Over the millennia, Georgians developed an understandable expertise, and had more than 500 varieties of grapes, many of them exclusive to the region. Unfortunately, during the 70 years of Soviet occupation (1921-91) the country was designated as an area for winemaking, with the emphasis being on mass production. Most grape varieties were forgotten as collective farmers' unions focused on using a limited number of high-productivity types, and tailored their wines for the taste buds of the Russian workers who preferred semi-sweet styles (which is still the case today).

ON THE GRAPEVINE

The renaissance of the Georgian wine industry is a recent phenomenon, and is less linked to the fall of the Soviet Union than the change in relations with Russia when, from 2006 to 2013, an embargo was imposed on Georgian goods. Up until that moment, Russia was still the market for the vast majority of wine exports (about 95 per cent). With the embargo, the country had to look to new markets, initially to former Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland and the Baltic States, and then to Western Europe and the US. For that, quality had to improve, and they had to create something unique. That's where the 8,000 years of winemaking expertise came in, and that truly special creation – natural wine.

Fortunately, during all those years of Soviet occupation, some farmers had continued making wine for their private consumption in the traditional way, and using many of those little-regarded grape varieties. This involved putting their crushed grapes into clay jars buried in the ground – called qvervi – and leaving the wine for its first fermentation (for 20-25 days) with skins and stems. These are then removed and it is left for between six months and two years to complete



OPPOSITE PAGE:
Vineyard in
Racha-Lechkhumi
FROM TOP: Georgian
cuisine; a wine
cellar; qvervi jugs



te the fermentation. The resulting “natural” wine – whether red or white – is peculiar to the country and increasingly prized by enthusiasts. The white wine, because of its preparation, has a distinctive, unmistakable look and taste (it varies widely, not least because of the various terroir from which it comes, and those hundreds of varieties of grapes). And so the circle turned, and qvervi wines became a central part of the marketing of Georgia’s wine industry and tourism sector.

DELICATE BALANCE

The wine industry provides an allegory for Georgia’s position today – geographically, geopolitically and economically. Its natural major trading partner is Russia, but with the occupation of two of Georgia’s regions – South Ossetia and Abkhazia – and frequent blockades and embargoes, not just of goods but even of flights, relying on Russia is a dangerous game for both exporters and the country. Yet nor can they afford to ignore Russia, or deliberately inflame the situation.

To take wine as an example, Russia still makes up 62 per cent of exports, followed by Ukraine at 12 per cent, China (8 per cent)

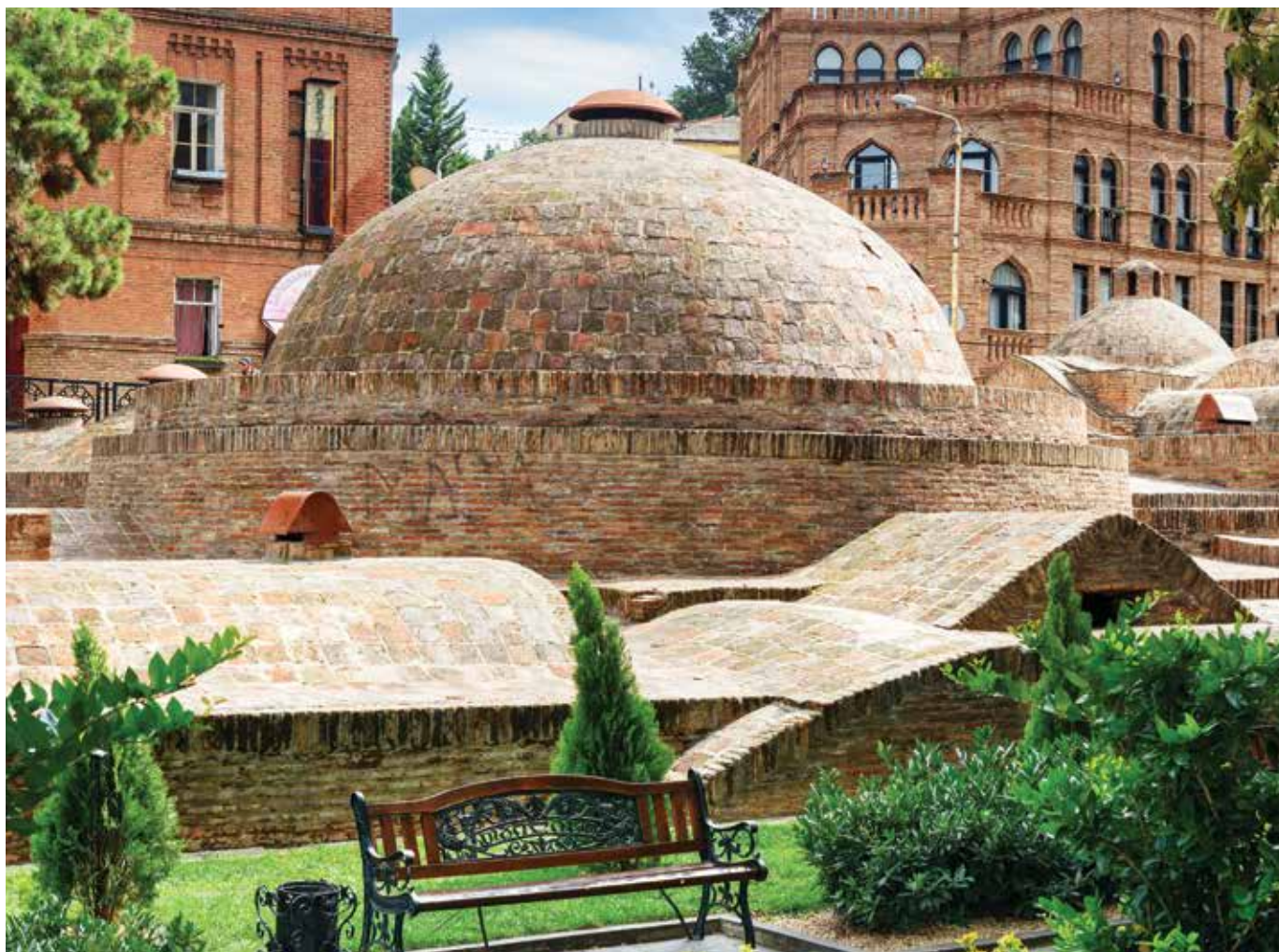
and Kazakhstan (4 per cent). There is growth in other markets – exports in 2017 rose by 18 per cent – but Russia is still essential, not only for the 300 million bottles produced each year, but for all trade.

There’s also the dilemma of tourism. Georgia’s 8.5 million visitors in 2018 came largely from neighbouring Armenia and Azerbaijan, but Russia is still important to much of Georgia’s tourism industry, although the country is finding success in encouraging visitors from Western Europe, Asia and the Gulf.

Then there is a further connection – many of the richest Georgians made their money in Russia, and have returned to finance private development in the country. These wealthy businessmen inevitably influence politics, from bankrolling parties to standing in their own right for office.

For the most obvious manifestation of this, glance up towards a large glass-faced modernist castle on a hill overlooking the capital, Tbilisi. This is the 9,290 sqm home and office of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the country’s richest man (compare his net wealth of US\$5 billion with Georgia’s GDP in 2017 of US\$15 billion). The symbolism of his house is

BELOW:
Abanotubani
sulphur baths



TBILISI TIPS

Accommodation options in the capital have improved hugely in recent years. The Iveria hotel, which once housed refugees, is now the impressive Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel, Tbilisi (radissonhotels.com), and offers great views from the upper floors (although try to ignore the eyesore that is the Biltmore hotel – a good example of the unrestrained construction of recent years).

Also recommended are the hotels owned by Temur Ugulava, founder of Adjara Group. Rooms (roomshotels.com) and Stamba (stamba.hotel.com) are co-located in a converted former Soviet-era newspaper printing house; the latter is higher-end but both have a lovely range of rooms and dining venues.

From the same group, there's also Fabrika (fabrikatbilisi.com), which combines a hostel with a co-working space and a courtyard full of shops, cafés and a restaurant.

The Wyndham Grand has just opened in a central position just off Freedom Square (for a review visit businessstraveller.com/trying-an



FROM TOP: Rooms; Stamba; Fabrika; Radisson Collection Tsinandali

d-tested), next to a huge new mixed-use development that will open gradually over the next year or so. Best of all is the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace, the most well-known of all of the city's hotels, which was originally built in 1989 and reopened earlier this year following an extensive four-year renovation. See our next issue for a review.

Georgia's cuisine is world-renowned. While in Tbilisi, try Shavi Lomi (the Black Lion; facebook.com/shavilomirestaurant) for its interesting twists on Georgian traditional cuisine and its authentic atmosphere – it is set in some renovated old houses.

Outside the capital, you can go to wineries and sample their natural wines – try to visit Iago winery in Mtskheta (iago.ge) and Okro's in Signaghi in the Kakheti region (okrogvino.com). Stay at the Radisson Collection Tsinandali Estate Georgia (radissonhotels.com).

obvious. He is widely considered to have a significant influence on all aspects of political life; a coalition of parties he had founded, called Georgian Dream, won the elections in 2012 and later that year he was appointed as prime minister by Georgia's parliament, serving just over a year. Several people told me that nothing happens in the city without his knowledge and approval, and while that might be overstating it, for a man who is often said to enjoy keeping a low profile, it's a rather elevated position from which to maintain it.

Georgia's future stability and prosperity depends on it navigating a careful course between its desire for the west and its relationship with Russia. Located in the South Caucasus, along with its westerly neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan, it has always been a crossing place. Lying between Europe and Asia, and between the Caspian and Black Seas, with a distance of only 700 miles between the two, makes it a natural transit point.

It was once on the Silk Route, but with the discovery of the oil fields around Baku in Azerbaijan, oil was transported by rail over to the Black Sea. Stalin made a name for himself organising strikes at the Rothschild refining factory in the coastal city of Batumi, and even today one of the major contributors to Georgia's GDP (15 per cent in 2017) is transit – of goods transported by road and rail over its territory to

the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi, and also oil and gas from the fields near Baku.

PORTS OF CALL

Even here, however, controversy reigns. The new deep-sea port on the Black Sea, called Anaklia, is an important element of Georgia's aim to become a logistical hub between Eurasia and Europe. The largest ships can easily pass into the Black Sea, but there is currently no port at the eastern end to accommodate them. At the same time, on the Caspian Sea coast, new ports being built by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan (Aylat, Aktau and Turkmenbashi) would allow goods from China to be disembarked and then transported across the South Caucasus to Anaklia. As the Economist described in February this year: "Currently there are three land corridors between China and Europe: a southern one, via Iran, made impractical by American sanctions; a middle one, via the Caspian Sea and then across Georgia to the Black Sea, made impractical by the lack of modern deep-sea Georgian ports; and a northern one, via Russia, on which most east-west land trade currently flows. Anaklia proposes to change that by giving the middle corridor the deep-sea port it lacks and removing the bottleneck."



Georgia aims to become a logistical hub between Eurasia and Europe

It's an appealing prospect, but there is a problem. Since Anaklia would be a deep-sea port, it would also be able to accommodate military vessels. Speaking at the fifth Tbilisi International Conference in an interview for the Georgian Institute for Security Policy, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, former commanding general of the US armed forces in Europe, described it as a "dream scenario" having Georgia as "a place where US Navy ships would come in... for maintenance, refurbishment [and] port visits". It would also help to facilitate Georgia's entry into NATO, something that has been on and off since the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit.

Logic seems to dictate that Georgia should join NATO, but this would mean a negotiation about the most famous article of membership – Article 5, which states that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. Since Russia has maintained thousands of troops in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is unsurprisingly opposed to Georgia joining NATO. Former NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated in March that

since "Georgia fulfils almost all criteria to become a member of NATO... the way to move beyond that stalemate is to discuss in Georgia whether you will accept an arrangement where NATO's Article 5 covers only that Georgian territory where the Georgian government has full sovereignty." As Georgia's president, Salome Zourabichvili, puts it, the country is both blessed and cursed by its geography. The positive side of this is that the west, whether the US, NATO or the World Bank, has a vested interest in ensuring that Georgia succeeds. The negative side is obvious with two regions of the country currently occupied.

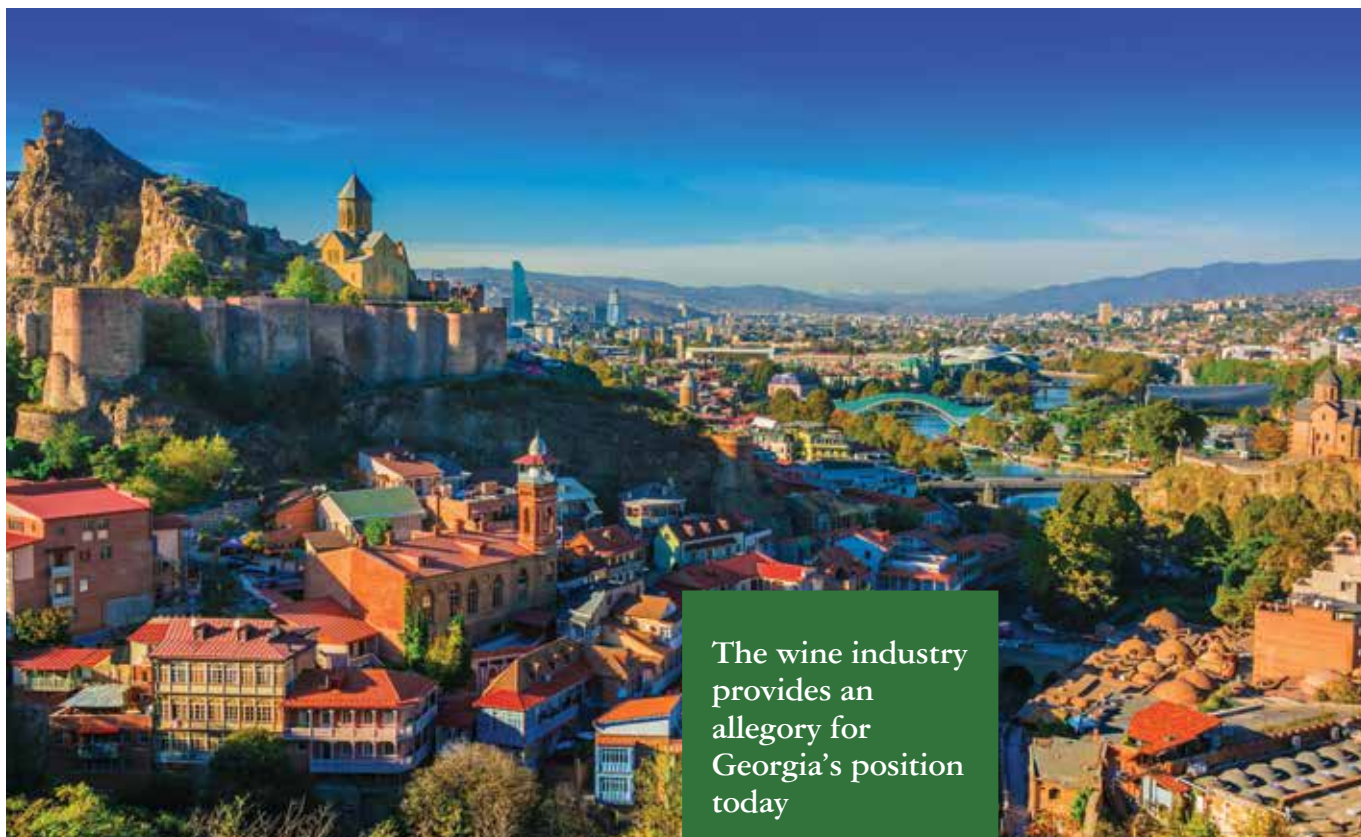
Since 2014, Georgia has been part of the European Union's Free Trade Area, with the EU continuing to be the country's largest trading partner, accounting for more than a quarter of Georgia's total trade turnover. Zourabichvili is firm that Georgia is aiming for eventual EU membership as well, even in the face of the reluctance of the EU to expand further. As an example of "thinking outside the box", he said that Georgia would "knock on every door... open every door, and by the time we are finishing opening all the doors, you will discover that Georgia has become an EU member". Natalie Sabanadze, Georgia's ambassador in Brussels, says: "We know the EU is not ready to offer us membership... but we want to be prepared for when they are."

In the meantime, more money needs to be spent on infrastructure. The World Bank's new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for 2019-22 (in collaboration with the government of Georgia) involves 11 investment projects with total commitments of US\$699 million, of which about 60 per cent is concentrated on the ongoing East-West Highway and secondary roads projects.

Still, Georgia's economy is more than transit and transport. The mountains and their rivers provide the raw materials for hydropower, with electricity exported to Turkey in the summers. Agriculture also plays a part. The whole of the South Caucasus is a wonderful place for food production, as anyone who has tried Armenian or Georgian cuisine will tell you (the tomatoes are the best I have ever tasted). The Black Sea coast is perfect for hazelnut production, with Ferrero buying a large part for its Nutella and Ferrero Rocher production.

And then there is tourism, which is growing quickly but will present challenges for a country where the infrastructure is poor. The only useful railway goes between Tbilisi and Batumi, and the generally poor roads are congested by minivans and taxis ferrying workers around, as well as huge trucks coming across the border to and from Russia.

The growth rate of the economy is about 5 per cent, which sounds good until you consider that if it were to continue at that rate, it would take Georgia 20 years to reach the level of Bulgaria, the poorest country in the EU, and that's only if Bulgaria stopped developing. Tourists will tell you what good value Georgia is, but that's because 80 per cent of people earn less than US\$370 a month and a fifth live in po-



The wine industry provides an allegory for Georgia's position today



verty. Unemployment is officially around 15 per cent, and education suffers from a lack of investment.

As with the wine industry, Georgia is trying to position itself as a high-end destination, with its lack of big factories and industrial production, unspoiled nature (37 per cent of the country is forest), and organic fruit and vegetables all fitting the bill for eco-tourism. The Caucasus Mountains are great for trekking, and you can stay with local communities in home stays while visiting monasteries and local winemakers. For special interest holidays, there's horse riding and rafting. The aim is for high-spending tourists to be attracted by these remote areas as much as by a city break in Tbilisi. But as for getting around, far from having the network for charging electric cars, the country

FROM TOP: St Nicholas church overlooks Tbilisi; the Bridge Of Peace spans the Kura river in the capital

still runs on poor-quality diesel and petrol, increasing pollution.

Georgia is business-friendly, however. In the centre of many towns you will find a large, out-of-place modern building – the public service hall – that, in the words of Lonely Planet, is a “one-stop shop for citizens to deal quickly with government bureaucracy in an open, corruption-detering environment”. It's also where you would go to set up a business, which is a quick, efficient thing to do, a legacy of the policies of previous president Mikheil Saakashvili. The largest example of one of these halls in Tbilisi was designed by Italian architects Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas (also responsible for Terminal 3 of Shenzhen Bao'an International airport), and looks like white mushrooms growing by the Mtkvari river, but the examples in Telavi and Tianeti are also worth noting as you tour the country.

Widespread language skills among the young population in Tbilisi will obviously help, but then many of these people are mobile and are willing to look outside their borders if the country does not offer opportunities. It's an example of how trying to predict the future for Georgia is impossible, but given how far it has come since 1991, despite significant setbacks, there are grounds for optimism. I'll be raising a glass of amber wine to that when I pop open the bottles I brought back with me.

Course of history

Wander the streets
of Zagreb and
discover a city with
a fascinating past

22



MAIN PICTURE:
Jelacic square
FROM TOP:
Dolac market;
St Mark's
Church; Zagreb
funicular and
Lotrščak tower

WORDS JANE FOSTER

Croatia might be better known for its coastline, but if you are visiting its capital on business you'll find much to discover, too. Nestled in the north-west of the country, Zagreb's historic centre has a Central European ambience thanks to its architecture and café culture, the result of centuries under Austro-Hungarian rule.

The city centre is made up of two parts – the medieval Gornji Grad (Upper Town) and 19th-century Donji Grad (Lower Town), which meet at Trg Bana Jelacica, the main square. While Gornji Grad is made up of cobbled alleys that are mostly pedestrian-only, Donji Grad is flat and laid out on a grid, with a constant flow of cars and trams. As a whole, the area is compact and can easily be explored on foot – here are some highlights to take in.

TRG BANA JELACICA

Zagrebian city life centres on the main square, laid down in the 19th century and named after Count Ban Jelacic, an army general who abolished serfdom, and is honoured here by a gallant bronze equine statue. Vienna Secession and art deco buildings surround the square, many with old-fashioned cafés at ground level, making it the city's favourite meeting point.

Immediately north of the square, Dolac market (dubbed the "Belly of Zagreb") has been in operation daily since the 1930s. On the piazza, stalls are piled high with colourful fruit and veg – in autumn, expect pumpkins, mandarins, lemons, dried figs and walnuts. Below, market halls vend meat such as red kulen (salami seasoned with paprika) and kobasica (sausages) from Slavonia, while an adjoining fish market vends fresh seafood, delivered direct from the Adriatic coast at dawn each morning.

GORNJI GRAD

The Upper Town is the heart of "Old Zagreb" – the first bishopric was established here in 1094, while the adjoining neighbourhood of Gradec was proclaimed a free royal city in 1242. Built into a hillside, with cobbled streets running north-south, traversed by wooden stairways running east-west, you'll see more tourists than locals in Gornji Grad.

Visible from Dolac market, the twin spires of the cathedral rise above terracotta rooftops. Its neo-Gothic façade conceals



Grad to Ilica, the city's bustling main shopping street, lined with well-known European chains. Side passages take you into quaint *dvorista* (courtyards), home to smaller boutiques, ateliers and cafés. If you're not in the mood for shopping, retrace your steps and descend to the main square via *Tkalcićeva*, a colourful pedestrian-only cobbled street packed with busy little cafés and bars, much loved by local students, with outdoor terraces, and rugs and heating provided through the winter.

Where to eat: *Lanterna na Dolcu* is a fine choice for dinner, with an arched brick ceiling and starched white table linens. Its chefs shop for produce for their authentic regional dishes at nearby Dolac market – try the speciality, *pisanica stubica* (veal medallions in a plum sauce, served with croquettes). Closed on Mondays. lanterna-zagreb.com

Where to drink: *Bornstein*, near the cathedral, is a stylish wine bar in a vaulted brick cellar. There is Croatian wine-tasting and an adjoining shop where you can buy bottles to take home. Closed on Sundays. bornstein.hr

What to see: Standing near the parliament, the Museum of Broken Relationships – perhaps appropriately, given the break-up of Yugoslavia – examines love stories that went astray. Each exhibit is a testimony to a doomed liaison, with a short text explaining its significance to its ex-owner. Open daily; entry 40 kn (£4.85). brokenrelationships.com

Where to shop: *Link Gallery* is a tiny concept store stocking quirky accessories by Croatian designers, such as cera-

mics, wood-and-epoxy-resin jewellery, marble kitchenware and hip backpacks. galerija-link.hr

DONJI GRAD

Laid out by the Hapsburgs in the 19th century as the city expanded, the Lower Town is a grid of tree-lined boulevards overlooked by grandiose Austro-Hungarian buildings. Walking from the main square down to the *Glavni kolodvor* (main train station), you'll pass through three adjoining monumental squares, each centring on a park with green lawns and towering plane trees. It's especially lovely here during the city's Advent festivities (November 30-January 7; adventzagreb.com), when the trees are hung with fairy lights, kiosks sell mulled wine, the old music pavilion hosts after-dark concerts, and an open-air ice rink is set up in front of the station.

Zagreb once lay on the Orient Express rail route, hence the opening of the imposing Hotel Esplanade next to the station in 1925. Nearby are various public buildings erected by the Hapsburgs, including several (slightly weary) museums and the impressive imperial-yellow Croatian National Theatre. South-east of the train station, the area between Držić avenue



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Trams have been running in Zagreb since 1891; *Bornstein* is an atmospheric spot for a drink; *Tkalcićeva* Street is lined with cafés and bars

a spacious interior with tall, slender columns. There's been a church here since the 13th century – check out the northern wall, which bears an inscription of the Ten Commandments written in Glagolitic, a medieval script that predates Cyrillic and remains unique to Croatia.

The Roman Catholic church has played a pivotal role here for centuries – Croats are predominantly Catholic, while most Serbs are Orthodox Christians. One of Zagreb's most charming religious shrines is *Kamenita vrata* (Stone Gate), a medieval archway concealing an icon of Our Lady, where the faithful light flickering candles.

Behind the Sabor (parliament) you'll see St Mark's Church, with its colourful roof. Nearby stands the 13th-century, 30-metre-tall *Lotrščak Tower* on *Strossmayer promenade*. A cannon is fired here every day at noon, and if you make your way to the top (entry fee 20 kn/£2.40) you'll be rewarded with fantastic views, with the high-rise apartment blocks of Novi Zagreb (New Zagreb) rising to the south, on the far side of the River Sava.

From here, a tiny funicular (5 kn/61p) connects *Gornji*



and Radnicka street, close to the new Doubletree hotel, is regarded as the new business district, with recently constructed high-rises.

Heading east from the main square, Vlaska street runs into Maksimirska road, which will bring you to Maksimir Park, an expanse of lawns, clusters of oak trees, ponds and ornamental flower beds. Also here is Maksimir Stadium, where Zagreb's football team, Dinamo, and the Croatian national squad play their home matches. In this neighbourhood, a deliciously sweet smell of dark chocolate hangs in the air – the Kras factory (kras.hr) produces Croatia's favourite chocolates, Griotte (filled with cherry liquor) and Bajadera (with hazelnut nougat).

Where to eat: Modern European restaurant Noel was awarded a Michelin star earlier this year. Chef Goran Kocis's dégustation menus (four or seven courses) might include almond and lobster risotto, ravioli with trout and truffles, or duck with pumpkin. It's located several blocks east of the main square. Closed on Sundays. noel.hr

Where to drink: Dezman Bar serves quality coffee, organic herbal teas, fine wines (by the glass or bottle) plus cocktails and snacks, all day in a peaceful pedestrian area off busy Ilica street. Closed Sunday-Monday. dezman.hr

What to see: The Modern Gallery exhibits an array of paintings, sculpture and multimedia from the 19th century to the present. Displayed chronologically, it highlights the avant-garde creativity in the former Yugoslavia and today's Croatia – look out for works by sculptor Ivan Mestrovic and painter Edo Murtic. It lies midway between the main square and the train station. Closed Mondays; entry 40 kn (£4.85). moderna-galerija.hr/en

Where to shop: Aromatica stocks its own natural cosmetics, including soaps, shampoos and lotions, containing fragrant rosemary, sage and lavender, plus essential oils and teas. It's on Vlaska, east of the main square. aromatica.hr/en/.

BOVE: Hotel Esplanade

BELOW: Trakoscan Castle; Plitvice Lakes National Park



TRIPS OUT OF TOWN

If you have time, there are some excellent excursions close to the capital.

IN HALF A DAY...

Located about 9km north of Zagreb, Medvednica Nature Park is criss-crossed by a network of well-marked hiking trails, leading through meadows and woodlands. Begin at the Sljeme tunnel, then follow the most popular trail (number 18) to the Bliznec Information Centre and up to the Puntijarka mountain hut (6km; 927 metres above sea level), where you can refuel with a classic hiker's lunch of *grah s kobasicom* (beans and sausages). Medvednica's highest peak, Mount Sljeme, rises 1,035 metres and offers skiing in winter. pp-medvednica.hr

IN A FULL DAY...

About 50km north of the city, rural Zagorje is known for its sleepy villages, imposing castles and hills planted with vineyards. Several wineries are open for tours and tasting (reservations recommended), notably Bodren, Bolfan and Vuglec Breg. On November 11, Martinje (St Martin's Day) is enthusiastically celebrated in Zagorje with the blessing of the season's new wine. The best castles to visit are the sturdy medieval Veliki Tabor and the white fairytale Trakoscan. For lunch, try Gresna Gorica near Veliki Tabor,

which serves rustic local specialties such as *zapečeni strukli* (baked cheese dumplings). visitzagorje.hr, bodren.hr, bolfanvinskivrh.hr, vuglec-breg.hr, gresna-gorica.hr

OVERNIGHT...

Croatia's most visited inland destination, Plitvice Lakes National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage site located 130km south of Zagreb. It's set amid dense pine forests that conceal 16 turquoise lakes connected by a series of cascades and waterfalls. The entrance

ticket (from 60 kn/£7.27 to 250 kn/£30.28 depending on the season) gives you access to a labyrinth of wooden walkways that cross the park and the national park boats that traverse the lakes. Stay at the luxurious Fenomen Plitvice boutique hotel.

np-plitvicka-jezera.hr, fenomen-plitvice.com

HANOI



26

WORDS MICHAEL ALLEN

ROCKS

The Vietnamese capital's profile – and economy – are on the rise

When veteran Hanoi-based lawyer Tony Foster went to his office during the last week of February 2019, he had to make his way past machine gun-toting Vietnamese and North Korean guards and armoured cars while snipers manned the rooftops. It was the week of the two-day summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un that, despite not ending favourably for the US president and North Korean supreme leader, drew the attention of the global community to Vietnam's capital.

"Our office is right next to where Kim was staying, so it was a hell of an inconvenience because we were told originally that we were not going to be able to go to the office for three days – but we complained and got special passes," recalls Foster, a partner at Magic Circle firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer.

The summit may have been a temporary irritation for workers in the area but, as Filippo Bortoletti, deputy manager of Dezan Shira and Associates' international business advisory in Hanoi, points out, it has done wonders for the city's standing on the global stage, showing that Vietnam can be relevant in international politics and economics. "Even if in that meeting nothing happened specifically, the fact that they met in Hanoi is significant," Bortoletti says. "It had a big impact, maybe not on Vietnamese people but on how foreign people perceive Vietnam."

BRIGHT FUTURE

Those living and working in Hanoi didn't need the summit to tell them that their city, where some 39.8 per cent of the population is below 24 years old, is on an exciting economic growth trajectory. Nor can first-time visitors fail to notice the buzzing atmosphere of youthful optimism that pervades it.

While Ho Chi Minh City (also known by its former name of Saigon) is widely regarded as the country's business capital,

Hanoi gives visitors more of a flavour of the "real" Vietnam and a more relaxed environment, while still offering excellent business opportunities. "When I first came here from Saigon, I'd been forewarned by a lot of my ex-colleagues

that when you come to Hanoi it's not just another city in Vietnam; you will feel like you're in a different country," says Humayoon (Tom) Shakhzadeh, general manager of the new Oakwood Residence Hanoi, which opened in October. "If you're looking for that high-paced, energetic lifestyle then compared

with Saigon it's wanting, but on the other hand if you want to engage more with Vietnamese culture then this is the place to be."

Let's look at the economic figures: average gross regional domestic product (GRDP) growth between 2016 and 2018 was 7.36 per cent, while GRDP per capita reached 116 million dong (£3,875). The unemployment rate was only 2.17 per cent in the first quarter of this year.

This has been partly driven by investment from foreign companies, mostly from the Asia-Pacific region. "In Hanoi, there's a huge amount of Japanese and Korean manufacturing investment," Foster says. "Samsung has invested billions of dollars in smartphone factories. The Japanese have all sorts of manufacturing operations in Hanoi in the north. There's an industrial zone that goes through from Hanoi to Hai Phong and it's full of factories, often Asian owned. If you take a seaplane flight, which I did in October 2018, you fly fairly low and will



LEFT: Motorbikes are the preferred method of transport

ABOVE: Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump meet in Hanoi in February 2019



see the extent of the investment. Even I was surprised.” Korea’s Samsung is building a research and development centre in Hanoi that, once completed, will employ 3,000 people and be the largest of its kind in Southeast Asia, according to the Hanoi Times. In July 2019, Samsung SDS became the largest shareholder of Vietnamese IT services company CMC Corporation. Samsung plans to utilise the Hanoi-based firm as a base to develop software in Southeast Asia. “The biggest employer at a private level in Vietnam is Samsung, and that’s because they employ a lot of factory workers,” says Hao Tran, co-founder and chief executive of Vietcetera, a bilingual Vietnamese- and English-language media company based in Ho Chi Minh City. “The number-one single export from Vietnam is smartphone parts – shipping them to Korea for assembly. Where people were [previously] mostly on the lower-skilled manufacturing side, the trend now is for people making cars, smartphone parts and all of that fancy stuff.”

Much of that manufacturing is done in high-tech industrial parks. Hanoi aims to build 30 new industrial clusters by the end of 2019, according to the state-run Vietnam News Agency, in addition to 70 existing ones covering 1,337 hectares and encompassing about 3,100 operational production facilities. By 2020, there will be 138 clusters with an area of more than 2,623 hectares in the city, according to a report by Dezan Shira, with complexes in the northern districts prioritising electronics and IT, engineering, automobiles, textile, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Down south, the focus is on the biological industry for high-tech farming and supporting sectors, while in western areas the focus is on bio-industry for agriculture, high-tech industrial production, construction materials and high-end furniture production. Tran says: “The country is moving towards services rather than products or manufacturing, but in the grand scheme of things Vietnam is still about agriculture and lower-skilled manufacturing.”

Hanoi also has a nascent start-up culture. Do Son Duong is chief executive of Toong, a co-working space provider with six locations in Hanoi and two more on the way. When he founded it in 2015, setting up a co-working space was re-

garded as a “far-fetched idea” in Vietnam, Duong recalls, but since 2016 there has been a “co-working wave”. “Even the most optimistic person predicted we could not last more than three months,” he says. “In the first few months we only had a handful of short-term customers and day-trippers. It took quite a long time to educate the market about the concept.”

PACE OF CHANGE

Economic growth invariably alters the face of a city – look at China, the coastal metropolises of which have metamorphosed into economic powerhouses over just a couple of decades. The pace of change in Hanoi is similarly stark, although construction is a little more pedestrian than in China. As I check out of the Pan Pacific Hanoi, opposite the hotel’s entrance the skeleton of a half-built high-rise looms over me. The 16-storey building was begun in November 2010 by Hanoi Housing Development and Investment Corporation, according to Vietnamese online news site Dan Tri, but the building now sits abandoned, rusting and overgrown.

Ken Atkinson, executive chairman of accounting firm Grant Thornton Vietnam, says the Vietnamese government’s style is different from that of its Chinese counterpart. “Once the government approves something in China they just steam ahead and do it, whereas here it’s still driven by consensus,” he says.

Construction delays aside, Foster has witnessed big changes in the city. He came to Hanoi in 1994 when the US embargo was lifted. “Occasionally, you catch yourself thinking: ‘Was I really here, or am I in a different place?’ It’s not comparable at all. They’re in the process of digging into the foundations of a building that they’ve torn down next to us to build the HQ of a bank, and a block away they’ve just





‘Vietnamese people are earning more money than ever and are able to afford these things’

torn down a lovely colonial building and I’m not sure what’s going to go in there – probably another tower,” he says. “All of this construction is changing the fabric of the city, so it’s not as charming as it used to be, which is quite sad, but you can understand it.”

Hanoi is developing so quickly that some streets are being constructed before they can be officially named. Local residents are taking it upon themselves to (illegally) name the streets, says Vietnam News.

EAST MEETS WEST

While Hanoi’s old-time charm may be being partly eroded by development, visitors cannot fail to feel the infectious sen-

se of optimism among Vietnamese residents, especially those who have gained a foothold in the burgeoning middle class and are benefiting from rapid economic growth. “Generally in Vietnam there’s an emergence of – I don’t like to call it Western [influence] – but there’s an acknowledgment of a taste for brands and new experiences that’s driving these consumption patterns, and Vietnamese people are earning more money than ever and are able to afford these things,” Tran says.

The city now has at least 15 shopping malls, such as the Aeon Mall in Long Bien, which, with its plethora of luxury outlets, wouldn’t look out of place in Hong Kong or Singapore. There are nearly 20 international schools, while you’ll also find supermarkets stocked with Japanese and Korean goods to feed the nouveau riche. Foreign fashion brands are fast entering the Vietnamese market, with H&M and Zara already established. “Uniqlo is launching in Vietnam for the first time at the end of the year – Ho Chi Minh City first and Hanoi will follow after,” Tran says.

The rise of middle-class consumer culture alongside a working class still on low wages makes for some strange price contrasts. I paid more than US\$10 for a cocktail in a trendy Old Quarter speakeasy before slurping down a bowl of roadside pho for about 75 cents. “When I first moved back to Vietnam, my colleagues mocked me for living a luxury lifestyle because I would grab a 90,000 dong [£3] Starbucks coffee before work rather than a more local coffee for around 25,000 dong [84p],” says Henry Vo, a Vietnamese who grew up in the UK but returned to Hanoi in 2019 to work for start-up Bamboo Airways.

Hanoi’s middle class has enjoyed steady growth since the US-Vietnam embargo was lifted in 1994. “At that time, the bicycle was a primary means of transport. Then, step by step, more and more families had motor scooters. Now, many people, not just the wealthiest, are buying cars,” says Thomas Joseph Treutler, managing director of the Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh offices of law firm Tilleke and Gibbins. “Income has increased and people have the means to travel a lot on weekends – checking out Vietnam’s fantastic seaside and mounta-



FROM TOP: Big brands are arriving on the city’s streets; a bar in the French quarter



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in resorts or visiting neighbouring countries.” He adds: “The value of real estate has grown a lot in the past 25 years – many local Hanoians have done well in the market and obtain extra income by renting out properties. In the 1990s, most people you met would be working for a government agency and it would be rarer to meet someone in private industry. That is no longer the case.”

ON YOUR BIKE

So if you’re in Hanoi and want to take in as much of this development as quickly as possible, what’s the best way to do it? As long as your life insurance policy is up to date, it’s without question on the back of a motorcycle.

Cruising the city streets on the back of a Vespa Sprint Notte on a Sunday afternoon with Henry Vo, it struck me that it sure beats the indignity of being rammed into an overcrowded subway carriage. We share the road with rebellious bikers pulling wheelies in the middle of the highway, young couples engaging in public displays of affection while riding, men with propane gas canisters attached precariously to the sides of their bikes – everyone deftly avoiding each other, including the taxi drivers watching TV while navigating.

It couldn’t be described as exactly safe (although most Hanoians will insist that it is), but if you’re brave enough this is the only way to see Hanoi like a local. Pretty much everyone in the city rides a motorbike, whether they are at the wheel themselves, are being driven by a friend

If you’re brave enough then riding a motorbike is the only way to see Hanoi like a local

or partner, or hail a bike taxi through the Grab app. The motorbikes are an evolution from the bicycles that flooded the city in the late 1980s and 1990s. “If you stand on a street corner you’ll see 500 motorbikes; in 1990 you would have seen 500 bicycles – that’s the difference,” says Antony Slewka, director of sales and marketing at the Metropole Hanoi, the hotel where Trump and Kim had their meeting.

The future of Hanoi’s transport system – if the frenzy of motorbikes interspersed with a few cars and the occasional bus can be called a “system” – is uncertain. It could go the way of Beijing, where the middle class all start buying cars and the roads get clogged up, or the forthcoming but delayed subway might be a roaring success, allowing the city to become more like Singapore or Hong Kong. “The subway will be a better way of moving but I’m not confident it will be finished soon,” Bortoletti says. “This segment” – he points to a portion of the subway under construction – “they planned to finish in 15 months. They started two weeks ago. Frankly, I don’t think they’ll finish in one year. It will take some time.”

Looping the West Lake with Vo, the wind in our faces as we pass locals and foreigners alike out on their motorbikes for a Sunday joyride, some stopping for a cool lakeside beer, one can’t help but feel that something would be lost if the transport network became more like that of other big cities.

“It’s quite fun [riding a motorbike],” Foster says. “Most of the drivers are actually incredibly careful and I’m amazed how few accidents there have been. I cycle around the city and it’s fun once you know the rules of the road – it does give you a little adrenaline, I suppose.”

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HEALTHY DEMAND

Hotels are working harder to help
us stay fit on the road

WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER



There has been a shift towards designing brighter, attractive fitness areas with more sophisticated kit

We all know that life on the road can lead to an unhealthy lifestyle. Disrupted sleep, fast food and a fair bit of stress thrown in for good measure can affect everything from job performance to our personal wellbeing.

Meanwhile, wellness has become a buzzword. The wellness economy was valued at US\$4.2 trillion in 2017 by the Global Wellness Institute, of which the travel market represents US\$639 billion with a predicted growth of 7.5 per cent annually until 2022, making it the fastest-growing sector of global tourism. In response, hotels have launched a range of amenities and services, from in-room kit to ergonomic workstations and nutritional meal plans.

GOOD INTENTIONS

Before booking a hotel, do you check whether it has a fitness centre? According to the GBTA Business Traveller Sentiment Index 2019, 83 per cent of business travellers consider gyms or proximity to jogging paths when choosing a hotel. Travel management company CWT also found that hotel gyms were the most common way for business travellers to adhere to their wellness routines (49 per cent), followed by the use of in-room fitness equipment (27 per cent).

As hotel managers will tell you, however, their fitness centres are empty most of the day, making them an expensive and inefficient use of valuable real estate. To confirm this, a 2017 study by Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration found that hotel

fitness amenities offered a low return on investment. And, as you'd guess, we overestimate how often we use the gym. Some 46 per cent of respondents intend to use them, but less than 22 per cent actually do, according to the study.

Emlyn Brown, vice-president of wellbeing for Accor's luxury and upper upscale brands, agrees: "Cornell is right. If you create and design a space to be an amenity, put it in a basement and give it little attention, it will produce no ROI [return on investment]."

As a result, there has been a significant shift towards designing more attractive fitness areas with brighter rooms, more sophisticated and high-tech equipment, and partnerships with fitness brands. "These spaces can very easily become animated if the right approach is taken from a design and development perspective," Brown says.

Select hotel groups across the US have chosen to partner with cycling fitness company Peloton, placing exercise bikes that stream workout videos in gyms and rooms. The move has been so popular that Peloton has a dedicated "hotel finder" website (hotelfinder.one-peloton.com), on which guests can also suggest potential hotel collaborations. Meanwhile, Fairmont and Westin have teamed up with fashion brands Reebok and New Balance to lend gym clothing and trainers to guests – helpful if you are travelling only with hand luggage.

Technology is also a key consideration for hotel groups, with on-demand exercise videos providing flexibility for guests. "If you want to work out at 3am because you're jet lagged, you'll still have access to that content," Brown says.

PICTURED:
Even Hotel Brooklyn

Aside from this, there's a need to engage the local community and take a leaf out of the likes of pay-by-class companies Barry's Bootcamp and Soul Cycle. The huge 930 sqm gym at TWA Hotel, located in the former airline terminal at New York JFK, for instance, sells day passes and memberships to non-hotel guests – attractive if you have a long layover and your gym kit with you, unused from your hotel stay elsewhere.

Whether the trend for better fitness centres continues largely depends on whether hotel groups recoup the cost of providing these facilities. The Cornell report admits that its one-year results “might not be indicative of the long-term financial return on fitness centres”, which is why, presumably, hotels have continued to build them.

Accor's Pullman brand, for instance, is introducing the first of its new Power Fit gyms in Paris next year, promising more attractive interior design, better lighting, more functional training areas and advanced technology, which it hopes will make it more attractive to guests.

The boundaries between fitness and hospitality also seem to be blurring, with hotel groups adding spa and wellness brands to their portfolios. In 2017, Hyatt acquired both the Miraval Group of wellness resorts and spas, and Exhale, a company offering boutique fitness classes and spa services, while Accor partnered with wellness-focused hotel brand Banyan Tree in 2016.

Likewise, US-based gym chains are expanding into the hospitality scene. Luxury gym brand Equinox opened a 212-room hotel in New York's Hudson Yards development in July, and plans to open properties in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Seattle and Santa Clara in California in the coming years.

Here we round up some of the initiatives introduced by hotel brands to help guests meet their goals.

Hilton

Hilton's Five Feet to Fitness concept was launched in 2017 as “part traditional hotel room, part miniature fitness centre” and is available in Hilton Hotels

and Resorts properties in New York, Texas, Illinois and Florida; Hilton plans to roll out the concept globally in more than 560 Doublerree by Hilton properties over the next two years. The guestrooms have 11 pieces of equipment including weights, a cycling bike and TRX suspension straps, while a touchscreen display embedded in the room's training rack provides more than 200 exercise tutorials. To ensure that other guests aren't disturbed, floors have a protective surface with an extra soundproofing layer. Rooms have a meditation chair plus free hydrating drinks and bio-freeze gel packs to relieve muscle tension.

fivefeettofitness.hilton.com

Kimpton Hotels

IHG's luxury Kimpton brand has custom-designed bikes for complimentary use at all hotels, while each room has a yoga mat. Hotels also run fitness and wellness classes and provide healthy options on restaurant menus.

Rooms have a meditation chair plus free hydrating drinks and bio-freeze gel packs to relieve muscle tension



ABOVE: Hilton's Five Feet to Fitness room concept

On request, staff can perform a “Roll Out” service, in which they set up your mat, provide you with extra towels and flavoured water and activate the on-demand yoga channel on the TV.

kimptonhotels.com

Even Hotels

IHG's US-based Even brand has a “Where wellness is built in” slogan, so each hotel has a gym, and rooms come with fitness equipment, more than 18 workout videos, and ergonomic standing desks. Beds have eucalyptus linen and LED mood lighting headboards to improve sleep. Staff provide running routes and walking trails, while the hotels' Cork and Kale Market and Bar focuses on healthy eating.

ihg.com/evenhotels

Westin

Marriott's Westin brand allows you to book a Workout room in select hotels, which comes with hand weights, yoga accessories, a Peloton bike and medicine ball. All properties also have a state-of-the-art gym. The brand has partnered with TRX to stock its equipment in 200 hotels worldwide. The brand's “gear lending programme” allows you to borrow New Ba-

lance gym wear for US\$5 – the socks are new and yours to keep. Westin's Run Concierge – an on-site running expert – is available in most properties (18 in Europe) and suggests 3km and 8km running routes. Rooms provide a lavender and chamomile balm to rub on to your temples, the signature Heavenly bed designed for restorative sleep and a room-service menu with sleep-enhancing ingredients. The eco-

BELOW:
The Westin Chosun
Seoul; the Stamford
in Singapore

-friendly Element by Westin Hotels brand has 24-hour gyms and a "Bikes to Borrow" initiative for exploring on two wheels.

westin.marriott.com,
element-hotels.marriott.com

JW Marriott

JW Marriott has teamed up with fitness expert Nora Tobin to provide a series of workout videos for guests,

from yoga to high-intensity interval training. Ranging from three to 30 minutes in length, they are tailored to an array of fitness levels and can be found online or streamed in gyms at select hotels.

marriott.com/jw-marriott

Pullman Hotels and Resorts

Accor's Pullman brand has a programme in partnership with wellness coach Sarah Hoey. The hotels offer an "Active Breakfast" menu, designed for age defence, energy boost, balance and detox, with dairy-, sugar- and gluten-free selections. A Youtube channel with Hoey's seven-minute workout videos allows guests to follow routines in their rooms, including a short guide to gentle stretching and exercise, with a morning and evening routine provided for better sleep. Rooms also include a fitness bag, complete with weights and other workout equipment, and jogging map. pullman.accorhotels.com

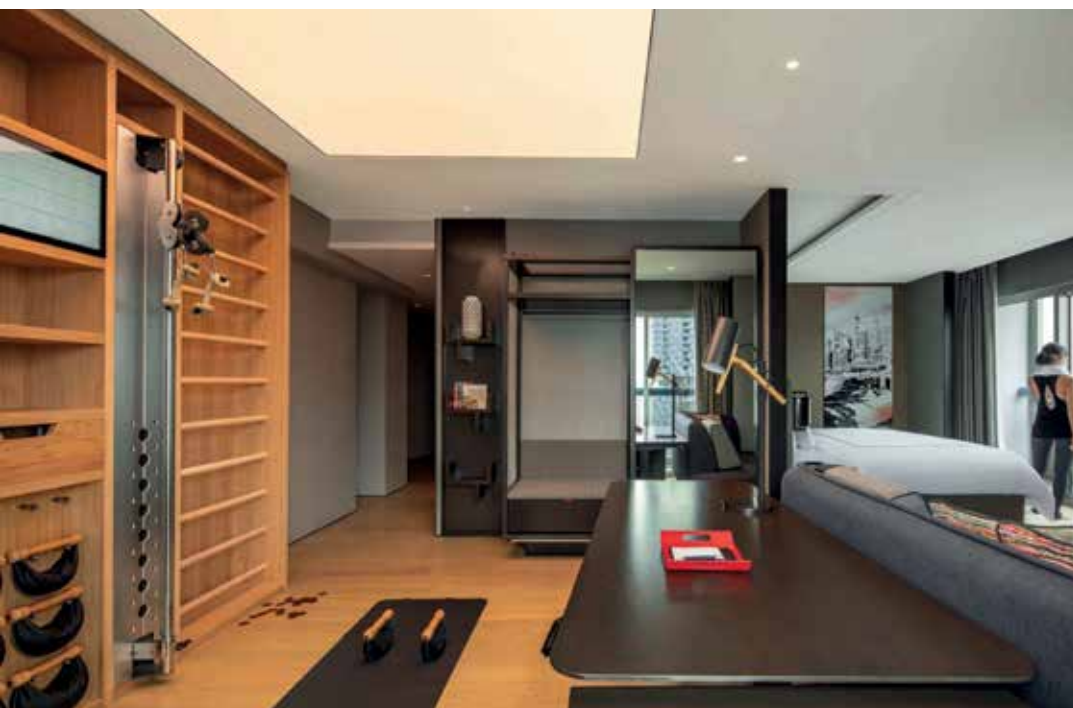
Swissotel

The Accor brand's Vitality concept offers ideas for workouts on its website, while guests can order equipment to their room. Swissotel partnered with Wallpaper magazine in 2017 to create its Vitality room category, offering virtual classes on a screen built into a "Fitness wall", energising snacks and drinks, and ergonomic furniture. The room also has an air purification system to cool you down after exercising, while circadian light is designed to help with jet lag. Each property has a jogging map with three levels. Available at Swissotel Zurich, the Stamford in Singapore and Swissotel Chicago, the brand plans to extend this to more hotels. swissotel.com

Tryp by Wyndham

Tryp offers both regular and fitness rooms at most of its properties. The latter include streaming facilities for following workouts, an in-room elliptical, exercise bike or treadmill, and a mat. Complimentary bottled water and extra towels are provided. There are also small gyms with two to six machines.

wyndhamhotels.com/en-uk/tryp





A real treat for culinary enthusiasts

Dear fish and seafood lovers! There's a real feast waiting for you in the newly opened Sheraton hotel at the Three Crosses Square. In two restaurants located on the ground floor of the hotel, the head chef Marcin Sasin serves delicious fresh fish and seafood.

ASIA IN WARSAW

Sasin's goal is to break away with the undeserved opinion that hotel restaurants serve food of poor quality. At inAzia you will have a chance to taste a whole range of seafood dishes. As for

appetizers, you can choose from fresh oysters, octopus in tempura and grilled tuna tataki - all delicious and highly-praised by guests. Other snacks include salmon tartare and the famous Taiwanese bao buns served with shrimps. The menu also includes excellent sushi with tuna, crab, salmon, shrimp and eel. As you can see, you don't have to go to a separate fancy restaurant or a sushi bar to eat really good sushi!

SIGNATURE DISHES

As for signature dishes of inAzia restaurant, those include pad thai (fried rice) with tofu and shrimps, as well as

seafood cooked on robata grill. Also squid, turbot or tuna marinated in a mango sauce - all prepared in a traditional Japanese fashion - take you to culinary heaven and back. It's a feast for the most demanding palates, but also for those who just want to try good, real Japanese food.

ITALIAN FLAVOURS

Cucina Mia is a new restaurant on the culinary map of Warsaw, specializing in Italian cuisine, including fish dishes. Those who have been to Italy know how important the tradition of drinking aperitivo is. This in combination with small snacks called "cicchetti" is a



perfect choice for an evening out with friends. Cucina Mia's signature dish is a perch fished in the crystal clear waters of the Adriatic.

QUALITY AND ATMOSPHERE

Importantly, the fish served in both restaurants come from highly-reputed suppliers known for their top quality products. They are stored under optimal conditions, which you can feel with every bite of food you eat.

Both inAzia and Cucina Mia are also loved for the unique, relaxing atmosphere. In the Italian restaurant you can try the so-called "gathering table" concept, where guests are encouraged to eat, drink and feast together.

A subtle mosaic of green, red and beige highlights the unique atmosphere of the place, while a mural by the local

artist Agata Czeremuszkin-Chrut gives the restaurant a truly Italian character. The sublime interiors decorated in coral and sea colours highlight the oriental atmosphere of InAzia, while built-in windows with a view on a lively kitchen allow guests to watch the restaurant's excellent chefs at work.

STYLE AND ELEGANCE

"The timeless elegance designed with a modern flair." This is the main concept that the designer Alex Kravetz followed while designing the hotel's suites. The guestrooms are filled with natural light with views across the city and aim to provide a contemporary, residential feel and offer high-tech amenities as well as a work desk. The hotel also features a spacious Sheraton Club Lounge; sheraton.pl

InAzia

Cucina Mia

Sheraton Grand Warsaw

ul. Bolesława Prusa 2

00-493 Warsaw

@inazia_warsaw

@cucina_mia_warsaw

LOT launches new services to the US!

In November 2019, Poland joined the US visa waiver programme. One of the initiators of the #BizWizDo-USA social campaign, LOT Polish Airlines is consistently strengthening its offer on transatlantic routes. This year, the Polish national carrier will launch several new services to the USA. From 3 May, LOT's aircraft will start serving the Cracow - New York (JFK) route; on 2 June the airline will launch its direct Warsaw - Washington DC (IAD) service, while the 5 August will mark the beginning of the new era for LOT with the launch of Warsaw - San Francisco (SFO) service.

BUSINESS AND LEISURE

In spring, LOT Polish Airlines will launch its new transatlantic service from Poland. Beginning 3 May the airline will begin flying from Cracow Airport to JFK Airport in New York. The flights will be operated according to the following schedule:

- LO19 KRK-JFK 18:45-22:30 Sunday
- LO20 JFK-KRK 00:20-14:55 Sunday

A month later, the Polish national carrier will inaugurate another convenient connection to the United States. LOT's B787 Dreamliners will fly to Washington DC, covering the distance of more than 7000 kilometres in slightly over 9 hours. This will be the fastest way to travel from Poland and the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe to the capital of the US. The services on this route will begin on 2 June and will be operated according to the following schedule:

- LO39 WAW-IAD 16:50-20:30 on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays
- LO40 IAD-WAW 22:25-13:25 (+1) on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays

Washington is home to the most important institutions of the US government and administration, as well as for numerous global companies. You can find here headquarters and branches of 70 companies whose annual revenues exceed US\$1 billion, including: Amazon, Hilton, Discovery, MARS, as well as General Dynamics defense corporation. Washington is also an attractive tourist destination.

On 5 August, LOT Polish Airlines will launch one more direct connection to the USA, this time from Warsaw to San Francisco. This will be the 10th route of the Polish carrier connecting Poland with the United States. The 9500-kilometre route will also be served by B787 Dreamliners and the whole flight will take slightly more than 12 hours. This will be the fastest way to travel from Poland and the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe to "the City by the Bay". The services on this route will be operated four times weekly according to the following schedule:

- LO35 WAW-SFO 11:35-14:30 on Mondays and Fridays

- LO37 WAW-SFO 17:20-20:15 on Wednesdays and Saturdays
- LO36 SFO-WAW 16:25-13:00 (+1) on Mondays and Fridays
- LO38 SFO-WAW 22:10-18:45 (+1) on Wednesdays and Saturdays

San Francisco has been recognized as a global business centre for years. Wrapping around the south end of San Francisco Bay, the Silicon Valley is home to the world's major tech giants, including Google, Uber, Twitter, Facebook, Hewlett-Packard, Apple, eBay, Netflix, Tesla or LinkedIn. It's also a popular tourist destination thanks to the Golden Gate Bridge, famous for its Hollywood productions, picturesque Pacific coast and the historic Alcatraz prison. Every year "San Fran" attracts more than 25 million of tourists from all over the world. The new

BELOW:
San Francisco





ABOVE FROM LEFT:
Washington DC;
Boeing 787
Dreamliner

connection to the warm state of California is also a great opportunity to see from the air the famous Greenland island in its winter glory.

OVER 120 DESTINATIONS

The new flight schedule of LOT Polish Airlines has been set up to provide as many convenient, short transfers (even less than 1 hour) at Warsaw Chopin Airport, as possible.

LOT Polish Airlines flies now to more than 120 destinations worldwide, including 20 long-distance ones. At present, the Polish carrier offers flights from Warsaw to New York (JFK/EWR), Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco (SFO from 5 August 2020), Washington (IAD from 2 June 2020), Toronto, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing (PEK/PKX), Singapore, Delhi and to Colombo. In addition, LOT flies from Cracow to Chicago and New York (JFK from 3 May 2020), from Rzeszów to New York (EWR) and from Budapest to New York (JFK) and Seoul.

DREAMLINERS AND THEIR COMFORTS

Long-haul services are operated by state-of-the-art narrow-body Boeing 787 Dreamliners aircraft. With the use of state-of-the-art technology, the B787 are able to maintain a higher pressure and air humidity on board than other passenger aircraft in this class. All those factors help enhance passengers' comfort during such a long flight and reduce the so-called jet lag effect. Each aircraft will feature three travel classes: LOT Business Class with seats which recline to the position of a flat bed and a galley akin to one at a top-class restaurant; LOT Premium Economy Class with larger personal space, comfortable seats with footrests, thigh support, cocktail tables and a rich menu, as well as LOT Economy Class with modern seats with personal in-flight entertainment screens and USB sockets, and fresh and diverse meals served during flights.

NO NEED FOR VISA TO THE US

Visa holders may continue to travel to the US with a B1/B2 visa until it expires. Travellers from Poland who don't have a valid visa, can now easily apply online for entry to the US through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) at the address: esta.cbp.dhs.gov. An ESTA authorization costs \$14, is valid for two years and the whole application procedure is fast and efficient. In the case of a positive verification, the ESTA is granted within a maximum of 72 hours. For more information, visit the website of the US Embassy in Poland at: pl.usembassy.gov

Tickets for LOT's flights are available via all sales channels, including the lot.com website.



WORDS NIGEL TISDALL



BLUE SKY THINKING

New routes, more flights, upgraded fleets and airports – is air travel in the Caribbean finally joining the 21st century?



Exciting developments are in the air as carriers recognise the potential of the Caribbean



O h, I do like an airport with chickens. They are clucking around my feet in the bungalow-sized terminal at Barbuda Codrington airport, gateway to Antigua's little-visited but quite lovely sister isle, Barbuda. Blessed with the delightful airport code BBQ, it offers all of the crowd-free charm and friendliness you'd expect from a Caribbean backwater tickled by just a few flights a day. If only all flying was as laid-back as this...

Unfortunately, for romantics like me, such sleepy little airports are in decline. From the Bahamas to Tobago, exciting developments are in the air as carriers recognise the potential of the Caribbean as a destination for business, tourism and family visits. As the peak holiday season kicks off about now in a flurry of lurid welcome cocktails and fancy towel arrangements rearing up from petal-strewn beds, many travellers will arrive on newly launched routes. Most are from North America, for as winter blows in who can resist the chance to wave goodbye to icy Minneapolis in favour of heat-drenched Nassau, with thanks to Sun Country Airlines? Or hop on a United flight from grey New Jersey to the wildly colourful streets of Curaçao?

On and on the list of fresh connections goes, with American Airlines at the head of the charge. "We're proud to be the leading carrier here with more than 1,000 weekly flights to 38 destinations," says Alfredo Gonzalez, managing director of its Caribbean operations. He says the airline has continued to grow its footprint in the region by adding new destinations and increasing frequency, and the proof is right there on the sun beds and in family homes – trips to see friends and relatives is a big part of this traffic. In summer 2019, American added six routes to the islands from US cities. Another four follow in December 2019, including from Dallas and Chicago to the US Virgin Islands, where flagship hotels such as the Ritz-Carlton St Thomas have reopened after the ravages of Hurricane Irma in 2017.

HOME GROWN

Regional carriers have also upped their game. "We're now flying to 24 cities in 16 countries," says Trevor Sadler, chief executive of Turks and Caicos-based InterCaribbean, which has added 50-seat Embraer ERJ145 jets to its fleet to cover longer distances. A proposed new codesharing alliance, Caribsky, will hopefully see Air Antilles, Winair and Liat join forces to reduce costs and create better connections. In my experience, Liat has made significant improvements since introducing ATR aircraft – it now has ten and operates 491 flights a week across 15 destinations from its hubs in Antigua, Barbados and Trinidad.

Nothing is perfect, though. On a recent Liat flight, technical issues meant a straightforward hop from St Kitts to

SHORT AND SWEET

The Caribbean is home to some of the world's shortest commercial runways

SABA

Pilots need special training to fly in and out of Juancho E Yrausquin airport on the Dutch island of Saba. At just 400 metres and overlooking steep cliffs, the concrete runway needs good weather conditions for flights to operate.

BARBUDA

Devastated by Hurricane Irma in September 2017, Barbuda is now rebuilding its homes and tourist industry. Codrington airport is fully operational with a 500-metre runway served by flights from Antigua that take 15 minutes.

MONTserrat

Opened in 2005, John A Osborne airport's 600-metre runway (under which runs a public tunnel) is principally used for the 15-minute hop between this British Overseas Territory and neighbouring Antigua. St Barths
Passengers arriving on

this glamorous French island face a landing that suddenly swoops down then ends with an inspiring view – the 650-metre runway at Gustaf III airport runs right up to a dazzling white sand beach.

UNION ISLAND

Union Island airport is a key transport hub in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Arriving here is invariably exhilarating as aircraft take a flight path that passes over the island to land on a 752-metre runway culminating in the sea.



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Grenada turned into a night in an airport hotel then a journey via six islands including Trinidad to get to my destination almost a day late. The Caribbean remains a place where a flight may well leave early and your luggage never catches up with you. At peak times, immigration controls can seem maddeningly understaffed, while departure lounges can get so crowded it is almost standing room only. But, hey, they do also play Elvis on the airside transfer bus, and the patties at Antigua's VC Bird International airport are so delicious you might well sneak a second.

FACING PAGE FROM TOP:

The flight path for Princess Juliana airport, St Maarten; low-key Barbuda Codrington airport

NO GUARANTEES

New routes may launch but they don't always last. In March 2019, after four years, Norwegian axed its low-cost services from Fort Lauderdale, New York and Montréal to the French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Jetblue has stepped in to reconnect JFK with Guadeloupe (from February 1), but such cuts are a blow for the hoteliers, taxi drivers and ice-cream sellers who had grown accustomed to North American sun-seekers flying in.



Connections with Europe present a more dappled picture. Some carriers are bravely forging new links – in October, Lufthansa launched thrice-weekly flights from Frankfurt to Barbados in cooperation with Eurowings, while low-cost Air Belgium starts a service from Brussels to Martinique and Guadeloupe in December 2019.

On the flip side, Virgin Atlantic ceases flying between London Gatwick and St Lucia in June 2020 after 21 years. British Airways has responded by upping its frequency next summer, and the St Lucian government has committed to a US\$175 million redevelopment of Hewanorra International airport due for completion in 2021. “The airport project is part of our plan to double tourism arrivals in ten to 15 years,” says minister for tourism Dominic Fedee. December 2019 sees American Airlines launch seasonal flights to the island from Chicago.

Other airports have also been expanding. Curaçao has been impressively upgraded to process 2.5 million people a year. Princess Juliana International on St Maarten has been rebuilding after severe hurricane damage, while Argyle International on St Vincent, which opened almost three years ago, is welcoming flights from Toronto, New York and Miami as well as regional destinations. In August, Jamaica introduced online immigration forms to speed up arrivals, a system already working well in Aruba and Curaçao.

Premium travellers are likewise seeing enhancements. IAM Jet Centre, which offers private jet and VIP lounge services at four Caribbean airports, is adding St Lucia to its roster in December 2019. Fans of Bequia, a tiny island in St Vincent and the Grenadines, can from December 12 fly there on Bequia Air, which is offering a 25-minute connection from Barbados on a nine-seat Beechcraft King Air B200. Schedules tie in with long-haul services, and guests staying at Bequia Beach hotel for seven

nights or more receive a free flight or two depending on the package.

Unpackaged travel arranged online is also on the rise, thanks to Airbnb

ROOM FOR GROWTH

So where will these new arrivals stay? “We have seven developments at varying stages of maturity,” says Fedee, who forecasts that St Lucia will add 2,500 hotel rooms over the next decade – projects include a golf resort from Canadian developer Cabot, and a fourth Sandals resort. Other islands are also building rapidly, such as St Kitts, where for many years the only sizeable place to stay was a 394-room Marriott. Now the island has an upscale Park Hyatt set beside its best beach, while a 273-room Ramada resort is under construction. On Antigua, the new adults-only, all-inclusive Hammock Cove Resort and Spa debuts on December 1, while the Rosewood Half Moon Bay is due to open in 2022.

Unpackaged travel arranged online is also on the rise, thanks to Airbnb and the inclination of younger travellers to sort their own flights, accommodation and experiences in the hope of a cheaper and more authentic visit. Airbnb is particularly strong in Puerto Rico, welcoming 600,000 guests in the past year, and other popular islands are Cuba, Barbados (which has a good bus service and high-class supermarkets), and Grenada. When I stayed here in a lofty flat with views over the 3km-long Grande Anse beach, my host volunteered to pick me up from the airport at no extra cost, then let me check out late. New flights, glossy resorts and tourism masterplans are all good news, but a trip to the Caribbean is also about engaging with its charismatic people. That’s why travellers, keep flying there – and, yes, the rum’s pretty good, too.

ABOVE FROM LEFT:
Park Hyatt St
Kitts; Bequia
Beach Hotel



Club Med

Wakacje premium All-Inclusvie

Wszystkie przyjemności świata!



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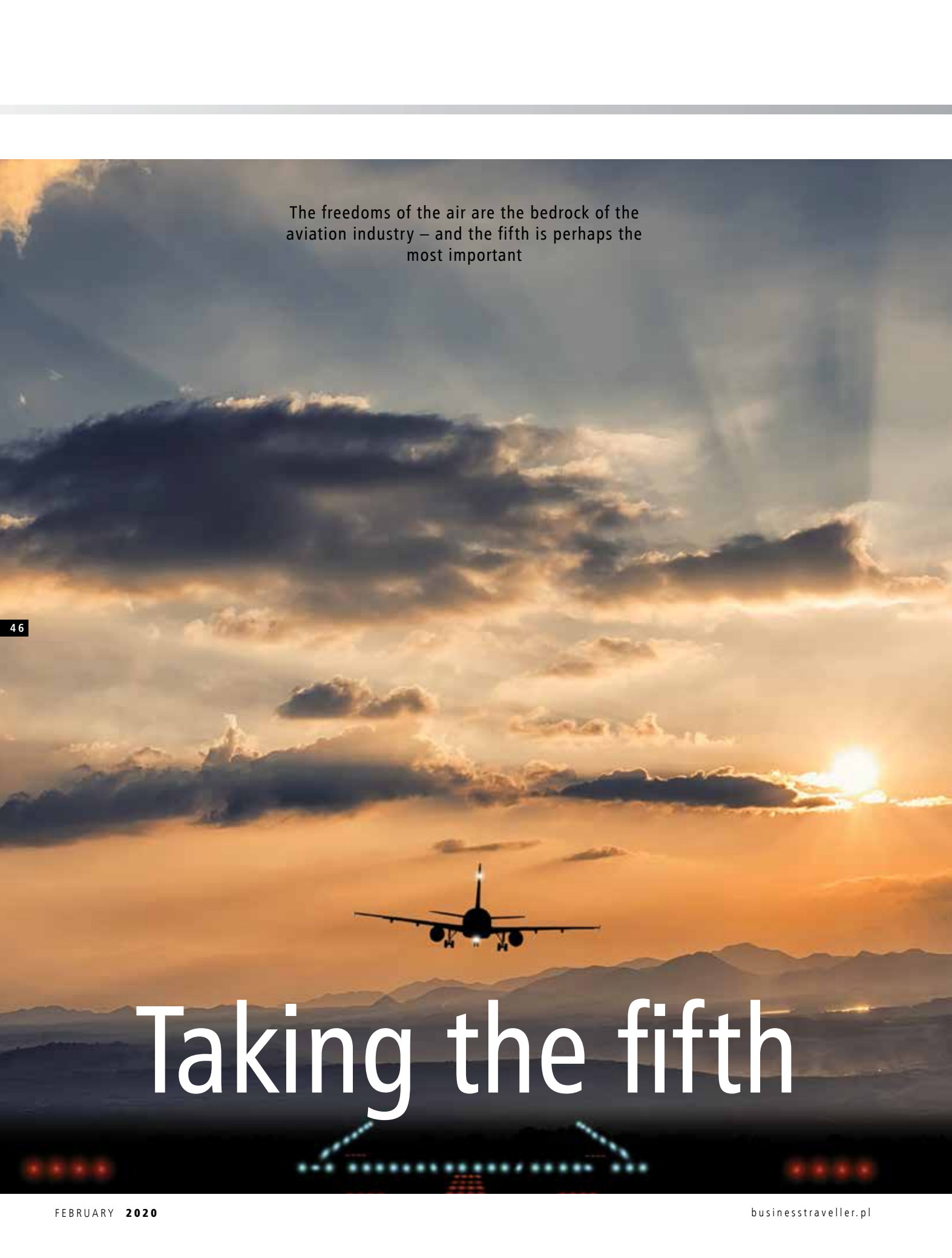


www.clubmed.pl



Tamka 16/4, Warszawa

tel. 22 455 38 38



The freedoms of the air are the bedrock of the aviation industry – and the fifth is perhaps the most important

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Taking the fifth

WORDS ALEX MCWHIRTER

Towards the end of the Second World War, a group of wise men convened in Chicago. Their meeting was to result in the Chicago Convention of 1944, which would determine how civil aviation would function in the future. Five freedoms of the air were established.

They ranged from the first – the right to fly over a foreign country without landing – to the fifth, which is perhaps the most interesting. Simply put, fifth freedom grants an airline of one country the right to carry travellers between two other countries. One example would be British Airways carrying passengers between Singapore and Sydney, or Dubai’s Emirates flying customers between Milan and New York.

In the post-war years, fifth-freedom rights were of great benefit to airlines because aircraft of that era lacked range. It made long-distance routes such as Delhi-New York or London-Singapore viable because passengers could be carried to and from intermediate points. It also enabled airlines to operate to, from and within West Germany. For many years after the war, West Germany’s national airline was grounded, so fifth-freedom rights provided Germany with air links to the outside world, as well as those connecting the West with West Berlin (the latter were routed over East German airspace).

However, fifth freedoms are not a right. Over the decades, many airlines have had to surrender these “rights” when new ASAs (air service agreements) were drawn up. Because ASAs are conducted behind closed doors we cannot say for certain but it’s believed that both Air India and El Al surrendered some or all transatlantic flights from London. Singapore Airlines no longer operates as many transpacific flights from Hong Kong as it did in days gone by. In the 1970s, Japan Airlines operated the Silk Route between London and

Fifth freedom benefits travellers by providing more choice and, often, cheaper fares

Tokyo. Having fifth-freedom rights enabled JAL to carry passengers between London and Rome, Delhi and Bangkok. JAL also had rights to transport passengers between Delhi and Bangkok. I remember JAL’s fifth-freedom rights well, as I was a passenger on several of its Silk Route B747 flights. (Italian, Indian and Thai residents would enjoy similar rights along the route.)

The downside for any airline is that if they are too successful, there is the risk that governments will want to withdraw these rights because they syphon passengers from their national airline. Consider the protests in Rome in 2014 when Emirates acquired fifth-freedom rights between Milan and New York, for example.

What’s more, not all fifth-freedom routes are successful. There are plenty of examples of airlines abandoning certain routes because they were unprofitable. Recently, Ethiopian Airlines dropped Dublin-Los Angeles, to be replaced later by Dublin-Madrid, although the latter did not last long, either – according to its website, the route ceased last month.

At the time of writing, meanwhile, Emirates is seeking to drop its fifth-freedom Singapore-Brisbane flight because it says it is making “substantial losses”. And now, facing tougher times, Cathay Pacific has decided to abandon Vancouver-New York next year, disappointing Vancouverites and New Yorkers who chose the flight for its higher standards when compared with North American carriers.

PASSENGER GAINS

How does fifth freedom benefit travellers? In short, it provides more choice and, often, cheaper fares. Examples here would include Taiwan’s EVA Air, which links London with Bangkok, Singapore Airlines (SIA), which plies the transpacific from both Hong Kong and Tokyo, and KLM, which links Singapore and Denpasar. One also invariably gets to sample a modern wide-body jet that they might not otherwise get to experience on the route – think of Emirates, whose A380s fly Bangkok-Hong Kong and Milan-New York, which are more commonly served by narrow-body aircraft.

Sometimes an airline gains fifth-freedom rights for a route neglected by the national carrier. Would SIA have gained Manchester-Houston rights were that route served by any UK or US airline? Or would Emirates have secured rights for Barcelona-Mexico City if it was already served by Iberia? (It starts next month, although at time of writing Aeromexico had mounted a strong objection.) Fifth-freedom rights play a valuable role for this particular route, in fact – as Mexico City airport is at high altitude, no Gulf airline currently flies there from their home airport as they would be unable to return home nonstop.

Emirates gained Athens-New York rights because there is no Greek carrier able to operate the route so the government was happy for Emirates to take over. Air service within Africa, meanwhile, can be sparse so the governments there liberally grant fifth-freedom rights where necessary. Consider Accra-Abidjan, where fifth-freedom carriers outnumber the one national airline, Air Côte d'Ivoire.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

So what are the drawbacks of such routes? Sometimes the schedule may not be convenient – flights might not be daily or may operate at odd times. No two routes are the same, so it's always wise to check.

Other factors include en route delays and that if it is a short tag sector, the cabin staff (who may have started work at the originating point) may not feel motivated. Sometimes, however, one gets a fresh crew. One contributor to our online forum (businessstraveller.com/forum) recently flew on KLM's Singapore-Denpasar service and posted that he was happy not only with the good-value fare but also the staff attitude. The latter could possibly be because the team operating Amsterdam-Singapore disembark at Changi, from where a new crew takes over for the Singapore-Denpasar-Singapore sectors. (Another crew then takes over for Singapore-Amsterdam).

In theory, fifth-freedom rights should no longer exist (with the exception of Europe-Australasia) because new aircraft can fly much further. But knowing the complicated world of aeropolitics, they will no doubt be around for some time to come.

Sometimes the schedule may not be convenient – flights might not be daily or may operate at odd times



20 good fifth-freedom flights

London to Los Angeles	Air New Zealand
London to Bangkok	EVA Air
London to Singapore	Qantas
Manchester to Houston	Singapore Airlines
Athens to New York Newark	Emirates
Barcelona to Mexico City	Emirates (next month, subject to approval)
Frankfurt to New York JFK	Singapore Airlines
Milan Malpensa to New York JFK	Emirates
Vienna to Bangkok	EVA Air
Accra to Abidjan	Emirates
Bangkok to Singapore	Cathay Pacific
Bangkok to Hong Kong	Emirates
Bangkok to Hong Kong	Ethiopian Airlines
Hong Kong to San Francisco	Singapore Airlines
Kuala Lumpur to Jakarta	KLM
Singapore to Denpasar	KLM
Singapore to Sydney	British Airways
Singapore to Melbourne	Emirates
Tokyo Narita to Los Angeles	Singapore Airlines
Vancouver to New York JFK	Cathay Pacific (until spring 2020)



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To the slope by a subway train

Serfaus, Fiss and Ladis are three alpine retro-Roman villages located on a plateau above the Inntal, in the western part of Austrian Tyrol. Bordering with Germany, Switzerland and Italy, they provide the name for the whole Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis ski area, which boasts its very own... underground train system.

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WORDS MARZENA MRÓZ



Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis is a real paradise for all winter sports aficionados. The area of 450 hectares is home to more than 160 kilometres of well-groomed pistes (this according to new measurement procedures; in fact, the total length of skiable runs is 212), as many as 67 cable cars and ski lifts, and 116 kilometres of cross-country trails, freeride areas and snow parks. In other words, you can practise here any winter sport you can only imagine.

FOR BEGINNERS AND SEASONED SKIERS

The huge ski area stretches from 1200 to 2820 metres above sea level, offering much more than just a joint ski pass. With a wide range of varied slopes fitting both the needs of beginners and more seasoned skiers, Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis leaves nothing to be desired. Perfectly prepared by snow groomers, the →



DESTINATIONS

slopes are a real treat for both lovers of fast “schussing” and those who prefer carving skis on all levels of difficulty. Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis is also known for perfect skiing conditions lasting here until late spring, because 80 percent of all the slopes in the area are within range of snow guns. The region offers 11 gondola railways, 16 chairlifts (two eight-seater, seven six-seater and seven four-seater), 11 drag lifts and 29 rope lifts, which are popularly called “magic carpets”. As many as 123 kilometres of the runs have the red difficulty level, 47 kilometres of pistes are the blue ones suitable for beginners. There are also 28 kilometres of black pistes aimed at the most experienced and seasoned skiers, as well as 16 kilometres of the so-called “ski trails”.

THE ALPS IN THE SUN

The region is famous for a remarkably large number of sunny winter days, which is mainly due to its unique geographical location. All the three towns are located at an altitude of about 1400 metres above sea level, on a plateau, above which the ski area reaches 2800 metres. And so you can enjoy skiing here until late in the afternoon, wrapping your day with a cup of tea or a glass of wine on the sunny terrace of one of Austria's charming hotels or guesthouses. No wonder that the Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis region is the perfect option for both a weekend and a longer stay in the mountains.

FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Note that Serfaus is a car-free zone, which means you can't drive around it in your car. Luckily, the region boasts excellent public transport, including the underground railway, which is an Alpine form of a metro system. Interestingly, it's one of only two Austrian underground train systems (the second, larger one is in Vienna).

In view of many experts, no other ski region in the world can match the comprehensive family offer of Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis. No wonder it's been ranked among top three ski resorts worldwide by the highly-regarded skiresort.de website, and placed in the top three of the prestigious study entitled “Best



The region is famous for a remarkably large number of sunny winter days.



Sunny slopes of the Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis region in the Austrian Alps.

PRESS MATERIALS



Ski Resort” (Mountain Management in cooperation with the University of Innsbruck/Bozen), which surveyed 46,000 winter sports aficionados, asking them to select their favourite ski area.

This high position is partly owing to the resort’s vast offer for families, including the highly-praised Kinderschneealm and MurmliPark snow parks with their own ski areas and excellent skiing academies for children. Other attractions and amenities include restaurants for children, all-day care for the youngest kids or the Berta’s Kinderland village, which is one of the Alps’ largest and most famous children’s play paradise. Eighty percent of the 212 kilometres of slopes in Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis area are red and blue, which means that they suit both adults and children. The

Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis is also a real paradise for families.

Kinderschneealm in Serfaus and Berta’s Kinderland in Fiss-Ladis provide excellent winter entertainment, including a ski course, all-day childcare and a special restaurant for the little ones. Young skiers are also taken care of at ski lifts, where the so-called “Helping Hands” (specially trained employees) help them get on the lift and safely put their equipment in a special holder. The offer for older children includes fun parks and flying vehicles, known here as Serfauser Sauer, Fisser Flieger and Skyswing.

FROM WELLNESS RESIDENZ SCHALBER TO THE SLOPE

You can get to Serfaus from Innsbruck in just 1.5 hours. Located in Serfaus at 15 Dorfbahnstrasse, the five-star Wellness Residenz Schalber is widely considered one of the most beautiful hotels in the whole Tyrol. Spectacularly situated with stunning views over several Alpine peaks, it offers the highest standards and excellent service.

Also noteworthy is the hotel’s fine restaurant and one of the most beautiful spas in the Austrian Alps; schalber.com

The hotel also overlooks the Masner ski resort, yet another ski paradise with long slopes and tons of fresh snow. We reach the viewing platform with a sculpture of an eagle situated on Masnerkopf mountain (2828 metres above sea level). Nearby there are areas that are part of the Feel Free offer. It’s a huge area connecting freeride trails with a paradise for freestylers.

The Fisser Nordhang, the northern slope of the mountain, guarantees stable skiing conditions and a large variety of pistes. At Zwolferkopf, located at 2600 meters above sea level, we take a train to test the best pistes there: Almabfahrt, Bodenabfahrt and the most difficult one called the Adlerpiste. Interestingly, while taking a ride by gondola lift here, you can listen to short stories about wild animals living in the area.



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PAR EXCELLENCE

Luxury and warmth combine at this country manor with a Ryder Cup-worthy golf course and Michelin-starred dining

WORDS MICHELLE HARBI



Reopened in 2017, its multimillion-euro renovation included the addition of a new West Wing

LEFT: Adare Manor boasts a revamped Tom Fazio golf course
INSET: Michelin-starred cooking in the Oak Room

Adare Manor is on a roll. In July it was confirmed that the luxury Limerick hotel would stage the 2026 Ryder Cup at its new Tom Fazio-designed golf course. Then, in October, its fine-dining restaurant, the Oak Room, was awarded a Michelin star less than two years after it opened. Add to that the UK and Ireland's only La Mer spa and everything from a plush cinema to expansive grounds to explore, and it makes the range of what the recently renovated property has to offer pretty formidable – both indoors and outdoors.

Which helps when you're in the west of Ireland. We visited in the midst of typical August summer weather. Greeted by pelting rain on the half-hour drive from Shannon airport, by the time we had been welcomed warmly by top-hatted staff at the entrance gate, checked in and taken a window-side seat in the drawing room for some light lunch, dazzling sun had broken out across the formal gardens and 340 hectares of immaculate grounds. (I'll come back to the greenkeeping later – it turned out to provide an unexpected highlight of our visit.)

Built on the banks of the River Maigue in the mid-19th century and a hotel since 1988, Adare Manor has long been among the country's top five-star addresses. Still, it is its multimillion-euro full-scale refurbishment by Limerick tycoon JP McManus – who bought the hotel in 2015 and is a co-owner of Sandy Lane in Barbados – that has cemented its status as one of Ireland's most illustrious properties.

Reopened in November 2017, its renovation – which took almost two years and was led by architectural firm Reardon Smith, previously behind the restoration of London's Savoy – included the addition of a new 42-room West Wing that has been designed to match seamlessly with the neo-gothic limestone manor house, which emerges imposingly in the distance when you first wind your way along the driveway through the parkland. A 350-capacity ballroom has also been added.

GRAND DESIGNS

As well as restoring the façade of the old manor – which was built by the second Earl of Dunraven as a calendar house, with 365 windows, 52 chimneys, seven stone pillars and four towers – the works have made the most of its elaborate original features. In the Great Hall reception, the aroma of a crackling fire drifts up into its vaulted arches and ornate Minstrels' Gallery, while upstairs, the 40-metre-long Gallery, with its high arched ceiling, stained-glass windows and intricate 17th-century wood carvings, is a lovely space in which to enjoy a leisurely breakfast.

Still, you would be forgiven for ordering in room service. Designed in classic, elegant style, the 104 rooms and



My Sleep Sound massage did what it said on the tin – I was fit for bed straight after dinner



suites start from 43 sqm and have restful colour schemes, great views and marble bathrooms with Acqua di Parma toiletries. Sumptuous king beds and iPads for controlling the lights, blinds and air con serve to make you feel even lazier.

Still, there is too much to enjoy elsewhere for lingering all day. The revamped 7,509-yard, par-72 golf course – and its David Collins Studio-designed club, the Carriage House – is drawing more enthusiasts since the Ryder an-

FROM TOP:
The spa's light-filled pool area; the Great Hall; a Deluxe room

nouncement. In July it will host the sixth JP McManus Pro-Am, at which the likes of Tiger Woods, Rory McIlroy and Shane Lowry will tee off against Hugh Grant, Mark Wahlberg and boxer Wladimir Klitschko in aid of various charities.

I won't pretend to be one of those enthusiasts – I headed for the spa instead, a beautiful spot with a light-filled pool area overlooking the golf course. My signature Sleep Sound massage did what it said on the tin – I was fit for bed straight after our dinner in the Carriage House, which serves up excellent steaks alongside the likes of Dublin Bay prawns, Atlantic lobster and Connemara lamb in a buzzy, stylish space.

Located in the manor house, the Oak Room offers refined contemporary Irish cuisine overlooking the river and gardens. On top of the restaurant scooping a star, its head of wines and beverage, Jurica Gojevic, won the Michelin Sommelier Award 2020. Below stairs, the former servants' hall is now the Tack Room bar, where the whiskey collection includes more than 100 rare bottles.

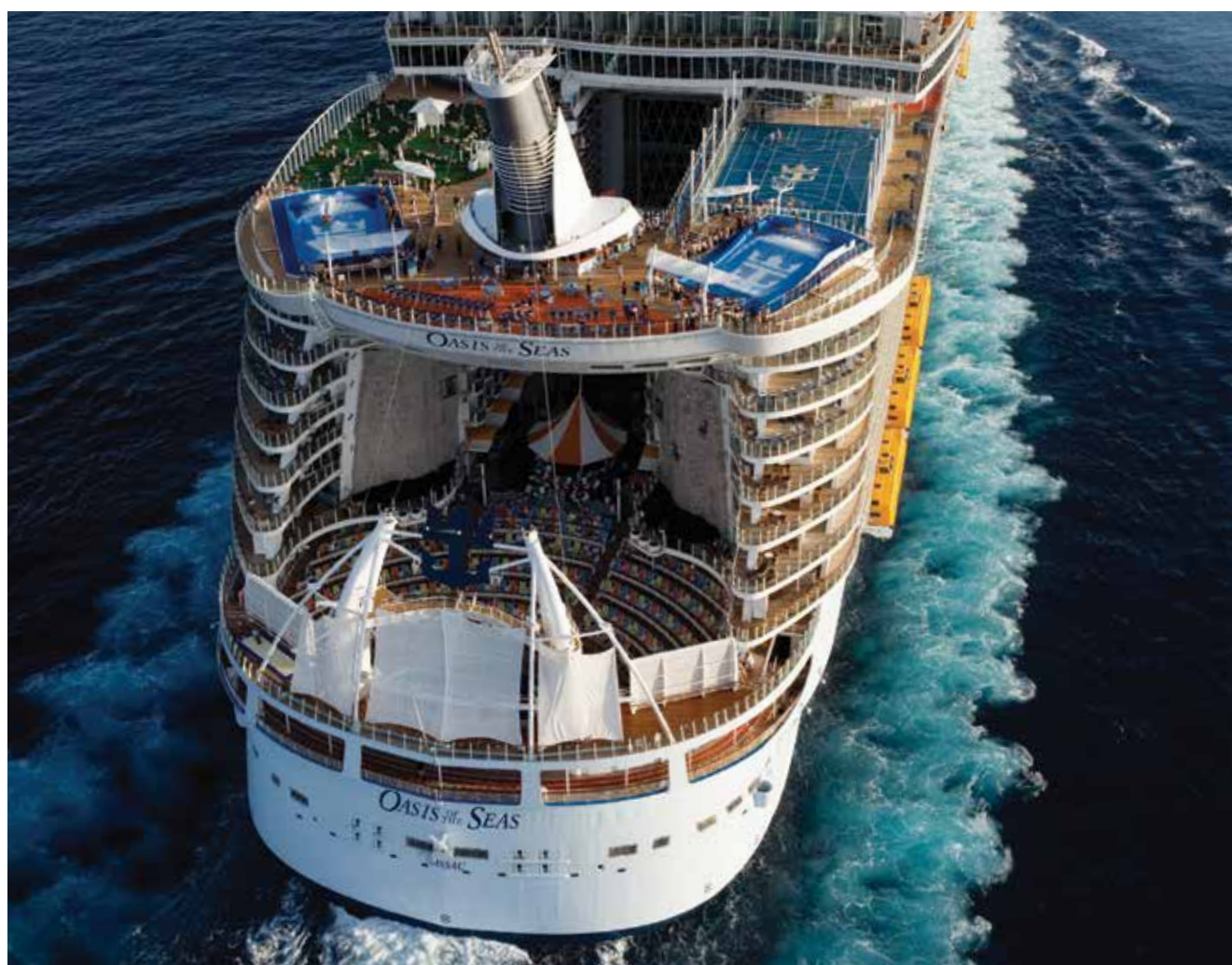
ON THE GREEN

For walking off all the indulgence, the grounds – which are planted with about 2,850 trees and 100,000 shrubs and plants – are also home to walled gardens and a fairy woodland trail. Bikes and wellies can be borrowed, while trout fishing, falconry and archery are among the activities available. Or you could wander down to pretty Adare Village and have a pint. Like the estate, the village's history dates back to the 13th century, and it is home to traditional thatched cottages, antique shops and boutiques. If you have more time than the Cliffs of Moher, the picturesque beaches of Clare and Kerry and lively Galway City – a 2020 European Capital of Culture – are enjoyable day trips.

I mentioned the ground-keeping earlier. Previous Irish holidays of mine may have involved many a pint, but having a small child in tow this time necessitated better behaviour. Our break here, as it happened, coincided with his sudden obsession with lawnmowers. With all of those hectares and a cutting-edge golf course to keep in pristine condition, we couldn't have been in a better spot; we thus spent much more time than I might have anticipated watching the various pieces of machinery marking out perfect strips of green. But what I really wasn't expecting was that the staff, on discovering his new-found passion, would arrange for one of the greenkeepers to meet us from our lunch and take him for a spin on a ride-on, even supplying a set of mini-ear defenders to protect him from the noise.

Months on, he's still talking about it, and for me it sums up the warmth and thoughtfulness of service you receive at Adare Manor. And that, ultimately, is what we remember the most from the best luxury stays.

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WORDA CHRIS HALL

TIME FOR CHANGE

The Swiss watch industry would do well to take note of IWC's movement towards a more sustainable future



IWC chief executive Chris Grainger-Herr has laid down the goal of going entirely plastic-free

There isn't much crossover between the worlds of luxury watchmaking and environmental awareness. You're unlikely to find many Extinction Rebellion protesters wearing Montblanc watches, and I'm pretty sure I know what Greta Thunberg thinks of the acres of orange plastic surrounding the Louis Vuitton flagship store on London's Bond Street as it undergoes yet another extravagant makeover.

For a long time, the closest the Swiss watch industry got to a coherent position on sustainability was the oft-repeated line that because a watch lasts for decades, it's inherently a sustainable item. Well, perhaps – no doubt there's a larger carbon footprint incurred by buying cheap ones that break every couple of years – but even though the Swiss watch you just bought might last a lifetime, the brand that made it is turning out hundreds of thousands just like it, all relying pretty heavily on raw materials, shipping, manufacturing and marketing that aren't exactly green.

Hang on, though – haven't we all heard about the various watchmakers' efforts to save endangered coral/stingrays/hammerhead sharks, and clean up the waters of the Caribbean/Polynesian islands/the Rhine in the process? It's



true that there are plenty of high-profile initiatives to preserve photogenic locations and species, but when it comes to the nitty-gritty of behaving sustainably, the great and the good of Switzerland's watch industry are coming up a little short.

Don't take my word for it – I refer you to a damning report issued by the Swiss WWF this time last year, which, having looked at the eco-credentials of the nation's 15 largest watch brands, concluded that “most of the companies have not taken any appropriate steps to address and counter climate change... The results also show that few companies recognise their responsibility and that action and more transparency towards sounder environmental management are needed... the overall findings are highly worrying.” Ouch.

The WWF graded the 15 on a scale from “latecomer/non-compliant” to “visionary”. None made the top category, or even the one below it, “frontrunner”. Still, one brand was judged deserving of “ambitious” status, and that was IWC.

It helped that IWC is in possession of a new factory building with 2,183 sqm of solar panels on its roof, but, in truth, the company's efforts to think a little deeper about its impact on the environment began some years ago, when it set up a sustainability committee with representatives from across the company and started producing biennial reports with fairly ambitious targets.

The next one, set to be published at the start of 2020, will report that greenhouse gas emissions are down 10 per cent, and highlight that the brand is on the verge of using entirely renewable energy at all of its premises around the world. There's more; chief executive Chris Grainger-Herr has laid down the goal of going entirely

ABOVE: IWC's new manufacturing centre

LEFT/ABOVE LEFT: Big Pilot's Watch Constant-Force Tourbillon Edition “Le Petit Prince”; iwc.com

plastic-free, and the company wants to insist on sustainable certification not only for all of its suppliers, but all of their suppliers. It is even looking at certifying its marketing events for sustainability, and makes sure to buy enough carbon offsets to cover its various stunts – which this year has involved sponsoring a restored Spitfire on a round-the-world trip.

Let's be in no doubt: buying a luxury watch is still an exercise in indulgence, and if the brands really want to tackle the industry's impact on the world around it then there is a long way yet to go – including locking horns with the world's diamond and gold producers. And, yet, even on this front, there is some inspiration on offer – various other brands including Cartier and Chopard are making efforts to use responsibly mined, artisanal gold, and IWC claims it is well on the way to using nothing but recycled gold across its range.

Now, I'm not saying that means you can look at the Big Pilot's Watch shown here in an entirely new light; as a CHF 235,000 (£184,000) constant-force tourbillon with 341 components and a 96-hour power reserve, it still goes down as a serious extravagance in my book. The constant-force tourbillon, by the way, is what you can see on the left-hand side of the dial; a tiny chain-driven mechanism that is phenomenally fiddly, and is designed to ensure that the energy of the watch's mainspring gets metered out with unvarying torque, for more even and accurate timekeeping.

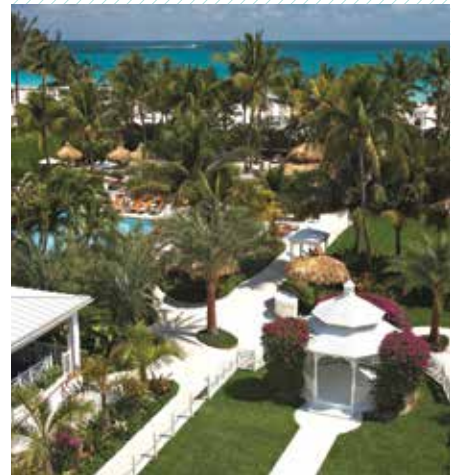
So, yes, when it comes to staggering feats of over-engineering, some aspects of the watch world are never going to change. But as we turn over a new year, the clock really is ticking for the rest of the Swiss to start thinking a bit more like IWC.

The Palms Hotel&Spa



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thepalmshotel.com



You can feel at home here, especially since the hotel staff are always on hand to assist guests both day and night.

Part of the luxury Preferred Hotels&Resorts collection, The Palms Hotel&Spa is a green haven located right on the beachfront of Miami Beach. Living up to the hotel's name, the palm-leaf motif is present throughout the whole resort, making it stand out from other properties in the area. Add to this the Caribbean climate, excellent service and unique location within the city, and it becomes clear that The Palms Hotel&Spa is one of the best addresses in Miami Beach.

WHERE IS IT?

The hotel is located in the very heart of Miami Beach, in the popular Mid Beach Area. The building is slightly tucked away on a pristine stretch of beach, standing among a lush garden, between 30th and 31st Streets. Looking out the window of an ocean view room, it's easy to imagine that you are on a paradise island surrounded by crystal clear water, fine sand and lots of tropical greenery. Miami In-

ternational Airport is just 12 miles away, while the city's business district is 9 miles, best reached by taxi. The hotel is also close to numerous shops, cafés, restaurants and beautiful art deco houses, which are so characteristic of Miami Beach. Lincoln Street with its vast shopping opportunities can be reached from the hotel by a free shuttle service - a stylish bus that runs every 15 minutes. Also the nightlife on Ocean Drive, Collins Street and Washington is literally a stone's throw from The Palms Hotel.

ROOMS AND SUITES

The hotel has 251 recently refurbished rooms; 141 of them with city views, 28 with partial ocean views, while 78 rooms and 4 suites have spectacular views of the azure waters of the Atlantic you can admire through huge floor-to-ceiling windows. Eleven ocean view rooms have the Superior status, meaning they come with an additional sofa, while seven Family Connecting Combo rooms can be combined

to easily accommodate a larger family. On the 12th floor of the building there are two stunning City View Junior Suites and two One-Bedroom Oceanfront Suites - all with terraces.

The décor in all rooms and throughout the public spaces is tasteful and appealing. The colour palette in the rooms includes pastel shades of beige and brown, with only a few more pronounced accents, such as bolster pillows and bed runners in orange red colours. The rooms also come with functional and comfortable chairs, a table, a lamp, a counter top where you can put your laptop, a flatscreen TV, and a ceiling fan, which adds to the holiday-like ambiance of the space.

POOL, BEACH AND GARDEN

The Palms Hotel&Spa offers its guests a heated outdoor pool, as well as a scenic strip of private beach with turquoise loungers and spacious cabanas situated very close to the oceanfront. The beach waiter service includes provi-

ding towels and orders from the hotel bar. The hotel's lush garden features tall palm trees and orchids, as well as the unique on-site "Organic Chef's Garden", where herbs and produce used in the hotel's restaurant are grown. In one of the trees there is a birdhouse for two hotel parrots that can imitate human speech and readily pose for pictures.

BAR AND RESTAURANT

Helmed by Executive Sous Chef Daryn Garcia, Essensia Restaurant & Lounge serves delicious breakfasts, lunches and dinners, prepared with fresh, organic products, some sourced straight from the hotel's on-site garden. I was especially fond of mouth-watering fresh seafood served with a medley of vegetables, as well as Caribbean dishes that are best enjoyed on the wooden veranda with the ocean view. Over the years, the restaurant has received numerous accolades, with the most recent including Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence 2018, OpenTable.com Diner's Choice Winner 2019, and Snail of Approval 2018.

Tiki Bar's offer is very comprehensive and diverse, starting with fancy cocktails best sipped on the beach, to a wide choice of wine and different varieties of gin.

SPA AND FITNESS

Located in the lower lobby level of the hotel, the luxury AVEDA Spa stretches over an area of almost 500 sqm. You can enjoy here a wide range of holistic treatments and rituals per-



Looking out the window of an ocean view room, it's easy to imagine that you are on a paradise island surrounded by crystal clear water, fine sand and lots of tropical greenery.

med by experienced therapists who tailor the procedures to individual needs and preferences of guests. Massages are performed either in a tranquil open-air cabana or in the comfort of a well-equipped treatment room, and selected

products of the luxury AVEDA brand are available for purchase. Non-hotel guests enjoying spa services of 50 minutes or more, have full use of the hotel's tropical grounds with private beach and swimming pool. The Palms Hotel&Spa also has a 24/7, well-equipped fitness room with treadmills, stationary bikes and free weights.

EVENT VENUES

With more than 740 sqm of event space, including 9 meeting rooms, the hotel is a perfect choice for those looking for a venue to host a business meeting, a conference or a private function. The hotel has also two spacious ballrooms (the 246 sqm Royal Palm and the 160 sqm Queen Palm located in the lobby level) with access to natural light, which can accommodate up to 220 guests for a banquet. The covered terrace and the spacious on-site garden are also a great choice for a cocktail-party, a wedding reception or a family reunion. The hotel has a dedicated team of professionals to provide assistance and take care of all the details of the event. The beautifully designed and decorated hotel lobby (335 sqm) is often used as a venue for various exhibitions. Overall, The Palms Hotel&Spa has what it takes to help you celebrate special events and memorable moments.



SERVICE AND AMENITIES

The hotel is well-known for its organic cuisine served in Essensia Restaurant & Lounge, excellent spa facilities, yoga classes and a well-equipped fitness room.

On-site you can also find a well-stocked gift shop with coffee bar, deli counter and a variety of fashion and gift items. Other amenities include free morning papers delivered to the rooms, free access to wifi (available throughout the hotel), a 24-hour self-service business centre, concierge and laundry services. Importantly, The Palms Hotel&Spa is praised for its eco-friendly ethos that runs throughout the whole property and can be seen at every step. For instance, you won't find here any plastic cups, straws or cutlery, while drinking water, available throughout the hotel, is served in paper cones. The same applies to the cuisine Essensia restaurant is renowned for. Dishes here are prepared with natural ingredients sourced from organic farms or the on-site garden. All of this is taken care of by the management of the hotel and the family that runs the property.

VERDICT

The Palms Hotel&Spa is a truly unique place - an idyllic hotel belonging to the unique Preferred Hotels&Resorts collection and located in the most beautiful part of South Beach. With tall palm trees that provide lots of shade in the scorching heat of Miami, and a spacious garden where you can enjoy your meal in the nature, it's a place to enjoy the best of both worlds. It



seems that nature was an obvious inspiration both for the designer of the hotel interiors and for the head chef who collaborates closely with local produce suppliers and seasons his dishes with herbs from the hotel garden. All rooms and suites feature stylish, tasteful décor, and guests are welcomed with a complimentary bottle of wine. You can feel at home here, especially since the hotel staff are always on hand to assist guests both day and night.

One of the property's undeniable assets are its meeting and event facilities, making it a

perfect venue for any function, especially such a memorable one as a wedding reception. The hotel is also praised for its efforts in lessening its impact on the environment, and leading a healthy and wholesome lifestyle. For me personally, one of the best and memorable experiences I had there was visiting the hotel's stylish library in the evening. I sat there in a comfortable chair, sipping fine wine and listening to the beautiful sounds of live piano music floating through the room. If that's not bliss, I don't know what else is... *Marzena Mróz*



Bania Conference Centre, Białka Tatrzańska

BACKGROUND

Hotel Bania **** Thermal & Ski sits at the foot of the largest ski resort in Poland and is connected to thermal pools. In December 2019, the property received a new wing, comprising a state-of-the-art Bania Conference Centre for up to 1000 people.

WHERE IS IT?

Bania hotel is located in the very heart of Białka Tatrzańska, considered to be the leading ski resort in Poland. The hotel offers the breathtaking views of the High Tatra and Pieniny mountains as well as the ski slope nearby.

MEETING FACILITIES

With the area of 3500 sqm and the state-of-the-art multimedia solutions, Bania Conference Centre is one of the top facilities of this type in the southern part of Poland. Depending on



The interiors of the Centre feature tasteful décor with several Podhale-inspired accents.

the client's needs, it's possible to create here one large space for up to 1000 guests, or 14 independent meeting rooms. The property has a separate conference reception area, a spacious foyer with an outdoor terrace and professional catering and technical facilities. The interiors of the Centre feature tasteful décor with several Podhale-inspired accents.

ROOMS

The hotel offers 800 beds in 262 rooms and suites. It's therefore the largest hotel property in Poland designed in line with the principles of local architecture, with the use of wood and natural stone, which add to the overall pleasant ambiance. The decor of the rooms in the new wing is once again a tasteful combination of Podhale-inspired architecture with the simplicity of Scandinavian style. Wooden ornaments, which come from local carpenters, are particularly attractive.

FOOD AND DRINK

In addition to individual catering facilities in the conference wing of the hotel, the property also has three restaurants: Górska serving regional specialties, Tatrzańska where buffet breakfasts are served (try its home-made bread - it's simply delicious), and Rohatka, which specializes in Italian cuisine. One of the highlights of the new wing of the hotel is its cosy Na

CONTACT

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www.hotelbania.pl

BEST FOR:

Modern-looking, flexible spaces, a wide range of accompanying events.

DON'T MISS

Find some time to pop into the Na Szczyście café situated on the fourth floor of the hotel.

It's a perfect place for a small business meeting with a cup of good coffee.



Szczyście café situated on the top floor of the building, where you can admire the stunning panorama, while sipping aromatic coffee. Equally impressive is the water bar adjacent to the outdoor pool, where you can order your favourite cocktails.

LEISURE FACILITIES

In addition to the thermal bath complex offering unlimited access to business customers, it's also worth visiting the on-site SPA&Wellness zone with five saunas and saunas and seven specialized treatment rooms. There is also a great news for guests seeking active leisure: the Tatras Super Ski pass gives you access to 91 ski slopes within 17 resorts around the region.

VERDICT:

With the highest quality of service and a comprehensive business offer, Bania resort is, undoubtedly, a perfect venue for conferences, fairs and incentive trips that can easily be enriched by a wide range of team-building activities and leisure options.



Toronto

Street food, murals and local projects in Canada's biggest city

1 Loblaws

Start outside Canada's largest super-market chain, Loblaws, on Portland Street and Queen Street West. Here, the developer has respected the local area by having shops at street level, echoing the smaller-scale retail on Queen Street West – the supermarket is on the upper floor and Winners fashion store on the next level up. Inside, despite being new-build, there's a slight industrial warehouse feel that fits with the general area. Before you turn west, look at the painting of a giant eye on a building further east on the south side of the street. The mural is by US artist Shepard Fairey, best known for his Hope poster of Barack Obama created during the 2008 US elections. The building used to house a popular nightclub called Tattoo.

2 Theatre Passe Muraille

Queen Street West was the baseline established by the Royal Engineers when they laid out the town of York (now Toronto) in 1783. Formerly Lot Street, it was renamed in the 1840s in honour of Queen Victoria. Despite being a heritage conservation area, it is an important east-west corridor with streetcars running along it. Cross the road and head north on Ryerson Avenue, past the new Workplace One, an example of the district's former factories and warehouses which are now loft apartments or workspaces. Check out Theatre Passe Muraille, located in the former Nasmith Bakery and Stables. One of the city's top independent theatres, in January it is showing *Suitcase/Adrenaline*, a production about the experiences of Syrian refugees. passemuraille.ca

3 Black squirrels

Ryerson Avenue is a street of humbly constructed houses that shows the effect of original city planning, which stopped buildings away from the main streets from being higher than three storeys. It also has conservation park areas, where, season permitting (in winter they tend to hibernate), you might see distinctive black squirrels running along telephone wires and electricity cables. These are in fact called the Eastern Grey, but those with black fur dominate. Various explanations have been put forward for their colour, from the presence of black asphalt on roofs, meaning they are more camouflaged from hawks, to the fact that black fur provides more insulation in harsh winters. The mutant gene may also be down to greater levels of testosterone – the black squirrels are



more successful at breeding than their grey brothers. You have to be aggressive to survive in the city.

4 MARKET 707

Head up through Alexandra Park, which was created from the gardens of a now demolished house and expanded in the 1960s as the city knocked down old properties and built new ones in the hope of regenerating what was a working class area. The communities themselves have formed local groups and engendered the sense of neighbourhood spirit that is tangible here. You'll see gardens in schools where pupils grow vegetables and herbs, while at Market 707 you can try a range of street food. Founded in 2010 by the Scadding Court Community Centre, who got the idea

from a trip to Ghana to turn old shipping containers into vending stalls, it serves up international food (Japanese, Afghan, Thai, West Indian) as well as local specialities. It's located on Dundas Street, which was named after Henry Dundas, the first Viscount Melville, who never even visited Toronto.

scaddingcourt.org/market-707

5 Kensington Market

Head north along Denison Avenue and you'll enter the Kensington Market area, home to shops and apartments, through Bellevue Square Park – named after a mansion once here that was owned by the influential Denison family. Characterised by Victorian-era houses, this area has been multicultural for well

over a century, settled by the English then, in turn, Russian and Polish Jewish communities, and waves of new immigrants from Italy, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Currently the district faces a challenge from Airbnb, hence the signs about the area being “more than a one night stand”. It's a great place for sampling a range of cuisines inexpensively, (try Rasta Pasta for Jamaican-Italian fusion or Nu Bugel for Montréal-style bagels with smoked trout) and buying everything from tourist mementos to local cheese. You can also legally buy marijuana in the city from registered outlets, and smoke it in lounges such as Hotbox Café (which missed out on a licence to sell it as these were awarded by lottery). Tour Guys offers free walking tours: tourguys.ca

JESSE MILNS: TOURISM TORONTO, ADOBESTOCK

METAL ITEMS ON BOARD

My boss has recently underwent hip surgery and has metal implants in his bones. He will soon be travelling to Asia by direct flight to Seoul. Does he need to report his condition to the airline? Won't he have any trouble during airport security checks? I'm afraid the security gate will beep, detecting his metal implant. Also, taking into account his condition, is he entitled to a seat with more legroom?

Agnieszka

Dear Agnieszka,

If a lot of time has passed since the operation and the boss can walk alone, there is no need to inform the airline. However, if your boss isn't fully mobile yet, I suggest you request a standard wheelchair, which will be available from the moment he arrives at the airport until he boards the plane. Also at the destination airport, there will be a member of staff waiting for your boss with a wheelchair (usually by the airbridge or airstairs), and they will assist him at passport and customs checks.

In such a situation, a standard service should be more than enough. A wheelchair must be ordered at least 48 hours before departure. It's worth remembering that the availability of specialist wheelchairs (for example, a wheelchair that fits on board an aircraft) may be limited.

It's possible to select a specific seat before the departure. I'm afraid it won't be possible to allocate a seat at an emergency exit for procedural reasons, as in case of an emergency your boss won't be able to provide assistance to other passengers. I recommend a seat in the first row of economy class, which offers slightly more legroom. It can be booked in advance for an additional fee, but I don't recommend waiting until the last minute.

All passengers must undergo security screening at the airport prior to their departure. The metal detector gates are very sensitive and will of course detect metal elements, especially large ones, such as the hip joint prosthesis. That's why, the security officer should be informed of the medical issue, and an additional, routine manual check will probably be necessary. Please note that for airport staff this is nothing unusual; they have experience with various medical problems.

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.



A LONGER HOTEL STAY

I need to make a hotel reservation for two employees for a fairly long stay. What are the booking options, considering that the employees will stay at the hotel for about six weeks? They prefer to stay in the same room for the whole stay, as they don't want to move their luggage several times. Also, since they will spend some of the weekends at their homes, will we have to pay for the nights when they actually didn't stay at the hotel? Can I make a reservation via the Concur system? Will they earn any points in the loyalty scheme?

Iwona

Dear Iwona,

Most reservation systems allow you to make a hotel reservation for a maximum of 30 days. If you use the Concur system, you will need to make two separate reservations - for 30 days and for 14 days. However, I suggest that you contact the hotel directly (or through an agent) to check your long-term stay rate. It happens very often that hotel chains offer discounts for stays exceeding 30 days, but those are granted individually depending on the planned hotel occupancy.

Such guests usually stay in one room for the whole period of their stay; it also happens that they get a room upgrade. I'm quite sure that they won't have to move to any other room. I'm afraid, however, that you won't be able to pay only for the nights when the employees actually stayed in the hotel. This is because the hotel won't be able to offer those rooms to anyone else, even if the demand were high. You can ask for discounts on breakfasts (if they are not included in the room price) and special rates for using the laundry room. For long stays many hotels also offer their guests a half or full board options, similarly to those offered to package travellers.

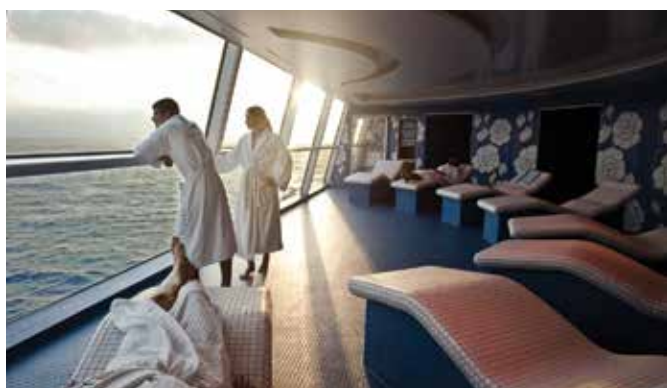
Employees of course do not lose points in the loyalty scheme, they can accrue them on general terms. A discounted rate for a long-term stay doesn't mean that such guest can't collect their points. Do remember however to provide their member numbers while booking, and later make sure that the points have appeared on their accounts.



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