

middle east

TRAVEL

Issue 202 July/August 2006

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Big Boats
Touring Thailand
New Orleans Recovered
Summer Precautions
Driving Around Berlin

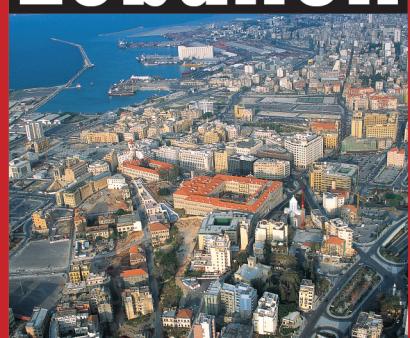
Brand Awakening

Starwood Stimulates Senses

SOS Egypt
Tourism vs. Terrorism
Interview: Tourism Minister

**Palestinian
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Long Road Ahead

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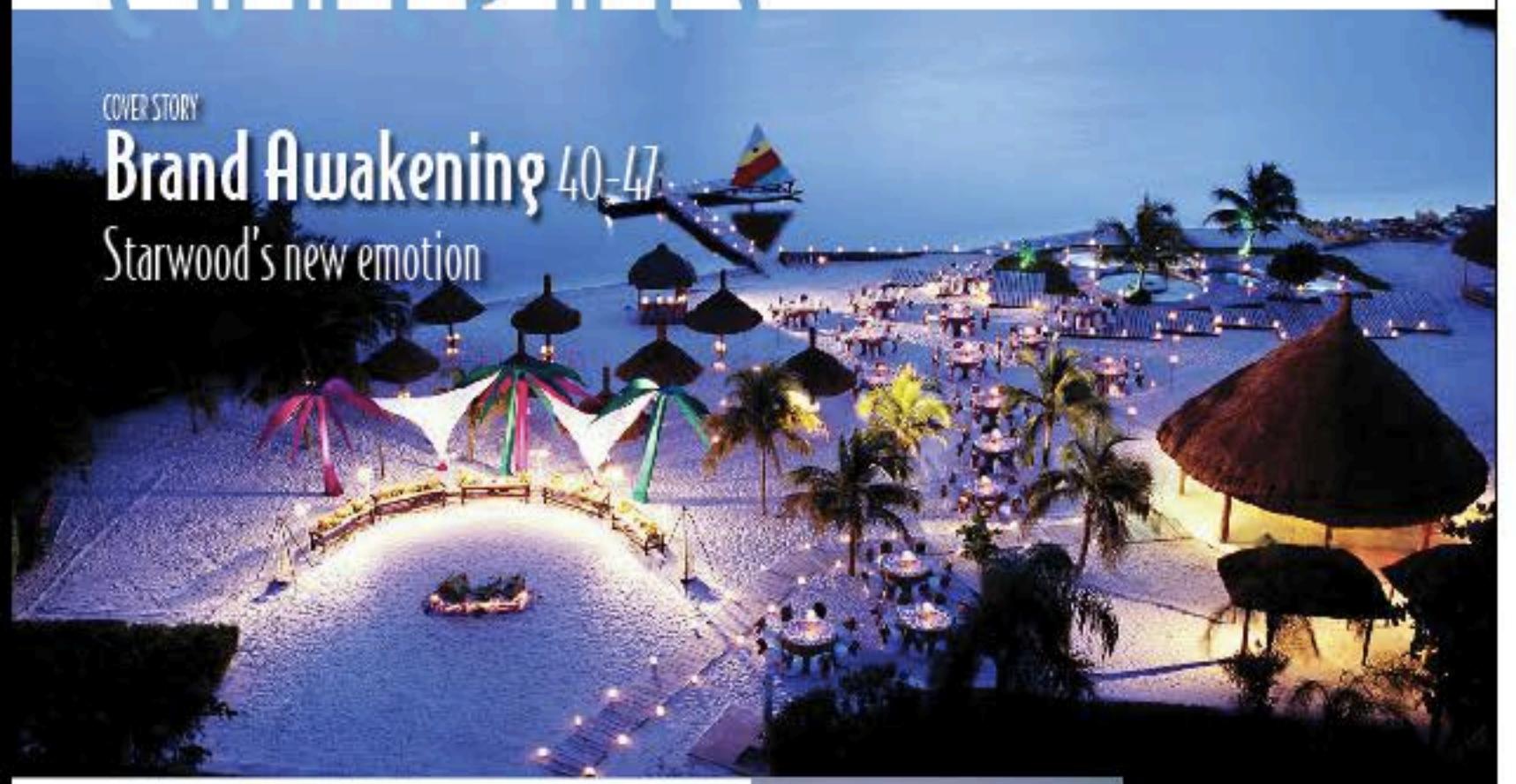
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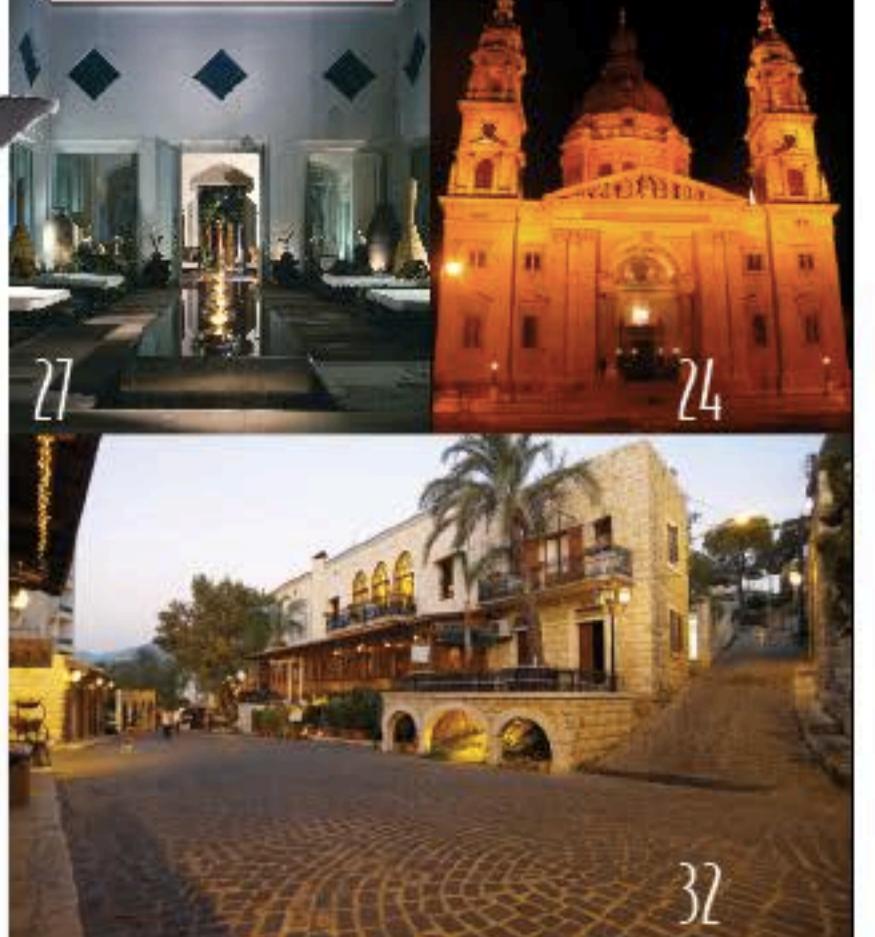
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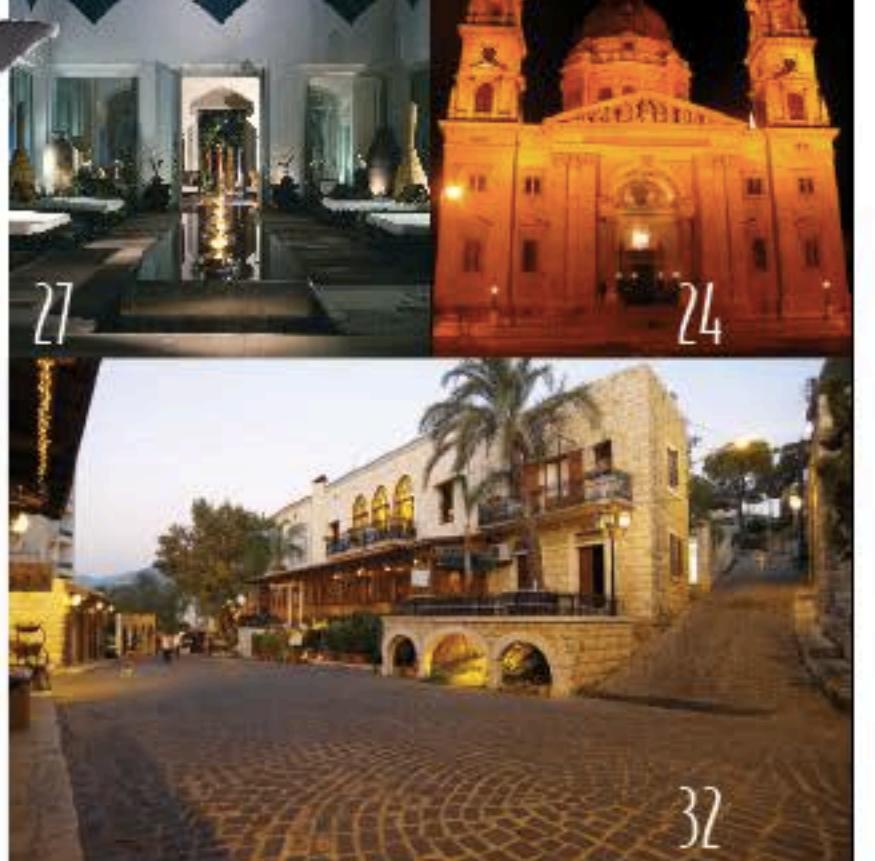
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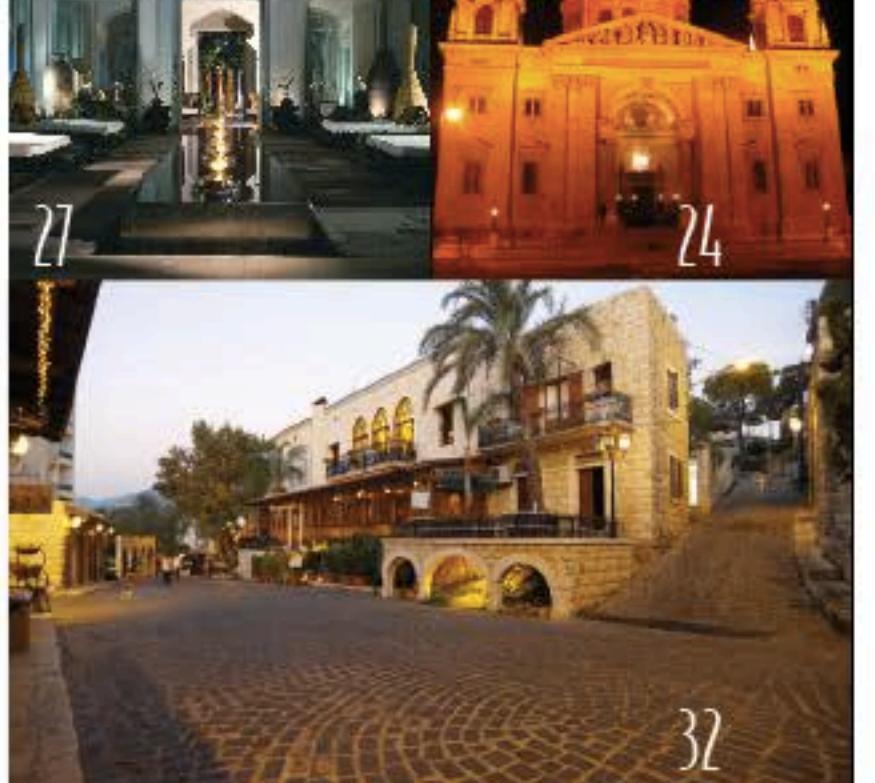
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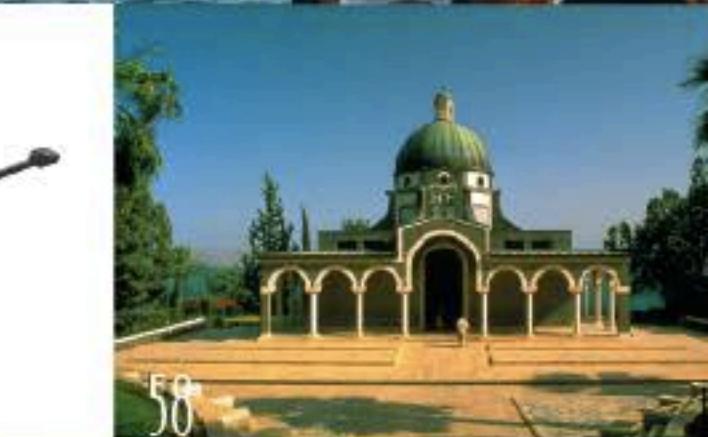
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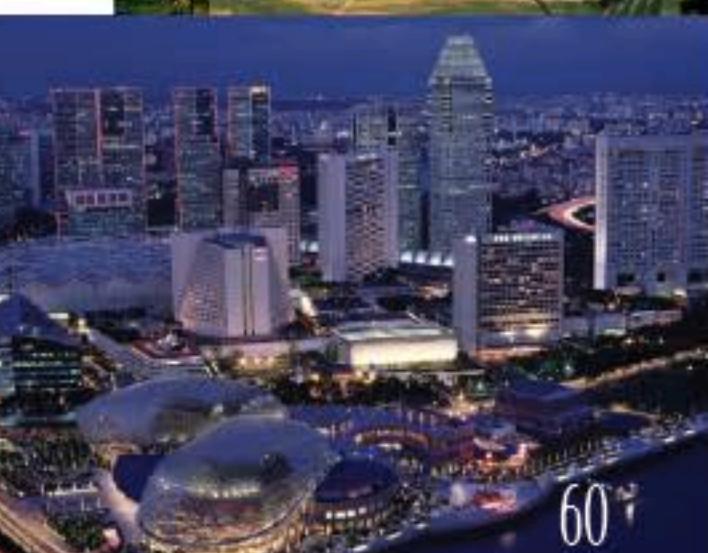
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To experience a personal touch

A few years ago Naomi Klein's *No Logo* bestseller made a huge impact when it was first published. For all the little rebels within us, we appreciated its direct attack on the corporate world. Its analysis of marketing brands was like a defiant Sex Pistols concert. But perhaps the most important point emphasised was the significance of brands and their manipulative subliminal culture.

Let's face it. We live in an environment surrounded by brands. Through advertising and million dollar campaigns, we are constantly faced with brands - whether we are driving our car down the highway past a huge Kit Kat chocolate bar billboard or staring at a Kellogg's cereal box during breakfast. All in all, we still prefer to choose.

When we check in a hotel, it is for different reasons: convenient location, appealing service, availability, costs or just because your secretary arranged everything for you and you could care less.

But in the end, you do care for your comfort and for your demands. So you check in your hotel expecting the best service - and when your host falls short of your demands that's when all hell breaks loose. And so what about the brand? Should you care?

According to Starwood, who has spent the past year working on defining their eight hotel brands, they have realised that a hotel stay should be an experience. And a unique one too. So the next time you step into a hotel property you should identify it - or lets say feel it - without having to look at the brand logo outside.

In short, a hotel chain should operate with passion like other brands do it. You step into a Virgin Megastore to purchase your latest U2 album, but once inside you see a group of people huddling around a pop artist promoting a gig - and then you grab a snack in their cafeteria. You board an airline - and while all you want to do is get to your destination as anxiously as possible - you are greeted warmly, given a pair of headphones that hooks up to a hundred TV channels and the experience turns out to be extra special. And so for you now, that brand means something.

It couldn't be more simple than that now, could it? Since brands are a big part of our lives and we love some of the experiences they give us, we have no choice but to choose an experience we love.

Check out our Brand Awakening cover story (pg 40) this issue and let us hear your point of view - email us at metravel@eim.ae.

Have a nice read and a great summer.



Maan Hamzi
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letters

Jam packed

I have just returned to Dubai and I am shocked at the number of new hotels that are popping up like weeds around the city. Although I'm aware of the hotel shortage, I can't imagine there is a need for so many five-star hotels. I think that hotel executives have gotten carried away with themselves and need to take a step back and seriously rethink their plans.

Omar Kassab
Dubai, UAE

You'll be glad to know that we will be addressing this issue, among others, revolving around the hotel industry in a special supplement on hotels in our Sept/Oct 2006 edition. You will read for yourself what the movers and shakers in the hotel business have to say.



Nice take off

Your Airline CEO supplement in the last issue of ME Travel was fantastic. As someone who works in the airline industry, I have not seen such a compilation of informative and intelligent interviews in any other publications. It is high time that a travel magazine takes on this sort of challenge and I commend you for an excellent issue.

Thomas Spreels
Doha, Qatar



Flight fight

Great job on your airline supplement. With so many new and evolving airlines in the region, it was interesting to read about the vision and mandate of each of these airlines. With so much competition and potential in this sector, it is necessary for people to understand where these airlines are coming from, and where they intend to go in the coming years.

Maya
Bahrain



Space fantasy

I read with interest your piece on space tourism (*Out of This World*). It's a fascinating concept but unfortunately, it appears that only the rich will be able to indulge their childhood fantasies for the time being. However, I'm hopeful that one day these incredible projects will become more accessible to the common man.

Tim Knightly
London, UK



Culture spot

I have lived in Sharjah for several years and I have seen its quiet development in the shadow of Dubai. The authorities have taken a sustainable approach to building up the emirate and I think that in 10 years time it will be a thriving tourist destination. While we do face many of the traffic problems similar to Dubai, its focus on familial and cultural experiences make it an ideal place to raise my children.

Raed Wehbe
Dubai, UAE

On track

News from the Middle East

AIRLINES · HOTELS · REAL ESTATE · AIRPORTS · DUTY FREES · YACHTS · EVENTS



[Hotels - Saudi Arabia]

Prince Alwaleed acquires Fairmont
The United States Federal Trade Commission has approved plans by Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz, Chairman of Kingdom Holding Company to acquire Fairmont Hotels and Resorts for \$3.9 billion. In January of this year, Kingdom Hotels International announced that it will acquire Fairmont Hotels & Resorts for \$3.9 billion, and it will merge with Raffles of Singapore making the combination equal to \$5.5 billion. The deal will give the Canadian

company two-thirds by affiliates of Kingdom Hotels International and one-third by Colony Capital Acquisitions and they will acquire all of Fairmont's outstanding common shares at a price of \$45 per share in cash. "We are delighted at the combining of Fairmont and Raffles, global leaders in high quality hotels," said HRH Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz Alsaud. "This acquisition will expand our global presence in the hotels and resorts sector and reflects our commitment to seeking significant and prominent investments."

[Hotels - UAE]

Intelligent workout

The Natural Elements gymnasium at Le Meridien Dubai has equipped its gym with the Fitlinxx computer system, adding an 'intelligent' dimension to the workout experience. Fitlinxx allows gym users to get maximum benefit from workouts by acting like a personal trainer to motivate members and monitor their programs,

coach them through workouts for better technique and track progress over time. On all strength equipment in the gym, Fitlinxx appears as an easy-to-read touch-screen display that's attached to each machine. For cardiovascular equipment, each machine's existing console is networked to Fitlinxx. The system can be accessed on workout-floor kiosks, at the staff computer station, or anytime/anywhere on the web.



[Hotels - Saudi Arabia]

Top honours for Ritz-Carlton

For the second year in a row, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company has been ranked first as the most prestigious brand by The Luxury Institute's Luxury Brand Status Index Survey. The hotel company took top honours over 18 other hospitality corporations among consumers with a minimum net worth of \$750,000. "We are especially pleased that we were rated highest for superior quality and making our customers feel special across all of their experiences," said Simon Cooper, president and CEO of The Ritz-Carlton.

"It is a tribute to the commitment to our guests from our ladies and gentlemen at our hotels and resorts around the world," he noted. The Luxury Institute is an independent and objective research institution. The institute provides a portfolio of publications and research that guide and educate high net-worth individuals and the companies that cater to them on trends, wealthy consumer rankings and ratings of luxury brands, and best practices.



[Airlines - UAE]

Club World gets taste of First

British Airways is giving business class travellers an opportunity to experience its First cabin when travelling between the UAE and North America. Passengers

purchasing Club World tickets to the USA and Canada for travel before 15 June 2006 will get a free upgrade to First between London and the USA or Canada in both directions. The upgrade can be confirmed at the time of booking and is subject to availability. Commenting on the offer, British Airways' Manager for the UAE, Deborah Frampton, said, "It's an excellent opportunity for our premium customers to experience two distinctive classes of travel for the price of one. Club World has experienced strong growth in the UAE and many of the customers are frequent flyers and Executive Club members. British Airways offers daily flights from Abu Dhabi to London and twice daily from Dubai to London with over 50 connecting flights a week to 22 destinations in North America."



[Airlines - France]

Mobile phones to be used on Air France planes

In early 2007 Air France will be the first airline to take delivery of a new A318 equipped with OnAir, an inflight system which allows mobile phones to be used on board without disrupting navigation. During a six-month period from March to September 2007 on services to Europe and North Africa, Air France will carry out trials on this aircraft with passengers, first of all by messaging and emailing only, and then with sound. During this phase, Air France will ask passengers to give their opinion on this facility by means of a questionnaire, which will be given to them during the trip. The findings of this study will decide whether the service will be extended or not to other aircraft in the fleet. This service will enable passengers to receive and send calls and SMS' on a mobile phone, receive and send emails on a laptop or PDA and access the internet in WAP/imeode. Leaflets will be distributed to passengers before the flight (explaining the service, how it functions, tariffs etc.) and flight attendants will make announcements during the flight. Patrick Roux, Head of Marketing, said "Air France has always shared the full benefits of the latest technology with its passengers, while endeavouring to preserve the flight as a haven of peace and well-being."



[Airlines - Survey]

Internet a must for passengers

Global air travelers prefer airlines that offer in-flight Internet connectivity and even adjust their travel plans and choice of airline to be on Internet-connected flights, according to a survey released today by Connexion by Boeing, a business unit of The Boeing Company. The Connexion by Boeing service, which launched commercially in May 2004, is currently offered on more than 180 routes daily worldwide and is the only in-flight, high-speed Internet, data and entertainment service available today. In an effort to track service trends, Connexion by Boeing teamed with Burke Research to conduct a global biannual study on

customer satisfaction and loyalty. The recent research findings confirm that we're on target to provide passengers with the best in-flight connectivity experience possible, and to provide airlines with new ways to differentiate their brand and retain and attract new customers," said Laurette Koellner, president of Connexion by Boeing. "The most recent study, which focuses on the second half of 2005 and includes responses from nearly 3,200 participants* worldwide, shows that in-flight Internet is changing traveler behavior: 83 per cent of those surveyed said that the availability of the Connexion by Boeing service will have an impact on future travel plans and their choice of airline carrier."

[Real Estate - UAE]

Lagoons takes environmental route
Sama Dubai, the international real estate investment and development arm of Dubai Holding, has commenced the construction of the Dhs 5 billion (\$1.3bn) infrastructure works for The Lagoons, its 6.5 million square metre Dubai Creek waterfront project located near the heart of Dubai. The investment will cover the cost of marine works, bridges, roads, elevated roads and water treatment facilities.

Sama Dubai intends to be a real estate industry leader in the quality of its projects and protection of the environment. All the necessary measures are being taken to ensure the highest standards are maintained throughout the



course of construction. Comprehensive research of the environment, through extensive environmental impact

assessments, is being carried out in coordination with Dubai Municipality and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

**[Airlines - UAE]**

Emirates lounges in Germany
Emirates has opened dedicated lounges for its First and Business Class passengers at both Munich and Frankfurt airports. Emirates serves both cities with double daily services to and from Dubai. The opening of these lounges coincides with the start of the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

The 620-square-metres lounge in Munich can also be used by Gold members of the airline's frequent flyer programme, Skywards. The Emirates lounge is modelled on the carrier's award-winning lounges at Dubai International Airport, and is part of Emirates' multi-million investment programme to install lounges at key airports across its global network.

Emirates lounges boast a wide array of passenger amenities including extensive seating areas with a large number of comfortable leather armchairs, and flat-screen TVs situated throughout showing the latest news and lifestyle programmes from a selection of global channels. The lounge will also offer full shower facilities. Germany is the third European destination on the airline's network to offer dedicated Emirates Lounges, following the launch of similar lounges at London Gatwick and Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport and its own dedicated lounge facilities in New York JF and in cities across Australia and New Zealand. Emirates flies two non-stop flights each day between Munich and Dubai, and Frankfurt and Dubai, with morning and evening departures.

**[Real Estate - UAE]****Central Park Towers in Dubai**

Falconcity of Wonders, an ambitious falcon shaped tourist and recreational city being set up within Dubailand, has announced the launch of Central Park Towers NY. Remodelled after the towers surrounding New York City's world-famous Central Park, the project will be located at the base of the Falconcity of Wonders project in the feet of the Falcon beside the international cities such as Rome, Venice, Beirut, and India, and will comprise a total of 24 towers made up of residential, commercial and hotel towers.

At the centre of this project will be a 93,000-square-metre park to complete the recreation of New York City's famous Central Park. Moreover, there will be 29 floors dedicated to parking, which will be strategically located to ensure easy access for residents and visitors.

[Travel - Middle East]**IATA serious about safety**

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) recently honoured Egypt for its leadership in promoting safety by incorporating the IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) into its safety oversight programmes. The association's 261 members, representing 94 per cent of scheduled international traffic, commended the Arab Civil Aviation Commission for the resolution passed at its recent General Assembly urging its sixteen member states to require IOSA registration for any carrier based in their territories or using their airports. The IATA Annual General Meeting also formally approved a resolution requiring that all IATA members be IOSA registered. All new members of the association will be required to pass IOSA before they join. And all existing members must contract for an IOSA audit by the end of 2006 and complete an audit by the end of 2007 to retain membership.

**[Airlines - UAE]****Backseat comfortable**

Etihad Airways' premium guests flying from Abu Dhabi to the United Kingdom can now travel to their meetings in style. The newly launched Etihad Chauffeur service entitles Diamond and Pearl Zone Guests to a luxury limousine transfer service to or from their locations, when they are arriving or departing from either London Heathrow or Gatwick airports. Plans are also underway to introduce the service to Manchester later this summer. Luxury chauffeur services company Chauffeurcar is fulfilling the transport needs for Etihad's top-tier guests by providing prestigious marques, including the BMW 7 series and Mercedes S Class for Diamond guests, and Mercedes E Class and Volvo S80 for Pearl guests.



of airline industry professionals, Qatar Airways came up trumps with three distinct awards, named after the late British aviation pioneer Sir Freddie Laker.

The awards recognise the world's best travel loyalty programmes in the aviation and hotel industries as voted by frequent travellers

worldwide. Qatar Airways' Privilege Club won awards for the Best Elite Level, Best Website and Best Bonus Promotion during 2005. In addition, Privilege Club was named among the top five in a number of other categories.

[Airlines - Qatar]**Qatar Airways grabs 3 Frederies**

Qatar Airways' Privilege Club is riding on the crest of a wave by winning a clutch of prizes at the annual Freddie Awards held in Los Angeles. Among a gathering

codeshare destination will strengthen a relationship with Lufthansa that has been in place for many years. Both airlines currently codeshare on flights between Doha and Frankfurt, a route operated by the two carriers. Qatar Airways also applies its QR code on flights operated by Lufthansa between Frankfurt and Geneva, as well as Munich and Geneva. In addition, Lufthansa applies its LH code on Qatar Airways' flights between Doha and Munich.





[Real Estate - UAE]

High design comes to Dubai
Galadari Investment Office announced an exclusive collaboration with YOO, a design company owned by Philippe Starck and John Hitchcox, to develop residential properties in Dubai. YOO will provide complete concept design for the interiors of G-Tower, Galadari's's premium residential development.

Philippe Starck will design all the apartments, amenity spaces and pool area in the tower. The G-Tower and YOO by Starck is the first branded residential tower in the region. Dubai will join international cities that boast YOO-designed properties, including London, Sydney, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, New York, Toronto, Copenhagen and Miami. YOO is a collaboration of the experience of designer Philippe Starck matched with developer John Hitchcox. Projects are designed and marketed with development partners and investors.

[Airlines - UAE]

Out of West Africa

Emirates is further extending its network of flights to West Africa, bringing the growth market closer to Dubai. Effective 8th June, the airline will introduce one extra flight per week to its recently launched Abidjan operation. With this addition, the Dubai-based carrier's presence into the Ivorian city will grow to a total of five weekly flights; operated every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. The aircraft will be equipped to offer 12 First, 42 Business and 183 Economy class seats, along with 17 tonnes of cargo capacity.

The additional capacity is forecasted to benefit Ivorian traders of coffee, cocoa beans, and palm oil to further their trade in the Middle East, Far East and Europe.



It will also cater to the increasing demand from neighbouring West African countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Republic of Guinea. Emirates is fortifying its presence in West Africa and positioning itself as a strong partner for the region's trade-oriented economy, with flights from Dubai to three countries in the region, Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.



[Real Estate - UAE]

Island Fever

Abu Dhabi's Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC) which is overseeing the mixed-use development of Saadiyat Island, which lies just 500 metres offshore the UAE's capital city, has pledged to protect archaeological sites uncovered on the island. Saadiyat Island is being developed in three phases to transform the unique 27 square kilometre natural asset into a strategic international tourism destination. "Over 20 archaeological sites have been identified on Saadiyat Island, most of them concentrated in two groups on rocky outcrops and dating back to the late Islamic period, over the last few hundred years," explained Mubarak Al Muhairi, Director General of Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA) and Managing Director of TDIC. "The discoveries include fireplaces, the remains of small buildings and scatters of pottery and seashells which give an indication of the way of life of former Saadiyat inhabitants."

[Real Estate - UAE]

New pearl in town

Abu Dhabi is to get a new contemporary five-star coastal landmark. The Emirates Pearl is a joint venture project between Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC), the company charged with leveraging the tourism assets of the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA), and the Atlas Group, a leading telecommunications company in the UAE. The hotel and serviced apartment resort, including 240 metre-high tower, will be built at a cost of Dhs 500 million (\$136mi) on the capital's Khalidiya coast, opposite the prestigious seven-star Emirates Palace Hotel.

The tower, which houses 352 spacious rooms and suites and 104 luxuriously furnished apartments all with balconies and Gulf views, sits on a 22-metre high, five-storey podium which features a 20-metre high atrium with five restaurants, service centres, offices, a gym, hair salon, spa, meeting rooms, business centre and shops. Serviced apartments are a mix of one, two and three-bedroom units.

The resort will also have a private penthouse complete with helipad and two Presidential suites with their own private entrance, swimming pool, meeting rooms and lounges. Executive floor guests will benefit from an indoor swimming pool.



[Tourism - Middle East]

Austria charms Arab travellers

A recent study states that Austrian managers are some of the most charming contributors to globalisation. It is thought that not only are they efficient and innovative but they are exceptional in relationship management and it appears this is attributed to their 'Austrian charm'.

"This is our special way of dealing with people," says Arthur Oberascher, head of Austrian National Tourist Office. "After all, this is what we have learned in the course of our history as a country with many different peoples. It is a quality we automatically absorb". Likewise, the Arabs have their own special way of putting people at ease and showing their hospitality. It is very common for Arabs to share a convivial conversation with someone they have just met although they may not be in

the mood for them. In the Arab world, this is called mojamalah - to tell a person something that makes him or her happy, even though it might not be entirely true.

It is such respect and consideration for fellow human beings, giving them precious time by listening and sharing moments of each other's lives that define mojamalah and Austrian charm. The Austrian tourist board is looking to include such charm in its future offerings. It is being helped by the University of Cologne that has established a separate faculty to study charm and how it can enhance service at customer level. But how can service be taught to comprise professionalism as well as charm? "We shall soon be starting a research project to deal with this question so that eventually we shall have the tools to plan holidays that are full of 'Charm,'" answers Oberascher.

[Cruising - UAE]

Dubai sets sail

An increased demand in tourism interest from European and Far Eastern visitors will soon see a greater number of cruise ships moving through Dubai. A senior official of SNTTA Emir Tours, a member of the Dubai based Liberty Investment Company, said that world-class facilities, liberal environment and a diversity of attractions have all helped in positioning Dubai in the European market as a leading port of call for major cruise liners operating out of Europe.

"Tourists are extremely keen about enhancing their cruise ship experience by seeking destinations that are exceptionally safe, warm & friendly and offer a good mix of culture and heritage," explained Jyoti Panchmatia, General Manager of SNTTA Emir Tours. "Dubai has all those elements and more. At the same time, it offers a blend of modernity and tradition, making it an exotic destination for international travellers." According to 2005 estimates from Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing estimates, 12,000 visitors arrived at the Dubai Cruise Terminal last year making it the biggest port of call for international cruise ships in the Middle East.





[Technology - Middle East]

E for Express

United Parcel Service is streamlining the delivery process for imported goods through the Dubai customs' e-clearance system. Saving valuable transit time by automating the clearance process, the new system enables goods being shipped to the UAE to be processed even before they touch down in Dubai.

In the previous customs environment, UPS officials would take paperwork by hand to the Cargo Village and queue for a hand-typed bill of entry. With the e-clearance system designed especially for express couriers such as UPS, the company can now input the information required by customs directly into the e-clearance system for online approval. "The UPS system enables us to have a manifest that details exactly which shipments are on each flight, so we can literally clear these items for delivery before they touch down in the UAE. We can print our own commercial invoices



and bills of entry, which not only eliminates the queuing process, but also means that customers get their goods faster," said John Tansey, the company's UAE-based general manager.

With online e-clearance system, the courier company now has a database of all shipments with electronic bills of entry in case any clarification is required at a later date.

[Technology - Middle East]

Lean mean screen machine

Middle Eastern airports are set to see new American technology which promises to dramatically enhance the passenger security screening process at airports. The newly developed SmartCheck Personnel Screening System uses X-ray technology to detect any objects, metallic or non-metallic, concealed under a person's clothing by reflecting an X-ray beam from a passenger to a detector to create a photo-like image that is easy to interpret and understand.

The system's software incorporates algorithms that ensure only an outline of a person's body is displayed to eliminate privacy concerns. The result is a safe personnel screening system that ensures a person's privacy while providing an effective screening process for identifying weapons, explosives, drugs and other illegal substances in high-threat environments.

The system fits within standard doorways and is far less intrusive and time consuming than a pat down search. American Science and Engineering (AS&E), developers of the new system, say that the device could make the intrusive and time-consuming pat-down searches obsolete. "With this system as a primary screening method there should be little need to resolve false alarms with a secondary inspection, thereby improving the efficiency of the screening process," explained Anthony Fabiano, CEO of AS&E. The system was showcased at Airport Build and Supply Exhibition which took place in Dubai in June.

Steal deals

[Hotel Summer Offers]

Ritz-Carlton Dubai



The Ritz-Carlton, Dubai is offering a deluxe room for Dhs825 per night for a single or double occupancy. Alternatively, pay 50% extra on the room rate and stay in a Deluxe Suite for Dhs1235 per room per night. (Valid until 31 August, 2006)



Le

Meridien Al Aqah

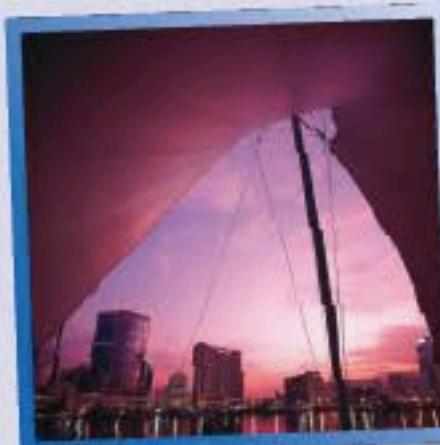
Le Meridien Al Aqah, is offering a welcome respite from city life with rates starting from just Dhs 299 (\$81) per person per night. Set against the majestic Hajjar mountain range, the resort provides an unparalleled level of service as well as first rate dining and leisure facilities. Guests who take advantage of this special offer - which is valid until September 15, 2006 - will also receive complimentary breakfast in addition to a meal at Views restaurant.

Intercontinental Resort and Spa

Mzaar

Lebanon's InterContinental Mountain Resort and Spa Mzaar, located just an hour's drive from Beirut, is offering three special summer escape packages to choose from, including a 5-night complete rejuvenation package and a one-week 'Discover Lebanon' sightseeing holiday.

The Mzaar Mountain Summer Vacation Packages range from 5-nights to 1 month, with guests receiving accommodation with full Mzaar breakfast, daily lunch or dinner in one of the resort's eleven restaurants, daily fresh fruits and hot beverage service and complimentary airport transfers. Valid until the end of September.



Intercontinental Dubai

For the fantastic price of only Dhs 410 (excluding taxes) stay at Intercontinental Dubai and take advantage of all the great facilities it has to offer to relax and unwind including 11 restaurants, 3 bars, a traditional Arabian Dhow, a Cake Shop, 24 hour leisure facilities and much more! Open to all UAE and Qatar residents until 21st August this package offers the perfect opportunity to relax and enjoy with loved ones.

Other deals

[Airlines - International]

Children Vacation for Free

This summer British Airways Holidays is offering a chance for families to save



money when they travel to exclusive British Airways online destinations in the UK, Europe, Canada and the USA. The offer enables two adults to travel to a destination of their choice from the ba.com list and have their two children stay with them for free.

[Car Rental - Oman]

Sultan of the road

Up until July 15th, travellers to Oman who lease a vehicle from the Oman page of the Thrifty Car Rental website (www.thrifty.com) will receive a 10 per cent discount on economy, compact, mid-size and full-size cars. Those wishing to explore the country's famous mountainous and desert terrain will benefit from a discount of 20 per cent upon renting a full-size 4x4 vehicle.

Thrifty has also announced enhancement of their rental fleet which now features a full line of vehicles, including Honda Accord, Nissan Patrol and Toyota Landcruiser, all of which will be accessible to visitors to Oman.

"With temperatures soaring across the region, Oman, with its pristine beaches, rugged coastline and fascinating cultural heritage is able to offer the perfect antidote for those wishing to 'escape' for a few days," said Ijtiba Yasin, Thrifty's Oman manager.

"What's more, our excellent offer on 4x4's will enable visitors to enjoy - or perhaps endure - some exhilarating off-road driving through the country's



[Real Estate - UAE]

Grand entrance

ETA Star, a leading property developer in the UAE, has partnered with Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank (ADCB) to offer an attractive limited period promotion for the newly launched "The Grandeur Residences" at the Palm Jumeriah Crescent. Customers can take advantage of a special interest rate of 5.99 per cent for six months, for loans booked during the promotion that runs till April 15th, 2006, thereafter the rate will automatically revert to the bank's standard variable rate.

[MICE - UAE]

Dubai bidding for conferences and conventions up to 2020

After the With Dubai now hosting many international meetings, the Dubai Convention Bureau, Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing and the UK-based Janet Sealy Partnership are marketing Dubai in Europe as a leading associations destination and are continuing to bid for global conferences and conventions until 2020 which demonstrates that the emirate can host congresses and conferences of all sizes from a few hundred to several thousand delegates and win bids against more established worldwide destinations.

Awadh Seghayer Al Ketbi, director of the DCB, said: "We have succeeded in promoting Dubai as an events destination as well as in the incentives market. We are preparing ourselves to secure enough business for the future. Working with JSP will contribute towards achieving our goals. We are bidding for conferences and conventions until the year 2020 bearing in mind the infrastructure and facilities that the emirate will gain during this period."

The DTCM announced the DCB in March 2003 to meet the growing demand of the MICE industry and to promote the emirate as an international business tourism destination. DCB supports Dubai's convention hotels and venues by marketing their facilities regionally and internationally and bids on behalf of Dubai for international events. The bureau is targeting 750,000 additional guest nights from the international rotating meetings market by 2008, generating cumulative revenues for Dubai's hotels in excess of \$200 million.



[Airport Hotels - GCC]

Yo! We dig this place!

Yotel, the world's most unique hotel, has officially confirmed that it will open its first two hotels at London Heathrow and London Gatwick in mid 2006, following a major investment by Kuwaiti based IFA Hotels & Resorts, a subsidiary of International Financial Advisors.

The long awaited Yotel concept will be developed throughout the world in prime city centre and airport locations.

Yotel was created by Yo! founder Simon Woodroffe and Yotel CEO Gerard Greene, who were seeking to develop a product that offered low cost luxury accommodation. The idea for Yotel was conceived by Simon, who decided to translate the language of luxury airline travel into a small capsule-style hotel which Gerard evolved into today's reality.

After three years of development, they have announced the first sites, and proffered "the delivery of luxury at a low cost", which they say requires a



quantum leap in thinking and design.

The Yotel concept uses the language of airline travel and offers a business class experience for less than \$120 a night.

Designed by Priestman Goode, who have helped Airbus define the interior of the A380, the 'cabins' are 10 meter square and feature rotating double beds, techno walls, sophisticated lighting, pull down desks, monsoon shower, flat screen TV and wi-fi access. Cabins can be

booked in blocks of four hours enabling delayed and transfer passengers to relax privately in a hotel environment.

However, the most advanced element of Yotel is its windows, which will face onto the corridor creating a "street", while at the same time providing complete light and privacy at the guest's wishes. This will allow Yotel to open in tricky central city locations, airports, rail hubs and even underground.

[Real Estate - UAE]

Living in the city

Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank and the Ilyas & Mustafa Galadari Group have this week agreed to arrangements whereby buyers of both residential and commercial units within the City of Arabia will be eligible for mortgage loans from the bank. This attractive scheme is available primarily

for customers resident in the UAE and covers the wide spectrum of offerings within the City of Arabia. For residential mortgages the scheme allows a maximum 90% loan over a 25 year loan period,

whereas the loans for the commercial units, (offices), allows a maximum of 70% loan value.

The City of Arabia is located in the heart

of Dubailand and covers 20 million sq feet of land, hosting the world's largest shopping mall, the Mall of Arabia, the unique theme attraction, The Restless Planet as well as 34 residential, commercial and mixed use tower blocks; in addition to the Wadi Walk. Construction has already begun on the project with piling underway for the Mall of Arabia.



Travel and trade

Tourists of all sorts directly consume goods and services. Pleasure seekers purchase resort accommodations, entertainment tickets, souvenirs and food, some of which need to be imported. Business visitors may be negotiating sales or purchase of goods or services or may be setting up joint ventures. Government agents may be negotiating bilateral or multilateral trade agreements. Thus travel may lead to increased international trade. Similarly, when there is trade between two countries in physical goods or services, there will be even more business travel between two countries. Business people may return for leisure

purposes or take the families to visit the

countries where they do business.

Tourism receipts not only provide foreign exchange earnings but also contribute to trade diversification, stabilise the foreign currency receipts, and provide a cushion against the instability of merchandise exports. The benefits accrued from tourism may however partly be negated by 'leakage'. The globalisation of tourism has seemingly produced a downside effect for developing countries, which risk greater leakage through marginalisation by the creation of industry conglomerates in most advanced nations. The benefits of liberalisation are being threatened by the potential for anticompetitive practices of a few dominant tourism suppliers in world tourism market.

As a service industry, tourism is subject to international trade negotiations and agreements and the effective implementation of provisions.

Increasing participation of developing countries and progressive liberalisation provide an appropriate framework for



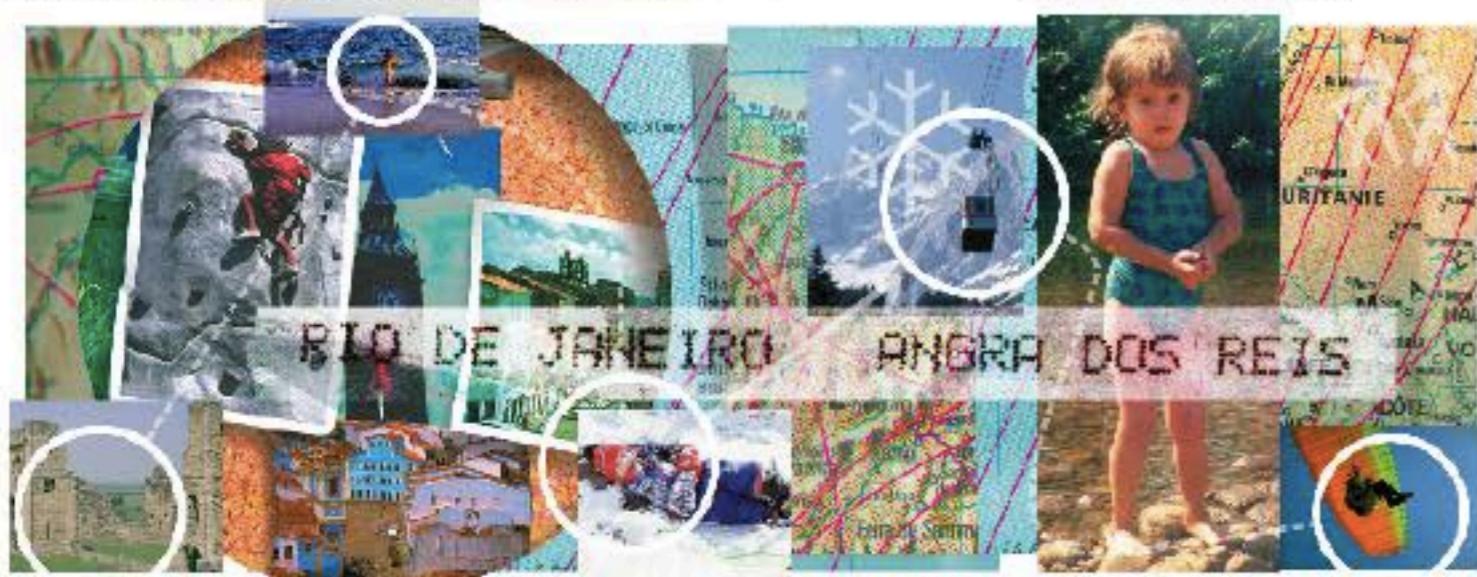
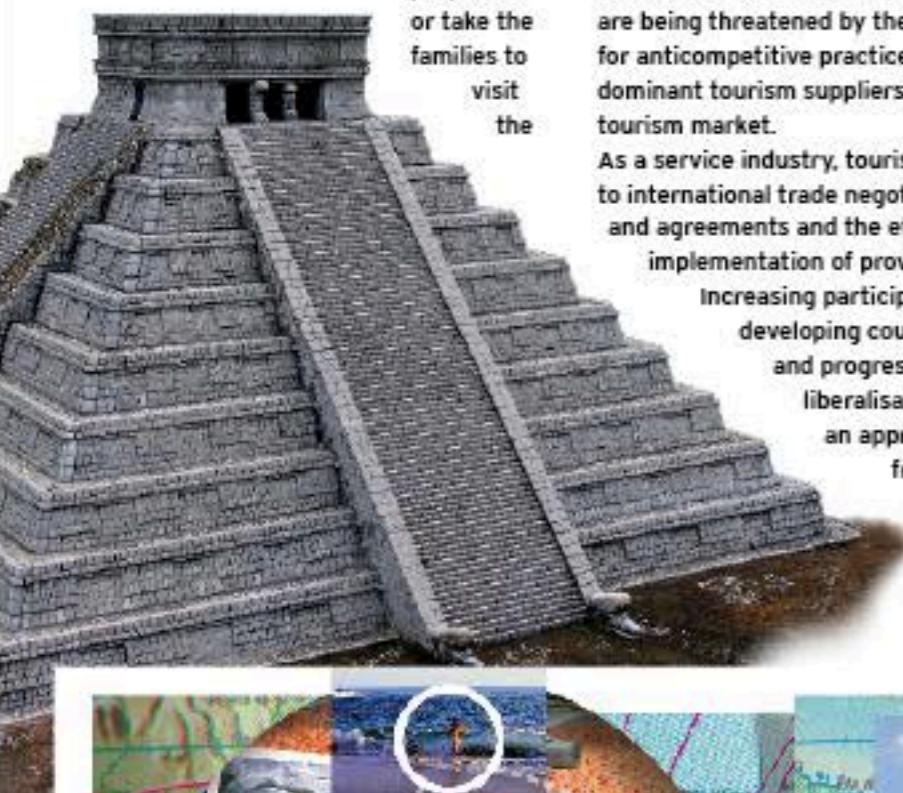
developing countries

to request specific commitments from advanced countries to support the economic and social viability of their tourism industry.

The developing countries should therefore step up their participation in international agreements by strengthening their negotiation skills and making more objective analysis of their national problems. Particular attention should be paid to the prevention of predatory behaviour with anticompetitive practices by dominant integrated suppliers in the originating markets.

At the same time, they should try to create adequate framework for environmental sustainability of tourism and preservation of domestic cultural heritage. Other domestic policy reforms should include easing domestic regulations, enlarging market access, human resource development and investment in tourism infrastructure.

Habibullah Khan is associate professor at Universitas 21 Global's Graduate School of Business



[Exhibitions - UK]

Change will do you good

Never before has the travel and tourism industry been faced with such relentless upheaval, change and development, claimed Fiona Jeffery, managing director of World Travel Market.

"Change is now a permanent part of our lives, moving faster almost every day", said Ms. Jeffery. "No one can manage a business without being able to anticipate where trends and developments will lead us in the future." "All of us need to be more flexible, more in tune with the latest thinking if we are to retain and expand business.

"World Travel Market is changing too, to reflect new initiatives, themes and concepts that will help industry professionals to ride the rollercoaster of the next few years."

She said that this year's will provide the latest market intelligence on industry trends and hot topics. A total of 202 destinations and over 48,000



professionals are expected to attend. New WTM initiatives tracking trends and innovation likely to shape the future include a new online facility for

delegates, a unique travel technology show, major sector emphasis on airlines and hotels, space tourism and focus on one of the most important new sectors sweeping the world - health, spa and wellness tourism.

"World Travel Market is a barometer of those forces that are constantly changing the way we think and how we respond to customer demand, their lifestyles, differing moods and preferences, ages, health and vitality," commented Jeffrey.

"Almost everything that is altering the way we live our lives is an essential transforming dynamic in the development of international travel and tourism.

"It is for this reason that World Travel Market changes each time and why no one can afford to miss out on the business opportunities available at this year's event."

World Travel Market takes place on November 6-9, 2006 at ExCeL in London.

[Hotels - UAE]

Ahoy Captain!

The Dhow Palace Hotel is now open for business. The new five-star hotel located in the heart of Bur Dubai's commercial district with proximity to the Airport, World Trade Centre, BurJuman Shopping Mall, has done its soft opening and is ready to receive guests.

As the name suggests, the Dhow is traditional in roots, value and hospitality yet, non traditional and unconventional in a lot of other ideas and ideals.

The hotel with ship theme has 282 luxurious guest rooms which includes Commodore and Captain Suites. Each room is equipped with a plasma TV, interactive entertainment facilities, high speed internet, in room safes and international direct dial telephones. The Deluxe rooms, on the other hand are designed and furnished in traditional Arabic theme.

The property has many outlets in which you can enjoy authentic foods. For the time being, only the Docklands, an all



day international dining restaurant, the Queens Quays, a bar lounge and the Anchor café are open for business. Several other theme restaurants are scheduled to open soon such as a Lebanese, an Italian, an Indian and a

Southeast Asian seafood specialty restaurant. In addition to this, there will be a steak house and a Fidel's cigar lounge.

The hotel also boasts a multi use ballroom for up to 500 guests.



[Security - UAE]

Tourist Trust

Dubai Police has established a specialized department to deal with concerns or problems of tourists. Dubai Police's Tourist Security Department was established in 2001, especially to cater to the tourism sector. "The main goal of the program is to provide fast services for a tourist to save money and time because a tourist's time is very precious," said Captain Abdullah Al Shamsi, Head of Tourism Coordination Section at the Tourist Security Department. Captain Al Shamsi said the department has initiated a number of programmes and urged other concerned departments to do the same by coordinating with them. The department has provided a 24-hour toll-free number and tourists can call about lost items, the location of certain places, misbehaviour or misunderstandings. Tourists can also contact the department at: t.s@dubaipolice.gov.ae.

[Yachts - GCC]

Going topless

Western Marine has rolled a new cool and sporty yacht, the Aicon 72. The Aicon brand is new to the GCC market and the success which Western Marine has achieved by selling 2 Aicon 56s has prompted the new-born to be released. The Aicon 72 Open is the first model of this line. It is a concentration of technology, design and practicality, starting with the exterior lines that recall recent Aicon productions. It is distinguished by an innovative oversized porthole located directly at the master cabin.

This model is equipped with a rooftop that can be electronically opened; it has large windows and a door in crystal that closes the space entirely astern. Turning into the interior, there is a living room in front of which there is a fully equipped bar. Behind the bar there is a staircase that leads down into the lower bridge to the spacious and very functional kitchen area. Total privacy is guaranteed in the sleeping quarters



located in the lower bridge. Back on the main deck which boasts a spectacular view for clear navigation, the steering compartment is equipped with the most

modern electronic instruments. The overall length of the Aicon 72 is 23 metres. Maximum speed is close to 38 knots while cruising speed is 33 knots.

TRAVEL TRENDS

TRACKING TRAVEL AND TOURISM FACTS AND FIGURES

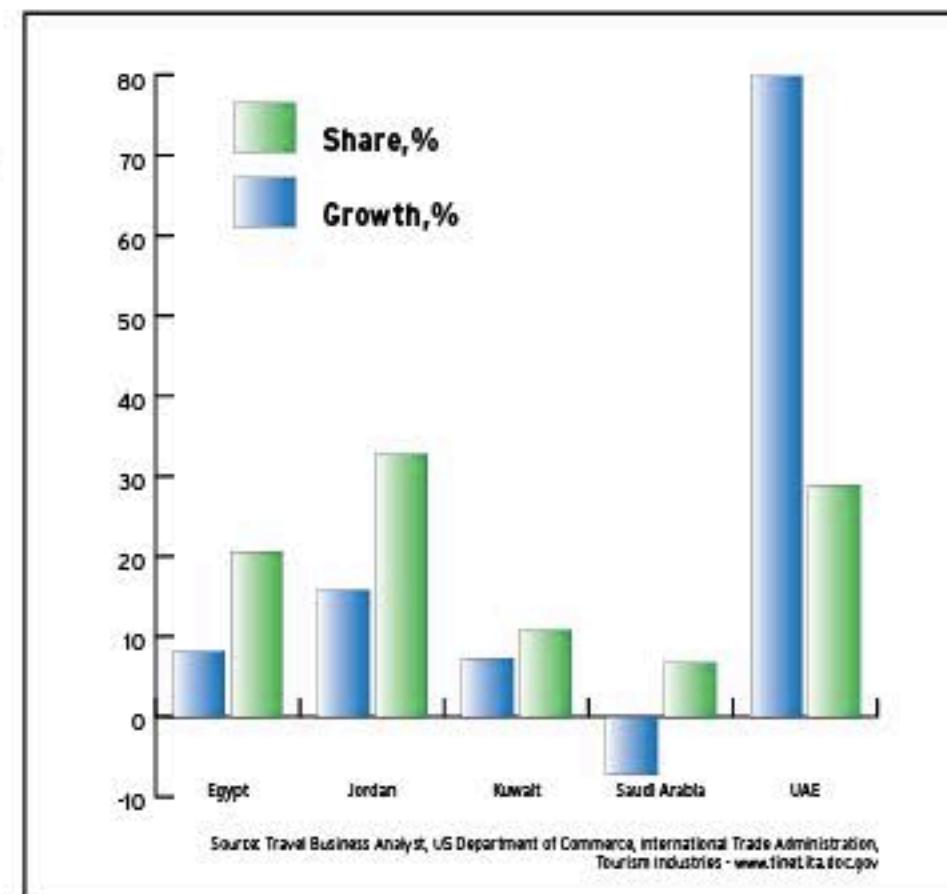


US AIR TRAVEL

There were significant changes to air travel patterns to-and-from the US in 2005. The overall Middle East* market grew at a much faster pace than total US air traffic - 24 per cent compared with 6 per cent. However, the region is still a tiny part of the US market. It grew from 0.4 per cent share in 2004 to 0.5 per cent in 2005.

Two-thirds of the increase in 2005 came from UAE/US traffic - which grew an additional 70,000 seats-filled, representing 29 per cent. That rapid growth took it into second place in the region, overtaking Egypt/US, and also increased its market share from 20 to 29 per cent. Jordan/US still remains the largest Middle East country-pair, and also grew fast in 2005 (at 16 per cent), but lost share from its 35 per cent in 2004, to 33 per cent in 2005.

(*Markets as listed in the table. Others are too small to fit into the criteria for separate listing in US Department of Commerce documents.)



TRAVEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council, the private sector competitor to the World Tourism Organisation) says the travel business in the Middle East will be worth US\$148bn this year - 4 per cent up.

(This measure should include all elements of travel, not just inbound and outbound, but investment and such items as the cost of purchasing the tyres on a rental car. We have restated some descriptions used by WTTC to make them closer to norms in the industry.)

Surprisingly, WTTC puts a higher value on the inbound industry than outbound - 44 per cent of the total for inbound, against 38 per cent outbound.

WTTC forecasts for 10 years into the future, although such a long-term outlook has less value now; five or seven years seems to be the practical maximum.

From here to 2016, WTTC forecasts average annual growth of 4.4 per cent. The main factor is faster growth in outbound travel - which would give it 43 per cent of the total in 2016, overtaking inbound, with 40 per cent. If we are surprised that inbound will be larger this year, we are also surprised at the opposite

outlook for 2016. Does WTTC not see much change in inbound markets - which are currently sluggish? And it expects faster growth for outbound. That could be based on

increasing citizen wealth; which seems certain in the oil-based economies, but surely Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, etc, will become poorer, partly because of that concomitant increase in their

FORECAST MIDDLE EAST TRAVEL PROFILE

Item	2016			2006		
	US\$b	AAGR ^{††} %	Share, %	US\$b	Growth ^{††} %	Share, %
Outbound & domestic travel:						
Personal travel spend	93	5.5	33.2	42	4.9	28.5
Business travel spend	28	5.6	10.2	14	9.0	9.3
Inbound travel:						
Visitor spend	56	5.2	19.9	27	6.0	18.5
Other spend	57	1.7	20.4	40	-1.0	26.8
Other:						
Government spending	7	2.4	2.3	4	4.7	2.6
Capital investment	39	4.4	14.1	21	5.2	14.3
Total	279	4.4	100	148	4.0	100

Notes: *Over 2005. AAGR = average annual growth rate, 2007-10. Source: World Travel & Tourism Council.



TUNISIA TROUBLES?

The main figures on Tunisia's visitor business in 2005 look fair - visitor arrivals up 6.4 per cent to 6 million; hotel occupancy up 3.6 points to 52.3 per cent; visitor length-of-stay (LoS) up from 5.1 to 5.8 days (up 14 per cent); visitor revenue up 5.2 per cent to \$309 million (TD402mn).

But on closer inspection:

- Decline in average spending by visitors. If visitors increased 6 per cent, and LoS 14 per cent, their spending

should have been much more than a 5 per cent increase - perhaps closer to 15 per cent.

- Most of the country's leading market sources were weak; growth in the overall total was due primarily to the second-largest market, France, which grew 14.6 per cent to 1.2 million visitors.

The largest, Libya, actually fell, by 2.2 per cent to 1.4mn arrivals; Algeria increased slightly, 1.8 per cent to 930,000; and Germany's increase was also slight, up 0.4 per cent to 570,000. Making up the top five was Italy, with a better growth rate - 5.5 per cent to 470,000.

news from around the world

Globetrotter

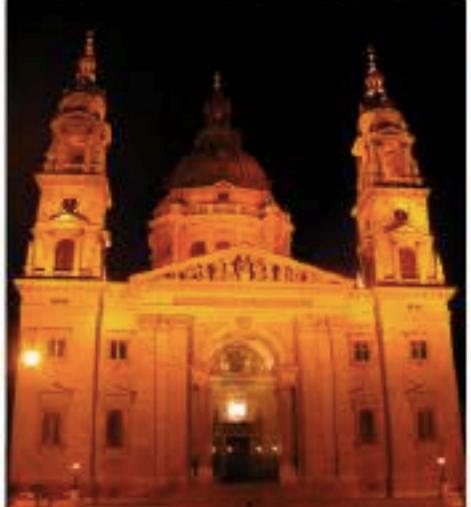


restaurants which offers pre-theatre dinners and drinks.

Summer Opera and Ballet Festival

(July-August)

The opera season in Budapest runs from the end of September to early June, however July and August sees some of the best opera and ballet during The Budapest, the Opera and Ballet Festival, which is staged at the magnificent State Opera House.



Summertime in Budapest

The Hungarian capital, Budapest, is a merger of two towns. On the west bank of the River Danube is Buda, the old medieval town with its quaint cobbled streets, and mixture of medieval and neo-classical buildings and on the eastern side is Pest, the administrative and business centre. Millions of visitors come from around the world each year to visit this beautiful city for its architecture, cultural offerings and business prospects. Here are some events you can catch this summer.



Summer Evenings in the Károlyi Gardens

(June 8 - July 29)

The courtyards of the Károlyi Palace stages classical concerts, theatre and dance performances, generally on Fridays and Saturdays. The palace gardens have some excellent

Sziget Island Festival

(August 9-16)

The deserted shipyard island of Hajógyári Sziget hosts one of the largest concerts in central Europe. This year's festival will feature international artist and DJs. Visitors can enjoy a number of dance and motion theatre performances during the week long festival as well. The location also serves as a site of art exhibitions, literary events and classical music concerts.

Festival of Folk Arts

(August)

The Folk Arts Festival held in the Buda Castle gives visitors a chance to see folk art and crafts from different regions of Hungary. Local artisans demonstrate traditional crafts, while other entertainment includes street performers, folk dance, music performances and puppet shows. On St Stephen's Day, there is a parade of master craftsmen and dancers and the

Travel Horrors

Travel horrors are an everyday reality for passengers, according to one of India's top experts in airport planning and management. Inderjit Singh, Executive Director of the Airports Authority of India, warned that an architect's dream can be a nightmare for passengers, and that millions are mistreated. Singh says the reality is that airport designers and operators are guilty of treating passengers with disdain, even contempt. "An air traveller, the customer, is often referred to as 'pax' – a horrible word – in airline and airport parlance," he told an audience of airport trade visitors during the exhibition's seminar program.

The air traveller is not a unit to be regarded as being of a basic standard, usually minuscule in size, somewhat lacking in both intelligence and general ability to find his way about."

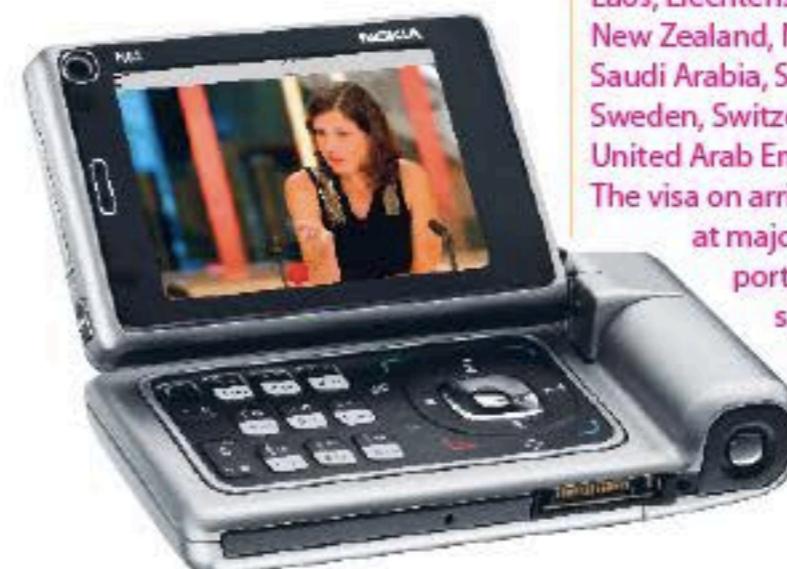
Inderjit sites over \$200 billion more is likely to be spent in the next two decades on the design, development and construction of new terminals and reconstruction and up-gradation of the existing

ones, the majority of them in the Middle East, Africa, Indian Subcontinent, CIS and the Asia-Pacific region. The need of the day is not a grandiose statement of architectural styles vying with one another for awards, but safe and secure terminal buildings that are functional and flexible, convenient and comfortable, spacious and aesthetically pleasant.



Mobile TV

TV addicts, rest assured. With Nokia's new phone you can now catch your favourite rerun of Sex and the City or watch the latest Al Jazeera news while on the move. The N92 model features an automatic channel finder, high-quality stereo sound, video transfer from PC, record and store broadcast TV programs, 2GB memory card, music player, FM radio, 2-megapixel camera and video recorder.



Indonesian Arrivals

As of June 2006, countries extended Visa on Arrival facilities by the Indonesian government have been increased to 52 to facilitate tourism as well as visits for social, business or official duties. The Visa on Arrival countries are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Laos, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the Maldives, the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates and United States.

The visa on arrival facility is at major international ports of arrival, such as Bali and Jakarta. A fee and passport size pictures are required.





Escape to Cyprus

If you're looking for sun and sand, mountain escapes and archaeological diggings, then try Cyprus this summer. History and tourism are comfortably intertwined on this Mediterranean island. Luxurious five-star resorts within walking distance of well-preserved Greek and Roman ruins offer every amenity the modern traveller has come to expect, from excellent pools and beachfronts to modern health spas.

In the country side, you can often stay the night in renovated traditional houses and indulge in farm-fresh Mediterranean cuisine. Meanwhile the island's sunny coastline, from Agia Napa in the East to Pafos in the West, offers wonderful beach resorts. There are crusader fortresses framed by tall cypress trees, Greco-Roman theatres carved out of cliffs and Byzantine buildings perched incredibly on mountaintops.

The Amara Spa

Park Hyatt - Dubai, UAE

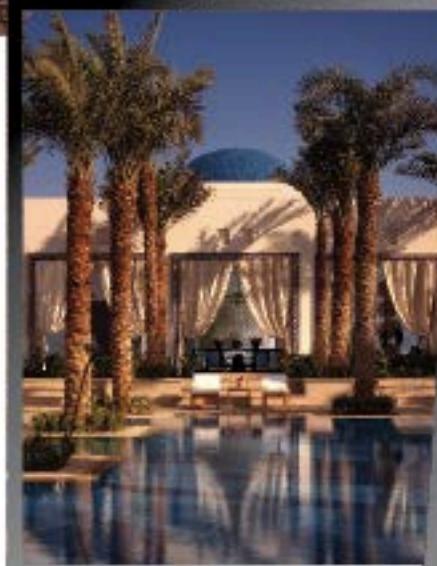
Treatments

Amara focuses on rituals using Europe's finest treatments and therapies with indigenous Arabian touches. The Shiffa, meaning 'healing' in ancient Arabic, is the world's premier organic aromatherapy line. Carita, a highly effective anti-aging skin care range, combines phyto-therapy products, specialised massage techniques and exclusive pro-lift technology to instantly lift and rejuvenate. These therapies are highly reflected in packages such as the Swedish massage, the Anne Semonin Phyto-Aromatic, Shiffa Exclusive and the Carita Ideal Intense.

Rituals

The use of the swimming pool, fragranced steam room, lounges, terraces and gymnasium is encouraged with any Amara ritual. All rituals include the

Spa's signature hand and foot cleansing along with other various welcome touches, including the unique outdoor tropical rain shower. Also, the welcome includes a selection of the



Spa's cuisine menu, Arabian treats and beverages.

Accommodation

Amara features eight spacious luxury suites, each with its own private outdoor terrace, lounge area, indoor and outdoor rain showers. In addition to the Amara Spa, Park Hyatt Dubai also features eight Spa Rooms. Each of these rooms has its own private steam room and treatment area. All rooms boast a stunning view of the Dubai creek from their balconies and offer an exclusive and extensive menu of Amara treatments administered by skilled therapists.

Products

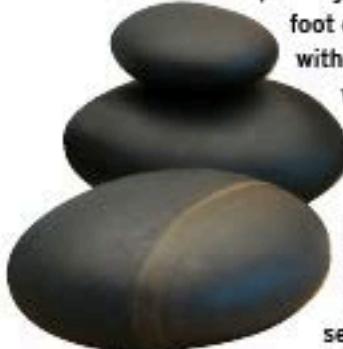


The Anne Semonin range utilises the vital forces of fresh herbs, plants and seaweeds to awaken the senses with unique formulations personalised for individual skin types. The Carita, a unique fusion of science and nature lies at the heart of this anti-aging skincare treatment. As for the 'Shiffa', its exquisite therapies reflect the ancient Arabian beauty philosophy with the use of pure and precious oils.

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Sleepy Town Awakes from Nightmare

When the Red Sea resort town of Dahab was bombed in April this year, Egypt's tourism sector also took a blow. But Tourism Minister Zuheir Garranah tells Hazel Heyer about the industry's resilience to such attacks and shares some promising figures.

Copts expected to have a blast on Sham el Nessim. Not of this kind. On the special day, the spring festival held on the Monday after Coptic Easter, it was certainly a good excuse for all Egyptians to party. On the occasion, it is customary to rise very early in the morning and enjoy the entire day walking miles of beach along the Mediterranean coast or the Red Sea. Typical activities mark the festive day, capped by fireworks. Not bombs. On April 24, coinciding with Sinai Liberation Day which commemorates Israel's 1982 withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, three suicide bombs ripped through the Red Sea resort of Dahab leaving 18 people dead. Half a dozen cafes and shop-fronts had been completely blown out. The seaside promenade, newly paved in pink and white, was covered in blood. Apparently locals and volunteer rescuers helping with the clean-up believe everyone was expecting a bomb attack sooner or later after the deadly strikes on Taba in October 2004, and Sharm el Sheikh in July 2005. At a time when occupancy rates in hotels and

touristy villages all over Sharm el Sheikh were over 90 per cent, early second quarter 2006, terrorists struck again. If anything, Egypt has again proven to be resilient. Tourism Minister Zuheir Garranah is convinced the industry will bounce back within weeks. He assured occupancy is back to normal. "In the last weeks, we were running on average 60-65 per cent on par with 2005, not exceedingly high because of the slowdown in the season." Winter is Egypt's peak season with the European clientele and summer with Arab clients from around the region. Fall and spring, the shoulder seasons, are popular with the locals though not necessarily the only period when Egyptians pack the hotels. People take off on Coptic and Muslim holidays, and when they can, extend weekends. A low-budget backpackers' resort, Dahab is currently being upgraded to capture the more affluent tourists, served by a newly-built Hilton and other resort hotels well away from the Internet cafe, henna and massage parlours and trinket shops popular with the divers, windsurfers and hippies.



However, as Garranah explained, it is a unique destination catering to a special niche of travellers. "It isn't in our plan to develop it for the time-being as we concentrate on other more popular, more visited destinations," he added. Traffic from Europe has definitely returned. Garranah indicated there is a slight dip in the bookings.

"However cancellations on previous



bookings did not exceed 1 to 2 per cent through the season until the end of October 2006. We are currently in the summer season. This slowdown starts to level off, adjusting to normal numbers. Yet domestic traffic shows no drop. It is not back up to normal business either because local flow has its seasons." Hotels were spared in the incident. The ones hit were shops in the bazaar and the cafeteria. They are again open for business. One of the three bombs that went off targeted Al Capone Restaurant, once one of the resort's most popular spots. Asked whether the ministry offers some sort of financial support to the victims in the tourist shops, Garranah said it is actually the business groups and cooperatives which help them.

"Donations we receive are taken to the shop-owners affected by the blast." Subsidies for charters running less than full and airline insurance on empty seats will not offer to bump up arrivals to Sharm. The minister confirmed they are not doing so - they don't think the market needs it as yet.

"There has been no significant drop bad enough to initiate charter flight subsidies, let alone push the tourism office to interfere in the market. We will only do so when the business slows down further; when the only way to promote tour operators' business is through covering empty seats on charters to help maintain their flights." Open-skies policy is still an issue for Egypt's airline traffic situation. The chief does not think open-skies will ever apply to Cairo. Meanwhile Sharm el Sheikh Airport which receives passengers to Dahab enjoys open skies.

"Today the only missing open-skies feature is in Cairo. Arrivals to Cairo come on domestic flights to Dahab. We are building a facility in Cairo which will accommodate 22 million passengers a year. But without an open-skies policy, not much will come out of our efforts or any proposed project."

"I am quite positive we can reach projected numbers and even better our forecast of 8.6 million visitors this year. We would like to target 9.3 to 9.6 million tourists this year. The government has targeted an additional 50,000 new rooms and 1 million new visitors every year. This growth will create 200,000 new jobs a year. We'll rev it up. The high season is still ahead of us."

As there are no filling in of the gaps in airlifts, no new events promoting Egypt will be added to the tourism calendar. "Nothing else special is to take place in 2006 to push sales," said Garranah. After all, things that could have boosted the market have already been considered and implemented. The minister confirmed several business reforms made this year have changed the business landscape. Business tax came down from 42 percent to 20 per cent. The hotel investment laws and creation of new establishments have

also been modified. "With hotel supply importations, we now have a more encouraging system which lessens the burden on the purchasing department. This applies to the customs regulations on desalination, air-conditioning and furniture," said Garranah. Duties related to hotel investments have been reduced. Privileges given to Egyptians who want to acquire properties in Egypt now also apply to foreigners. Garranah said foreigners are now treated like Egyptians in terms of buying, renting and registering properties.

"Restrictions to foreign buyers of real estate have been lifted as our residential tourism portfolio grows in time."

Is Dahab prepared to go on the residential tourism real estate listing? "We just changed the rules late last year. As we concentrate right now on the most requested real estate blocks on the Red Sea such as Hurghada and Marsa Alam, we also focus on Cairo, the Mediterranean Coast and Alexandria but not Dahab," said Garranah.

About investigations following the blast, he kept mum. "Egypt receives millions of tourists and we will continue to serve guests. Security and safety remains our top priority and most important commitment. Measures have been taken to a higher level. Despite terrorism becoming a global problem, people still choose to travel. They don't fear but only feel angry. As for us, such incidents can no longer dictate upon our lives and style of living."





Force of a Silver Bullet

James Evans, Cathay Pacific's UAE and Oman country manager, discusses his airline's growing business in the Middle East.



Is Cathay using hubs in the region?

With our alliances we connect people through Dubai from here but that's for people who want to do round trips through Asia and the Middle East. Otherwise, Cathay goes direct to Europe from Hong Kong.

Cathay flies from Hong Kong direct to Europe. But can Cathay utilise Dubai as a second hub?

No. Historically, our focus is to build up Dubai for our Middle Eastern points. We won't use it as a springboard per se.

Why not? Don't you see it as effective? For us and our market dynamics, we do focus on having the hub and network. We will build this up to feed the Hong Kong hub.

If you were to carry on to Europe and carry flights through Dubai, how would that affect Hong Kong or Cathay? We have the Dubai-Hong Kong market and there is a clear Hong Kong-Europe market. We serve European hubs several times a day. Passengers prefer Europe to Hong Kong flights so we build up Dubai as a spoke. It's about providing what passengers want. There are

clear markets for us from Europe. Our strength is to Hong Kong; and through our partner British Airways, their strength is to London.

With a reputation as one of the top airlines in the world, you can easily use other airports as secondary hubs. Our position is to strengthen our frequencies and that's our direction that we see as being profitable. We use Bangkok as a secondary hub. We fly from Dubai twice a week and you can say Dubai is somewhat a secondary hub. As for cargo, this is a different matter. From Dubai, we go to Manchester, Munich and Brussels. Dubai is a cargo hub.

Who are your main travellers on the Hong Kong-Dubai route? There's been double digit growth and that's on the same number of flights, so

there's a lot more travel from here. To break up that growth, it's been bigger on the front end than on the back end. Cathay Pacific is Hong Kong's airline and we want to show it off as a business and leisure destination. You have the Cathay approach to build awareness about Hong Kong and Cathay's network. You have the tourism board promoting it as a leisure and business destination. So there's significant growth in trade. The passengers' demographics do change by season as there is a season when business men travel to trade fairs in China, which are very important. In the summer you see a lot of destinations such as Hong Kong being so well connected to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and China and it's a hub from which people take their vacation.

How is mainland China and its airline competition affecting your business? When there is competition you have to work harder to attract business. No one knows Hong Kong like we do. And the airport has been voted first or second airport year after year and we have to ensure we give people a reason to choose Cathay. We have several interlines to China with our sister airline Dragon Air (which Cathay Pacific has 18 per cent ownership).

With the Dragon Air network into China, you really have a whole spectrum of destinations into the mainland.

What are your plans for growing Cathay in the Middle East?

From here, it's to provide the right flight times so we can connect passengers as

Where does Hong Kong stand in terms of airline traffic and is it decreasing with regional competition?

It's calmly developing as a destination. You'll have the size of the cake grow and it's about how you maintain your market share and provide a service to keep your market interested. There is a market for people wanting to see Hong Kong with a host of other destinations.

We've been flying to Beijing for two years and Shanghai is next this year. China is a very big focus for Cathay. Economically, Hong Kong has changed over the decades from being a manufacturing base to a service base. You've won Airline of the Year, how do you plan to maintain your status amongst the competition?

We have a 'service straight from the heart' philosophy which captures what we try to instil in the Cathay team. It's important that they know they are working for the best. Right from reservation onwards, every single step is important. The human touch is very important to us. The key differentiator is making sure we have the best people.

What are your plans for growing Cathay in the Middle East?

From here, it's to provide the right flight times so we can connect passengers as

conveniently as possible. We don't have plans to increase frequencies but we're always looking at profitable growth opportunities. The Middle East as a whole is important.

What are some new destinations?

Abu Dhabi is very important sales territory and there has been double digit growth as well. We fly from Bahrain, Riyadh and Dubai.

Are you planning to fly to Qatar?

We signed agreements to connect passengers on to other destinations. We serve the market but we don't fly there. **And the Levant?**

They are offline sales territory, we don't fly there. But they're interesting.

How about Cairo?

We have been looking at Cairo for some time. But it will depend on several factors that we're watching.

How are things looking for you, in terms of airline industry?

Our turnover grew 19.1 per cent. However our profit dropped 25 per cent but that was on the back of a 67 per cent increase in our fuel bill which is having a major impact on us. So clearly, the price of fuel is having an impact on industry.

We ordered 17 Boeing 777's and three Airbus A330's with an option to order 20 more 777's which is our biggest order ever. We're 60 years old with 101 air

crafts this year and making our single largest order ever.

Are there any plans to order the Airbus A380 double-decker?

We have not ordered A380's. To boost our capacity we ordered some Boeing 747's and the 777 ER aircraft.

Tell us about the 'silver bullet'.

We have recently stripped the paint off our 14 freighters and that has reduced the weight on each B747 by 200kg. That saves the company 2.7million on fuel costs every a year.





Revival of the fittest?

Tourism has always been a major factor in fuelling Lebanon's economy. With increased political tension and bad publicity, this Mediterranean country is hoping to recapture its past glory. Zeina Abou Zaki and Maan Hamzi report

Lebanon has been rather unfortunate in its effort to restore a positive image of itself. Just as the political situation seems to simmer down and the economy promises a more prosperous future, something unexpectedly destructive happens. Self-destructive that is.

The country achieved high revenues in 2004 and inbound tourism was on the rise. In fact, people in the travel and tourism industry were confident Lebanon was close to regaining its charming pre-war status. Many were excited to revive their pre-war 1960's 'Switzerland of the Middle East' image and capitalise on it.

But not so fast.

The bomb blast that blew up the convoy of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others on February 14, 2005 shattered the whole nation, froze the whole economy and fuelled political tension reminiscent of the 15-year-old civil war. A series of targeted killings and political divide among sectarian groups took the country 30 years backwards. Lebanon was in the spotlight of the media again - this time the whole world was watching for the wrong reasons. Bad publicity was the last thing the Middle East nation needed at a time it was trying to boost its image.

Although the year 2005 has shown a little decline in the number of tourists due to the political problems comparing to 2004, it is quite clear that the tourism sector recovered quicker than it was expected.

Lebanon received around 1.1 million visitors in 2005 as compared to 1.28 million the previous year. The 11 per cent drop in visitor arrivals was exceptional due to the political tensions.

With expectation of 1.5 million tourists this year Joseph Sarkis the Lebanese Minister of Tourism is very optimistic that income from the travel and tourism industry will pick up.

According to Sarkis, around 350,000 tourists visited Lebanon from January to April 2006 and this is a very positive indicator that this year has exceeded the numbers and growth rates of the exceptional year of 2004.

Sarkis counts a lot on the political



stability that prevailed over the past few months and hopes this will continue to achieve better results. Lebanon is also banking on business from the Chinese market which will gain Lebanon a share during this year as a result of a protocol agreement signed between the two nations.

On the other hand tourism investment is still growing. In the 2003, total investments - majority in the tourism sector - reached \$1 billion raising Lebanon to a leading position in attracting foreign investments among the Levant countries. Although this is not a very large number, it is good enough for the 10,452 square kilometre size of a country.

Attracting investment and project construction is still an ongoing project. In fact, a lot of hotels are about to open between now and 2007 which will add a capacity of 3,000 rooms to the already existing 16,700. There are up to 600 rooms opening up each year while many more rooms are being refurbished to modern appeal.

Beirut is mainly home to five-star properties - some managed by international groups like the Intercontinental Phoenicia and others are locally owned and run. The more remote mountainous towns have always been a favourite among Gulf Arabs - mainly Saudis and Kuwaitis - and therefore very luxurious properties are in demand.



to make tourism a major contributor to the Lebanese economy. Already, established tour operators have expanded their businesses after seeing growth in 2004, and tourist services have greatly improved. World-renowned tour operator Thomas Cook launched its Beirut office in 2004 as more Europeans

gained an interest in travelling to the region. Overall, optimism is the key to reviving Lebanon's resilient tourist business. The Lebanese have had enough of wars and political rivalries, and therefore are willing to develop their country and grow their economy. They all agree on developing a prosperous state and state-of-the-art services. And tourism is high on the agenda.

However, the question is not the about the will and the determination for progress. It's about the implementation process.

So far, the tourism sector and the whole economy is dependant on stability. Unless the internal political troubles are resolved under a well-respected and balanced government, there will be

Lebanon at a Glance

One who visits Lebanon is fascinated by the 7,000 year old little country. The weather is always moderate, the prices are very reasonable and, most of all the people are friendly. As a republic since 1943, it is a compact country of 10,452 square Kilometres with a population of 3.57 millions (year 2000). The capital is Beirut.

Sightseeing

With its well known archaeological sites and ruins (Baalbeck, Sidon, Tyre, Byblos, Anjar, Bileidinne and Deir El Qamar), Lebanon constitutes the best place for tourists interested in cultural tourism. Eco-tourism exists widely in most of the Lebanese villages and mountains. Natural grottos like in Jeita, Qadisha and Kfarlim are very popular among visitors, as well as the famous Cedar trees in Bechari and Al-Shouf areas. In addition, the simple traditional lifestyle of the small villages set in lush natural environment permits tourists to enjoy a unique pastoral experience.

Sports

Skiling is another favourite activity. Whether its on the slopes of Lebanon's majestic mountains in winter or gliding on water skis off the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, skiling has always been an attractive choice. Car racing, horseback riding, camping, paragliding and beach activities along with a variety of sporty activities add a lot of flavour to the adventurous visitor.

Nightlife

Arguably the best clubbing hotspot in the Arab world is Beirut, where hundreds of lounge bars, outdoor cafes, restaurants and clubs that play anything from contemporary

Arabic music to gothic rock are found. Popular Lebanese cuisine is widely available among the many restaurants that offer authentic delights and live entertainment.

Beirut Central District

The newly rebuilt downtown is always worth a visit. The area was completely refurbished during the 1990's preserving its unique Levantine architectural style but in newly rebuilt frame - after it was terribly destroyed during the war. The opening up of the downtown area or Beirut Central District has given the Lebanese people - to a certain extent - hope and confidence in the revival of their country, and encouraged the international community to seek investment.

Now the BCD thrives with trendy clubs, such as the Buddha Bar, outdoor cafes, world-famous fashion brand stores and reputable businesses like Reuters and Virgin.

Business Tourism

MICE tourism is another growing business. Beirut is famous for its business meetings and conferences in addition to the progressive financial sector. Fashion and jewellery design is another successful sector and Lebanese designers, like Elle Saab and Robert Mouawad, are known worldwide. Beirut is becoming increasingly active in hosting shows that attract another segment of tourists.

Media is also another point of strength to the country. You can find offices for all regional and international broadcasting institutions, from Qatar's Al-Jazeera to CNN. News agencies like Reuters, Associated Press and Agence France Presse also have offices.

no healthy economy; hence no healthy tourism. And with not enough income from tourism, the economy will remain weakened.

And therefore the fate of the travel industry all lies in the hands of vicious Lebanese politics.

Facts for Visitors

Local time in Lebanon is GMT +02 in winter and GMT +03 in summer (April to September). Winter days are short, with daylight from 6:00 until 17:00. In summer, the days are longer, from 5:00 until 20:00.

Lebanon is a democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government based on confessional divides and a cabinet headed by a prime minister. Its constitution is based on the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, with a president elected every six years. Passports are valid for six months and are required by all except nationals of Syria arriving from their country with a valid national ID.

Visas: Visas are required by all, except for the nationals of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE for stays of up to three months. Nationals of the European Community, Commonwealth, American continent, Russia and Japan can obtain their visas on arrival at Beirut International Airport or any other port of entry at the Lebanese border. Other nationals of East Europe and Asia should contact the consulate at the Lebanese Embassy for details about how to obtain their visas. Visitor or Business visas cost 50,000 Lebanese Pounds (\$33).

Restricted Entry: The Government of Lebanon refuses entry to holders of Israeli passports, holders of passports containing an Israeli visa stamp, valid or expired, used or unused and passports with entry stamps to Israel.

Lebanon enjoys an essential Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters and longer warm summers. The country is rain-free between June and October. Visitors can count on 300 sunny days every year. However, mountains are cold and snowy in winter. Average annual rainfall is about 1,000 millimetres in Beirut, but much higher in the mountains. Warm clothes are essential in the winter. Lowest temperature may be as low as -4 degrees Celsius in the mountains, and 10°C on the coast.

Currency: The Lebanese pound (LE) is the official currency. \$1 = LE1,500. But US dollars are widely available and very commonly used.



Despite the political upheaval, hoteliers claim they have not suffered as much throughout 2005. Five-star chains in the capital reported over 70 per cent occupancy in January, but the bomb blast that killed Rafiq Hariri in February brought figures to as low as 30 per cent. When it comes to hotels, Lebanon has done considerably well for itself. After the war ended in 1991, the country had a little over 150 hotels running two years later. Now, there are more than twice as many. This year, the Four Seasons and Hilton are planning to launch in Beirut while high-class resorts are being

planned along the coast and in the mountains. Mega projects like Sannine Zenith complex, the Phoenician Town and Beirut Gate are all indicators that international investor confidence is growing and Lebanese entrepreneurs are optimistic about the future of their country. Developed by the Saudi-owned Al Salam Group, the Sannine Zenith project is notably the largest tourism scheme to be introduced in Lebanon. Its estimated cost is over \$1.5 billion and it will be developed in the lush and arable Bekaa Valley.

Tourism Drive
Tourism has historically played a central role in Lebanon's economy contributing around 20 per cent of gross domestic product. In the 60's and through the mid-70's, the country's Mediterranean culture attracted a great many Western Europeans to the country's pristine beaches, ancient ruins and ski slopes. Right before the brutal Lebanese civil war broke out, it is worthy to note that Lebanon received 1.4 million visitors in 1974. As the war came to an end in the 90s, the country depended on its private sector to fuel its economy and refuel its tourism drive.

Arrivals were on the rise - mostly attributing to the Lebanese diaspora. Tourism increased over 30 per cent per year between 1993 and 1995, and around 15 per cent from 1994 to 2004. With the rise of world terrorism since September 11th and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Lebanon like the rest of the Middle East took a strong blow in its travel and tourism sector. In 2002, tourist arrivals went 14 per cent over the previous year. But the following year (2003) arrivals grew only on 6 per cent. But 2004 was a good year for the country with around 1.28 million visitors - that is a whopping 26 per cent



Beirut's 5-Star Hotels

Sheraton Coral Beach Hotel & Resort

Situated along the dazzling stretch of the clear blue Mediterranean Sea, this hotel is just a few minutes away from Beirut International Airport, and is the ultimate location for business and leisure travellers. The hotel boasts 97 rooms and suites, along with the resort offering 500 cabins and 24 chalets surrounding the beautifully landscaped gardens and swimming pools.

Tel: +961 1 859 000
Email: coralbeach.reservations@sheraton.com

Safir Heliopolitan Hotel

The hotel is ideally located minutes away from Beirut International Airport and Beirut Central District, as well as the major shopping and entertainment areas. Overlooking the Pigeon Rock and the Mediterranean Sea, the 18-storey building stands proudly against Beirut's sky, offering 119 furnished rooms, 12 grand suites, 12 executive suites, one presidential suite and two executive floors.

Tel: +961 1 810 555
Email: reserve@safirheliopolitan.com

Gefinor Rotana Hotel

The 164 rooms and suites of the Gefinor Rotana has become a preferred destination for business travellers. Executive guests can enjoy Club Rotana special privileges like exclusive access to the Club Rotana Lounge with its magnificent views, as well as private check-in and check-out, complimentary breakfast, evening cocktails, DVD rentals, professional secretarial support and a mobile business centre.

Tel: +961 1 371 888
www.rotana.com

Movenpick Hotel & Resort Beirut

With 90,000 square meters of landscaping, the hotel's 292 guestrooms and are a calm oasis in the heart of the city. Located directly on the Mediterranean Sea, the property is also just an hour's drive from Faraya ski resorts and beaches along the coast. Designed by renowned French interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, the hotel offers an array of dining experiences ranging from international to authentic Lebanese cuisine.

Tel: +961 1 869 666
www.movenpick-beirut.com

InterContinental Phoenicia Hotel

The hotel became famous during the civil war with guerrilla fighters battles revolving around it. Restored after the war to its pastime grandeur, it has once again become a landmark of modern Lebanon. Only walking distance from the central business district and overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, it is a complex comprising two towers and one residential building. It houses 446 rooms and suites, ballroom, a shopping arcade, restaurants, conference and exhibition areas, two swimming pools and a spa.

Tel: +961 1 369 100
Email: phoenicia@phoenicia-ic.com

Beirut Marriott Hotel

Located on the fringe of the central business district, it is 100 meters from the sea and only six kilometres away from Beirut International Airport. The Golf Club of Lebanon, the Sports City stadium and downtown Beirut are just five minutes away, making it an ideal destination for business and pleasure. It houses a variety of restaurants, outdoor pool and health club which includes massage services.

Tel: +961 840 540
www.marriott.com/beylib



24 hours in... Amsterdam

You're lucky to have landed in one of the most accessible transit city's in the world - Amsterdam! Fun, cultured and laid back, this Dutch city offers the perfect 24-hour getaway.

Transportation

The train is the quickest and cheapest way into the heart of downtown Amsterdam. Settle in and enjoy the pleasant 15-minute journey into town, debark at Central Station. The best way to enjoy Amsterdam is by foot, bicycle or tram. Be sure to bring an umbrella and sweater during rainy season.

Sights

The city is a sight in itself and a pleasant stay can be had by simply taking in the cafes, pubs and coffeeshops that dot every corner. With so many great places to visit, here are just a few.

The Van Gogh Museum

Containing the largest collection of paintings by Vincent van Gogh, the museum is a treasure trove for art lovers. It also holds a large collection of 19th works from various artists, in addition to numerous exhibitions. Paulus Potterstraat 7

Red Light District

It's touristy but it's gotta be done. Walk around and gaze at the working ladies who at your service and the sex and coffeeshops that line the streets.

Canal Trip

The 90-minute ride around Amsterdam will give you a glimpse at the distinct neighbourhoods that make up the city. Plus, it'll give your feet a nice rest.

Damrak by Central Station

Begijnhof

Amsterdam is famous for its hidden



courtyards that reveal tranquil gardens. The Begijnhof is one of the most famous with both an English church and the oldest house in the city (circa 1475). Follow the doorway on the Spui or around the corner to the Gedempte Begijnensloot.

Heineken Beer Factory

Go, drink, be happy. No children. Stadhouderskade 78.

Eating Out

Aside from pancakes, there isn't a ton of Dutch food options to choose from. However:

Restaurant d'Vijff Vleghen

offers "New Dutch Cuisine" that brings together old world traditions of Dutch cuisine and modern tastes. The restaurant is a museum in itself that is made up of nine uniquely designed dining rooms, all with a collection of original paintings, armoury and glassware on display. Spuistraat 294 - 302 1012 VX

The Pancake Bakery

A wonderful feast of carbs and goodness. A great atmosphere and cheap prices make it a popular spot amongst the locals. Prinsengracht 191

Nightlife

In Amsterdam, the party is limited by your imagination

Jimmy Woo

Mix a little ultra-century century flavour, a dab of the Orient, some of the city's biggest deejays and what you have is

the Amsterdam's trendiest spot. Korte Leidsestraat 19 - 1017 RC

The Casablanca Jazz Cafe

Located near the Red Light District, this club represents the feel-goodness and diversity that people love about Amsterdam. Dancing, dining, karaoke and a multi-ethnic crowd. Zeedijk 26

Shopping

The main shopping districts are the Leidsestraat, Kalverstraat and Nieuweijk right near the Central Station. For boutique shopping, head to the Jordaan area where you'll find an array of unique stores.

Hotels

InterContinental Amstel Hotel

Amsterdam's most exclusive and celebrated hotel, it is situated in a secluded area of Amstel River but still close to downtown. Professor Tulpplein 1, 1018 GX

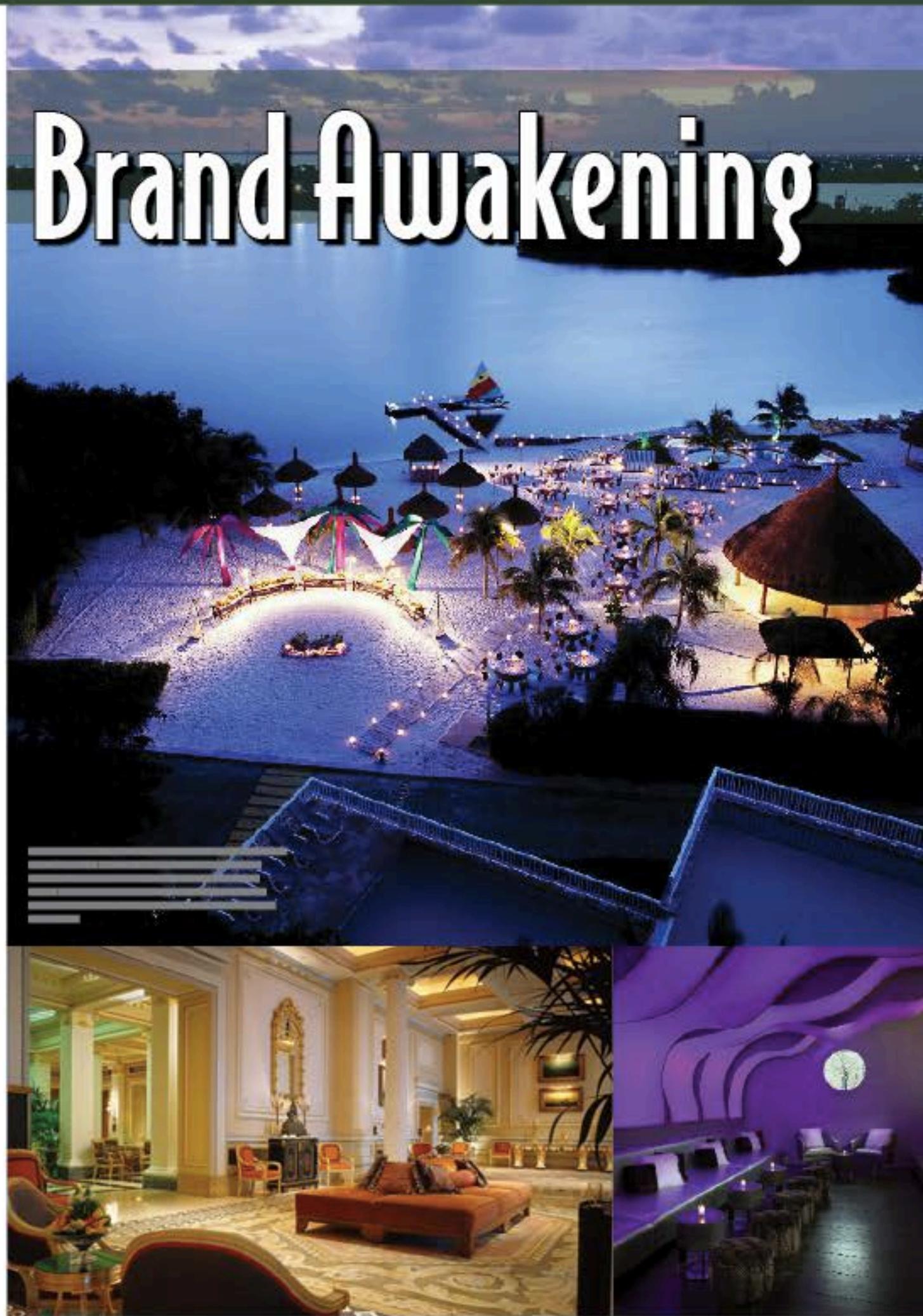
Swissotel Amsterdam

Well located next to Central Square and within walking distance to the train stations, museums and main sites.

Damrak 96, 1012 LP



Brand Awakening



Starwood is experiencing a sensual stimulation - and it's ready to tell the whole world about it. Maan Hamzi meets with top hotel executives during Starwood's Media Summit in New York to learn about the company's major branding-defining strategies.

Forget your RevPars and hotel jargon. Forget about sales targets and money-spinning strategies. You can forget about everything that has to do with marketing a hotel. There is something fundamentally wrong with our hotel industry. If you ask Steve Heyer, the chief executive officer of Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, he'll tell you: "A ketchup bottle holds more desire and loyalty than a 300-room hotel."

Desire - that is one of the key words Starwood has seriously absorbed into its DNA, and thus is influencing its entire hotel philosophy. Over the past year, the company has re-established its business model as a 'global branded hotel operating company'. In other words, Starwood has realised that selling beds and boxes is not the endgame.

Surely hotels are in the business to generate profit, but money - applied to every other trade on this planet - can make an entrepreneur oblivious to the value of their services. Are hotels in this day and age really catering to a customer's needs? Certainly they are never too short of boasting about their wonderful services, fantastic restaurants and most exotic spas. They are all proud of their loyalty programmes and precious partnerships.

The real question is: how many really are determined to make an emotional connection with their guests? And this is exactly the self-realisation which brought Starwood to its current state of metamorphosis - that is, from selling beds to sharing feelings.

"This is a unique industry because uniqueness and not ubiquity builds strong brands," stated Steve Heyer during the Starwood Media Summit held in New York City in May. "The industry needs great properties strung together with consistent and signature experiences that make a great brand." The company has embarked on



a mission to make an emotional connection with their guests and earn a lot more money for their owners and as well as themselves. Starwood aims to be strong in the hotel industry as a branded company by moving from trademarks to brands. With eight hotel brands within its portfolio, Starwood decided to simply redefine each brand in three words. The company started by asking its general managers what their hotel brand stood for. Not surprisingly, they all gave similar answers about their great service, ideal locations and their sumptuous dishes.

The company realised they had to come up with something that made a significant difference, explained Roeland Vos, Starwood's president for Europe, Africa and Middle East. "If you can't get the general manager to differentiate among the brands, how will you get the consumers to understand what the differences are? You cannot tell a story about what a brand stands for - you have to define it in two or three words," said Vos.

With this in mind, Starwood decided to research about what brands people would like to associate with. Everything else that came afterwards had to fit into three words.

"Those three words can be broad or large but once you define them, you have to stick to them. The moment you have a framework you have to make sure it doesn't lose its local flavour," said Vos. Starwood clearly understands a brand isn't a name or a logo, or just a room with a bed. Heyer stressed how a brand is an experience. "A brand is to state a unique promise to each and every customer that we will deliver an indelible moment and help create a memory. Brand loyalty in the hotel industry is not near the levels it should be. Consumers don't connect with hotel brands with nearly the passion," he explained. According to Heyer, people love hotel properties because they have had unique experiences there at some point. And those experiences are not necessarily remembered because of the brand as much as it is for the property. Hence, the company wants each of its brands to stand out as a place of experience where the guest can associate emotionally with the brand. "The experience only really becomes memorable when it is made to be different, better and special. That creates preferences which drives profit," Heyer said.



"Why do we want to be confined to the classic hotel business and commodity margins and robust cycles when we can be the hotel industry's first experienced retailer? Virgin, Apple and Oprah - they sell connection, affiliation, feelings and the idea. A brand is an idea."

"Our brands must be ideas and feelings attached to rooms," reaffirmed Heyer. And the key to do this is innovation. Defining the brands is only part of Starwood's strategy. The company has concluded the bulk of their asset disposition programmes with a host of their partners.

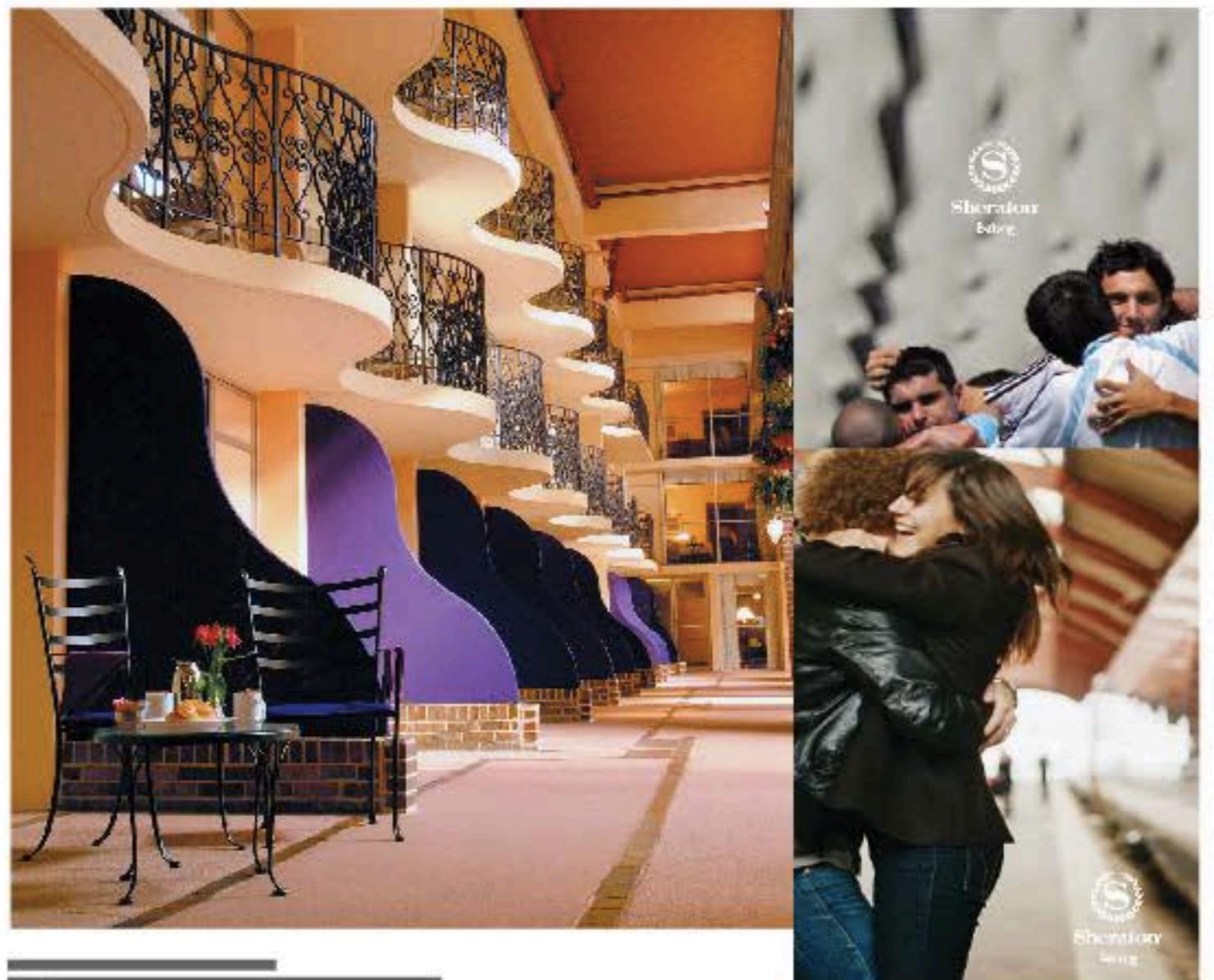
While they build a service culture, the group is introducing extensive training programmes to its associates and staff worldwide. The company's acquisition of the European chain Le Meridien last November and its launch of its stylish and affordable Aloft hotels have further diversified the company's portfolio. They have also announced Westin's extended stay programme.

The company made a strategic decision to sell real estate that didn't fit the company's criteria for continued ownership. "We reduced our dependence

on whole real estate while maintaining a footprint. We didn't get smaller in our distribution and weight, we just got much more capital-efficient. As we did this we were building long-term relationships with our standing partners who will help further our growth," explained Heyer.

This "asset right" strategy - as the management calls it - has been demonstrated by the sale of more than \$5 billion in non-strategic properties over the last 18 months. At the same time, Starwood has retained ownership of its most attractive assets that can be redeveloped, repositioned or possess vacation ownership opportunities. The group will continue to churn its real estate portfolio and as it mines the value in its retained assets those will be sold and other strategic assets will be purchased. The company sold 58 hotels, retaining 88 hotels of which are of higher market value than those sold. Starwood feels this move makes it well focused, while at the same time is better balanced and cash rich. Contract signing has doubled over the first quarter of 2005. Meanwhile, the company is

pursuing 500 deals. The group expects to sign 150 new hotel contracts in 2006 and anticipates 5 to 7 per cent net annual unit growth through 2009. Starwood's management divulge that their objectives will take a lot of time, commitment and execution. To implement such goals includes driving RevPar growth, growing margins, aggressively expanding their footprint with more hotels in more places, cultivating brand loyalty through signature brand-based marketing and of course, introducing exceptional services. "Strong brands, great service and sound operations in both hotel development and guest delivery" is the mantra for our company. That's because our brands will be substantially more attractive to owners and developers and they can generate propelling return on invested capital for their owner," said Heyer. The CEO stressed that truly differentiated brands are Starwood's innovation but also underlined the importance of being a distribution company. "As long as our partners can reinforce that experience, we can deliver an enriched experience by programming



our hotels with other strategic alliances to build stronger brands for us. "We are focused on creating lifestyle brands. And strong brands create memorable guest experiences and that drives preference which drives loyalty which creates RevPar growth and system profits. It's a wonderful cycle when you get it right," Heyer said. Starwood has been working with the property owners to clarify standards. Also training staff to follow those standard is very crucial. "We are training the staff in such a way that we are not talking about our products," said Vos. One of the biggest realities, Vos added, is for every one of their 145,000 employees to feel what they work for. "A person who works for Sheraton has to breathe Sheraton. When they wake up,

they should think Sheraton, feel it and dress like a Sheraton person. How that looks or feels has to be defined - and that's what we are trying to do." Service also makes more of a difference than physical appearance. "We will have to make sure that the customer - without looking at the name on the hotel building - will recognise the brand. If you are a Mercedes driver and I take the star off the car, you will still recognise it," said Vos. The company has already rolled out ad campaigns to highlight the emotional connection of their brands. Don't expect to see fluffy beds, swimming pools and ordinary diners. And no clichés either. Sheraton's \$20 million global television campaign, for example, features people of different races warmly greeting

each other with hugs, kisses, toasts, handshakes and even high-fives. Meanwhile, Westin TV commercials under the tagline "This is how it should feel" encourage people to relax or wake up to sound of chirping birds. In the Middle East, Starwood will also be speaking to owners to invest in its "personal touch". While the region is more familiar with Sheraton and Le Meridien, the company intends to promote its other brands like Westin and Aloft, where there is a gap for such hotel styles. The company recently announced its first W properties in the Middle East - one will be launched in Qatar's West Bay at the end of 2007 and the other at Dubai Festival City in 2008. Starwood is also shifting its Middle East headquarters to Dubai. ■

We speak to Javier Benito, Starwood's executive vice president and chief marketing officer, about Starwood's new brand mission.

How do you enhance your brand with various partnerships?

Think about this, Illy Coffee and the Meridien brand, you see they already created something very different - the quality of the display and brand. If you go to any hotel in the US you will not find this.

But don't you see any negative repercussions?

I think it's about choosing the right partner and the brand that will enhance you as opposed to any brand that approaches you.

What about brand partnerships in the Middle East?

We're trying to establish a global brand and then those partnerships will be complemented with strong local partnerships. But a lot of people that stay in the hotel are not local so you have to cater to them.

How will the Internet empower your brand?

Five years ago, we had \$200 million in online sales and last year it reached \$1 billion. The cost of that transaction is much smaller than if you have a live person answering the phones. Also, if I have people watching my advertising on the web, there's an incentive for them to watch the ad and I'm going to be more powerful because I'm going to be more efficient. So instead of investing in a 30-second commercial, I'm going to invest it in my website.

We will use the Internet as an enabler. We need to use technology as a way to stay in touch with the customer. You are not dehumanising the experience but enhancing it.

Sheraton in collaboration with Yahoo! are offering Internet access in its hotel lobbies. What is your relationship with Yahoo!?

It's a combined partnership and we



Q&A



share the costs and the revenues. Yahoo! benefits because people can come to the hotel and sign up for free with Yahoo! whereas they normally have to pay \$35. Eventually you become one of their members and they recruit someone in their target. What we get is development support and their dollars. No one had approached them to do that and theirs is a link to the Sheraton site on Yahoo!.

How have loyalty schemes brought about innovations into your company? People now get a lot of loyalty points and we want to give them creative ways to use the points. For example, Victoria Secret has a party that's very exclusive and people want access to that. So by putting a package together, you're giving something new and different. You can do the same with a Pavarotti concert, depending on your interests.

Your hotels at the moment still do not portray your image. Do you agree? Well, we have a long way to go before we get there; it's not going to happen right away. We know that if you train the general manager, they can properly train the staff and that will solve issues.

We have specific ways of asking for this and if you don't see a change, there's a problem.

What's your anticipated return on investment?

We already command a premium versus our competition and we'll begin to increase our premium in terms of competition and we are ready to tackle our RevPar which means more revenue than the competition.



We caught up with Roeland Vos, Starwood's president for Europe, Africa and Middle East, in New York to discuss the company's restructuring.

How did the rebranding concept begin?

We realised that if you go for a real branding company, you have to stand for something that makes a difference in the customer's mind.

We have to make sure that within our brands we have the local cultures reflected. Take the Westin for example. When you enter a Westin, you get a refreshing welcoming drink. In the Middle East that's nothing special because a lot of people do it. That doesn't mean all over the world the drink had to be the same. In China you would serve tea; in Japan, green tea; and in the Middle East, coffee. In Europe it could be glass of lemonade or beer.

This is a big move for Starwood's management and its employees. How do you communicate that message throughout the company?

We started it off in San Diego this year where we gathered all our general managers to address what our brand stands for. From there on, we had a number of get-togethers with individual brand leaders so they could spread those messages. Then in each of our hotels, the staff are trained.

At the same time you need to create some sort of a hype. For example, you see some people painting a Sheraton cafeteria orange. It is not the orange of the cafeteria, it is the fact that people see that something has changed.

Was the acquisition of Le Meridien the catalyst for this change?

It was before the acquisition. As long as we continue to distinguish the luxury brands, we can keep adding more.

We knew we had to do something for Sheraton, Westin, Four Points, The Luxury Collection, St Regis and W. Le Meridien was just a reconfirmation that if you do that well, you can keep adding brands.



Q&A



People recognise brands but more for the brand name than what it stands for.

That's why I think it's our role to explain to owners about brand strategies and what is the best for them. We have to start differentiating between the different brands and explain that to the public. In the next six months you will start seeing those things coming along in the Middle East.

How do you convince the owners to continue to invest in the property?

The owners are interested in return-on-investment. If they have an asset in a hotel that's underperforming, it's mostly from a financial perspective.

If you put money back in and have the right brand, your RevPar is right above the line. Where we can, we will convince the owner that by investing he's making a smart decision and going to make more money, especially in the Middle East where the owners are very sensitive because they have the financial capabilities to do so.

Too many brands within one company could be confusing to some people.

I think there is no limit to the amount of brands you can have as long as it's

different in the customer's mind. At a certain point in time, these major brands will have saturated the market and something will have to be done. When we see that the market is saturated we will deliver something new, such as Aloft.

The consumer wants the best experience for the best pricing. How does that fit into your model?

You can come to a point where people will pay for the experience rather than just the bed. There is no rationale because people like the brand, the image and have the emotional connection and will pay the price. We want to get to the point where people don't differentiate on price but on other things.

Sacrifices are always made in such a move. What were yours?

We're not losing a lot but we are cutting costs that are not facing the customer and using that money to build the customer experience. I don't think we're losing anything.

What about Starwood as a brand?

Starwood is not meant to be a consumer brand and is the owner of all the hotels. But you will not see a Starwood Hotel, that's not the idea.

Sheraton**Brand Description:** *warm, comforting, connections*

Sheraton's positioning is being brought to life at every stage of the guest experience, from new television advertising, new collateral and a new signature 'warm welcome'. Starwood's largest brand debuted its Yahoo! Link @ Sheraton, a lobby hub where guests can hop on the Internet, explore the Yahoo!-designed, locally-tailored website, grab a coffee, work, chat, read, watch TV or play a game. The hotel's new ad campaign truly depicts its homely business nature - "At Sheraton you don't just stay here, you belong."

**Le Méridien****Brand Description:** *chic, cultured, discovery*

Le Méridien, the European chain Starwood acquired in November 2005, has also embarked on a fresh brand strategy. The hotel seeks to engage its guests in a meaningful way - bringing alive its passion points of music, film, art, photography, food, design, architecture and fashion. It aims to curate an experience for its guests, stimulating them and enriching their stay. Growth plans are aggressive with a strong pipeline in place and a special emphasis on North America where the brand is

**Luxury Collection****Brand Description:** *exceptional, indigenous, unique, experience*

The managers of the third largest luxury hotel brand in the world felt they had to add an extra word to describe their chain. The Luxury Collection is evolving from a primarily trade-facing brand to a consumer brand. The chain will focus on including the world's most celebrated independent hotels in a collection famed for its stunning properties like the Gritti Palace, the Hotel Imperial and the Cala di Volpe.

Starwood's new brand positioning is set to make things more clear for its owners, consumers and of course, itself. Here's how it is characterising its eight hotel brands.

**St. Regis****Brand Description:** *uncompromising, bespoke, seductive, address*

Again, three words aren't enough to define the prestige of St. Regis. The chain is rolling out some of the world's most spectacular new hotels and continues to develop residences with 12 under progress. Signature services will include a wine aficionado programme, restaurants with celebrity chefs, an expansion of its famed butler service and new Remede spas.

**W****Brand Description:** *flirty, insider, escape*

With 20 properties around the world, this hotel brand boasts a real unique flavour. Funky and suave, comfortable and cool, W hotels exhibit dramatic ultra-modern architecture, warm lighting and a vibrant atmosphere for those who appreciate artistic tastes. Special services include exclusive partnerships, access to events and its Whatever/Whenever programme which provides guests with whatever they want and whenever they want it. W is opening its first Middle East properties, a 292-room property in Doha in 2007 and a 350-room hotel at Dubai Festival City in 2008.

**Aloft****Brand Description:** *sassy, refreshing, oasis*

Launched less than a year ago, aloft is W reinvented. The catch: it is more affordable. The hotel will feature inspiring benefits including its Anything/Anytime service promise, its grab-n-go food and beverage concept and airy public spaces designed for social gatherings. Aloft expects to launch its first hotel by 2007 while more than 500 properties are planned by 2012.

(Aloft image is an artist impression)

**Westin****Brand Description:** *personal, instinctive, renewal*

If you are a new-age health buff seeking a heavenly experience, then Westin is definitely your type. This is the first hotel chain to ban smoking, meanwhile introducing a new 'sensory welcome' featuring white tea scents, transcendental music, tranquil lighting, refreshing towels and an elixir. The chain is working with the Mayo Clinic to understand the effects of travel on mind, body and spirit. Westin is stressing on its emotional highlights through its multi-million dollar ad campaign

Sail of the Season

UAE-based Gulf Craft is the Middle East's largest luxury yacht and leisure boat manufacturer. It produces around 400 yachts and boats a year and exports more than 70 per cent of them worldwide. Setup in Ajman 24 years ago, the company is one of very few global manufacturers with the skill and capacity to produce over 30-metre long fibreglass-hulled luxury yachts.

Maan Hamzi finds out more from Erwin Bamps, Gulf Craft's executive manager

Why would a customer want to buy a boat made in the Arab world rather than somewhere where there is a more established boat-making industry?
Nowadays, the customer is more interested in the value for money, image, and styling and on the other end it's where the boat was made. If you look at a computer, you look for the branding; you don't look at the origin of the parts. People do not question that any longer. **What is the profile of the people buying your boats?**

As I was growing up, I knew that boating was for an exclusive minority of people. But boating has become very democratic and opened up to a lot of people although it's not yet a mature market. The type of customer is changing because today there's an

industrial or a retired person who's made his money and they don't have to be enormously rich to afford a boat. Now it can cost around \$30,000 to \$40,000. Banks have also opened up to financing for boats which makes it more affordable and democratic.

We see more banks in the Middle East providing loans on yachts. This is a clear sign of a boating boom.

It's very common in the US. People buy more boats there than in Europe. The typical boater doesn't have a 60-foot yacht. The typical guy cleans his boat on the weekend and goes out fishing with his wife whose casting the anchor over the boat. It's not the glamorous side of boating. But there's also a large boating community that can spend up to \$350,000 on a boat and that group is still growing. The focus here is driven by people who want a floating palace and who also want to enjoy their life and use their money instead of banking it.

Do find more people financing through banks or paying lump sums?

Buying a boat is becoming easier because people used to do it by paying a lump sum. Now people have 40 per cent of the money and are getting the rest



financed. The second type is the person who really wanted one boat but could only afford another boat which costs less.

Banks are now feeling more comfortable and there is more flexibility in giving those types of customers the loans to buy the boats they want. We don't want to let the customer go. We tell them the financing is available but we don't try to encourage it.

Dubai has become such an attraction for the real estate industry and a lot of these are waterfront developments – that's perfect for your business.

What relationship or deals have you established with these real estate companies?

The marine lifestyle is going to add value to the properties, but of course, developers are also exploring new marketing opportunities. There isn't an official partnership but there is a consideration on how to further develop the marina lifestyle. There is cooperation without a formal relationship – it's on a one-to-one basis. **Do you see a boom in the next five years?**



It is not happening today but we're gearing up for an increase in the international market. In the Gulf, we think it'll be much higher than most areas worldwide. You will see a drastic increase in the next five years.

Are you prepared for it?

We're set to establish three new assembly sites in the next 14 to 15 months. We have five sites, including Dubai and the Maldives.

Why the Maldives?

If you look at the map, you see 2,100 islands and we're the only one with a quality product who's producing there. Therefore you can see we have a very good position. It's a good destination because people don't use cars, they use boats. But there are only very few destinations that are like the Maldives. The ocean is calm and easy to move around the waters with a small vessel, and people are making a lot of money. We're the only one out there and we supply boats to South India, Singapore and Thailand.

What is your target market?

Over 70 per cent of our boats are exported to Australia and the Mediterranean area. That doesn't mean that the customers are there, but the boats end up there. A lot of Russian, German and Arab nationals will put their boats there. We see the bulk of our boats going to the Gulf or the greater Middle East. But as for nationality, it's very mixed.

What's your top of the line products?

The Majesty is the super luxury line and we have lower-end fishing and multi-functional boats for cruising and water skiing. A

boat will cost around \$12,000 at the low end.

What's your smallest boat?

We build 20-foot boats. Our advantage is that our customers understand the level of quality that goes into our products.

You build 400 boats and yachts a year. That seems like quite a big figure for UAE-based company. How much demand is there?

The problem that we have is that we can't deliver what's been ordered because we have a backup of 200 boats. And we're at capacity all the time. The product is very strong and the market is continuing to grow. The Gulf Craft boats, which are put on the market, are usually up for sale for six to 12 hours before they're purchased.

With all the growth throughout the Gulf, are you prepared to take on the demand?

The demand isn't completely there yet. While I'm boasting of our backup in our order book, most of it's for export.

Being a boat manufacturer and boating is a big part of the tourism industry, do you see yourself as a contributor to increasing tourism into the region?

When I came to live here, Dubai was a shopping

destination. Dubai has now become an end destination. People see it as a popular weekend destination where they come to find entertainment in many different ways. In Dubai, they continuously think about what is lacking in their tourism portfolio. Hotels are looking for people to spend their money and we can work with them for short cruises and fishing trips. That's where we come from.

Do you have any plans to develop the cruising industry?

That's a very different industry and the problem is that Dubai is very far from other destinations. Cruise liners don't allow for a week between stops. And around Dubai, there isn't much of a cruising destination.

Do you think you're going to become a necessity in the Gulf with all the marine lifestyle projects?

There is a problem with the marine lifestyle in Dubai. The developers said to people that they can have their boat in front of their homes but they forgot to actually build the marina. Now they are prioritising that initiative, but this should have been part of the entire plan.

How does boating in the Gulf differ from other places?

Boating in the Gulf is a way to entertain friends and family because it's simply too hot to go out. In Dubai, people want their own floating mansion. You see very different types of boating throughout the world and that's what's unique about the Gulf – enclosed cabins



WOMEN

Tropical Luxe

A unique timepiece from Corum has brilliant coloured toucans surrounded by tropical flowers hand-painted on a mother-of-pearl dial. The 18-carat white gold case set with diamonds of 3.30 carats forms a fitting frame for this beautifully matched pair. This 2006 addition to Corum's Artisan Collection is limited to only 50 pieces worldwide and no two are the same in colouration.



Eye Style

Dolce & Gabbana steps out with their Spring-Summer Eyewear collection which is all about cool contours, super style and comfort. For those who love their name brands to be known, the fashion designer's logo is prominently displayed in a crystal setting. Also featuring prominently are Aviator-style models with super-size rings on extra-slim frames and metal strips on the bridge for an emphatic look.



Snow White

Christian Dior claims to have made it to the cutting edge of skin whitening with their new line of DiorSnow Pure. With 16 products in the new line, there is a treatment for all ages, complexions and seasons. Within this program, women will find what they're looking for and can emerge with a fabulously fair, flawless and even complexion.



Exotic and Sweet

A feminine, flirty look accented by island-inspired hand-crafted accessories, vibrant floral designs in succulent of papaya and berry, with accents of green, ivory and neutral hues of brown serve as inspiration for Estée Lauder's Spring 2006 Colour Story. The full line of cosmetics brings out the island girl in every woman.



Feet Forward

Valencia is right on the heels of the latest footwear trends taken from the catwalks of Milan this summer. Stylish women are advised to pay special attention to floral inspirations, with floral foliage and colours that range from fluorescent oranges and greens, baby pinks and blues, to the more mature tans. To bring out the night bird in you, take advantage of the almost gothic allure of metallic leathers, faux jewels and animal prints available this season.



Exclusive Sparklers



Exclusivity and quality are the keynotes of every Graff jewel and its style and workmanship are noted of the brand's exclusive line. Graff necklaces, earrings and pendants also use precious stones like emeralds, rubies and sapphires. Graff's high-end jewels include fancy yellow and white diamond necklace, vivid yellow radiant cut diamond earrings set with white pear shape and marquise diamonds, flawless diamond drop earrings and bracelets in cushion cut stones.

Who's the Boss?

For the man who aspires high, Hugo Boss offers their new premium fragrance, Boss Selection. This fragrance bottles the smell of success, sophistication and elegance. It's touted as lively, light and elegant yet strong and modern. BOSS Selection is a scent of contrasts, with green and fizzy top notes, light with grapefruit and mandarin and infused with spicy pink peppercorn.



Taking It Back

These new sunglasses from Dunhill take inspiration from Alfred Dunhill's first collection of protective motorist goggles in 1897 that provided practical protection for early 20th century automobile drivers. Updated for today's gentlemen; the collection builds on Dunhill's unique motoring heritage, creating chic, sleek and innovative new styles. Using the original "sun goggles" as inspiration, Dunhill has revised and modernised this iconic design to create an inspiring pair of sunglasses.



Golden Scribe

Black and gold are the signature colours of the legendary Montblanc Meisterstück.

The new Solitaire series picks up these classic ingredients and reinterprets them in a new, distinctive and contemporary way with elegant, eye-catching stripes. In this collection, the gold cap and barrel of the fountain pen are finished with stripes of deep black. The clip is also gold. On the caps of the rollerball and ballpoint pens, fine stripes contrast appealingly with the lustrous black barrel.

Loud and Proud

De Ville X2 Big Date Co-Axial chronometer is available in 18-carat red gold De Ville timepiece. The X2's name refers to the juxtaposition of the large gold Roman and Arabic numerals on the three-hour markers and in the big date window. On the dial the three dimensional, highly polished applied numerals, Omega logo and name are all crafted out of gold. The black dial offsets the white-painted 'railway' minute track and date numbers.



Sixty Style

Cool, sexy and rugged are the words used to describe the new Spring/Summer 2006 collection from Sixty, the Italian brand for men. Cool white shirts, smart capris, striped T-shirts, detailed shirts with embroidery, jeans with eye-catching back pockets and handcrafted round necks. Revolving around the second-hand concept, every garment still maintains the modern touch, paying special attention to the details and materials.

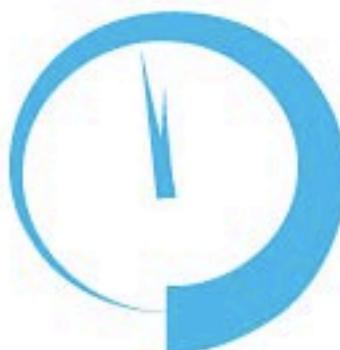


Platinum Fashion

The Vacheron Constantin Patrimony Contemporaine watch comes platinum 950 - we're talking case, dial and a buckle for the wrist strap. The pure round oversized case offsets its micro-grain finished platinum dial in a discreet play of reflecting light only achievable with this precious element. Designed and crafted according to the most demanding standards of Swiss craftsmanship, this extra slim piece with its deliberately unadorned face, embodies the classic heritage of its maker, a tradition gained over more than 250 years.



Gold & Black



Last minute



Adventure

Situated at the base of the New Zealand Southern Alps, Lake Wanaka is renowned as being one of best skydiving spots. Accompanied by a professional instructor you can experience the excitement of skydiving without having to learn how. Freefall at speeds of up to 200km/h and enjoy breathtaking views of Mount Aspiring, Mount Cook, glaciers, rivers, lakes and the rugged wilderness of the Mount Aspiring National Park. Lake Wanaka also offers eco-rafting, kayaking, trekking, wilderness jet boating and golf. It is accessible from neighbouring Queenstown and Christchurch by road.

Tel: +64 03 443 7207
skydive@lakewanaka.co.nz

Extreme



The Great White Shark is one of the most feared predators known to man and the largest carnivore in the ocean. Interestingly, sharks on average kill less than 10 people each year, worldwide, whereas millions of sharks perish at the hands of fisherman hunting for food. If you wish a close encounter with

this misunderstood creature from the safe confines of a cage, head for Gansbaai. Located about 160 kilometres southeast of Cape Town, South Africa, it is one of the world's finest locations for viewing the Great White. Peak times for sightings are June, July and August.

Tel: +27 0 28 384 1005
dive@sharkwatchsouthafrica.com

Escape

Perched high in the Atlas Mountains is the Kasbah Tamadot, this 18-room mountain resort owned by Richard Branson of Virgin fame offers stunning



views across river valleys and snow capped mountains. Services include trekking and skiing in season, hot-air balloon rides, visits to nearby villages and scenic flights over the Sahara Desert. For those wanting to relax and unwind, the resort offers a traditional Moroccan bath, an infinity pool, both indoor and outdoor heated swimming pools and a spa. The resort is reached by either a scenic drive from Marrakech or a 10-minute helicopter flight direct from the airport.

Tel: +44 020 8600 0430
enquiries@limitededition.virgin.co.uk

Unique

The first-ever undersea restaurant in the world has been introduced at the Hilton Maldives Resort & Spa Rangali Island. Ithaa sits five meters below the waves of the Indian Ocean, surrounded by vibrant coral and marine-life. The



entire restaurant except for the floor is made of clear acrylic, offering diners panoramic views and a feeling of being completely at one with the underwater world. Seating only 14 people at a time, this unique restaurant offers contemporary Maldivian cuisine and a wide selection of wine and champagne.

Tel: +960 668 0629
maldives@hilton.com

Events

The Pamplona Bull Run is held each year from the 7th to 14th of July in Pamplona, Spain where hundreds of locals and visitors risk their lives as they run with frenzied bulls along the 800-metre route across the town's narrow streets all the way to the bullring. To participate in the run you do not have to sign up anywhere; you just enter into the run and try to do as best as you can. Pamplona is just four hours by road from Madrid. The closest airport is Noáin situated seven kilometres outside Pamplona. Just pray you come back alive!

Tel: +34 948 420 100
pamplona.net@ayto-pamplona.e





Name: Irina Sharma
Job title: Managing Partner
Company: ekadaa Public Relations
Company Profile: A focused PR company with multinational and Middle East clients, including German Tourism Board, Lufthansa Airlines, Clinique and Durex.

How many times do you travel a year?

Around 10 times a year.

Do you enjoy travelling?

I am absolutely addicted to it!

What airlines do you travel with?

Lufthansa and Emirates

What changes would you like to see implemented on the airline?

I travel with airlines that meet my requirements.

Do you look for time or comfort?

It depends. On business trips, I try to book the most efficient flights. But when I am on leisure, I go all the way for comfort. Mostly on arrival I walk straight into meetings.

How do you kill time in the air?

Chatting, reading and working. I also have a set of exercises I do on long flights.

So you try to make friends on board?
I make friends all the time. It's no different at 35,000 feet above ground.

Do you ever use the phone/fax on board?
Very rarely.

Watch movies?
On long-haul flights, I mostly enjoy the documentaries or the comedy channel.

Airbus or Boeing?
Depend again on long or short flight

Your favourite stopover?

Moscow

Your worst stopover?

Minneapolis. From the time I stepped off the aircraft all things went wrong.

Flight delays and bad airport.

Do you ever book online?

Always. Most of my travel plans are last minute, e-ticketing system works the best also you earn 75-100 per cent more air miles booking online on most carriers.

What technology do you carry along?
Laptop and my iPod.

What challenges do you face during

What's in the suitcase?

Mobile phone: Nokia
Pen: Tiffany
Watch: Don't wear any
Suit: BCBG and Express
Fragrance: Arabic and aromatic oils, Jean Paul Gaultier and Clinique aromatics
And... A writing



your travels?

Traffic in most cities. It's the worst annoyance.

Are you part of any frequent flier programmes?

Emirates, Lufthansa, Air France, Delta and AWA.

What do you look for in a hotel?

Non-smoking rooms is a priority and it helps if it's a renowned hotel chain.

Where were you most impressed with the hospitality?

It was a Family Inn in Novato. The ambiance, service and the hospitality are the best.

Any other loyalty programmes?

Marriott and Priority Club

Where do you spend your holidays?

Depends on the mood.

I just came back from a trip to San Francisco - now that's a place I can never have enough of.

Credit cards?

American Express, Visa and MasterCard

Do you have time to go shopping while you're travelling?

Always. I hit the music shops first for the latest alternative CDs.

Do you hire a car or take public transportation?

I find limousine service to be the most convenient and comfortable. You can't argue with that, eh?

How much do you depend on technology?

Apart from food, mostly everything.



Is Palestine on the Map?

With escalating tension between Israelis and Palestinians, what hopes are there for tourism revival in the West Bank and the Gaza strip? Hazel Heyer addresses the Palestinians in authority.

Only after the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was established in 1994, work began on developing tourism to Palestine. Building the infrastructure, training facilities, promoting investment and developing the Palestinian product as well as promoting it abroad were serious. Within a short period, international markets realised the destination's regional potential. Shortly, Palestine was back on the international tourism map as a unique destination. Within the flash-in-the-pan 'boom', tourism contributed \$350 million to the national annual revenue and provided 12,000 job opportunities.

Investment in the tourism sector increased remarkably and in the third quarter of the year 2000, the number of tourists reached 1 million with 350,000 tourists spending at least four nights in Palestinian hotels which registered a total inventory of 6,000 rooms.

"When we came into the picture in 1994, Palestine had only 2,000 hotel rooms - from Gaza to Jerusalem (East and West) and the West Bank," explains Tourism minister Ziad Al Bandak.

"Between 1994 and 2000, we built another 2,000 hotel rooms. Hotel development was rapid and widespread. Think about it, approximately 5,000 in six years is quite an achievement. It was the dream of the Palestinians to build more and more. Tourism until mid-2000 contributed 7 to 9 per cent of GDP. Of course, we know it picked up only until the intifada when we got seriously hit." Al Bandak's advisor Ibrahim Jadallah explains how the situation was topsy-turvy overnight: "Virtually everything came to a halt. In Bethlehem, two 5-star hotels closed. In Jericho, one Inter-Continental Hotel and numerous other resorts and casinos shut their doors. In

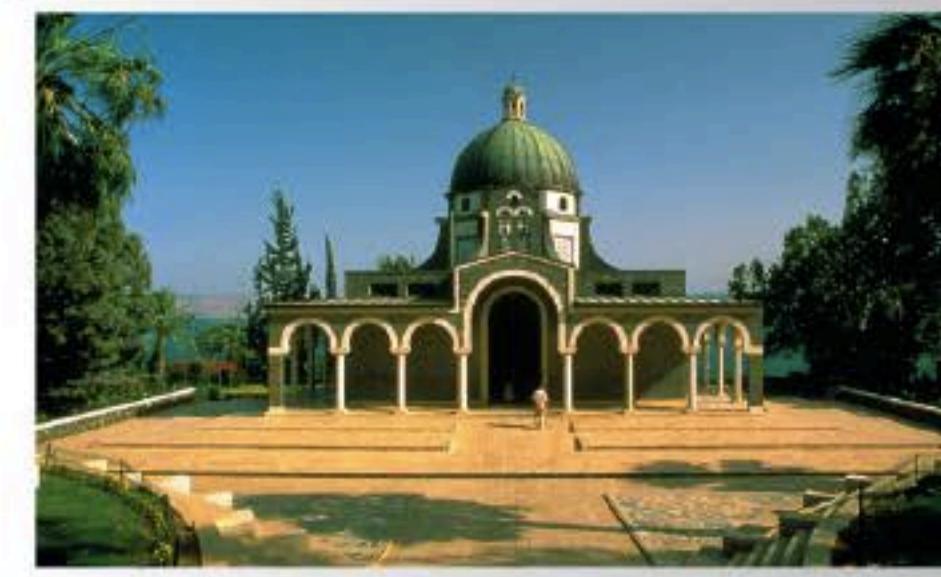
Ramallah, three big hotels closed." In the middle of 2003, the political scenario reversed the economic downturn following the implementation of the so-called road map to peace and the Israeli withdrawal from Bethlehem. Tourism began to pick-up again. Tourists trickled in despite the unstable situation. The tourism authority resumed work with attracting pilgrims and religious tourists. Unfortunately, the constant off- and on- peace negotiations stunted the advancement of trade and plunged the region back to its previous, if not, worst state in history.

Left with no choice, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, against all odds, spiked up activities in tourism fairs across the globe and kept itself visible in international forums on tourism and development - all to secure Palestinian interests and facilities despite road blocks ahead.

(One Palestinian Authority lady representative had traveled three days on foot for hundreds of miles along the Mediterranean coast just to

attend Lebanon's tourism exhibition AWTTE. She was not allowed by Israeli border guards to cross. Since no other representative was in Beirut to man their booth, she did the impossible.) In 2004, the Holy Land saw a sharp rise in the number of pilgrim arrivals. According to statistics from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Bethlehem, in the first six months of 2004 tourist arrivals to Palestine increased more than 110 per cent compared to the same period last year. The surge is attributed to the combined efforts by the tourism ministry, the private sector and the international community. Efforts focused on rehabilitating the infrastructure, marketing and promoting Palestine in the international markets and implementing capacity building and awareness programmes.

Even the late Pope John Paul II, in his address to the General Assembly of the Italian Bishop's Conference at the Vatican City, lauded the initiative adopted by the Italian diocese to promote pilgrimage to the Holy Land.



After the Gaza pullout in 2005, Palestinian tourism experts started pinning their hopes on internal tourism. It was one (perhaps the only) way to tap the numbers, as the beaches were getting a lot of attention. Gaza's Deir Al Balah has beautiful beaches, golden bright sand, year-round sunshine, great seafood, quality dates and archaeological sites. It attracted native family vacationers in the midst of widespread instability. From the West Bank, people thronged Gaza's shores. "Work on building hotels in Gaza started in 1994. There were two to three hotels. Today, there are almost 1,000 rooms. Although not a lot of tourists stay in these hotels for obvious reasons, the business relies on diplomatic or governmental visitors. Despite difficulties today, we are working to revive the hotel sector," says Al Bandak. The serious challenge, Jadallah says, is how to increase tourism into Gaza. "There's no way to get to Gaza, neither from the sea nor air, nor land - through Egyptian or Israeli borders. It's just

inaccessible," the advisor claims. Meanwhile Bandak estimates if checkpoint procedures get lifted, they could reach pre-September 2000 numbers - two million visitors. "Most tourists come from Israeli operators," he says. "Their programme only allows them a couple of hours here. We help Palestinian operators to compete in the market, and attend trade fairs. Israeli propaganda says our cities are not secure. On the contrary, we care dearly for visitors. It's our culture." Another important issue is to find a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank. Many visitors from the West Bank like to travel to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jericho; some in the hope to see families and relatives. "We need access as soon as possible. Otherwise, we reap no benefits from the redeployment from Gaza. Nothing whatsoever gained from the previous negotiations!" exclaims Jadallah. "If only we can open and use the airport and seaport, the border crossings from Egypt and Israel, we will have some

traffic." People from Gaza sneak out through a fence, smuggling themselves out of a tiny gate. This boundary is now closed off. But the ministry is certain that if the borders are open again, tourists will flow in freely.

"There will be no tourism if there is no airport, no seaport and no open boundaries," Jadallah adds. "Gaza International Airport has been destroyed completely; every centimetre of asphalt on the runway, damaged."

Although Jadallah admits nothing will ever take place in the immediate future, there could be light at the end of a very long tunnel. "There are only two alternatives: to construct a high bridge or dig a tunnel, from Gaza to Hebron, about 45 kilometres long which will be difficult to do."

Recently, the Palestinians licensed about 100 new tour operators. Unfortunately, most of them today work with people who leave Palestine for Syria, Jeddah, Lebanon, Dubai, Turkey and European cities. "Of course, tourists are not the Palestinians; our people cannot go through the Israeli borders without problems," explains Jadallah.

"We licensed another 200 guides. I remember when we created the ministry in 1994 after we received the authority following the Oslo Accords. We had only 80 guides, the youngest was 55 years old. The Israelis did not allow any Palestinians to work as a guide. True to the word of the Israeli War Minister in 1967 who said, 'I can teach the Palestinians to become fighter pilots but never allow them to be tourist guides.' And so the 'guides' business remained dead. Today, we have a total of 280."

"We want tourists to come and sleep here, so unemployment can go down and the tourism industry gets a break." ■



Singapore

Alan Tan, who heads the Singapore Tourism Authority in the Middle East, talks about his country is trying to lure travellers from the region.

What are some of the initiatives that the Singapore Tourism Board is undertaking in the Middle East?

We opened our office in 2003 and this is the first time we have a Middle East presence. This is our regional base and there are a few key segments that we promote. We sell Singapore as a business destination in addition to an ideal place for exhibitions and trade shows. We also pursue Singapore as a medical destination. Then there is International Enterprise Singapore that helps Singapore-based companies internationalise their operations or export their services and expertise.

How much growth have you seen?

From 2004 we had about 68,000 visitors from the Middle East - a 20 per cent increase from our 2002 figures.

We don't count 2003 because of SARS. Going into 2005, we continued the growth by 3.8 per cent over 2004 numbers. I think for 2006, we're positive because during the first three months we've seen about 20 per cent growth.

What is the number of travellers?

For 2005, we had 71,000 visitors from the Middle East region and that's counting all nationalities.

What's the most important target market for you?

The GCC is the most important area for us and the UAE is still our largest market with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait round out the top three.

In regards to your medical tourism, what offers do you promote?

We have one of the best health care systems in the world and that was ranked by the World Health Organization. That's something a lot of people aren't aware of. We're promoting Singapore to foreign patients.

Because we only have four million people, there is limited opportunity for our doctors to practise their skills. In that sense, foreign patients help us improve our skills.

Today our key focus is stem cell transplants and treatments for thalassemia. These are some of the

most important treatments for Gulf residents. We do not focus on generic treatments like health screenings but rather on high-end patients and surgeries.



Is Dubai taking business away from Singapore?

Dubai is the regional hub for the Middle East. Likewise, Singapore is the hub for Southeast Asia. I don't think that competition in that sense will be that much of an issue. Maybe in terms of technology, but that's something everyone will have to grapple with.

Do both cities cooperate on any levels?

I think there are a lot of parallels between the two economies. It has generated a lot of two-way interactions. You'll see many Singapore officials visiting the Middle East and vice versa. We're learning from each other. Dubai is going through their own growth phase and they want to learn from Singapore. But they're doing it with their own style. The impact has been positive and we'll see a lot more exchanges.

Is Singapore looking at other areas to promote itself beyond business, leisure and health practices?

We have a tourism master plan that by



2015 we want to have 15 million visitors. We don't have enough attractions to get there but we're launching integrated resorts. The marina resort is to see a business centre and also a leisure facility. On the other hand we're focused on attracting families with theme parks. We're also focusing on shopping malls and improving them.

Singapore Airlines is ranked amongst the best in the world and that helps promote your tourism. What activities do you share with your airline?

As a national tourism organisation, we're completely different because they're private and we are government-run. I generally work with most carriers who have fly-packages to Singapore. We often offer packages and holidays with these airlines.

Southeast Asia, has had its health scares, particularly from SARS and avian flu. How do you confront these problems?

We are very fortunate that over the last tsunami and the bird flu we weren't really impacted in any sense. It's still business as usual but we are mindful of our neighbours. A lot of people still have lingering perceptions of some of these events. It's not about a country anymore, it's a regional issue.

In terms of tourism, is there healthy competition amongst ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries?

People who fly to Singapore and Malaysia usually go to

both countries. There is a natural traffic flow between the two. We do actively engage each other to come up with joint promotions.

We've seen Dubai and Malaysia with their own shopping festivals. How does shopping in Singapore compare?

We're very focused because the festival takes place once a year and feedback has been growing. We are changing according to market requests and customer opinions. We also offer very genuine discounts and year after year, people are spending more money.

The summer months are very good because many people leave the Middle East for their vacation so it ends up being very good for us.

What's the average stay for people in the Gulf to Singapore?

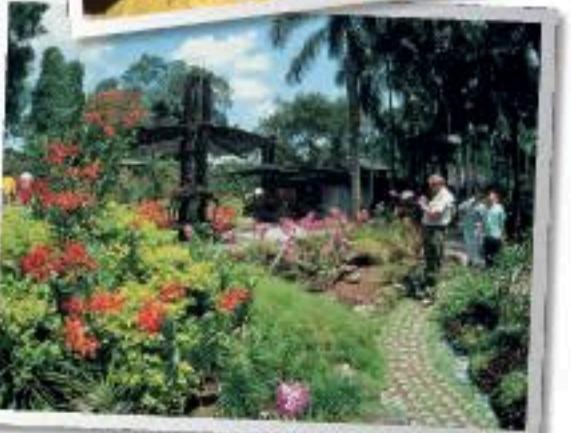
The average is four days.

What are your main global markets?

We have offices in London and Frankfurt. But one of the emerging regions will be Russia.

What are you target markets globally?

I think we'll try to target the long-haul markets and then Indonesia and Thailand for leisure and



Sizzling Summer Signs

The scorching summer months have settled in across the Middle East as people abandon the rat race to search out the ideal vacation destination. But whether you're traveling to cool or tropical destinations, be aware of a variety of health risks which may hamper your hard-earned days of rest and relaxation.

Sun Exposure

While protecting yourself from sun exposure should be common sense by now, it is important to remember that your regular sun screen may not be enough in certain tropical climates. Depending on skin, a higher sun protection factor (SPF) than what you're normally used to will help your skin as it adapts to the new conditions. Apply generously over all exposed parts 30 minutes before sun exposure. Be aware that water, snow and sand all reflect ultraviolet light and increase the sun's effects.

Altitude Sickness

If traveling to a cooler mountainous region for hiking, be sure to acclimatise the body to avoid any altitude-related illnesses. While most cases only occur in extreme conditions altitude-induced illnesses can include headache, nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite, vomiting and insomnia. If these symptoms are left untreated, they can escalate to life threatening conditions known as Acute High Altitude Pulmonary. However, such strong a strong reaction is usually felt in hardcore mountain climbers.

Mosquitoes

Mosquito bites may be a minor annoyance to some, and painfully aggravating for those with more extreme reactions to the bites. To prevent mosquito bites, wear long sleeves, hats and shoes. However, for people traveling to warm places, apply insect repellent continuously, especially in areas known for yellow fever and malaria. The most effective products contain DEET, an active ingredient found in many insect repellents. Products containing 100 per cent DEET are effective for around 10 hours, 30 per cent DEET

between five and six hours, 10 per cent is three hours and 5 per cent is two hours. Though less effective, insect repellents containing certain botanical products may be an option when the duration of insect exposure is short or the risk of major infections is small. One should be advised to be aware of any side effects which these repellents may cause on the skin.

Jetlag

Jetlag is a common occurrence for most travelers and symptoms can include sleeping disturbances, fatigue, irritability, loss of appetite and upset stomachs. The best way to avoid severe jetlag is to prepare the body for the time change. The easiest ways to combat this are to be well rested before travel, drink plenty of fluids, avoid consuming alcohol and eat light meals. Upon arrival, get exposed to natural sunlight and re-adjust your schedule immediately.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a common occurrence overseas and is caused by the overheating of the body as it acclimatises. To avoid this, relax during the first few days of the trip and avoid strenuous activities. Once your body gets used to its surroundings, more water and non-alcoholic drinks should be consumed. This will help balance the loss of fluids through sweating. Adding extra salt during meals should not be encouraged.

Quick note: Regardless of where your vacation plans will take you, common sense is the most priceless advice that can be given. Listen to your body when it tells you something isn't quite right, and take the right steps before you go on vacation to avoid any travel disasters.

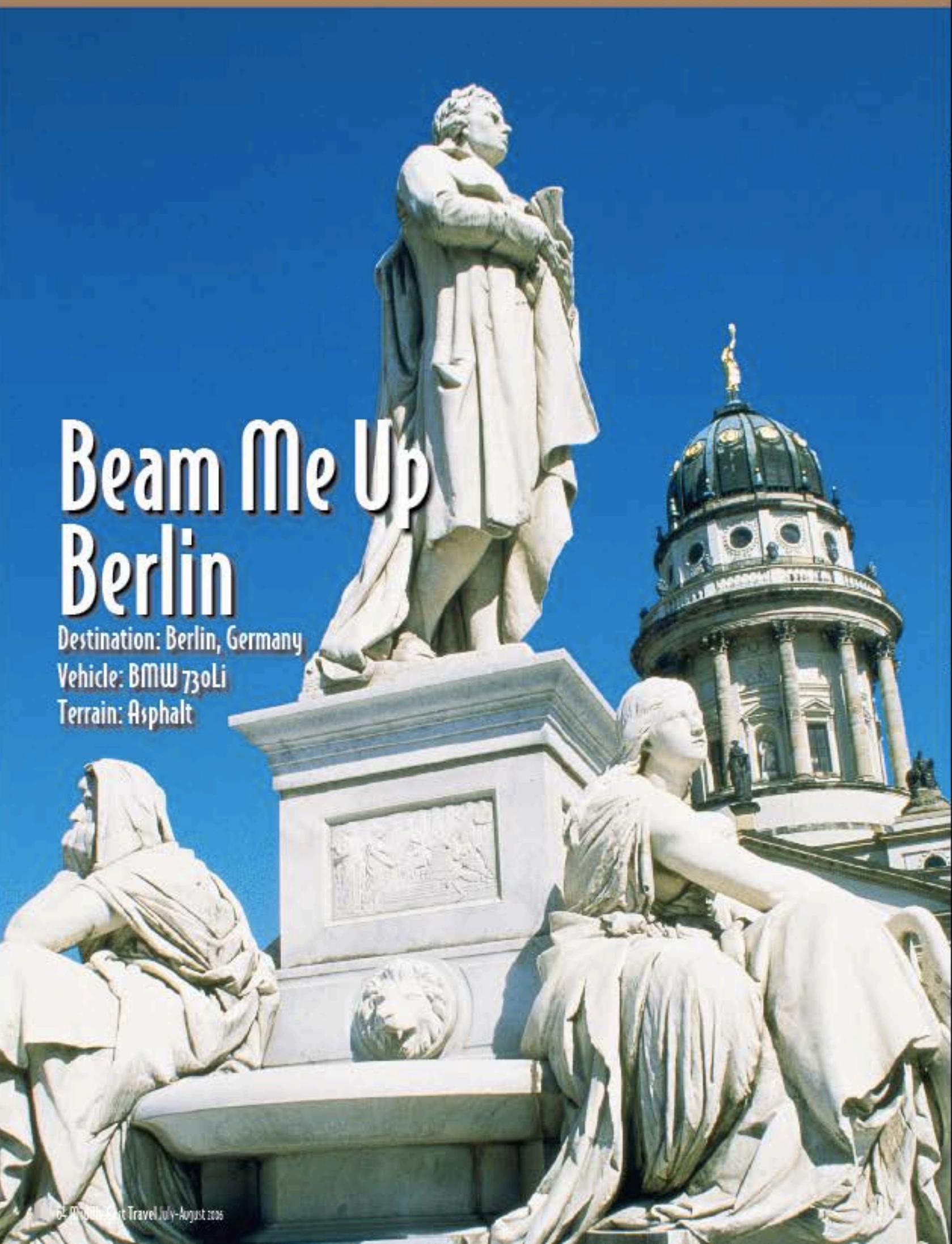


Beam Me Up Berlin

Destination: Berlin, Germany

Vehicle: BMW 730Li

Terrain: Asphalt



Berlin, the capital city of Germany, is a European centrepiece of arts, politics, culture and science. Its vibrant social scene and turbulent past have made it one of the world's major tourist destinations. But we decided the best way to conquer this wonderland is by one of its own. Who knows these smooth tarmac roads better than the pride of the land - a Beamer? So we chose the top of line in prestige, a set of wheels that combines power, luxury and comfort as smoothly together as whipped cream. Hmmm... delicious.

And we decided to kick start our journey on the famous Autobahn. This is one of the world's first highways and to this day, remains the stuff of legend. Its exceptional design and maintenance and lack of speed limit in certain areas make this a very big deal for driving enthusiasts. As one of Germany's national symbols, the highway's construction began in

1913 and now stretches to 12,044 kilometres. It is the second largest superhighway system, trailing only the US Interstate system. And while it looks like most highways running through Europe, it boasts some of the world's best drivers, seemingly well trained and well mannered in the art of doing 180 kilometres an hour. It was in this spirit that we decided to test out our lustrous BMW 7-Series. The BMW 730Li, the fourth-generation 7 Series and according to the manufacturer, the most successful luxury saloon so far.

Now, the first thing to note about the 730Li is that it isn't the sportiest of rides. Instead of conjuring ideas of a carefree lifestyle, it does exactly the opposite. Rather it gives someone the



impression that the owner of the 730Li is actually supposed to be sitting in the backseat, taking phone calls and doing business while being chauffeured around the city. It's that kind of car. BMW's new straight-six petrol engine with its magnesium-aluminium crankcase and fully variable valve drive was first introduced in the BMW 630i and is now in the 7 Series. The 730Li is 10 kilograms lighter than its predecessor and the new power



unit develops 258 horsepower, plus maximum torque of 300 Nm. When you're in a country where petrol is a concern consuming 4.7 per cent less fuel than the previous 730Li is a notable point. And all that with 12 per cent increase in engine output.

On the Autobahn, you want to take control of the wheels and take it to the maximum. Yes - no speed limits - feel free to lose control - cause you can't. That's it you can't. The 7-Series is an intelligent car and its highly-developed technical abilities are beyond our understanding. So we are not even going to get into the intricate details but we will shed some light to the layman out there who is envious of us speeding down Germany's highway with a massage parlour in our seat.

The BMW 7 Series features an aluminium suspension as standard, offers supreme steering precision, exceptional agility, and well-balanced driving characteristics. The BMW 7 Series combines superior agility and sporting performance with supreme comfort. The chassis and suspension of the 7 Series has been updated and enhanced to an even higher standard. The car's stability control is designed in such a way that each person's weight is automatically calculated so when you're taking a sharp turn, the car balances itself and the driver nor the passengers are not swerved about like what would be experienced in most other vehicles. The car comes in three modes of transmission - normal, sport and Steptronic manual gear. In the normal and sportive modes, the six-speed automatic transmission is automatic.

On the Autobahn, we decided to try out the sportive transmission so we can get more rev out of the car. Just as we had enough of acceleration - what are we talking about, you can never have enough of over speeding - we decided to hit the heart of the city. So as we pulled up near Brandenburg Gate, that famous arched monument that appears on Germany Euro coins, it was time to be chauffeur-driver. At this point, we were in normal mode and the back seat was adjusted to perfection. There was a television screen that pops up and it's hooked up to your DVD player - but who wants that right now when we've got Berlin to explore? Berlin is a sprawling and challenging city to navigate so be prepared to get lost.

whether it be driving, walking or public transportation. A good way to get your bearings is to pick out the Fernsehturm television tower which stands as the city's largest structure and is visible from most spots in central Berlin. There are hundreds of sightseeing possibilities in the city, so depending on your time constraints, choose wisely. For museum lovers, there are 153 museums to be enjoyed, most of them situated on the Unesco World Heritage Site, Museum Island. Located on the northern part of Spree Island between the Spree and Kupfergraben, its history as a museum hub dates back to 1841. Some great museums to visit include Egyptian Museum of Berlin which houses some of the most important

pieces of art from the Ancient Egyptian civilization. Or, stroll through the world's largest collection of mounted dinosaurs in the world at the Humboldt Museum of Natural History. In addition to museums, Berlin is a rich centre for the performing arts and includes over 50 theatres and opera houses, including the Berlin State Opera which opened in 1742. One of the great experiences of any visit to Berlin is an evening with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, considered one of the finest in the world. After spending an evening overcome with its music, it truly

convinces listeners of its golden reputation. One of the best places to find yourself is in the Nikolaiviertl district, the historical centre of the city. With churches dating back to the 13th century, it remains a major tourist destination and gives a sense of where the city's roots are found. In addition to dozens of other world class and one-of-a-kind venues that dot Berlin, shopping in this city is simply great. For anyone looking for trendy boutiques, head directly to the area surrounding Hackescher Markt. Not only

will shoppers find the latest style from one of Berlin's up and coming designers, they will be inundated with tons of outlets, clubs, bars and more galleries. Berlin will only reveal itself after numerous visits, so don't try to stuff it all in one try. To make the trip as pleasant as possible, only a few key landmarks were visited, a couple of bars were enjoyed and the promise of a return to vibrant Berlin was guaranteed. ■

BMW 730Li: This is the fourth-generation 7 Series. The six-cylinder engine has 258 horsepower and maximum torque of 300 Nm. Top speed is 244 km/h with 0-100 kilometers in 7.9 seconds. It comes in six-speed automatic and manual Steptronic transmission.



Lost City of New Orleans

New Orleans, which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina last year is beginning to see recovery. America's Creole culture may be back on its feet in no time, witnesses Hazel Heyer

Almost a year after Hurricane Katrina struck, damaging virtually everything in its path, the city of New Orleans is showing major signs of recovery. This unique and culturally-important city now claims it is truly open for business. During the last Mardi Gras on its 150th anniversary which took place in February, the city welcomed about a sixth of its normal visitor count. Though the years before Katrina posted record visitations for New Orleans climbing to as many as 2 million, Mardi Gras' economic impact reached more than \$1.56 billion in annual contributions. In 2003, the city spent \$4.7 million on police, fire and sanitation but earned \$21.3 million in direct tax revenue - a return on investment equal to 5 to 1. Louisiana citizens cannot wait to see numbers grow, however they fully understand the fact of reality. Despite the drop in tourism income, the spirit of the people and the resiliency of the hospitality industry remain undefeated. With about 270,000 homes destroyed by the storm surge and levee

breaches, New Orleans feels citizens will be back to rebuild after the party's over. Officials say some have come home. As at February 2006, Mayor Ray Nagin's office estimates the population to be on the rise. More than 200,000 people now reside in Orleans Parish, reporting a total for the entire metropolitan area of 929,554 as of January 17. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans had 484,000 residents and the metro population was 1.3 million. Though numbers may never be the same again and the demographics changed dramatically with the influx of outside labour force, increased population is expected somehow when some locals try and return. There are new communities to absorb the displaced families. St Thomas Project, once a notorious neighbourhood, has undergone a massive facelift. It is being transformed into a beautiful, cleaner, safer neighbourhood called River Gardens. A blossoming new community is expected to be 'financially and racially' mixed when finished. Blocks of pastel-

coloured structures built in 3 phases - from rental flats, condominiums to rental houses - now line the former project. Occupants will be charged according to how much they can pay, not with how high the rates can go. Great strides in tourism-related business and attractions have been made including with hosting/reviving the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, French Quarter Festival and numerous other special events for this year. "New Orleans has been a standard-bearer of hospitality and hosting of world-class events," said Sandra Shiltone, president and CEO of the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation. "We are pleased to offer visitors this year a full range of festivals and special events while we re-establish the city as a must-visit destination." Indeed, tourism renewal is what the Louisiana state is now seriously focused on. More than 800 restaurants have already reopened in Orleans Parish alone, employing 15,000, according to the Louisiana Restaurant Association.



The number of employees that could immediately be placed if they were available is 10,000. While the issue of housing remains a huge problem for the majority working in food and beverage, people have found ways to cope. They simply bunk up with other family members or colleagues for now. Eight to ten people, or one to two families, to a room is no shock to many. The Metairie district is where most of the city's existing workforce found temporary housing. The West Bank survived the hurricane with no damage, taking in some of the displaced. Some staff at the Russell's Marina Grill, the first and only one to open in the heavily devastated Lake Pontchartrain Boulevard, drive to Baton Rouge where they found the closest and most affordable accommodation.

Everybody's making an effort to restore the system. Since housing, for that matter staff housing, remains a huge issue, almost every staff bunks up with others or otherwise drive very long distances to and fro another city.

There are 100 metro area hotels and motels now open with 27,000 rooms in inventory. Although there were 265 hotels with rooms of 28, 338 pre-storm, some will reopen this year including the Ritz-Carlton and the Fairmont Hotel which had up to 3 metres of water, according to the Gray Line's Hurricane Katrina Tour guide. Some 81,000 enterprises in 10 parishes are open; 42,168 are currently online and another 20,268 have partially resumed operations. Public transport on certain routes within the city was free until June. Some 28 bus lines are running, providing 11,000 rides daily. With two others, the St Charles Avenue streetcar lines were hardest hit by Katrina. St Charles opens Christmas. On Canal Street downtown however, cars are lending tourists that classic tram experience.

Meantime, the Louis Armstrong International Airport reports increased flights from 74 to 78 on Mardi Gras weeks, to a further 91 flights in April.

Rebuild New Orleans, it will despite many questions about the city coming back in full swing as residential, or purely high-end residential or part industrial. There is no doubt it will come back to life depending on the funding the federal government will allocate for the levees. No matter how one looks at it, New Orleans is important to America. For many reasons such as - being one of the oldest cities in the US, the birthplace of jazz, one of the busiest ports of America, the home of esteemed medical research facilities, one of top three culinary destinations in the world. Without New Orleans, the US would have to find alternative sources of the country's most important consumer products - petroleum, chemical, mineral production, seafood and cash crops. Without New Orleans, one of the world's most important ports catering to 6,000 vessels, creating 380,000 jobs, \$37 billion of output and \$2.8 billion in tax revenue will have disappeared forever with Katrina. ■



Gadgets and Gizmos

TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY ESSENTIALS

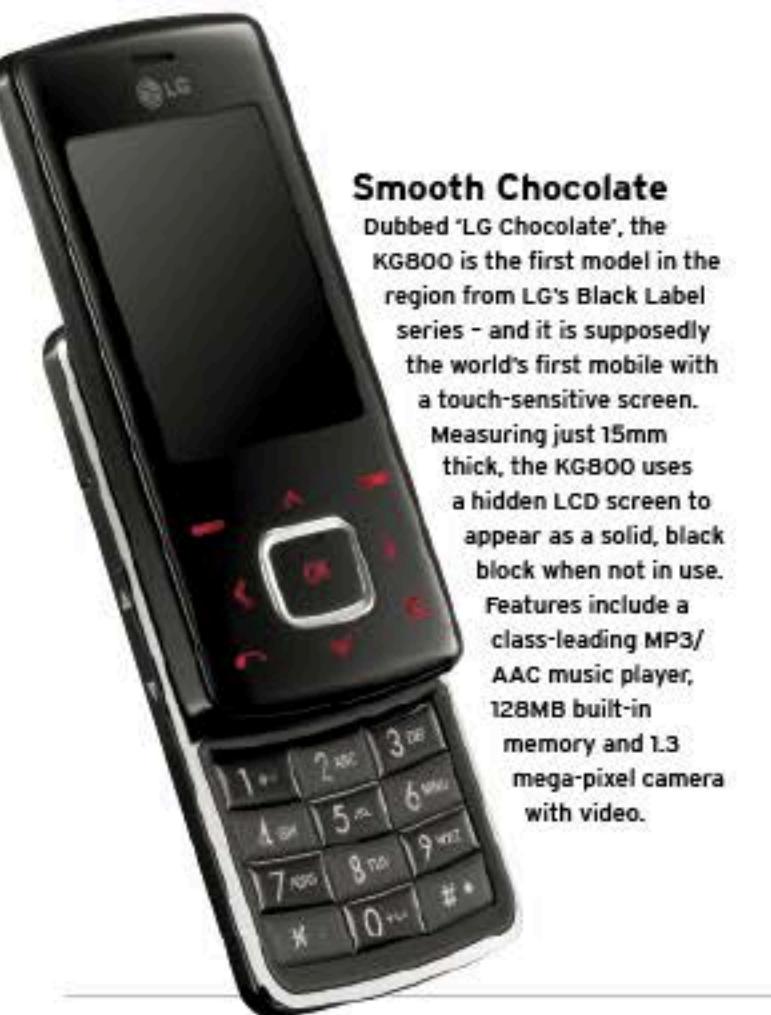
Take a Shot

Sony introduces the latest 7.2-megapixel Cyber-shot DSC-T30 model. The new model now has a high sensitive mode of up to ISO 1000 to prevent object shake even in low-light conditions. The camera takes sharp pictures in any situation, during fast-moving activities or low-light surroundings. It has a long battery life, user-friendly functions. It also boasts minimised power consumption to offer users extensive photo opportunities of up to 420 shots in one charge.



And it's Pink!

Nokia N72 in pearl pink or gloss black is equipped with a 2-megapixel camera and integrated digital music player with dedicated capture key, music player key, an integrated browser, FM radio and support for Visual Radio. The phone also allows the user to tailor their multimedia device to match their interests, whether music, imaging or entertainment content - all in a stylish design.



Smooth Chocolate

Dubbed 'LG Chocolate', the KG800 is the first model in the region from LG's Black Label series - and it is supposedly the world's first mobile with a touch-sensitive screen. Measuring just 15mm thick, the KG800 uses a hidden LCD screen to appear as a solid, black block when not in use. Features include a class-leading MP3/AAC music player, 128MB built-in memory and 1.3 mega-pixel camera with video.

Creative Sound

Creative offers its sleek new docking device for MP3 Players. With wide stereo effect and high quality sound clarity, it provides 32 hours of playback. The compact and sturdy clamshell design is ideal for travelers and lets you listen to music anywhere at anytime. In addition, the line-jack lets users plug into CD and notebook PC's.



Small and Mighty

O2 launches its PDA-phone that features a 2.0 mega pixel camera with built-in flash, enabling you to capture pin-sharp photos - indoors and outdoors, day and night. The Xda Atom is one of the first PDA phones to feature an FM radio tuner and the new O2 MediaPlus application - the first multimedia centre created for PDA-phones. Besides offering equaliser settings with Windows Media Player, O2 MediaPlus gives you complete control over your entertainment experience, and plays music, audio books, home movies and music videos from one interface.



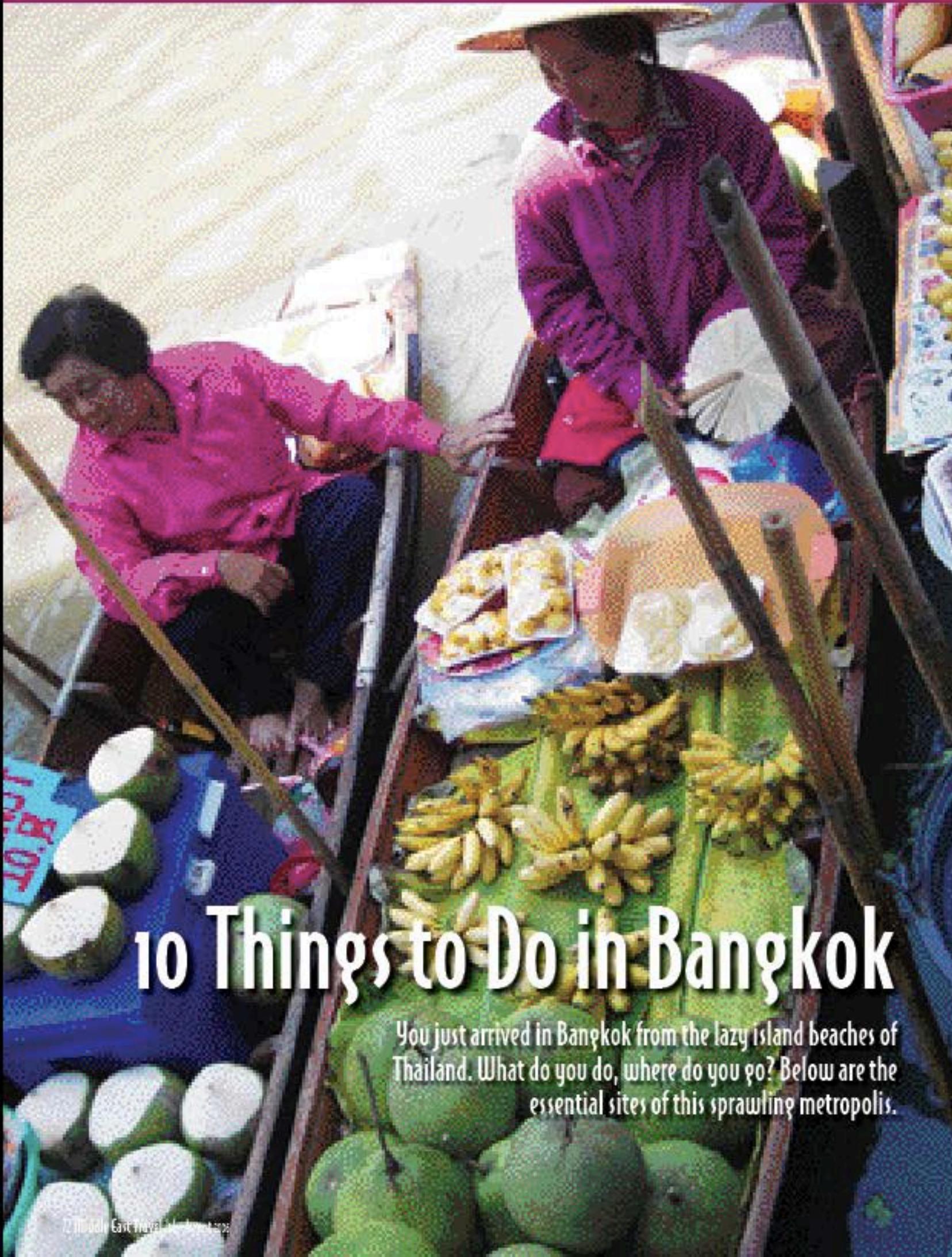
Active Listening

The Walkman-branded HPM-65 was designed to deliver the best possible sound for both voice and music. With sporty ear hooks to give a stable fit, the device is the perfect hands-free for an active lifestyle. The ear buds, made of soft silicon, rest in the ears and deliver music with a pleasant balance between treble and bass. A 3.5 mm plug allows the user to switch between earphones, giving freedom to change headphones.



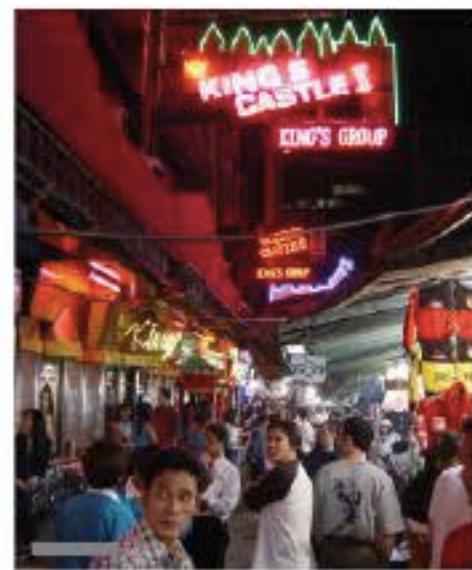
10 Things to Do in Bangkok

You just arrived in Bangkok from the lazy island beaches of Thailand. What do you do, where do you go? Below are the essential sites of this sprawling metropolis.



Phat Pong

You'll be hard pressed to find any other place in the world where women will shoot darts and smoke cigarettes out of their most private parts (get the drift). Phat Pong is seedy, sleazy and notorious, hence its popularity. The areas are geared toward single males looking for sex in all its forms. If the sex shows interest you, there's lots of variety to choose. Still, if cheap Thai prostitutes and the women and lady-boys of Thailand are really what you're looking for, buyer beware - a million times over. For the rest of the tourists looking for the essential Bangkok experience, the restaurants open until dawn and rip-off prices will turn you on or turn you away. Beware of pickpockets.



Grand Palace

The Grand Palace was built in 1782 and is almost identical to that of the Royal Palace in the former capital of Ayutthaya. It will take at least half a day to see all the sites which are enclosed in four walls that total 1,900 metres. There are museums of artefacts and artillery as well as a great place to people watch. The biggest attraction of the Grand Palace complex is the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, which is one of the most important sites in Thailand. People convene to pay respect to the Lord Buddha and His teachings and his sacred image is clad with one of three seasonal costumes that can only be changed by the King. When visiting, beware of the dress code which requires modest clothing to enter the grounds. However, clothing is provided at the entrance if you left your modesty back at the hotel.

Vimanmek Teak Mansion

Located in a leafy and fairly quiet area of the city, the Vimanmek Teak Mansion is the world's largest golden teakwood mansion with an elaborate style that shows significant Western influence. It was built in 1900 by King Rama V. There are 31 exhibition rooms and the Thai tour guides will take you through the mansion and give you a complete history of the place. And the tour is mandatory so don't expect to mosey along at your own pace. Once the tour is finished, the



manicured lawns offer a relaxing spot to chill out and escape Bangkok's busy pace.

Street Food

If you've come to Thailand to taste their famous cuisine, you can't ignore the thousands of street food vendors that will fill your belly with any combination of mouth watering foods. Walk along and stop to taste whatever great food interrupts your way. Watch vendors mix together all the traditional Thai elements, only to produce a filling and cheap dish is part of the experience. Pad Thai is the most famous dish and can



be found absolutely anywhere. As Thai people are known for their cleanliness, you can happily munch away, fairly



certain you won't be bed ridden for the next three days with Bangkok Belly, though it does exist.

Suan Lum Night Bazaar

Forget doing your shopping in any other place except Suan Lum. It has everything you could possibly want in terms of kitschy Thai souvenirs so stock up here. However, the place is a real gem for the great variety of Thai artisans and



designers who sell their goods here. You will not only find your standard items but a ton of small shops tailored to your tastes. The Night Bazaar is quite large and you will have no problems finding every gift you need to bring home. When you're finished, sit back and enjoy the incompetent service at one of the many restaurants that dot the night bazaar.

Slam Square

Thailand's reputation for cheap shopping is on perfect display at this sprawling section of the city. The selection of clothes, shoes and jewellery is comparable to none and has the added bonus of being of good quality and the latest styles. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes and clothing since you're sure to spend your time trying on a ton of things. It's a seemingly endless road of boutiques that finally spills into a massive shopping mall that will eventually overwhelm you as you limp along with bags and bags of purchases.

River Cruise

After wearing out your feet site seeing, cruise the Chao Phraya River on an old converted teakwood rice barge and take in the sites of Bangkok by evening. With a candlelit table and a great variety of Thai food to choose from, it's the perfect way to end a trip to this bustling and overwhelming city. The boat cruise will give you a different view of some of Bangkok's most famous sites. Choose a sunset cruise which leaves at 6pm or an Evening cruise at 8pm. There are dozens of cruise companies to choose from and most of them have the cruise down to a fine art.



Slam Niramit

On any trip to Bangkok, after you've had your fill of standard tour sites, an unexpected and exceptionally cool event awaits you. Siam Niramit: Journey Into the Enchanted Kingdom of Siam, is a \$40 million stage production that will blow your mind. On a specially built panoramic stage in a 2,000-seat auditorium, 150 performers will take you into a three part on musical journey the showcases the culture and history of ancient Siam. The production is so unexpectedly amazing that the first 20 minutes will be spent amazed that it even exists.

The colours, the music and the quality of the production is unbelievable, considering that most tourists consider the Teak mansion, Phat Pong and Emerald Palace (amongst a few others) the extent of Bangkok's sites. Unfortunately, the 2,000 seat

auditorium was far from capacity and the \$50 price tag is out of range for many locals, making this a risky investment for the Thai government. Nonetheless, it has now become a permanent fixture of Bangkok and anyone planning a trip to Bangkok should make an effort to see this show. For info on Siam Niramit, contact info@siamniramit.com.

Tea at the Oriental Bangkok

A trip to Bangkok is not the same without staying at the Oriental Bangkok. At least you have to drop by for an afternoon tea on the terrace and ponder at the boats crusing over the Chao Phraya River. But this Mandarin Oriental hotel in itself is an experience - not to mention it has been a magnet for worldwide celebrities since its launch 130 years ago. Here, you'll get it all: butler service, chauffer-driven BMW limousines, free private taxi-boats, thai

cooking and culture programmes and day care centre. You can also indulge at Lord Jim's seafood restaurant or chill out by the lush garden pation. And best of all - cross the river for topline body treatments at the Oriental Spa. For reservations, contact orbkk-reservations@mohg.com.

Khao San Road

The ultimate people-watching spot of Bangkok. As clubs and pubs close for the night, the crowds pour into the street, making their own parties on the sidewalk. You'll find plenty of hippies who haven't showered in days, Lady-boys who'd give top models a run for their money and everything else. While the street-vendors are happy to rip you off, clearly tired of bargaining with tourists, you can find lots of knock-off movies and cd's for cheap. Along with tons of bars and restaurants, you can happily spend an evening meandering around.





A Place in Paradise

The Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi Resort and Spa is a hidden paradise tucked away in one of the world's most popular destinations – Thailand.

There isn't a single description or photograph that someone can give about the Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi Resort and Spa in Chiang Mai that can really describe what a great resort it actually is. It's luxurious and hedonistic, while being totally faithful to the nature and culture of Lanna and Asian colonial history.

Tucked away amidst the lush greenery in Thailand's northern capital, the resort opened in 2004 and still retains the aura of being one of Thailand's best kept secrets. But naturally, such great places don't go unnoticed for very long.

The Dhara Dhevi is made up of 123 villas and suites. Instead of conventional hotel rooms, the resort offers 20 styles of accommodations ranging from teak pavilions and rice barns to colonial style suites. The most palatial of the villas comes complete with private swimming pools and Jacuzzis.

The concept for the design came from Rachen Intawong who envisioned the building of a working museum – a place where Thailand's Lanna culture and Asian colonial design came together. Intawong's conception for Dhara Dhevi

was chiselled by his immersion into Lanna history and art, as well as his regional travels to different villages and his study of rural architectural styles. In addition, Intawong drew inspiration from authentic Thai palaces, surrounded by rice paddy fields, lakes and Lanna-inspired houses.

The most incredible part of the Dhara Dhevi is how well it manages to blend with nature. On every path and in any corner, wildflowers, small creatures and minnow fish thrive, while guests are happily greeted by farmers and gardeners walking along the way.

Although it's a resort, it feels more like a village and you can't help but happily fall into a lull of contentedness as you mosey your way through the resort. You're not really going anywhere and you don't really care.

Many of the villas are built around a large rice paddy being ploughed by fat and happy water buffalos. While every aspect of the villa is authentic to the region, they all offer the latest gadgets and technology if you feel the need to push up your blood-pressure to pre-vacation levels.

Massive bathrooms with a whirlpool tub overlooking the rice paddy, plunge pool and large outdoor deck are luxurious standards of several villas. The bathroom alone is the size of a small New York hotel room and may be enough in itself to spend a few extra days at the resort.

For a bit of quiet contemplation, the second floor Thai pavilion is the perfect



spot from which to enjoy Chiang Mai's sunrise and take in the perfumed air, which is a great luxury if you're arriving from a smog-filled metropolis.

As a bonus, the villas are decorated with museum quality antiquities from the private collection of Suchet Suwanmongkol, a prominent Thai businessman and owner of the Dhara Dhevi. Tastefully decorated, the artwork adds to the cosy but spacious feeling of every room.

The tranquillity of the accommodations

conjures up a feeling of home, even when you're thousands of miles from it. And after a couple of days, the wooden planks that snake their way across the rice paddies and the ponds that dot the resort give you the feeling that you're ten-years old all over again. After figuring out the resort's design, it comes time to explore its nooks and crannies.

The Dhara Dhevi also features a variety of top notch restaurants which give guests a taste of Thailand's famous cuisine, in addition to the standard fare for those craving a taste of the familiar. But in this place, that's unlikely. Most of the ingredients are organic and arrive from nurseries in Chiang Mai which benefit poor local communities surrounding the northern capital. One of the biggest attractions of the Dhara Dhevi is its world class destination spa, touted as one of the first in Thailand. Spanning an incredible 3,100 square metres, it is a sanctuary unto itself that greets visitors as they arrive. Designed entirely of teak, every inch of the structure is embellished with



mouldings and sculptures depicting sacred animals and symbols of Buddhism.

Amazingly, the structure came about through the work of 150 Chiang Mai artisans who recreated it from its original Burmese template in Mandalay, Myanmar. The spa offers a complete range of European, Asian and North African relaxation therapies as well as ayurvedic treatments and the trained staff provide detailed consultations to decide the right treatments for every person's needs.

To stay in touch with home (just in case you want to), the resort provides a small and tranquil library stocked with hundreds of books on every subject, the latest magazines and an impressive collection of foreign and Western movies. And of course, Internet is available at the library, in addition to access in every room.

The Dhara Dhevi is a luxury that's not to be missed. Whether it's for a two nights or a couple of weeks, it offers the ultimate opportunity to take a deep, deep breath and savour the world's most simple and genuine pleasures. And we highly recommend that you get there before the rest of the world discovers it.

For more info on the Dhara Dhevi, contact
Tel: +66 53 888 888
www.mandarinoriental.com

You're only mobile

Mobile phones are replacing the travel agent and everyday iris scanners. Here are some examples of the latest technology available to the average traveller.

Whereas once upon a time mobile phones could only be used in the user's home country, mobile phones have evolved to the point where they are becoming a travellers most essential survival tool for organising and planning trips.

According to Steve Procter, head of iTAGG mobile agency, a cutting edge company seeking to maximize the power of the mobile, by 2010 mobile technology will be so advanced that it will allow customers to browse destinations and book directly through their handsets.

"When you consider that 95 per cent of adults in the UK have a mobile phone and nearly all of us take them with us when we travel, it's the companies that use this technology to enhance their customer service that will differentiate themselves from the competition," said Procter.

He went on to explain that travel suppliers working in tandem with traditional and online booking systems would have a powerful tool to reach even more consumers. Additionally, the mobiles could eventually be used to deliver travel tickets and booking and destination information.

"Travel suppliers can also use mobile technology as a revenue generator by charging to send city guides, for example, direct to a customer's mobile," said Procter.

In addition to the innovations expected of the mobile phone industry in the coming years, several companies have developed a variety of products to suit the expanding needs of the business traveller in today's market.

Such products include the flash memory USB from Sandisk which uses biometric sensors to protect the contents of the memory and is touted

as being 'virtually indestructible'.

As for Samsung, it has recently introduced the Pocket Imager which allows the user to give presentations while travelling. It plugs into mobiles and laptops to project movies, pictures or videos onto the equivalent of a 64-inch screen. Other gadgets include the Fizz Traveller which provides time and weather in almost every city in the world. It can also be used to create lists, measure international clothing and shoe sizes as well as other useful travel features.

One of the niftiest travel devices to launch has been the Digimemo which digitally captures and stores all paper writings which can then be edited and organized in Windows Software. It also converts handwritten notes and diagrams into digital format for downloading and emailing.

Travel technology has also become a lot more sophisticated and personalized such as the xVista, one of the world's first portable iris scanners. The xVista maps the iris of the user and registers the information onto a central computing device. The iris templates can then be stored onto low-



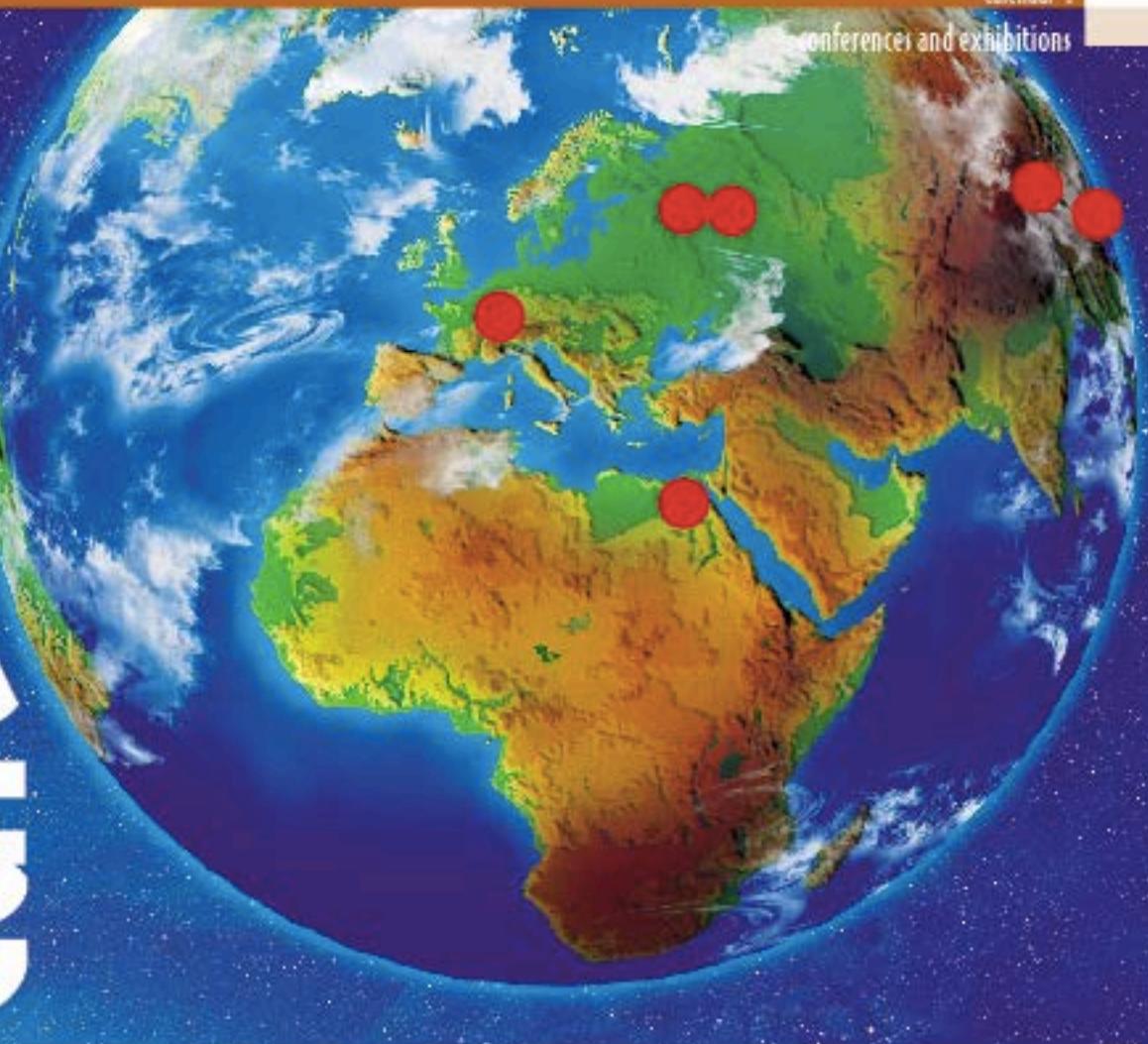
power computing systems like mobile phone cameras. Impressive enough, it can also store 250 000 iris templates. Other nifty and techy travel items include Memorex U3 smart-drive which allow all personal preferences to be stored on any Windows XP or 2000 PC as well as the Loc8tor whereby the user attaches a stamp-size tag on anything and in case of loss, the technology will pinpoint any item within a 60ft range.

From mobile phones that act as your travel agent, to stamp-size locators, the traveller's world will soon be revved up to digital overload. It only depends on how far you'll take it.



mark these dates

calendar





View from Central Park

Manhattan, New York

This shot was taken on the path between Bethesda Fountain on the lake and Strawberry Fields. Central Park is the most famous park in the world and New York's Central Park has been giving its residence a much needed refuge of greenery and peace for decades. Stretching 843 acres and taking up 6 per cent of Manhattan, it houses the Central Park Zoo in addition to man-made lakes and fine dining restaurants. With 25 million visitors each year, Central Park is the most frequently visited urban park in the United States.