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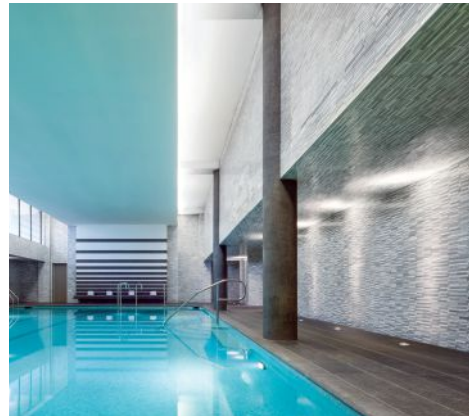
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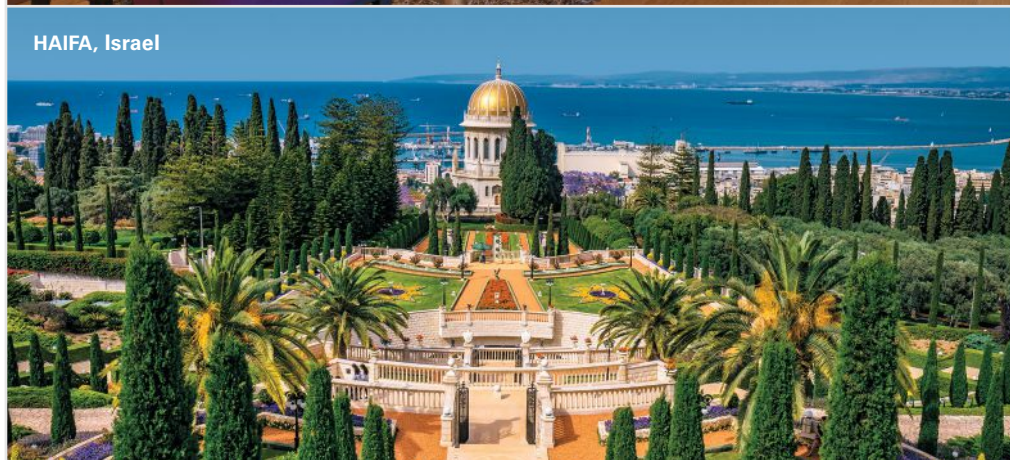
On the cover, Jeff Willner, Owner/CEO of Travel Edge

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Game Changer

It's time to pay attention, as this will really affect your wallet. Over the past few years, the consolidation activity in the industry has been at the agency level with mergers, buyouts and consortia affiliation changes. In many cases, agencies have become aligned with multiple consortia and distribution channels, all of which give that agency a great deal of flexibility and choice. A while back, aligning with multiple networks was done on the hush-hush and everyone turned a head on it.

Now, all this activity is out in the open and loyalty to a single entity has gone out the window for many.

You could say this new world is all part of our industry's survival, versatility, perseverance and ability to thrive in this ever-changing market. This is the new

travel agency landscape.

Now on to you, the travel advisor. You're the one that drives this commerce engine. It's your turn to have transparency in your earnings and prove your worth to your owner. Independent contractors comprise the majority of the advisors in the luxury space. They are in control, since most don't have contracts and can walk away anytime with the wonderful client list they brought to the table in the first place. How these independent contractors have been paid has always been different, since no industry standard exists. It was a very private discussion with your owner that you

kept to yourself. These days, very reputable agencies are offering very transparent commission plans that pay up to 100 percent commissions based on yearly dollar volume. So now host agencies that targeted remote advisors are seeing competition from full-service agencies. There's only one phrase to describe this: it's a game changer!

My advice is to do your homework and make sure the services you are used to are not compromised. It's not worth the extra money in your pocket when you have dissatisfied clients. The cat is out of the bag and commission percentages will no longer be a mystery. Game on!

JOHN MCMAHON
Executive Vice President/Group Publisher
jmcmahon@questex.com



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TRAVEL ADVISOR

Inspiring and Educating Sellers of Affluent Travel

Executive Vice President/Group Publisher: John McMahon | jmcmahon@questex.com
(212) 895-8243

Vice President/Editorial Director: Ruthanne Terrero, CTC | rterrero@questex.com
(212) 895-8423

Associate Editor, Luxury Travel Advisor; LuxuryTravelAdvisor.com:
Matt Turner | mturner@questex.com
(212) 895-8289

Contributing Editors: Joe Pike, Susan J. Young, Adam Leposa, Mary Winston Nicklin, Sharri Whiting de Masi, Emily Goldfischer, Pamela McCourt Francescone, Lindsay Lambert

Editor at Large: Priscilla Alexander

ADVERTISING & SALES STAFF

Group Sales Manager: Stephanie Gordon | sgordon@questex.com
(305) 854-1622

Northeast USA: Kristin Bator | kbator@questex.com
(212) 895-8242

Midwest & Southeast USA:
Andi Washington | awashington@questex.com
(773) 895-6662

Florida & Caribbean: Barbara Magro | bmagro@questex.com
(561)-257-1710

West Coast USA, Asia/Pacific: Chris Coon | ccoon@questex.com
(661) 775-1482

Europe, Middle East & Africa:
Megan Meeres | megan@mm-2.co.uk
+44 (0) 20-8961-3706

Spain, Mexico & Latin America:
Viveca Caldara | viveca@vcmedia.es
+34 971 198 377

Hawaii: Loren Malenchek | loren@hawaii.rr.com
(808) 283-7122

TRAVEL AGENT LEARNING AND LOYALTY:

Vice President, Learning and Loyalty: Kimberly Newbury | knewbury@questex.com
(312) 233-2647

ART, CIRCULATION & PROMOTION, MARKETING

Art Director: Debbie Sheehan | dsheehan@questex.com
(212) 895-8429

Contributing Art Director: Amy B. Witek | awitek@questex.com
(440) 879-8299

Senior Digital Imaging Specialist: Jon Shaw | jshaw@questex.com

Production Director: Hal Garstein | hgarstein@questex.com
(212) 895-8439

Production Specialist: Ana Maria Lindsey | alindsey@questex.com
(212) 895-8406

Audience Development Manager:
Debbie Gullian | dgullian@questex.com
(440) 249-4430

Customer Service: subscriptions, address changes, back issues, single current copies
Toll free (866) 344-1315; International (847) 763-9594 | luxurytraveladvisor@halldata.com

Reprints: Wright's Media, (877) 652-5295

Group Marketing Director: Jennifer L. Rosen | jrosen@questex.com
(212) 895-8262

QUESTEX CORPORATE
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President & C.E.O.: Kerry C. Gumas
Executive V.P.: John McMahon
Senior Vice President & Chief Digital Officer: Steve Kurtz

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What to Tell Your Client Now



CALIFORNIA COAST: I'm shown here, center, at L'Auberge del Mar, with Amanda Esposito, the hotel's leisure sales manager, and Marguarite Clark of Marguarite Clark Public Relations, who represents the property, just outside of San Diego. It turned out to be a lovely stay, just across the street from the Pacific Ocean, with plenty of California sunshine. Watch for my report in a future issue.

How often do you try to make your client feel like they're one of a kind and deserving of the best? All the time, right? Here's a wake-up call: you need to tell some of them that they're not as special as they think they are.

These would be your procrastinators who want you to do your magic at the last minute, even though you've been trying to get them to commit for months.

You know who I'm talking about, right?

Sit these lovely folks down, give them something cold to drink, look them straight in the eye and tell them that there are other affluent people out there who like to travel, too. The only difference is these other affluent people are also really good at planning ahead. Explain to your procrastinators that these plan-ahead people are the ones getting the top hotel suites and penthouses on the luxury cruise lines, and they're securing guaranteed departures with small groups to amazing places. And they don't have any stress over where they're going to spend their life-changing vacation, because they made up their mind ages ago to commit to this very important, very expensive experience.

You know the scenario all too well. Your client in question agonizes over making decisions. They debate whether they even want to go to the destination in question, and if they even want to travel in July. They mull the trip over and over again with their spouse and that process alone takes months. When they finally call you to book that trip to Iceland that departs in just three weeks, you have to give them a rude awakening: The inventory for that trip is long gone, just as you warned it would be.

You might consider likening the situation to that in the Realtor.com commercial where a couple shows up to buy the house of their dreams but the

early bird couple who scouted it out ahead of time is already hosting their housewarming party in it. When it comes to fabulous, there are only so many things to go around.

Luxury Travel Advisor just hosted its first Ultra Trendsetters conference, where advisor attendees told us that their biggest challenge this year is getting access to the top suites on ships and in hotels because their clients make their travel decisions too close in to their desired date of departure.

"There are only so many top suites in each destination. Some do not understand they are competing for space with people who have similar or higher resources at their disposal," said one luxury travel advisor.

Another issue? Finding slots on intimate-sized trips to exotic locales. Yacht charters, villas, private plane charters and helicopter tours to remote areas are also rare commodities and, like that dream house, are not easily replaced by something similar.

This scarcity dynamic is amplified when you consider that top luxury travel advisors are accruing more referral business than ever before. Their client roster is bursting with like-minded, super-affluent consumers willing to pay a lot for extremely special experiences. These same folks are feeling confident because of the strong stock market and they have a pent-up demand to travel, which means the luxury travel advisor has their hands full when it comes to securing luxury accommodations in popular locales.

So what's a travel advisor to do? Scope out alternate destinations, research land operators and suppliers who have access to amazing experiences and venues, but above all, speak to your clients about the importance of planning early, which often means a year out, or even earlier if the opportunity really is unique. It's a big world, filled with many very special people and they need to know where they fit in.

RUTHANNE TERRERO, CTC
Vice President/Editorial Director
rtterrero@questex.com
www.instagram.com/ruthanneterrero

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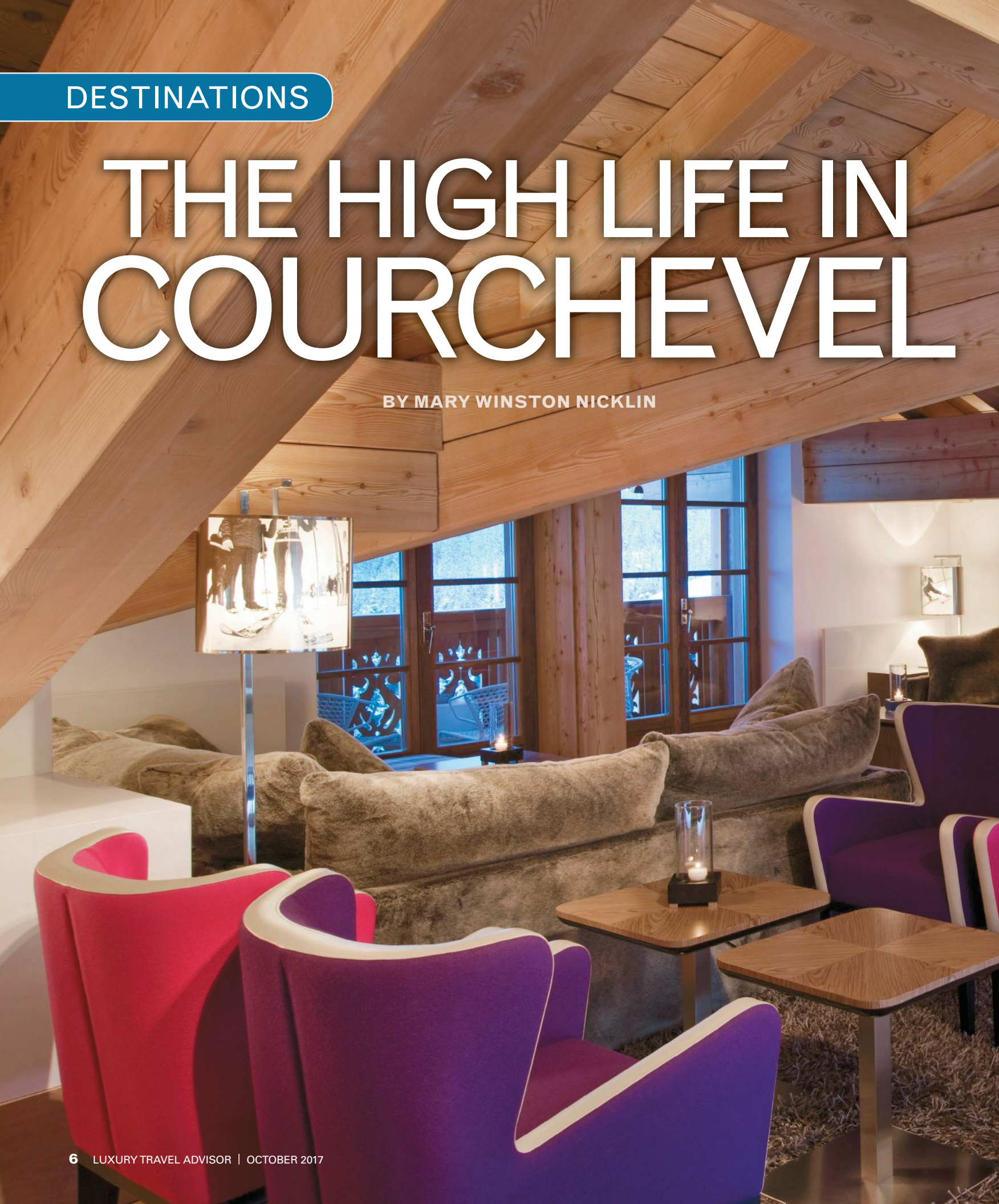
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DESTINATIONS

THE HIGH LIFE IN COURCHEVEL

BY MARY WINSTON NICKLIN



A modern lounge area with a wooden ceiling, colorful armchairs, and a glass wall. The room features a mix of contemporary and rustic design elements, including a large wooden beam ceiling, a glass wall, and a variety of seating options like a brown sofa, a pink armchair, and wooden chairs with patterned cushions. The floor is made of light-colored wood, and there are several round tables and a large shaggy rug.

Courchevel is known as the most glamorous destination in the French Alps. With three “palaces” and 18 five-star hotels, you’d be hard-pressed to find a greater concentration of luxury hotels and Michelin stars anywhere else in the world. But it also has superb skiing — without the lines. With views of iconic Mont Blanc, Courchevel is connected to the Trois Vallées, the largest ski domain on earth.

The well-groomed, high-altitude pistes at Courchevel 1850 are particularly adored by adrenaline hounds. Today it’s the winter destination of choice for the international jetsetter. In fact, those who summer in Saint-Tropez are apt to winter in Courchevel.

LE STRATO’s bar offers a warm, relaxed atmosphere to enjoy an aperitif or a night cap.

Just in time for the 2017-2018 ski season, *Luxury Travel Advisor* has the skinny on what's new.

Add this lovely hotel to your rolodex: **Le Strato**, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, is an intimate five-star hideaway right on the slopes. Here, traditional room keys are provided instead of plastic key cards, encouraging guests to have an interaction with staff as they come and go. Guests are recognized by name; staff even remember your exact breakfast choices.

Set at the base of the Cospillot piste, Le Strato has a killer location with sweeping views of the snow-capped peaks. There are just 25 guestrooms, of which four are duplex suites. We particularly like the Suites de Luxe equipped with private terraces. In-room treats include Nespresso machines, wine bars, and — in the white marble bathrooms — Toto toilets and a selection of Sothys amenities.

For VIPs seeking extra privacy, the Chalet Timeless has three floors and lots of luxury. Think fireplace, kitchen and outdoor terrace from where you can directly hit the slopes. Booking Tips: Like most hotels in Courchevel, Le Strato has an annual closure from

ACCESS:

Geneva is the preferred international airport, with Lyon also being a two-hour drive away. There is also a small airport at Chambéry (1 hour and 15 minutes by car from the resort). TGV access from Paris and London is via the Moutiers station. There's a heliport in Courchevel for helicopter arrivals, and also a 500-meter runway called the Altiport, infamous because of its short length and perilous cliffside setting — not for the faint of heart! Pilots taking off and landing on this runway must have a special permit.



LE STRATO has 25 suites and rooms, all of which have a balcony or a terrace. Seen here is an Executive Suite.

April to early December. Note that Le Strato is a family-friendly hotel with a dedicated children's room. Half-board stays can be arranged, as can prearranged ski packages, complete with lessons by top instructors. For VIP bookings, luxury travel advisors can reach out to General Manager Mathieu Petit (mathieupetit@hotelstrato.com; 011-330-479-415-160). Other arrangements can be made via Head Concierge Richard Vocanson (concierge@hotelstrato.com).

Regardless of your level, the hotel makes it easy to explore the pristine pistes with a top-notch ski room and direct ski-in/ski-out access. Over a cup of coffee and pastries in the morning, get expert advice from the professional team while you get fit for heated gloves and boots. (Forgot your gear? They'll outfit you from head to toe — for rent or purchase.) Le Strato has a partnership with the Maison Bernard Orcel — which is not just a luxury store, but a multi-brand fashion universe and a 40-year-old tradition in Courchevel. What this means is that you'll find all the latest chic fashions in the Bernard Orcel-branded onsite boutique. You'll also notice Strato by Rossignol skis that are customized by celebrated street artist JonOne, and — outside on the terrace — a white bear sculpture by Richard

Orlinski. (Le Strato showcases artwork in much the same way that the ski resort stages monumental exhibitions. Even Courchevel's cable cars are painted by renowned contemporary artists.)

After a day on the mountain, return to a glass of champagne at the ski room, then hit the Sothys spa. Situated on two levels, this bijou spa has a sublime pool lit by a murano chandelier facing a wall of glass framing the mountain vistas. There are also two saunas, a steam room, a Jacuzzi and four treatment rooms. Indulge in a facial, the "Secret de Sothys" treatment (a unique 11-step ritual), or the signature Strato massage. Private yoga classes and personal fitness trainers are also available.

Dining at Le Strato is an absolute highlight. Chef Jean-André Charial, who has two Michelin stars at his restaurant L'Oustau de Baumanière in Provence, oversees the kitchens at Baumanière 1850. Only open in the evenings, the Michelin-starred gourmet restaurant sends out artful dishes: Jerusalem artichoke covered in truffles; fish from Lake Geneva drizzled with a pumpkin jus. A more casual lunch — served in the bar or on the sunny terrace — is also delicious; don't miss the Baumanière salad, piled high with artichokes and pine nuts, followed by possibly the best molten lava cake we've tasted.

The winter season in Courchevel is packed with cultural events, championship ski races, polo tournaments on snow, and a February fireworks show. For people-watching, head to la Croisette, the storied street lined with luxury boutiques like Boucheron, the jewelry brand's best-selling franchise in all of Europe. Le Tremplin is a top après-ski spot. Some food-minded travelers come to Courchevel just to eat, skiing from restaurant to restaurant. There are a whopping 110 addresses, with some of the world's top chefs wintering in Courchevel. Le 1947, helmed by Chef Yannick Alléno, at the **Cheval Blanc** was the only new restaurant in France to receive a Michelin three-star rating in 2017. Le Kintessence at the **Hotel Le K2** nabbed two stars, as did the Montgomerie at the **Hotel Le K2 Altitude**.

New in 2017: Chef Mauro Colagreco — whose Michelin-starred Riviera restaurant, Mirazur, was named fourth in The World's 50 Best Restaurants 2017 — arrived in Courchevel 1850 with the opening of his BFire restaurant at the new **Barrière Les Neiges Courchevel**. This is the first mountain resort for Group Barrière (their portfolio includes the famous Fouquet's brasserie



BARRIERE LES NEIGES' 3,300-square-foot penthouse, "Les Neiges" apartment, is the top accommodation that presents sweeping views of the mountains from the terrace (here). Shown below is Mauro Colagreco's BFire Restaurant, which serves Italian and Argentinian-inspired dishes.

Photo by Fabrice Rambert

in Paris), which acquired the Hôtel des Neiges in July 2014 and reopened it last December. Barrière Les Neiges Courchevel promptly made a splash with celebrity sightings and film screenings (like Guillaume Canet's movie "Rock'n Roll").

There is a fun, happening vibe here, evident in the chic lobby. The 42 rooms and suites have an alpine chalet feel with fur throws and gorgeous wood paneling. Stand-out pieces include the "minibars" that are fashioned like travel trunks and covered with Hermès hides. **Booking Tips:** Thirty-six rooms have a balcony or terrace; 25 connecting rooms are good for groups and families; and six top suites come with butler service. The crème de la crème is the top-floor "Les Neiges" apartment, with more than 3,300 square feet of space. Luxury travel advisors may contact Véronique Beulz (vbeulz@groupebarriere.com).

com; 011-330-675-158-062), sales manager. The sky's the limit for Head Concierge Alain Keyzers (akeyzers@groupebarriere.com), who can arrange heli-skiing, night descents, slopeside lunches, dog sledding and more.

Facilities include the ski room, a private cinema, and an exceptional, movie-themed Kid's Club, complete with a hangout area for teenagers. Encompassing nearly 11,000 square feet, the Spa Diane Barrière is one of the largest in Courchevel. From anti-aging and slimming rituals to après-ski massages, the spa menu highlights products by cult brands Biologique Recherche and the Ligne St Barth. Pools, saunas, steam rooms, manicure station, scrubbing room... There's even a cryotherapy booth on the premises. For more information, reach out to Spa Manager Brigitte Bibard (bbibard@groupebarriere.com).



Photo by Fabrice Rambert

And that restaurant we were swooning over, BFire? Try sharing plates like steaks of Picanha beef or lamb à l'Asador, baked over embers, not forgetting churros with dulce de leche for dessert. Bien sûr, there's also Petrossian caviar, and black truffles can be shaved over any

dish (this is Courchevel we're talking about!). Dine by the fire on the terrace and you can watch the skiers swoosh by on the slopes. There's also a private chalet for traditional hearty fare like fondue, and an outpost of the Fouquet's brasserie (lobster ravioli, anyone?). ■

NEW IN PARIS

We check in to Le Crillon and the Nolinski to catch the latest luxury and live-like-a-local vibes in the City of Light.

BY MARY WINSTON NICKLIN

HÔTEL DE CRILLON's Suite Bernstein (here) has a 1,205-square-foot private terrace overlooking Place de la Concorde and the Eiffel Tower.

LES GRANDS APPARTEMENTS (top right), situated on the fourth floor of the Crillon, have been designed by Karl Lagerfeld.

Jardin d'Hiver (right center) at the Crillon is famous for savory and desserts created by Chef Jérôme Chaucesse.

Hôtel de Crillon, A Rosewood Hotel reopened in Paris in July following a reported \$300 million renovation, and we say now is the time to revisit the City of Light. Beyond the eternally delicious fashion and food, enticements include a happening cultural calendar, the newly pedestrianized riverside quays on the right bank, and the never-been-hotter hotel scene.

Could there really be a hotel reopening as hyped as the Ritz? The answer is a decisive, “oui.” The Hôtel de Crillon emerged from a reconstruction that created virtually a completely new property. In fact, Crillon groupies who visit the hotel won’t recognize the lobby, which is a series of elegant salon-style rooms, intimate in size. Builders excavated deep underground in order to add a spa and sparkling swimming pool lit from above by a skylight in the courtyard garden.

The Hôtel de Crillon is now under the auspices of Rosewood, whose brand mission is to reflect the soul of a place. Here, the focus is the “French art of living,” explains General Manager Marc Raffray. Case in point: Hugo Matha designed the chic staff uniforms; landscape architect Louis Benech did the courtyards and chef Christopher Hache oversees the restaurant, L’Ecrin. There’s more: Karl Lagerfeld conceived two top suites (Les Grands Appartements) and Buly — the 200-year-old French brand — customized the bath amenities.

In a highly competitive luxury hotel market — with 10 classified “palace” hotels and where the Four Seasons Hotel George V just opened a “five Michelin-star courtyard” for dining — how does the Crillon stand out? Insiders say it’s in the spaces you won’t find anywhere else, such as the barber shop, an outpost of the trendy La Barbière de Paris, and shoe-care service where you



can sink into an Aston Martin chair with a cognac while your shoes are buffed.

Our favorite new addition is Les Ambassadeurs bar, which is reason alone to stop by the Crillon and is already a hot spot for Parisians. What to imbibe: The #10isgoing is one of the most popular cocktails, made

with rum, Velvet Falernum, orange bitters, pineapple and raspberry. Or follow those-in-the-know and order “Les Ambassadeurs” — a signature Port and Grand Marnier-based cocktail that isn’t on the menu.

On a recent visit leading up to Paris Design Week, the hotel was positively buzzing. All seats

were taken in the Jardin d’Hiver and the Brasserie d’Aumont, where menu classics include smoked beef tartare and oysters, which are served at the bar. Head Concierge Olivier Cambournac (formerly at The Peninsula Paris) talked with guests around the specially designated “calendar table,” where coffee table books



THE NOLINSKI PARIS' Suite Josephine (here) is situated on the fifth floor and decorated with works of art and custom-made furniture.

AT NOLINSKI'S 506-square-foot Deluxe Suite (below), the bedroom and living room are separated by mirror doors.

ADVISOR INSIGHT:

Based in Washington D.C. and affiliated with **Virtuoso**, **Sari Greene** specializes in luxury and family travel. In Paris, she says, “**Four Seasons Hotel George V** is always a huge client favorite, the personal service they give my clients is always above and beyond. Recently, I’ve loved booking in the St. Germain neighborhood — clients enjoy the small boutique hotels [**Hôtel Bel Ami** and **Esprit St Germain** are recent favorites] and the sense of being in “real Paris.”

“With all of the amazing food in Paris, a food tour [with a company like **Context**] is my favorite way to explore the city — whether a private tour with exclusive access to some of the best chefs’ kitchens in the city or a small-group Chocolate and Macaron tour. I love the food tour because they usually incorporate some history and culture in addition to getting to eat the best food in the city!”

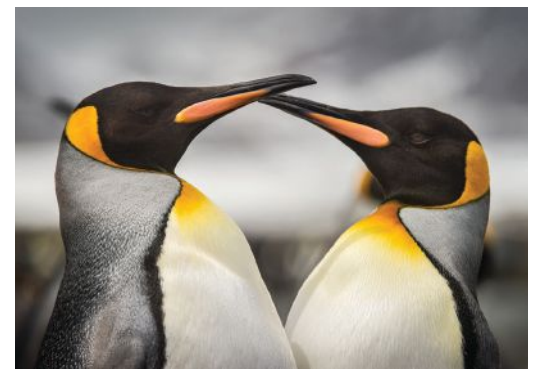


illustrate cultural events now taking place in Paris (like the Christian Dior exhibit at Les Arts Décoratifs). The lobby is punctuated with lovely fresh flower arrangements by florist Djordje Varda, and cases of

pretty pâtisserie. In Paris, pastry chefs are revered like haute couture designers, their creations ogled like fine jewelry behind glass. (Some of our favorite examples? The gems by Yann Couvreur and Le Meurice’s

Cédric Grolet.) At the Crillon, we love the “obelisk”-themed sweet by Executive Pastry Chef Jérôme Chausse. It pays homage to the famous Egyptian obelisk that stands tall outside on the Place de la Concorde.

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Other star attractions include the Hair Salon by David Lucas, a celebrity Parisian stylist, and Sense, a Rosewood Spa. Overseen by Director Sophie Demaret, the spa seeks to revive ancient French beauty rituals with “Lost Remedies” like the “19th-century French detoxification.” There are also a number of “Sense Journeys” like the “World Class Traveler,” which starts with a foot bath in essential oils and includes a full-body treatment and acupressure head massage.

Hôtel Le Crillon, the grande dame on the Place de la Concorde, is a long-time favorite of American clientele, not just because of its storied history, but also because of its proximity to the American embassy, a few steps away. **Booking Tips:** Of the 78 rooms, 36 suites and 10 signature suites, the Grande Premier room category has been most requested. In addition to the Karl Lagerfeld suites, the crème de la crème are the Marie Antoinette suites and the Louis XV, which has a terrace overlooking the Place de la Concorde. For VIPs, reach out to the Director of Sales Pauline Ehrhart (reservations: 011-080-554-2627).

Another new favorite on the Paris hotel scene is the **Nolinski**, a five-star residence that opened in July 2016 on the Avenue de l’Opéra. If Nolinski existed, he’d be the kind of guy you’d place front and center at your din-



ner party: a cultured aesthete who can spin tales of global adventures and charm even the stodgiest guest. Named for this fictional personage, the hotel radiates impeccable taste, from the décor by design darling Jean-Louis Deniot to the covetable in-room amenities like dringme smart phones. (Guests get free calls, and all of their history is erased when they check out. The touch of a button gets you the concierge or a taxi.)

Nolinski Paris is the first property from Evok Hôtels, a new brand from French industrial magnate Pierre Bastid. This is a group to watch: From luxe chalets in Courchevel to a Philippe Starck-designed flagship opening in the 16th arrondissement next year, Evok is actively scouting real estate in New York and London. Nolinski offers 45 guestrooms, decked out in Carrara marble and cool custom furniture. Perched on the fifth floor, Suite Josephine can be connected to the neigh-

boring rooms and suites to make a divine private apartment. **Nice Perk:** The suite’s D-Vine wine machine pours a perfectly aerated glass of wine without the pop of a cork. Madeleine Sadin (msadin@evokhotels.com) is the deputy general director; for VIP bookings, reserve at booking@nolinski.com.

Nolinski isn’t just a visual feast; this first arrondissement location puts you just a cobblestone’s throw from the Palais-Royal for convenient vintage shopping at Didier Ludot. You can see the gilded Palais Garnier opera house from your room, but quadruple-glazed windows mean you’re completely insulated from the traffic below. And if you’re out carousing all night with Le Tout-Paris, Nolinski will cure your hangover with the “lendemain de fête” breakfast and a treatment by Swiss brand La Colline in the subterranean spa. Reach out to Spa Director Lucas Sadej (spa@nolinski.com; 011-

330-142-861-010) for assistance in choosing between the cutting-edge treatments.

Fun Fact: The Réjane brasserie has become a beloved neighborhood institution — packed for lunch and dinner — and now it also has an épicerie for gourmet take-out items.

Mark your calendars for the reopening of the **Lutetia**, regarded as “the palace on the Rive Gauche.” The historic hotel facing Le Bon Marché department store is expected to reopen later this year after a complete overhaul. It’s owned by The Set Hotels group, also behind Hotel Café Royal in London and the Conservatorium in Amsterdam. They’ve appointed Jean-Luc Cousty, previously at the Hotel du Palais in Biarritz, as general manager.

Looking for a happening place to have a night cap in Paris? Two new design-centric hotels are getting lots of buzz for their bars. Sister to the **Bachaumont Hotel**, the **Hotel National des Arts et Métiers** has one of the best rooftops in town, while **The Hoxton** — which was one of the city’s most Instagrammed spots when it opened in late August — has a speakeasy called Jacques’ bar. In this Morocco-themed space, order up a Tikiztate cocktail, concocted with tequila altos, pineapple juice and ras el-hanout, or try the Jacques Snapper, a gin-based drink accented with harissa. ■

HOTEL NATIONAL DES ARTS ET MÉTIERS (here) is a new design-centric hotel generating a lot of buzz for its rooftops.

JACQUES’ BAR (right) at The Hoxton serves Moroccan-inspired drinks devised by local cocktail experts.





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BY MELIÁ

THE RITZ-CARLTON NEW YORK, CENTRAL PARK'S 1,900-square-foot Central Park Suite (below) has 13 large windows to capture panoramic view (here) of Central Park and Sixth Avenue.

NYC Anniversary Getaways

BY MATT TURNER

Few cities are more romantic than New York, thanks to its luxury accommodations, world-class restaurants and famous theaters. Here are some tips to help you live like a very affluent local on your next trip.

One of our favorite hotels is **The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park**, located right at the southern tip of its namesake park, which is perhaps the city's most romantic destination. Here, the hotel can organize posh picnics (with champagne, chocolate-covered strawberries, a custom five-course meal, a waterproof fleece blanket, an Insider's Guide to Central Park and, of course, a Frisbee and kite), horse and carriage rides (or if you'd prefer, you can get up close and feed the horses), and tours of any of the museums on Museum Mile, all nearby. Want to skip the culture tour? World-class shopping is also steps away.

Susanne Carter (susanne.carter@ritzcarlton.com), chef concierge, can organize an urban



adventure that suits your tastes; she can also, of course, find highly sought-after Broadway tickets or a table at the city's top restaurants.

We say The Ritz-Carlton's Royal Suite is a great option for couples. Located on the 22nd floor and spread over 1,980 square feet, the suite overlooks Central Park. If that's taken, the Central Park Suite has 1,900-square-foot of space, two living rooms and 13 large windows for park viewing.

Hint: City View Suites, City View Guest Rooms and Deluxe

Guest Rooms are the categories that do not have Central Park views. All guestrooms, however, have double vanities and separate bathtubs.

Should couples want a spa treatment after a long day exploring the park or the city, book them an in-room couple's massage. We recommend the Ultimate White Caviar Illuminating Facial. This 90-minute treatment helps keep the skin firm, hydrated and illuminated. Also included in the package are hand and feet massages. The La

Prairie Spa (the only such spa in the Northeast) has six treatment rooms and requires one to two weeks' notice for bookings.

As for dining, the Afternoon Tea in the Star Lounge is not to be missed. It's available daily from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and offerings change seasonally. Tip: The hotel even has its own signature tea inspired by Central Park. The other dining option at the hotel is Auden Bistro & Bar. The best seats are the banquets located by the windows overlooking Sixth Avenue. To get these seats (and to be safe, for any other), book at least one to two weeks in advance through Iwona Luksza (iwona.luksza@ritzcarlton.com), assistant director of food and beverage.

Note: The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park is entering its busy season, which lasts from October through early January. It is especially busy during Thanksgiving, when the hotel offers a great vantage point for viewing the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. It's recommended to book six months in advance during this time.



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Five blocks away is one of the city's oldest hotels and the first of its brand: **The St. Regis New York**.

The hotel, built in 1904 by John Jacob Astor, has 171 guestrooms and 67 suites. The Presidential Suite has a large foyer, a formal dining room, living room, a wood-paneled library, three bedrooms, four full baths and floor-to-ceiling windows with Fifth Avenue, 55th Street and Central Park views. Good to know: The Master Suite has a dressing room, spa-style bathroom, Jacuzzi tub and a private sitting area. However, the suitable accommodation for couples is the Royal Suite. It has one king bedroom, a separate living area, a formal dining room and Italian marble bathrooms with double sinks, deep-soaking tubs, a bidet, rain showers and mirrors with in-built HDTVs. Views from the suite are the same as the Presidential Suite. We love the



gold-toned walls and silk drapery in the master bedroom.

All guests have access to the St. Regis' signature 24-hour English-style butlers, the fitness center and spa. If advisors have any questions as to which room is best suited for their clients, speak with Ariel Frankel (ariel.frankel@stregis.com), marketing manager, or Katie Donald (katie.donald@stregis.com), director of sales.

The most difficult time to book a room is September through December due to the General Assembly of the United

Nations, Fashion Week and the holiday season.

The concierge team at the hotel can book guest experiences or reservations that include, but are not limited to, visits to Central Park, the Museum of Modern Art, Radio City Music Hall, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Bryant Park.

Guests can experience the immediate area in style through the hotel's in-house Bentley, available on a first-come, first-serve basis. To match, there is

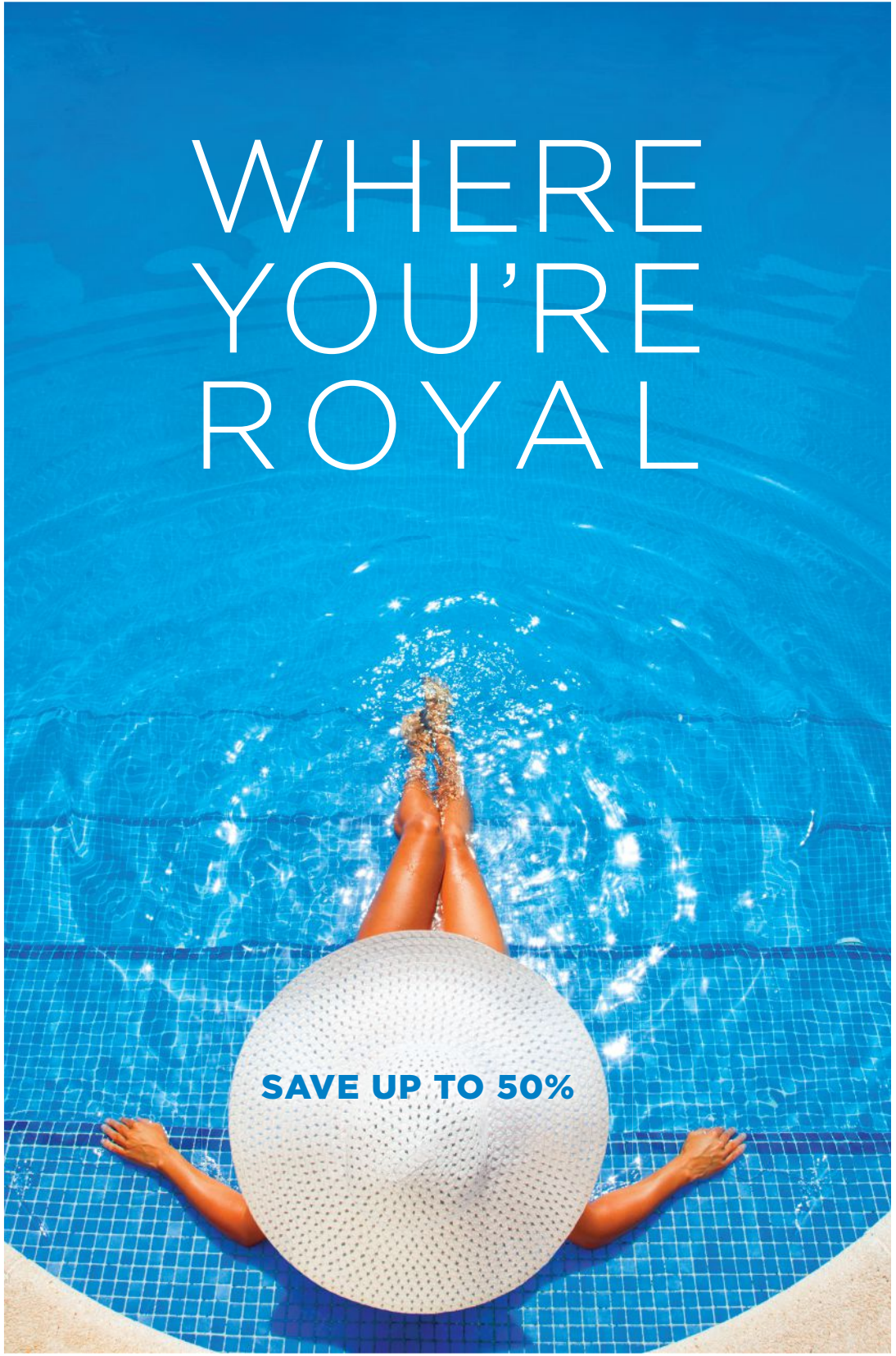
also a Bentley Suite, which was designed in collaboration with Bentley Motors. Other themed suites include the Tiffany Suite and Dior Suite. This winter, event designer Rebecca Gardner will transform the Cognac Room into a "Babes in Playland"-themed pop-up of her one-of-a-kind retail experience, Sugar Plum.

There are two dining options at The St. Regis: Astor Court and the King Cole Bar, the birthplace of the Red Snapper (the original Bloody Mary cocktail). We're personally not huge fans of Bloody Marys but loved this variety when we tried it.

Top Tip: Be sure to reserve Table 55 at the King Cole Bar; it's one of the most exclusive in New York. Only guests who reserve Table 55 will have access to a menu of rare whiskeys, vintage wines and exclusive craft cocktails. This table may be reserved nightly starting at 5 p.m. with a reservation fee



THE ST. REGIS NEW YORK's Astor Court (above) serves international cuisine. The Presidential Suite (here) at the hotel has three bedrooms, a large foyer, a formal dining room and a separate living room.



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FOUR SEASONS NEW YORK DOWNTOWN (here and left) has 189 rooms and suites. The 82-story building is the tallest in Downtown Manhattan.

of \$2,500 minimum spend. Reservations should be made 48 hours in advance.

Chef Concierge Maria Wittorp-DeJonge (maria.wittorp-dejonge@stregis.com) is available to help book any bespoke experience you have in mind. We recommend signing up for private sabrage lessons — what better way to open a bottle of bubbly to kick off the anniversary celebrations?

We're told The St. Regis New York is seeing increasingly younger and more international travelers, but the hotel remains a popular option for extended stays or a relaxing weekend getaway.

The **Four Seasons Hotel New York Downtown** opened last year as the company's second New York City hotel. The 189-room, 82-story building is the tallest in Downtown Manhattan, and there are an additional 157 private residences available as well.

Due to its proximity to Wall Street and the World Trade Center, the hotel sees many business travelers during the week, but couples flock in during the weekends. And generally, their stay begins with a surprise: it might be champagne, roses, a cake, or something new — the hotel likes to change it up and keep it secret. If you have a suggestion for your clients, reach out to General Manager Peter Humig (peter.humig@fourseasons.com), although we're told Sales Manager Liana Kraushaar

(liana.kraushaar@fourseasons.com) is a better point of contact.

As the hotel put it, "This is New York: we have every type of activity that anyone can think of. Whatever you can dream up, we can organize it." Suggestions include helicopter rides and sailing excursions. Other options include the Oculus, which contains Westfield World Trade shopping center, and One World Observatory. For couples looking for a local bite, they can try Nobu, Marc Forgione, ABC Kitchen, Tutto Il Giorno or Blacktail, a couple-oriented cocktail bar. For dessert, the Four Seasons says guests must try the gelato from Amorino Gelato.

At the hotel, couples should opt for either the Tribeca Suites or Gotham Suites with terraces. The former is a true one-room that spans 1,220 square feet with a dining room table, heated floors and in-mirror TVs in the bathroom; the latter has the feel of a residential apartment with two 40-square-foot terraces.

Note: All rooms have bathtubs; suite category rooms include double vanities; only the Royal Suite has a fireplace and butler service. This top-floor accommodation is 2,400 square feet and comes with early check-in and late check-out, a custom welcome amenity, limousine or helicopter transfer from local airports, complimentary private bar, two 80-minute massages and confirmed access to CUT

by Wolfgang Puck, the hotel's signature restaurant.

Hint: The Wagyu beef is the specialty, and for couples looking for a private dinner, there is a private room in the back they should request. Book a week in advance through cutny.hostess@wolfgangpuck.com, or 646-880-1995; the manager here is Louis Smeby.

The 6,000-square-foot spa has seven treatment rooms, including a couple's treatment

room; we hear the Luxury Green Caviar Facial by Dr. Burgener from Switzerland is the most popular option. It's advised to book treatments as early as possible, although a week is usually sufficient. To contact the spa, e-mail spa.nydowntown@fourseasons.com, or call 646-880-1990; Tara Cruz is the spa director and can arrange for spa treatments to be provided in guestrooms and suites. ■

An underwater photograph of a vibrant coral reef. The scene is illuminated from above, creating a blue and white light effect. Various types of coral, including branching and table corals, are visible. Several small orange fish are swimming around the reef. The background is dark, suggesting depth.

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BY SUSAN J. YOUNG

Certainly, major upscale cruise lines offer many two- to three-week voyages that explore a region or continent versus the typical one week or 10-day cruise. But the ultimate journey is a World Cruise, ranging from 85 days to 180 days, depending on the cruise line. Here's a look at some of

these voyages for 2019, with one highlighted port of call for each.

Tokyo, Japan: A favorite port call for luxury travelers, Tokyo brims with high-end shopping and fantastic cuisine. Guests on **Silversea Cruises'** 132-day World Cruise will have two full days to explore the city. Departing from San Francisco to London

on January 6, 2019, the 382-passenger *Silver Whisper* will visit 52 ports in 31 countries, with 17 overnight port calls. Guests will go ashore in French Polynesia, New Zealand, Australia, Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and the Philippines, Singapore, India, the Maldives and Seychelles, plus ports throughout Africa and Europe's Atlantic coast.

In Tokyo, much is new. A new landmark, Shibuya Hikarie opened in April as a multi-story complex with four underground floors and three above-ground floors with shopping, dining, a gallery and the large Tokyu Theater Orb. Also opening earlier this year was Tokyo Skytree Tower, developed around the world's largest, free standing broadcast tower



Photo by Getty Images / Ruslan Kaln

with office buildings, an aquarium and planetarium.

Shoppers can buy 'til they drop at Mitsui Outlet Park Kisarazu, which opened in Tokyo last spring with 171 stores and dining in a resort-style atmosphere. Why not view Mount Fuji from its Ocean View Terrace? Or, during an evening ashore, we'd opt for dinner at Tokyo's luxurious Kozue, which serves up kaiseki (Japan's version of haute cuisine) and resides on the 40th floor of the Park Hyatt Tokyo. We'd suggest making reservations for a window table offering views of Mount Fuji.

Themed around "A Tale of



Photo by Getty Images / vale_t

BAHA'ITEMPLE AND GARDENS (left) will be a major attraction for guests on *Seven Seas Navigator*, when the ship visits Haifa, Israel in 2019.

CUNARD guests will get a taste of Mauritius, when its 2,000-passenger *Queen Victoria* calls at the island nation's capital, Port Louis (above).

Tales," Silversea's 2019 World Cruise will feature nine writers (on various segments) onboard, including Pico Iyer and Paul Theroux; they'll write stories inspired by the world cruise route that will be included in a special anthology. Theroux is famed for "The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia," a travelogue recounting his four-month 1973 journey by train from London through Europe, the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia, plus a return via the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Silversea's World Cruise in 2019 will circumnavigate Africa with an overnight in Cape Town. It will also have a double overnight in Bordeaux, France; a stopover in Saint-Malo, gateway to Mont Saint-Michel, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and such special events as "Greeting Tahitian Gods," set in Papeete's only fully restored marae (temple); "Robben Island: A Walk Through the History of South Africa;" and a private opening of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain. Among perks for the full World Cruise are business air from select gateways, transfers, complimentary baggage valet service, a \$4,000 onboard spending credit per suite, complimentary unlimited Wi-Fi, complimentary laundry and dry-cleaning service and special commemorative gifts.

Haifa, Israel: Sailing from Los Angeles, the 131-day World Cruise of **Regent Seven Seas Cruises** departs January 4, 2019 to explore five continents; guests on *Seven Seas Navigator* will have the chance to explore 23 UNESCO World Heritage sites and 14 overnight stays will allow them to dine ashore in the evening, participate in local events or enjoy nightlife.

Regent's product is very inclusive, including free shore trips, butler service and paid gratuities, and this World Cruise also comes with combination cruise savings, complimentary first-class air transportation, and instant recognition as a Seven Seas Society (the line's loyalty club) member, which provides the guest with complimentary garment pressing and phone time, as well as priority online dining and shore excursion reservations.

This itinerary begins with a Pacific crossing to Hawaii, French Polynesia, Samoa and Fiji before the ship calls at multiple ports in Australia. Then it's on to Asia, including The Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, multiple ports in Vietnam and India. The ship also calls at the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan, and guests will spend three days in Israel, one day

during an Ashdod call and two days during a Haifa call.

While in Israel, cruisers can select many complimentary RSSC shore trips, as well as ones for an added fee. Guests have a wide choice of tours to Nazareth, Jerusalem, Bethlehem or Tel Aviv. Other options? If travelers have already toured those cities on past trips, two other good options are a shore trip to Acre (Akko), a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating to the Crusades era and a trip that includes historic Safed, a kibbutz and the Golan Heights.

Port Louis, Mauritius: In 2019, **Cunard Line's** 2,000-passenger *Queen Victoria* embarks on a classic 107-night western global circumnavigation roundtrip from Southampton, U.K. via the Panama Canal. The journey visits 24 countries, including South Africa, Bermuda, the U.S. (Port Canaveral, San Francisco and Hawaii) and Colombia and showcases destinations in Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. One enticing World Cruise port call is Port Louis, Mauritius.

At Port Louis, we'd opt for the "Yemen Safari by Single Quad Bike" excursion, which traverses the island's western side and provides views of sugar cane fields and villages en route to the Casela Nature and Leisure Park. Originally a bird park, it's now home to many animals and the private Yemen Nature Reserve, which has an African savannah feel. Boarding a quad bicycle, guests will travel through the reserve to see free-roaming zebras, antelopes, ostriches, wild boar, giant tortoises and wild monkeys.

Alternatively, Cunard's "Tea Route" excursion from Port Louis will immerse travelers in the island's tea heritage. First stop is the Domaine Saint Aubin estate, home to a lovely 19th-century plantation house. The estate



CUNARD's *Queen Victoria* received a \$40 million refurbishment in spring. Shown here is an upgraded Grand Suite.

still produces sugar, rum and vanilla pods. Cruisers will tour the estate's anthurium, vanilla plantation and rum distillery, before the tour continues to Bois Cheri, Mauritius' first and largest tea producer. There, they'll delve into tea production, have lunch and enjoy tea tasting. A final stop will be made at Domaine des Aubineaux, a 19th-century colonial mansion transformed into a tea museum. Be sure to stroll the camphor tree gardens.

Shoppers going ashore at Port Louis will find 150-plus shops at Le Caudan Waterfront; we'd pop into both Cottons, selling colorful hand-made textiles woven by local craftspeople from natural materials. Seeking a specialty gift? A Pinch of Salt sells savory "La Fleur de Sel" with such flavors as vanilla, chili, black pepper, garlic, baie rose, three peppers or herb. Heading outside the city, Arsenal in the Pamplemousses District has lovely cashmere products and high-end goods. The Port Louis Craft Market is a "must" for handicraft fans, and the city's Central Market sells wooden/traditional handicrafts and souvenirs, exotic fish and fresh produce.

In spring 2017, *Queen Victoria* received a \$40 million refurbishment with the redesign of five Penthouse Suites as well as the Aquitania, Berengaria, Mauretania and Laconia Grand Suites; the addition of 43 more

Britannia Club staterooms and a new Britannia Club restaurant in the former Chart Club space; a relocated Chart Club; and more upgrades. Sun worshippers will love the expanded aft Lido Sun Deck with new windbreakers, more sun loungers and the introduction of luxury cabanas, plus an expanded shaded area for al fresco dining.

Hong Kong, China: Five different options are offered by **Oceania Cruises** for its 2019 World Cruise on the 684-passenger *Insignia*; all depart in January and call overnight at Hong Kong. One voyage is a 158-day "Grand Escapade" cruise from New York to London, another an "Around the World in 180 days" voyage from New York to Miami. The rest feature U.S. embarkation/disembarkation ports; the 174-day "Global Exploration" roundtrip from New York, 177-day "World of Wonder" roundtrip from Miami and a 161-day "Celestial Traveler" voyage from Los Angeles to Miami.

Among the perks for full World Cruise guests are two-for-one cruise fares, complimentary first-class roundtrip airfare and OLife Choice amenities, including a choice of one of these: up to 72 shore excursions, a beverage package or up to a \$7,200 shipboard credit. Guests on these lengthy

voyages also receive complimentary prepaid gratuities, onboard medical care (with some restrictions), unlimited Internet, laundry services, a visa package, luggage delivery, one-night pre-cruise luxury hotel stay, roundtrip transfers and special shore-side events.

Additionally, while *Insignia* is in Hong Kong on April 13, 2019, full World Cruise guests will be treated to a special event at the Hong Kong Jockey Club, dating from the late 1800s. Cruisers will savor a buffet dinner of international dishes, watch horse-racing entertainment, and perhaps, if they so choose, put down a winning bet. Guests will then overnight on the ship.

While exploring the city the next day, those seeking a down-home, simple, local lunch can head for Lung Kee, 5 Gage Street in Central. This old-fashioned Hong Kong eatery — popular with the locals — serves yummy meats, including char siu, a reddish Hong Kong-style barbecue pork. Sweet and spicy, the char siu sauce is made with hoisin sauce, rice wine and honey. If you prefer a high-end lunch experience, we'd opt for the executive lunch at Lung King Heen (translated "View of the Dragon") in the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong.

Shopaholic? Then don't miss Harbour City, Hong Kong's largest mall with more than 450 shops and four distinct shopping

zones for kids, sports, fashion and cosmetics. It's actually composed of three malls — Ocean Terminal, Ocean Centre and Gateway Arcade. Outside on Canton Road, luxury shoppers will find Louis Vuitton's largest Asian store and Chanel's flagship Asia store. We'd also recommend checking out the fashions and beauty brands at Pacific Place, the mall atop MTR Admiralty Station that's home to Hong Kong's flagship Nars store. The mall's Beauty Gallery has such boutiques as Natura Bissé, Yves Saint Laurent and La Mer.

Adelaide, Australia:

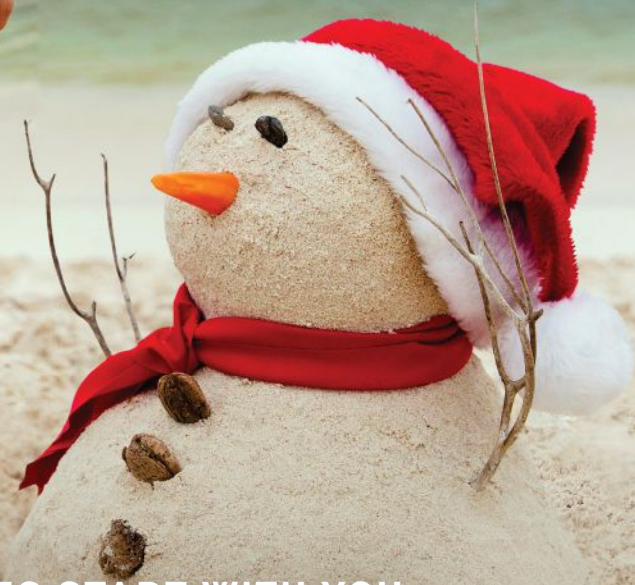
Departing January 13, 2019 from Los Angeles, **Crystal Cruises'** 980-passenger *Crystal Serenity* will operate an 85-day "Grand Continental Odysseys" 2019 World Cruise. Fresh from a major drydock refurbishment a few months earlier, the luxurious ship will sail with fewer passengers than in the past, allowing open seating with no set dining times in the main dining room. The ship will also sail with suite and public space upgrades which *Luxury Travel Advisor* has covered in past issues.

This pampering World Cruise calls at Hawaii and Kiribati, traverses the southern Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, rounds the Cape of Good Hope and visits cities like Malaga and Barcelona in the western Mediterranean. We particularly like that it ends with two nights in Monte Carlo for dining, gaming and nightlife plus a late disembarkation the next day so guests have three full days to explore ashore. Another big plus is the 10 nights spent in Australia's waters for an in-depth country experience; calls include Sydney, Hobart (Tasmania), Kangaroo Island, Adelaide, Albany, Busselton and Fremantle/Perth.

Adelaide isn't always visited on cruise itineraries, as less lengthy voyages often call at Sydney or

Cozumel, Mexico

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Melbourne. So even for many frequent cruisers, Adelaide is a fresh experience. What's to do? We'd start with a stroll around the Adelaide Central Market, a fresh-food center with gourmet cafés. Then wander around the galleries and museums in North Terrace, soaking in the architecture of the colonial-era buildings. Architectural buffs should pop into the grand Railway Station and view Parliament and Government House.

Those who love wine bars, shopping and dining shouldn't miss the East End's cosmopolitan Rundle Street. For men, Jack London's fashions conjure up images of The Beatles and Rolling Stones in their early days — a bit of a punk/rock attitude combined with classic tailoring. Or, for a more classic, gentleman's look, head to MJ Bale, a Sydney-based tailor and clothier. Ladies have a wide selection of shops, including the Australian brand "sass & bide," known for its modern designs; Seafolly for swimwear; and Uggs & Kisses for fluffy sheepskin ugg boots and wool apparel.

Service is top-notch onboard *Crystal Serenity*. For example, those in Crystal Penthouse



IN MONTEVIDEO, cruisers will head to Mercado del Puerto (Port Market) for traditional Uruguayan food and beverage.

Photo by Getty Images / vale.t

(CP) category suites will enjoy personal butler service, included gratuities, unpacking/packing upon request, pressing and shoe shine, afternoon tea service, nightly hors d'oeuvres, stocked bar, afternoon canapés, "ordering in" from specialty restaurants and private car transfers.

Montevideo, Uruguay: For luxury travelers who desire to go ashore at many South American ports, one good option is **Viking Ocean Cruises'** 128-day World Cruise, departing January 3, 2019 from Miami to London. Sailing southward through the Caribbean, the 930-passenger *Viking Sun* hugs the eastern and then the southern coastlines of South America, before heading into the Pacific; calls are made at multiple ports in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and

Chile, and the ship overnights in Rio De Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago and Port Stanley in the Falklands, among other destinations throughout the voyage.

In Montevideo, we'd suggest museum lovers head for the Museo Romantico and Casa Lavalleja, both part of the Museo Histórico Nacional. For something different, check out the Museo del Gaucho y de la Moneda, which displays gaucho (cowboy) memorabilia. The Museo Torres Garcia displays works from Joaquín Torres-García, an artist who spent much of his time in Europe, painted historical figures, and created many Cubist paintings (think Picasso). After sightseeing or museum hopping, we'd head for Tandory, which serves a blend of Asian, Latin and European flavors. The chef and owner is

Gabriel Coquel, service is top rate, and the décor includes souvenirs and heirlooms from Coquel's world travels. The menu changes daily, depending on what's available seasonally.

After sailing westward into the Pacific Ocean, *Viking Sun* calls at Robinson Crusoe Island, Easter Island, Tahiti (Papeete) and Bora Bora, French Polynesia, before continuing to New Zealand and Australia; one perk is a double overnight in Sydney. Then the voyage continues across the Indian Ocean to southern Africa. After an overnight in Cape Town, the cruise then sails around the Cape of Good Hope and along the western coast of Africa with calls in Namibia, Senegal, the Canary Islands and Morocco. Finally, the ship calls in Vigo, Spain prior to the voyage's conclusion in London.

Pre- and post-stay packages are available for Miami and London. For example, the post-cruise package includes two nights in London at the Conrad London St. James (or a similar property); two breakfasts and one lunch; a farewell wine and cheese reception; a guided city tour; all transfers and the services of a Viking host. ■

GLOBAL NAVIGATORS

U.S. ROUNDTRIP: On January 22, 2019, **Holland America Line's** 113-day "Grand World Voyage" on the 1,380-passenger *Amsterdam* sails roundtrip from Port Everglades, FL, so cruisers don't have to take a flight to a foreign country to begin or end their cruise. Circumnavigating the globe, the eclectic voyage calls at Ireland, Scandinavia, northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, Indian Ocean, Aqaba, Egypt, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, French Polynesia, Easter Island, Chile, Peru, Panama and Bermuda, among other destinations.

FIVE CONTINENTS: Sailing roundtrip from Los Angeles or Port Everglades, FL is **Princess Cruises'** 2019 World Cruise, which will touch five continents — everywhere from Cape Town, South Africa to Singapore, Brazil and the Panama Canal. The 670-passenger, recently refreshed *Pacific Princess* will make maiden calls at Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe; the remote island of St. Helena to visit Jamestown; and Stewart Island in New Zealand. One highlight is a call at Colombo, Sri Lanka, from where guests can venture to the sacred city of Kandy.

HOLIDAY VOYAGE: **Seabourn's** 128-day "Grand Oceans Explorations" from Los Angeles to Cape Town, "looks the part" of a World Cruise (although it's not billed that way). This extended voyage on *Seabourn Sojourn* departs October 15, 2018 and concludes February 21, 2019 in Cape Town, South Africa. Highlights include four days in Hawaii, calls at French Polynesia and in New Zealand, 18 days of calls and cruising around Australia (including Townsville and Fraser Island), plenty of ports in Asia, the Maldives and the Seychelles and calls in eastern and southern Africa.

ISLAND EXPLORER: On January 5, 2019, **MSC Cruises'** *MSC Magnifica* sets sail on the line's first World Cruise, a 129-night voyage roundtrip from Genoa, Italy. Guests will go ashore in the Caribbean, Central America, the U.S., South Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Middle East as well as six European countries. It's a great cruise for island lovers with five on tap in the Caribbean and others in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. Among the inclusions are 15 complimentary shore excursions and complimentary house wine by the glass in the main restaurant at lunch and dinner.

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CRUISES

Sailing the 'Queen Mary 2'

We enjoy transatlantic traditions and top innovations
on a recent jaunt at sea.

BY JOHN STONE

Life on Board

Fresh from its \$132 million renovation in mid-2016, the refurbished *Queen Mary 2* is enjoying its first full season of 22 regular transatlantic crossings per year between Southampton and New York. *Luxury Travel Advisor* just sailed on an annual "Fashion Week"-themed cruise to sample the new look and feel of **Cunard's** "remastered" flagship as it plies the Atlantic.

The first impression felt by passengers newly arrived on *Queen Mary 2* for their maiden transatlantic crossing is the ship's lavish spaciousness, not unlike entering a grand hotel. A sign at the purser's desk in the mid-ship lobby said our cruise was sailing "full" from Southampton to New York. The ship's guest capacity of 2,592, however, felt surprising based on its broad, uncrowded public spaces. The attentive 1,292-member international crew created an almost exact ratio of one staff per two guest members.

Our cruise attracted a passenger mix ranging from young, attractive singles to middle-aged couples celebrating special occasions, a few families with young children, and world-traveled seniors, many of them experienced Cunarders. British, American and German passengers blended seamlessly. Most dressed casually for a nonstop schedule of sport and cultural activities by day, and dressed to kill for fancy social occasions almost every night.

Two afternoon fashion shows in the Queens Room art deco ballroom, presented by famed Welsh-born fashion designer Julien Macdonald, who designs for Queen Elizabeth, Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, among others, created the flashbulb-popping excitement of a New York or Paris runway show. Another show by top students from New York's Parsons School of Design drew an equally enthusiastic crowd.

CUNARD'S refurbished *Queen Mary 2* can accommodate 2,592 guests. Seen here is the ship's Grand Lobby.

“Between 45 and 55 percent of our guests are past passengers,” said Hinano Yao, *Queen Mary 2*’s voyage sales and loyalty manager with 25 years of service with Cunard. “We have a different clientele who behave differently at sea,” she added. “These people are not port-oriented. They are here to relax, to enjoy a traditional transatlantic crossing...The U.S. is our best and biggest market.”

Dining

Queen Mary 2 guests dine at assigned tables and times according to their level of accommodations. As Britannia Balcony room guests, we had the 8:30 p.m. seating (a first seating is 6 p.m.) in the 1,200-seat Britannia dining room. Passengers in 76 Princess suites enjoy exclusive open dining in the Princess Grill, while guests in 96 larger Queens suites and penthouses enjoy luxurious Queens Grill dining, where delicacies like caviar and lobster are constants.

Men must wear tuxedos or dark business suits on the three formal nights and jackets on others. Women wear gowns or cocktail dresses on formal nights; we noticed much bling on display. A Black & White Ball, a Big Band Dance Party and a Roaring 20s Party are major post-dinner events. No jeans or shorts are welcome in public rooms after 6 p.m., but guests can dine in the King’s Court buffet on deck seven to skip dressing up.

Dinners include a range of beef, seafood and chicken dishes presented in three well-designed courses by *Queen Mary 2* Executive Chef Klaus Kremer and his team of 168 onboard assistants. Canyon Ranch, the famed onboard spa operator, offers three courses of spa cuisine on each dinner menu.

Tip: A five-course gourmet dinner in Verandah, the highly successful redesign of the former

Todd English restaurant, is \$49. A recommended option is the \$20 three-course lunch from a similar menu. Meals are sumptuous with three courses just enough to have the afternoon to work off the calories. Request a table opposite the bar on the starboard side for the best ocean views.

Breakfast and lunch menus are served in the main dining rooms, but most guests head to the redesigned King’s Court buffet restaurant running half the length of deck seven, where popular international and American food choices are abundant.

Insider Secret

Head for the newly designed Carinthia Lounge, located forward of the King’s Court buffet, during breakfast and lunch hours. This quiet, less crowded space has couches, large and small tables, a separate light buffet station, live music at noon, and its own coffee and cocktail bar.

A do-not-miss experience is the hydrotherapy pool in the ship’s Canyon Ranch Spa, forward of the Carinthia Lounge. Changing rooms and lockers with robes, slippers and towels are all provided. The indoor pool, full of water jets and a rain wall, attracted only a handful of guests during our multiple visits. A luxurious relaxation room with glass walls faces the sea and provides the best napping space on board.

Insider Tip: Instead of the \$40 daily spa fee, buy a three-day pass for \$75 or a six-day pass for \$105 to reduce the daily cost. Visits need not be on consecutive days, but they are habit-forming.

Unique Amenities

Have a spouse who would rather golf than cruise? The Fairways Golf Simulator at mid-ship on Deck 12 is a virtual golf club. It features 40 of the world’s best courses, including St. Andrews, Scotland; Pebble Beach, CA and Pinehurst, NC, on realistic video



projection screens. Playing a full round takes two hours at \$40 per hour, with two partners often sharing the cost.

Tip: Join the free Fairways driving contest most afternoons to test the program and find golf partners. More than 15 golfers were competing on our first sea day.

The *Queen Mary 2* also has the only Planetarium theater at sea, called Illuminations. An engaging 30-minute presentation on constellations over the Atlantic, and first-run 3-D films are presented here. Free tickets must be picked up on the morning of each performance.

There are now 24 dog kennels on Deck 12 at the rear starboard side of the ship. Owners visit their pets in two indoor playrooms or on an enclosed deck.

Good to know: Cats are also welcome in the kennel. One owner has made the crossing with her mellow cat three times despite it being surrounded by canines.

Technology

Multiple outlets for charging devices with American or British plugs and voltage are above the desk vanity in the Britannia Balcony staterooms. Wi-Fi is available around the ship for either \$0.75 per minute or in packages ranging from \$47.95 for 135 minutes to \$167.95 for 530 minutes. Computer workstations for e-mail and web



DINING (here) is overseen by Executive Chef Klaus Kremer and his team of 168 assistants. Seen above is the 1,200-seat Britannia Restaurant.

Photo by Maureen Cody Stone

browsing were readily available in the ship’s library on deck eight forward, or the internet center on deck two forward.

The stateroom’s 40-inch flat-screen TV includes news channels such as MSNBC, CNN and BBC-1 from the UK. Multiple channels play classic and contemporary films 24/7. American fans of British TV on PBS in the U.S. will find their favorite shows like “Queen Victoria” and “Poldark” on the ship’s ITV channel.

More Fun Stuff

Enjoy music? Social host Tommi Baxter-Hill said that 35 musicians were onboard *Queen Mary 2*, which included two dance bands, four pianists, a string quartet, a jazz quartet, a harpist and a rock band. We counted 40

QUEENS GRILL GRAND DUPLEXES (here) have a bedroom and two master bathrooms upstairs and a guest bathroom, a living and dining area and a balcony downstairs.

CANINES (below) are welcome on the ship, which has 24 dog kennels on deck 12.



Photo by Maureen Cody Stone

Cocktails, anyone?

Two spots for signature cocktails are the Chart Room on deck two and the Commodore Club, an observation lounge, on deck nine forward. The Chart Room has a unique two-ounce “Age of Discovery” cocktail made from a 300-liter barrel of Jack Daniel’s bourbon aged on *Queen Mary 2*’s upper deck during its 41,000-mile world voyage in 2016. A martini glass of this bourbon-and-liqueur cocktail costs \$120, or take a 700 milliliter bottle home for \$450.

The Commodore Club’s seven signature cocktails are each linked to one of seven commodores of the Cunard fleet knighted by an English king or queen.

Examples include the festive “Over the Top,” named for Sir James Charles and made with G Vine gin, sloe gin, cherry brandy and tonic, or a refreshingly fruity “All Consuming Passion,” named for Sir Ivan Thompson and mixed with gin, vanilla vodka, passion fruit puree and pineapple juice. The seven drinks, priced at \$16 to \$20 each, are colorful, elaborately garnished conversation pieces that entice both friends and strangers to analyze tasting experiences.

live music sessions in one daily program. Royal Court Theatre performers included London musical star Zoe Tyler and classical pianist Simon Callaghan. The ship’s six dance hosts dance with single partners at the Queens Room events and other venues.

Hint: Arrive early for 3:30 p.m. daily Afternoon Tea, served in the Queens Room. Table seats fill quickly for tea, finger sandwiches, scones and pastries served by white-gloved waiters and accompanied by a string quartet or a dance band.

Accommodations

Our Britannia Balcony state-room, located on deck six, had generous storage space with his-and-her closets on either side of a third half-closet with shelves and a combination safe with four dresser drawers below. The room décor comprises blonde wood paneling, beige walls and navy blue and gold accents. A love seat, coffee table and end tables are on either side of the plush queen bed. A fridge and minibar with limited selections are under the desk vanity.

The roomy bathroom has a step-in shower but no tub. A black marble sink top covers a beige vanity below the mirrored wall. Multi-level metal stor-

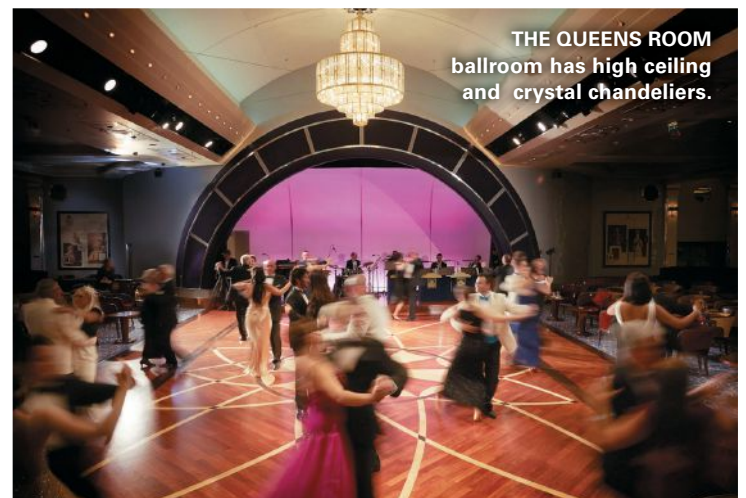
age shelves hang near the sink. Quercus toiletries are provided from Penhaligon’s of London with bottled items on the sink and shampoo and body soap dispensers on the shower wall.

Sailing

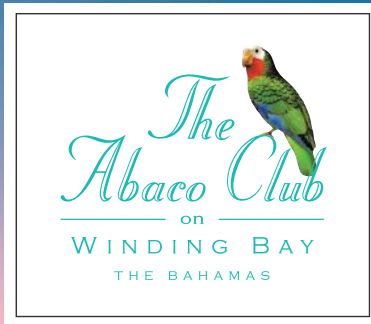
Queen Mary 2, which home-ports in Southampton, does about 22 crossings per year between Southampton and New York. Many of the most popular summer crossing itineraries include calls at eastern Canadian ports such as Quebec and Halifax either after departing or before disembarking in New York. Crossings in colder months toward year end are combined with calls in smaller southern Caribbean islands such as Tortola, St. Lucia and St. Kitts.

Voyage sales and loyalty manager Yao said the ship’s 2018 Grand Voyage is a 134-day world cruise in seven segments, departing from New York in January. The January 2019 Grand Voyage departure will be for a shorter itinerary, with five segments in 108 days.

Planning Ahead: Need your cruise sleep? Westbound sailings from Southampton to New York include five overnight time changes turning the clock back for one hour of extra sleep each time. Clocks on eastbound crossings move forward five times with guests losing hours of sleep. ■



THE QUEENS ROOM ballroom has high ceiling and crystal chandeliers.



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COVER STORY

JEFF WILLNER launched Travel Edge as a technology solution for travel agents, but has grown to love and respect the human factor that travel advisors bring to the table.



Transparency & Technology

Travel Edge's Jeff Willner is all about simplifying the travel advisor experience.

BY RUTHANNE TERRERO

It's a \$750 million enterprise that all started at a kitchen table. Jeff Willner, owner and CEO of Travel Edge, wanted to devise a technology solution to connect tour experts all over the world. That spurred the launch of his company, Kensington Tours, in 2006. That technology solution was then adapted for the travel agency market, and Willner's travel agency business was created in 2011, with its proprietary Agent Digital Experience (ADX) as its backbone.

Growth came primarily via acquisition early on. In 2011 alone, Willner purchased C Travel, Travel Edge, Worldview Travel and Pisa Brothers Travel, and Worldview Travel became the umbrella name for the growing company. In 2012, Travel Resources and Travel Door came in to the fold. In 2013, The Travel Network and Meyer Franklin were added on; and Cardoza-Bungy was purchased in 2015. Century Travel, a high-profile luxury agency owned by Gene Lashley and Peter Lloyd in Atlanta, was Willner's most recent purchase.

Earlier this year, Worldview Travel, based in Toronto, rebranded to Travel Edge and is now stepping into the limelight as a competitive player in the consolidating travel agency arena.

What's the story behind this burgeoning business, which is steadily becoming a collective for some of the most prestigious luxury executives in the business? We caught up with Willner at Virtuoso Travel Week in Las Vegas in August to learn the strategy of this evolving empire.

Good to know: Willner, who holds an MBA in Finance from Wharton and was awarded the Lauder medal in Public Policy, had a career prior to travel; in the '90s, he co-founded ObjectArts, a sizeable Microsoft technical training company. Travel was always in his blood, however. The son of missionaries, he grew up in Africa, close to where Stanley found Livingstone on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. As he was building ObjectArts, the travel bug struck big, and he hopped in a Land Rover Defender and drove it around the world. This ambitious venture earned him the title of "Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society." After he sold ObjectArts, Willner became a management consultant for McKinsey & Co.

Enter an "aha" moment.

"I had little kids and wanted to have some time with them, so I started a travel company at my kitchen table in 2006," he tells *Luxury Travel Advisor*. "And that little company has turned into Kensington Tours," he says, referring to the company that crafts FIT tours using private guides around the world. Since

its inception, Kensington has been recognized in consumer surveys by *Travel + Leisure* and *National Geographic Traveler*.

"That's over 11 years ago. It's now a \$100 million company and it grew 38 percent this year. So we're really proud of it," says Willner.

In the company's early days, it quickly became apparent that Willner needed to bring his technology expertise to Kensington.

"It just seemed weird to me that the technology didn't exist to do many of the things that we wanted to be doing as tour operators. So we ended up having to build it over the course of a decade or so," he tells us.

Now at Kensington, more than 300 guides and transport on-sites in 80 countries are connected via Willner's custom Tour Management Technology (TMT) platform. The technology allows the user to create custom itineraries in minutes, he says.

Willner admits that Kensington Tours' initial strategy was forged on the concept that travel agents were going away, but he was quickly disavowed of that belief. "I've found over time that there are a lot of amazing agents who are very highly skilled and hold great value for their clients," says Willner. "So we went from paying no commissions to really engaging with the travel agent channel. And in the process of doing that, I really fell in love with leisure travel and leisure travel agencies. So we started buying them."

The year was 2011 and the initial purchase was C Travel in Bermuda. Worldview Travel, originally owned by Ricci Zukerman, was the second. At this point, Willner says his plan for his company was to be a "purveyor of technology," powering agencies with a great back-end platform. For the first three years, the company, then known as Worldview Travel, acted more as a partner to the agencies it was acquiring, but over the last two years, Willner began drawing on the talent from those agencies to create a strong management team.

Enter Century Travel in Atlanta. "I started talking with Peter Lloyd and Gene Lashley at Century; they're great guys, they run a great shop and they have a great sense for style and for luxury," says Willner. "They're great builders of agents, they invest in their agents. So adding them to the mix as well was really a wonderful springboard for the group that we put together."

Today, the company, now known as Travel Edge, has 750 independent travel advisors in 13 offices in the U.S., Canada and Bermuda. Plans for 2017 are to grow by another 10 percent.

That could come organically, as advi-

TRAVEL EDGE

Headquarters: Toronto, Canada

Owner/CEO: Jeff Willner

EVP of Travel Edge Leisure:

Cheryl Nicholson

Annual Revenue: \$750 million

Business Mix: Leisure travel, corporate travel and private guided tours. The leisure division has 13 offices in the U.S., Canada and Bermuda.

Travel Advisors: 750 affiliated advisors specializing in air, cruise, vacation and VIP travel.

Affiliation: Virtuoso

Website: www.traveledge.com

COVER STORY

sors seeking a new home sign on with Travel Edge, or from additional purchases.

“Acquisitions are always something that’s on the table for us,” says Willner. He says he loves purchases where the owners are passionate

about leisure travel and want to stay involved and Travel Edge can step in to handle central-office functions, such as the finance and accounting, human resources and marketing, e-mail campaigns and cloud-based technology.

“This allows them to do more of what they love, which is the Century Travel story in a nutshell,” says Willner.

Travel Edge brings to the table a proprie-

tary technology called ADX, a.k.a. the “Agent Digital Experience,” a dashboard that accesses multi-GDSs, CRM, accounting, reporting and merchant processing.

Essentially, it allows advisors to create bundles of air, hotel, cruise, insurance and service fees, and give the client a single price quote for the trip. The advisor can easily add in a fee to that quote, and the back office

MEET CHERYL NICHOLSON, EVP OF LEISURE FOR TRAVEL EDGE

As the executive vice president of leisure for Travel Edge, Cheryl Nicholson runs the company’s entire leisure division, which straddles the United States, Canada and Bermuda, and includes a collection of 700 independent travel advisors. Nicholson is also responsible for recruiting new advisors into the network.

And while she’s based at Travel Edge headquarters in Toronto, she’s more often out in the field or at the company’s other locations. “I do a roadshow around all of our offices in all of our countries, and we make a conscious effort to make sure our communication includes our remote advisors as well,” she says.

Due to the wide geographical spread, opportunities to gather at big annual meetings, such as Virtuoso Travel Week in Las Vegas, are critical to Travel Edge, which encourages as many of its advisors as possible to attend the event, held every August. For this reason, Travel Edge pays a portion of the registration fees, based on the revenue tier the advisor falls under and even makes that contribution a part of the advisor agreement.

Who would be a good fit for Travel Edge? “We’re looking at those new to the industry and at those seeking a second career,” she says. “We’re also looking at established advisors who have been doing this for a long time. But our priority is to find people who fit with our vision of where we’re going as Travel Edge.”

What is the profile of that person?

“We’re looking for people who manage their clients the way that we would expect them to be managed. We are looking for entrepreneurs who are looking for new ways to grow their businesses. Some of our young professionals are doing great things with social media. We’re looking for people seeking unique ways to grow their business and who are professional about it, because we think we provide a great support system for them,” she notes. Advisors should be the type to nurture their clients and protect them while they’re traveling. “That’s more important to us than their number of years of experience,” she says.

She’s also keen on getting Travel Edge’s developing management team together regularly so that divisions are not working in silos, which can happen when a company grows via acquisition.

“That allows us to benefit from our acquisitions, such as Century Travel. We joined Century for the same reason that they joined us, and we want to leverage their best practices and share them with Bermuda, for example.”

Top performers will also meet once a year; in the planning phase is a trip to Costa Rica in December. “It’s a great opportunity for top performers in Montreal to tell top performers in Los Angeles what they’re doing to grow their businesses,” she says.

When it comes to future agency purchases, Nicholson says, it will once again be about being a good fit, rather than growing for the sake of growth.

In terms of expansion, Travel Edge might purchase an agency, or that agency could align as an affiliate. It comes down to the objectives of the existing agency, she says. Century Travel was an outright purchase and became a branch of Travel Edge. The former owners, Peter Lloyd and Gene Lashley, immediately became part of Travel Edge’s brain trust, and Lloyd was instrumental in helping develop its new website, she adds.

Nicholson says that travel advisors and agencies are looking carefully at whom they want to partner with and that the landscape is competitive.

“Selling travel is one of the most difficult jobs there is,” says Nicholson. “You need to know that if there is a situation, you’ve got an IT team that will help you, or a financial team, or an HR team. Those are the questions we’re hearing when people are considering whether they’re going to join. Everybody is interested in the commission and the revenue, but it’s also, ‘Who will support me? How many people are available?’ For that reason, Travel

Edge publishes service commitments that are transparent, and that include such information as how long it will take to get help if there’s something wrong with your phone, for example.”

Support comes in other ways. As Hurricane Irma was heading to Florida, Travel Edge reached out to their 15 advisors in its path from another office staffed by independents, who were ready to help by taking client calls and providing service to clients. Travel Edge’s head office also reached out directly to advisors, asking if there was anything they could do to assist with customers.

“Obviously, if you’re concerned about your own security, you can’t be managing your travel business, but we wanted to make sure that they were covered and protected,” notes Nicholson.

She tells us she’s excited to see where Travel Edge is going. “All of these changes are positive. We went to Travel Week as Travel Edge [for the first time] and the feedback we got was positive and energetic, so it’s really an exciting time to be part of the team,” she says.



CHERYL NICHOLSON keeps Travel Edge’s management team together.

accounting and commission tracking are handled automatically.

"It's an incredibly powerful platform," says Willner. "We are connected to multiple GDSs, to multiple wholesalers and to virtually all the cruise lines." Wholesalers connected to ADX include Hotelbeds.com, Jack Travel and GTA, which provide car service, attraction tickets, group tours and such, as well as trains and ferries in some locations.

Also in the offing? A connection to the 300 companies that Kensington Tours uses in 80 countries, which means advisors will be able to seamlessly book and bundle in private guided tours to their packages.

That's about a year away, but Willner says adding Kensington Tours to the mix will provide a layer of offerings such as game lodges, boutique hotels and local airlines.

Linking advisors directly to Kensington's system will turn them into personal luxury tour operators, says Willner. "This will give them the ability to create complete experiences for their clients."

Enabling the advisor to provide such a total travel experience for the client will empower them to charge more for their services, which Willner believes they should do.

"In our experience, when you can turn a series of services into a complete experience, there is room to start charging for the real value of trip-planning expertise, as well as mid-trip customer service, and post-trip issue resolution, if needed," says Willner. "Selling a bundle allows for higher fees and margins."

This plays in to Travel Edge's tagline, "Expertise that's worth the fees."

He cites examples of travel agents who specialize in cruises, but tell their clients to book their own air or pre- and post- hotel.

"That doesn't make any sense," says Willner. "Bringing it all into one package also gives the client peace of mind, because if something goes wrong with the hotel or the flight, there's someone who's going to stand behind that."

Advisors, in turn, booking via ADX, will have a full team to support the transaction.

All this keeps Willner jazzed about the company's potential and he says that the rebranding of Travel Edge from Worldview was just the start of a process that will make Travel Edge a more prominent player in the industry, and a "better place to have a career."

All these tools, including the Travel Edge support system, should allow advisors to earn margins of 20 percent, he says.

"If they can get to 20 percent, it will revo-



PETER LLOYD AND GENE LASHLEY's Century Travel is Travel Edge's latest acquisition.

lutionize their lives," says Willner. "They can build their businesses, they can afford to market again and they can afford to hire young people." Willner is keen on elevating the image of travel advisors, who he says have one of the most difficult jobs out there. "What galvanized and upset me when I fell in love with this industry was the level of casual disrespect there was for a profession that I think is one of the greatest professions that you can have. [Being a travel agent] is about helping people to reinvigorate, reconnect and enjoy their lives."

Another strategy at Travel Edge is to be as upfront as possible about how advisors are paid. "We publish our [commission] splits on our website, which is very rare for a travel company to do," Willner tells *Luxury Travel Advisor*. Those details, listed under an "Advisor Program" button, list advisor tiers such as "Small Biz," "Professional," "President's Club" and "Chairman's Circle." Based on revenue earnings, each category lists the services and amenities that come with each tier, as well as a commission-split schedule.

Established advisors joining Travel Edge will be credited for their past achievements from the start. "If an advisor comes over from some other company, they would receive the split based on their full volume," he explains. "For example, someone who had done \$400,000 to \$600,000 in revenue in the previous 12 months would immediately earn 90 percent on their first sale. The idea is not to penalize someone who brings over their own thriving business."

Why make a payment scheme so public?

"When I acquired the agencies, we had about 650 agents on 350 different arrangements and I felt that was unprofessional and unfair," says Willner. "It rewarded the agents who were the loudest or the most vocal, and there were a number of true top performers who were being, in effect, taken advantage of because they weren't loud enough," says Willner. "And

so we made a commitment as a company to be as transparent and honest with our clients, who are our agents, as we possibly could."

Attracting New Talent

More on the ADX technology: Travel Edge is \$20 million into its development and has a team of 40 programmers who push out a new build weekly with features and functionality that advisors have requested.

Willner notes that on screen, ADX has the appearance of being very "point and clicky," but he believes that simplicity is necessary if new talent is to be drawn in to the industry.

"We're not going to bring a whole new generation of people into travel if we've got to train them on blue screens," he says. "Technology is at its best when it acts the way you intuitively expect it to act."

Willner hopes that bringing new people to the industry will ease the dynamic of many agencies vying for the existing pool of advisors. "It's the chance to fundamentally change the model and for people to realize, 'I can win, while not making other people lose,'" he says.

Watch for Travel Edge, which has been fairly low key throughout its growth spurt, to be more in the forefront in the future.

"We haven't really beat our own drum very much, but we need to and it helps our agents to do it. If there is a message from an acquisition perspective, it's that we're in search of the best talent. If there are people who are excited about being in the business, but are tired of dealing with the craziness of accounting systems and other things, we can do that [for them]."

The Human Factor

Willner launched his company as a pure technology play, but he's enjoying the people side of the luxury travel advisor business more than he expected.

"I'm a bit of an introvert," he tells us. "My parents were missionaries in Africa, I grew up in the Congo. But, I've traveled a ton, I drove my Land Rover to 120 countries around the world and I'm a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society. So I really do like people and I'm a big advocate of family."

For that reason, he says, he loves that his management team comprises "nice, hard-working, low-ego people, and that's something we work really hard on. While we were on a tour to all of our branches a month ago, I realized we were giving out a lot of hugs. I really, really enjoy that part of it. That's what keeps you coming back to work." ■



Virtuoso's Innovative Agencies

BY MATT TURNER

Twenty years ago, many businesses were going from “bricks to clicks,” shifting to an online-first approach.

At this year's Virtuoso Travel Week, Erik Qualman, a digital speaker and author of *Socialnomics*, *Digital Leader* and *What Happens in Vegas Stays on YouTube* made the point (despite being an advocate of a strong online and social media presence) that people need human interaction. He reserved the term: “clicks to bricks.” It was an apt introduction for Virtuoso debuting its Innovation Awards.

This year's awards included Best Agency Office and Best Client Service Experience. The former was the brainchild of David Kolner, senior vice president, global member partnerships for Virtuoso. “When the idea happened for me, I was in Peru visiting

[Viajes Rosario Flórez's] new office,” he tells *Luxury Travel Advisor*.

When you walk into the agency you'll find a custom “floating wood ceiling,” designed by an architect who studied with Zaha Hadid. It flows through glass walls that create small meeting rooms. In the back of the office there's a second floating ceiling, this time cut in the shape of the continents. All of this is tied together by modern furniture and Peruvian accents. The goal was to make travelers feel that their vacation started as soon as they walked in the office.

“It is such a spectacular space...I was like, ‘Something is happening here in the industry that we need to actually celebrate and champion,’ because these people are investing in the space,” Kolner says. “The other thing that's amazing about it is that they're proclaiming that travel advisors still exist.”

From there, the idea of rewarding innovation took off.

Kolner says Virtuoso received over 40 applications for the award, with representation from all continents. The agencies had to fill out a questionnaire that included when they renovated, how much they spent, what their goals were, and client testimonials.

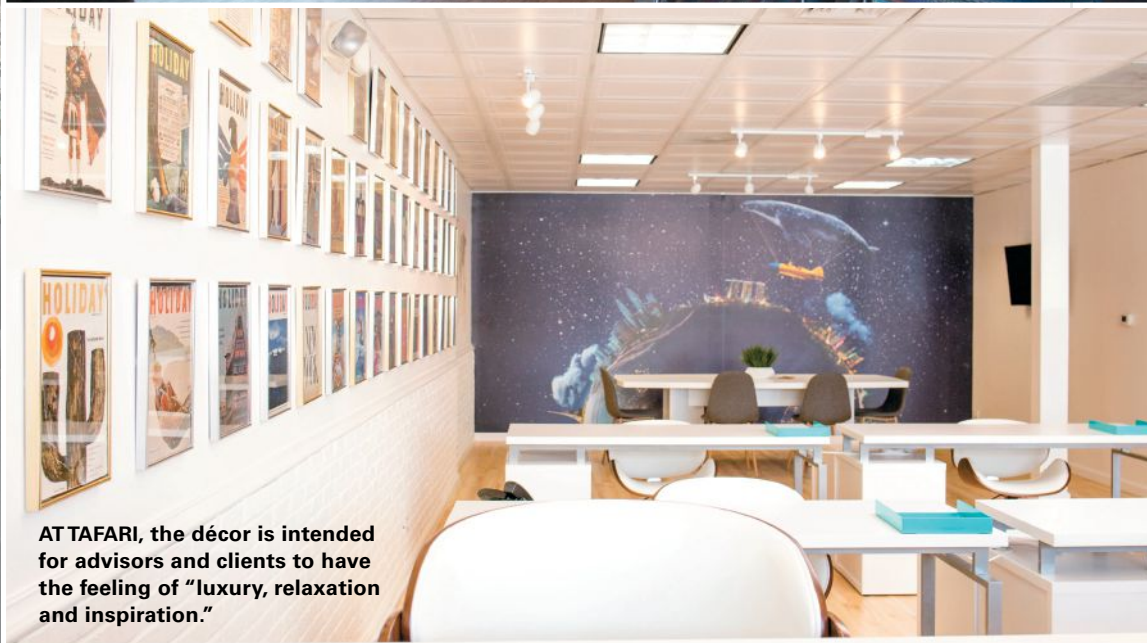
Departure Lounge in Austin, TX wasn't the first in the new wave of agency offices to offer more than just a place to sell travel, but they quickly became one of the most well known for doing so. Located on one of the city's busiest corners, the original Departure Lounge (it has since moved to a more affluent neighborhood) was very much that — a lounge, with a bar, snacks, touch-screen TVs and hosted events. As a pioneer of the revival of “Main Street's” travel agency, Departure Lounge owner Keith Waldon was one of



SELECT COLLECTION won the Best Agency Office award. The Stockholm, Sweden agency has a lobby furnished like a living room one would find in Paris.



TRAVEL DESIGN LOUNGE is a bar and events space, with happy hour included.



ATAFARI, the décor is intended for advisors and clients to have the feeling of “luxury, relaxation and inspiration.”

Kolner’s choices for his five-person panel for determining the winner of the Best Agency Office award.

The remainder of the team comprised Stephanie Anevich, executive vice president, leisure travel of Vision Travel Solutions; Ann Chamberlain, senior vice president membership & strategic partnerships with ASTA; Alexis Romer, vice president-sales, luxury travel industry of Marriott International Luxury Brands and Sarah Honeywell, Virtuoso’s office and facilities manager — all of whom are Virtuoso board members.

The finalists were Viajes Rosario Flórez in Lima, Peru; Atlántida Viatges in Barcelona, Spain; Charlotte Travel in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong; Pique Travel Design in Excelsior, MN; Tafari Travel in Denver, CO; The Local Foreigner in New York, NY; Travelcall, Part of Goldman Travel Group in Victoria, Australia;

Travel Design Lounge by Travel and Transport in Omaha, NE; Viajes Palacio in Colonia Los Morales, Mexico and the winner, Select Collection in Stockholm, Sweden.

Not all of the offices followed the same blueprint — in fact, they are all unique — which makes their individual successes even more exciting when considering the future of agencies. Virtuoso, however, found several similarities in the reasoning for renovations:

We wanted “to create a place of escapism; a place where you walk in the door and leave the city behind and enter a different culture, a different world,” Select Collection’s application says. Outdoors, a carpet and velvet ropes lead clients through the doors to find a lobby furnished like a living room you would find in Paris. There are also communal meeting spaces with tucked-away office space. But they didn’t want it to be overwhelming — after all,

it still needs to be a relaxing place where clients “could get into the holiday mode.”

The result? A three-treatment room day spa with exclusive use of the Swiss cellular skincare brand, Valmont.

“I just want to move in,” Kolner says.

The theme of escapism continues throughout the other agencies, as well.

“Our vision was to have a blank canvas for our clients who would be able to enter into the office and have us help them paint their holiday picture,” Charlotte Travel says.

With a limited amount of space, Charlotte Travel had to create a multifunctional space. For instance, the office has special-order tables that fold to fit in a closet and glass walls that open and close. However, a top feature might be the walls covered with photos taken by the staff while they were traveling. It brings a personal, familial feeling to the space.

VIAJES ROSARIO FLÓREZ in Lima has a custom “floating wood ceiling,” which flows through glass walls that create small meeting rooms.



VIAJES PALACIO, done up in a palette of white and yellow, houses travel books, art and electronics.



Another way to inspire creativity? An agency set in a 200-year-old gallery, where the works of Picasso, Dali, Miró and Chagall were on exhibit. “We wanted to embody an air of modernity and innovation,” Atlántida Viatges says. But the goal wasn’t to entirely renovate the space; Atlántida Viatges kept the original flooring and forged iron columns.

Pique Travel took a similar approach as Departure Lounge and converted a retail warehouse into an agency/events space. They note its “primary goal was to build a creative environment that reflects [its] culture.” And with the new office came a new series where Pique Travel hosts travel speakers to draw crowds from the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Get This: They even host weddings on the weekend when the office is closed — and sell the couple on a honeymoon!

Tafari’s innovation starts with its name. “Translated, ‘Tafari’ means ‘awe-inspiring.’ Our goals of the renovation were all geared around that single aim,” they say. The open-floor plan is intended for advisors and clients to have the feeling of “luxury, relaxation and inspiration.” In the back of the office, clients will find a wine and coffee bar with a seating area. We particularly love the mural on the back wall, which is very unique, to say the least.

“I think it really reflects that whole idea of, ‘Wow, I didn’t know a travel agency could look like that.’” Kolner says.

Despite the small space, New York’s The

Local Foreigner “wanted to create a comfortable, residential atmosphere to suit our collaborative approach to travel planning.” And by looking at it, you might think you stumbled into an elegant studio apartment. Yes, there are desks and computers where advisors work but there is also a dining area where everyone eats lunch everyday to decompress, catch up and get away from their desks. The meeting room — couch, chairs and coffee table included — better resembles a living room.

Travelcall’s newly renovated top-floor office takes a traditional office to the next level. The entrance is marble, the “cubicles” are open (to facilitate collaboration), and an outdoor patio space can host barbecues, wine tastings and other events.

Located in Omaha, Nebraska is Travel Design Lounge. “Innovation happens everywhere,” Kolner says. Travel Design Lounge is a full-on bar and events space, with happy hour and a “Get Tripsy” sign on the wall.

“We wanted to create an environment completely different from the traditional ‘business type’ design for our new location,” Travel Design Lounge says. “One with a more comfortable setting from a visual, seating, food and beverage standpoint...to encourage relaxing while exploring travel destinations.” Like Pique Travel, Travel Design Lounge launched a series of monthly travel-themed events. The office is even open on nights and weekends.

Within El Palacio de Hierro, you’ll find Viajes Palacio. The Mexican chain department store rivals that of Neiman Marcus and Harrods, and mixed within the stores is the agency. When clients step inside, they will find travel books, art and electronics. The renovation’s goal was to “create an innovative space, adapted to the needs of the current traveler,” says Viajes Palacio.

It’s a modern space with a palette of white and yellow. Local art in cubbies brings authenticity to the office without cluttering the space. The best part: The office connects directly to the luggage department.

As for the winner of this year’s Best Client Service Experience, Brownell Travel took home the hardware for its “Discover More” collaborative resource program. It’s not an entirely new process — they’ve actually been using it for years — but its functionality made it a clear choice for the award. “It’s one thing to have a great idea. It’s another to actually implement it and stick with it,” Kolner says. “It’s not just the spark of the innovation, but it’s actually carrying it through all the way.” ■

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ALILA FORT BISHANGARH (here) sits atop a granite hill with 360-degree views of Rajasthani landscape. The hotel has 59 suites. Shown below is a Grand Suite.



Edie Rodriguez announced she has stepped down as president and CEO of **Crystal Cruises** for a yet-to-be-named venture. Taking her place will be Tom Wolber. He most recently worked with the **Walt Disney Company** where he served in various executive roles for 28 years, 10 of which were with Disney Cruise Line where he served as senior vice president of operations. His skills include general management, operations, new-build construction and business development.

The Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead in Atlanta will be rebranded as **The Whitley, A Luxury Collection Hotel** effective December 1. Earlier this year, the property underwent a renovation, which included its lobby. A new restaurant and a ballroom with an outdoor event space were added.

Toscana Resort Castelfalfi has named Isidoro Di Franco (Isidoro.difranco@castelfalfi.it) as GM of **II Castelfalfi**, the five-star hotel within Toscana Resort Castelfalfi. Di Franco spent 20 years with Marriott International, and his most recent position was GM of Four Points by Sheraton in Bolzano, which won the Starwood EMEA Franchising Hotel of the Year Award in 2013, Starwood EMEA Rooms Excellence Award, and more.

Fancy a Fort in Jaipur?

Alila Fort Bishangarh, a 230-year-old warrior fort-turned boutique hotel, has opened in Jaipur, India. The original fort — six-foot-thick walls and battlements and all — remains intact, with a new structure to house the suites and public areas.

Alila Fort Bishangarh has 59 suites — each with bay windows, day beds, footed bathtubs, 42-inch TVs and Wi-Fi access. Fun Fact: There are 22 different room configurations and very few 90-degree-angle walls. All rooms have views of the Rajasthani landscape and Aravali Hills. Traveling with the family? We recommend the Royal or Grand Suites; the former “exemplify noble splendor,” while the latter “are designed for indulgence with a palette of neutral tones.”

What we love: The Spa Alila is carved out between granite rocks in the former dungeon. Here, guests can opt for the Roots of Jaipur treatment:

a 90-minute treatment that includes a detoxifying body scrub made from local green gram and turmeric, a deep-tissue massage that uses camphor, mustard and coconut oil, and a basil- and ginger-infused steam to clear the lungs and remove toxins.

Alila Fort Bishangarh likens its dining options to a treasure hunt: Turrets, cellars and secret passages have been turned into bars, lounges and creative spaces for dining and meetings. The former royal living quarters are now the indoor restaurant Amarsar, serving all palates; Nazaara, an outdoor dining terrace, serves Rajput and frontier cuisine, which involves sand-pit cooking and smoked meats; Madhuveni is a cigar and cognac lounge; and the Kachhawa Lounge, where a secret royal escape route was found, now serves the 4 Cs — champagne, coffee, *chai* and cakes.

Then, just down the hill is the Haveli, a “labyrinth of spaces to chill,” which includes a pool, bar fitness center, banquet lawns and Play Alila Kids Club. Outdoors, guests will also find an organic garden, a fruit orchard and a greenhouse.

Located at Bishangarh Village in the Jaipur District, Alila Fort Bishangarh is easily accessible from both Delhi and Jaipur. It is three hours from Indira Gandhi International Airport and one hour from Jaipur Airport. Amber Fort is only 45 minutes away and Bishangarh is a good base to explore Jaipur’s tourist attractions.

Reach out to host manager Sunaina Manerker (sunaina.manerker@alilahotels.com) for VIP bookings.

—Matt Turner



Hotel Stripes Kuala Lumpur

Hotel Stripes Kuala Lumpur, a member of the Autograph Collection, has opened in one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, Jalan Kamunting. We hear Hotel Stripes — just the second Autograph Collection hotel in Malaysia — exudes a true urban vibe and draws inspiration from the history of its local neighborhood, once used as a settlement for tin mining during the colonial era.

For travelers who want to get a sense of the neighborhood, just outside is what locals call “The Row” (formally known as the Asian Heritage Row); it has 22 shops in buildings dating to the 1940s, which are mostly made of wood and thatch (you can tell which buildings are post-Colonial as these are made of brick and tile), and includes a mix of restaurants, nightlife, cafés, art galleries and more.

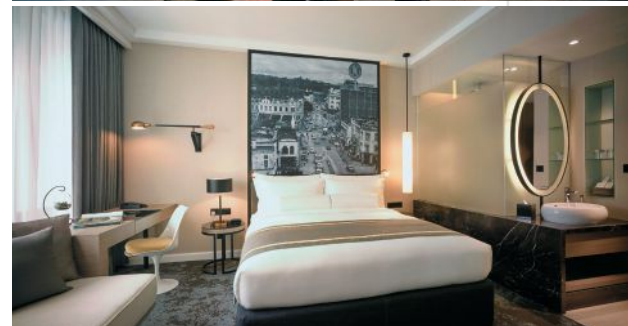
Back at the hotel, of the 184 rooms, the top dig is the 667-square-foot Stripes Suite. Tip: Ask for a room facing the Kuala

Lumpur Tower skyline — these are the best views. Couples, however, should consider the Executive Studio room as these are the only rooms that come with a bathtub. Recommend the Studio Rooms for families; these are the only connecting rooms.

Want to grab a bite to eat at the hotel? There are three options: Brasserie 25, a French-style restaurant with laidback cuisine that also offers Le Goûter (afternoon tea with a French twist); The Snug, a pitstop for a quick caffeine fix to start the day; and Man Tao, the rooftop pool bar, with views of Kuala Lumpur.

For special bookings and requests, contact assistant reservations manager Genevieve Lim (hsklresv@stripeskl.com). —*Matt Turner*

HOTEL STRIPES' rooftop pool bar, Man Tao (above right), provides sweeping views of the Kuala Lumpur Tower, which can be seen from some of the hotel's 184 rooms (right) as well.



Bobbing in true fashion...

Crisp air pinched our noses. My breath mixed with steam from my hot chocolate. We skiffed among bergy bits into the fjord, coming to a halt at the face of a towering blue glacier. No other souls in sight. Almost. A harbor seal popped up to say hello.



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New InterCon in Perth, Australia

InterContinental Perth City Centre opens in the King Street Precinct on October 15 with lots of lovely art on display. We hear the 16-story hotel will have works commissioned from leading local painters, ceramicists, glassblowers and sculptors.

Nice Touch: For a literal taste of Perth, the minibars are stocked with local wines and craft beers. Rooms also have smart TVs, complimentary Wi-Fi and 24/7 room service. The *crème de la crème* is The Penthouse, with a dining area, walk-in wardrobe, and 180-degree views of the city. Suite guests get Club InterContinental benefits, including à la carte

breakfast, all-day refreshments, Afternoon Tea service and drinks during the evening.

Diningwise, Heno & Ray has a tapas bar; Ascua (Spanish for “ember”) has a grill theme and

in-house sommelier; The Loft Lounge serves coffee and fresh pastries; and the eclectic Graffiti is “where food truck meets hole-in-the-wall diner.”

Across the street from the

hotel is His Majesty’s Theatre, home to the West Australian Opera, Ballet and other cultural events. Down the block, luxury shoppers will find Tiffany & Co., Chanel, Gucci, Kookai, an Australian-owned women’s fashion label, and Kailis Pearls, which started in northwest Australia.

Leading the hotel will be General Manager Adam McDonald, a former resident manager at **InterContinental Sydney**.

Reservations are now being taken for InterContinental Perth City Centre. Reach out to Chloe Harris (chloe.harris@ihg.com), business development manager, for VIP requests. —*Matt Turner*



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137 Pillars Suites & Residences Bangkok

Situated above 22 floors of private residences, the 34-suite **137 Pillars** boutique hotel, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World opened in April.

What's good? Suites are spacious, with dining tables, mood lighting, high ceilings, walk-in wardrobes, and en-suite bathrooms that have chic, circular bathtubs with built-in TVs. Yes, please. Bonus: All suites also come with butler service.

Tip: Have a variety of age groups in your traveling party? The Rattanakosin Suites are 1,200-square-feet in size and include two baths and an oversized outdoor balcony with a daybed and dining table. These top accommodations are also well suited for VIP couples, as are the

Pillars One-Bedroom Residences and the Pillars Executive One-Bedroom Residences, which include a kitchen, in-residence laundry and private balconies.

The two dining options here include Bangkok Trading Post Bistro & Deli, which serves international comfort food as well as grab-and-go options, and Nimitr, which dishes out cutting-edge Oriental fare.

At 137 Pillars' glass-walled fitness center (with free weight and cardio equipment options), guests can work with a personal trainer as well as with a Muay Thai or yoga instructor. On floor 27, guests will find a pool and Jacuzzi. Tip: Be sure to save time for a drink from The Marble Bar, of course. Fun Fact: The hotel also has its own indoor golf simulator



THE RATTANAKOSIN SUITE comes with a maxi bar and mood lighting.

and outdoor putting range.

The Nitra Spa, on floor 28, provides a range of face, body and holistic treatments. We recommend the Sleep by Design Therapy option, especially if

you're jetlagged.

For enquiries, advisors can contact Nutthirada Teppiphob (nutthirada@137pillarsbangkok.com), assistant director of sales - leisure. —Matt Turner



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JETSET REPORT

SHORTER, COOLER DAYS are just around the corner and we can't wait to cozy up by the fire with some hot cocoa. Even though we're not quite there yet, don't wait until the last minute to prep your winter wardrobe. These are some must-have goodies heading into the winter season.

COZY UP ANYWHERE

This **sofiacashmere** travel set makes itchy airplane blankets a thing of the past. The matching blanket, eye mask, socks and bag will take you from destination to destination in comfort and style. Bonus: You can even get the travel bag monogrammed. Get it at sofiacashmere.com.

Look Sharp

Scuffed footwear is never in style, and snow and salt can wreak havoc on a good pair of shoes. That's why every traveler who wants to look their best needs a good shoe care kit, whether they're on the road or at home. We love the one from **Allen Edmonds** because it comes in a super compact leather case for easy transport. Inside is all you need for your leather shoes, including brushes, wax polish in black and brown and polishing cloths.



Next-Generation Luggage

We're not surprised that at Virtuoso Travel Week, this bag was named one of Chad Clark's Certified 25 for 2017. The **G-RO Carry-On** is noticeably different, with signature big wheels made to roll easier and last longer. Suitable for all travelers, this bag comes with a laptop pocket, two USB ports, and TSA locks, all while being small enough to fit in an overhead. Visit g-ro.com for yours.



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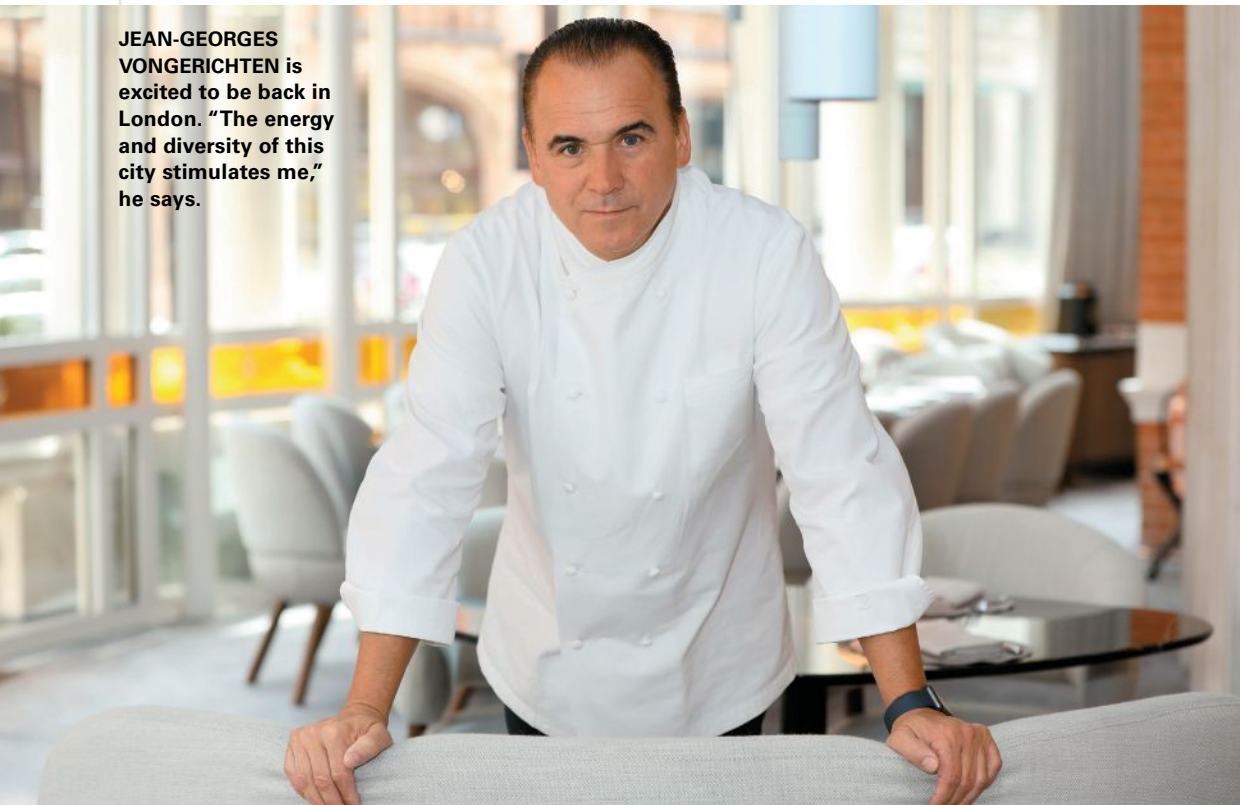
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Now even your four-legged friend can travel in style. **Hartman & Rose's** pet carrier is made from full grain vegetable-dyed cognac leather and has a shoulder strap with leather comfort pad. It's the perfect size to bring your small dog (or cat) with you on the go. And with a large mesh window in the front, you can easily check in with your furry friend just to say, "Hey, babe!" **Nice Touch:** The inside pads are removable for easy cleaning.



We Dish With Michelin-Star Chef Jean-Georges

JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHTEN is excited to be back in London. "The energy and diversity of this city stimulates me," he says.



manager, Daniel Alvarado, who was the general manager at The Ivy, as well as the service team we hired are second to none.

Where do you go in London for local cuisine?

I never visit London without going to Scott's for langoustine and Dover Sole.

What is your favorite London food market?

The food court at Harrods for its products and restaurants, and the Marylebone Farmers' Market.

Any neighborhoods you love for great ethnic food?

What I love about London is its melting-pot dining scene. Last time I was in town, we ate great Indian food at Jamavar, right around the corner from The Connaught!

Where do you go in London when you have the time to relax?

Hyde Park is my favorite oasis in the middle of the city.

Jean-Georges at The Connaught serves breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner, seven days a week. Reservations can be made at 011-440-207-107-8861. Top Tip: Ask for tables near the windows for the best views.

Good to know: Hélène Darroze will continue to operate her two-Michelin-star restaurant on the other side of the hotel.

—Emily Goldfischer

Jean-Georges Vongerichten has opened Jean-Georges at The Connaught, marking his return to London and the Maybourne Hotel Group since closing of Vong at The Berkeley in 2002. *Luxury Travel Advisor* had a chat with the Michelin-star chef while he was here for the opening to discuss his latest venture, the 30th restaurant in his culinary empire.

Why the return to London now?

I am so excited to be back in London during such a vibrant and dynamic time. The energy and

diversity of this city stimulates me. After 15 years, it feels like the perfect moment to be here.

Why The Connaught for this new venture?

The Connaught is the first hotel I ever visited in London and holds a special place in my heart. The hotel has always been a distinguished dining destination and I am excited to be a part of it.

What about this restaurant excites you the most?

The dining room, designed by interior architect John Heah, features floor-to-ceiling windows,

accented by stained glass by artist Jean-Michel Othoniel. The windows offer beautiful natural light into the dining room and pretty views of Mayfair.

You have 30 restaurants around the world. What is special to you about this new one at The Connaught?

I value the partnership with the Maybourne Group first and foremost. We have an amazing team at The Connaught. Our chef, Anshu Anghotra, who hails from India but was most recently at The Lanesborough, is an amazing talent, and the fabulous restaurant

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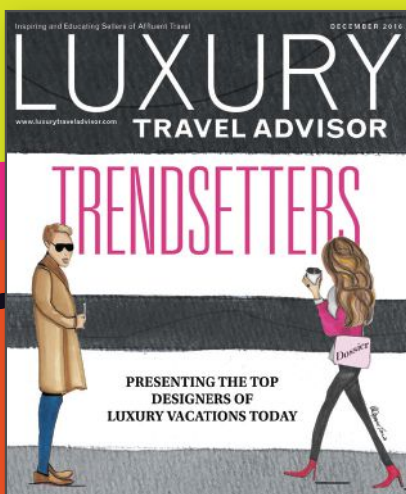
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Nihi Sumba Island



Richard Beck of Classic Travel recently ventured all the way to Sumba to see if the hype he had read about a resort there was true. He's returned with this full report.

Is **Nihi Sumba Island** really the best hotel in the world?

Wow! Could this be paradise? Nihi Sumba Island, named the world's best hotel two years in a row by *Travel + Leisure*, certainly grabbed my interest. Where is it? How do you get there? I hardly think when telling someone the best way to get to Capri, Aspen, St. Bart's or Mykonos, but now I had to look at a map. Nihi is on Sumba. Sounds like it could be a new acronym I don't know, but it's an island one hour from Denpasar, the capital of Bali in Indonesia. Then, when you land, it's a 90-minute drive from Sumba's Tambolaka Airport (TMC). OK, it's not a weekend jaunt from most places!

I wondered how, in 2012, Chris Burch and hotelier friend James McBride found, and then bought, what was a beach hostel owned by a couple from New Jersey. What they developed and reopened as a luxury Subanese resort is unbelievably impressive. I spent time with McBride while I was there and there were so many questions running through my mind

that I was sorry I didn't make a list beforehand.

Before I went, I read most of the prerequisite reviews in many of the illustrious travel magazines. I was psyched. First, I spent a week of sublime luxury in Ubud. Since it was my third visit, feeling somewhat morally obligated, I fleetingly attempted to understand Balinese culture. By the time I left Bali, I was recharged, relaxed and ready for a new experience.

The check-in for Nihi begins at Bali's Denpasar airport. Here, Nihi hotel personnel assist you through security, obtain boarding passes and check your luggage after having taken iPhone pictures, which are e-mailed to their handlers at the Sumba airport. This is so you don't have to wait on arrival. You're met and taken immediately to the waiting vehicle while your luggage is transported separately.

It's a long day and after about an hour into the pretty, but not overwhelmingly so, drive, I was beginning to think that I was just either too jaded or maybe this wasn't all that fabulous. I was missing the Tegallalang Rice Terraces of Ubud. Just then the car went around a bend and the driver pointed to the left. There, for as far as my eyes could see, was a new "WOW" landscape — lush, tropical vegetation and in the far distance a crescent-shaped beach and then a continuation of more hills in the distance. The sun was at that perfect afternoon angle on a cloudless day and the colors of celadon and jade mixed with others in between. It's just



beach, which you can access from the attached steps. There is also a “Spa Villa,” where you can spend the night. It’s extremely popular with honeymooners.

Dining venues include one restaurant named Ombak. Breakfast and dinner are served here. The setting is especially beautiful at breakfast when you can see the waves breaking below. There’s no floor, just sand; it’s very cool and sure to bring out the beachcomber in anyone. Nio Beach Club & Pool is where lunch is served. This restaurant is adjacent to the infinity pool, which is directly over the beach. And what a beach it is! I walked it each day at sunrise or immediately after breakfast and I almost always had the mile-and-half beach to myself. Immediately next to the Surf Shop is a beach bar like no other. If you’ve ever dreamed about what a beach bar should look like, this is it.

I can promise anyone that moments spent on this beach will be forever remembered. Finally, what beach resort do you know of that has its own chocolate factory? Far back in a jungle area is where this one is located. As I walked to it, I couldn’t imagine how much fun it would be. Surely, this is for kids and they will love it, but so will adults. That night the chocolate that I made was beautifully packaged and delivered to my villa.

Is Nihi the best hotel in the world? I wouldn’t have thought so before I went but it sure sells magazines. What they say about beauty being in the eyes of the beholder couldn’t be truer. I’ve been to a few very special hotels in my life and Nihi may just be the best beach resort I’ve ever experienced. I need to go back.

— *Richard Beck*

THE INFINITY POOL (left) at Nihi Sumba Island is directly over the beach.

RICHARD BECK (below left) is seen at the sand-floored Ombak restaurant.

VILLA ROOMS (above) have king beds and furnishings that blend with the surroundings.

a moment but one that’s filed in my travel memory bank and can easily be retrieved with the word Sumba.

When I arrived, the first thing that I remember thinking was how appropriate the hotels slogan is: “luxury on the edge of wildness.” The other thing that struck me was the sincere friendliness I felt. The enormous amount of ongoing training that is continuous is obvious. Sumba is an island with a population of around 650,000 and Nihi is the only luxury hotel on this relatively large island, and the largest single employer. The profits from the hotel and individual benefactors fund the Sumba Foundation, which, in turn, supports medical clinics, schools and communal farms on the island.

Nihi started out as a special place for surfers and it still is. However, to maintain its exclusivity and, I suspect, the ecology of the area, the hotel allows a maximum 10 guests a day to surf “Occy’s Left,” the break that started it all. There’s even the quintessential beachfront surf shop. It’s all on this majestic stretch of seemingly deserted beach. Naturally, there’s a resident surf instructor and resident yoga instructor.

The property seems large in area and is spread out. Privacy is key in the 32 villas that have one- to five-bedroom layouts. Each is so different and I can’t say which, if any, I liked more than another. During my stay, I was shown most of the accommodations and what

I remember vividly is whether you’re a couple, a family or friends traveling together there is an accommodation to suit all tastes. They have names like Kanatar, Lulu Amahu or Puncak. The villa rooms, which are all large, have quiet air conditioning and very comfortable king beds with masses of netting around them. The netting is probably as much for atmosphere as it is for practicality. The morning sun through the netting is another memory I’ll try not to forget. Photos don’t do justice to the understated furnishings, which blend so well with the surroundings. The outdoor areas of each accommodation are different in appearance, but they all have privacy, plunge pools and outdoor showers, and some even come with outdoor tubs.

The rates include three meals per day as well as non-alcoholic beverages, and there’s no charge for the minibar, which is replenished daily. Laundry service is also included. Nihi is also probably one of the few luxury resorts in the world that you can travel to with just a “carry-on.”

Nihi has created something they call the “Spa Safari.” It can be done for either half day, full day or overnight. It’s a must! The spa is built on a peninsula that’s about a 90-minute hike from the main part of the hotel. I did the hike early one morning with Managing Director James McBride. It was terrific spending time with him — learning more about the hotel and a little about his life.

The treatment “rooms” are two covered areas that are outside, high on a cliff with jaw-dropping sea views. Another area which is perhaps a three- to five-minute walk is where the private pool area is located, and just a few steps away is a marvelous outdoor dining pavilion that overlooks another spectacular

NIHI SUMBA ISLAND is set amidst lush, tropical vegetation and is considered a surfer’s paradise.



SIGHTINGS

From Basel, Switzerland to Las Vegas, Austin and San Diego, we were out and about, meeting with luxury travel friends. Here are some highlights.



At the Switzerland Travel Mart, Switzerland Tourism revealed the three winners of this year's Gold Flower Award for North American tour operators: Alpine Adventures, Europe Express and Kensington Tours. From left to right: Pascal Prinz, trade manager Eastern U.S. for Switzerland Tourism; Pete Kovacevic of Alpine Adventures; Nick Turnell, account manager, trade for Switzerland Tourism; Dana Toma of Kensington Tours; Mirko Capodanno, trade manager, Western U.S. for Switzerland; Paula McKay of Europe Express and Alex Herrmann, director of North America for Switzerland Tourism.



At the ASTA Global Convention, *Luxury Travel Advisor's* Chris Coon (right), met with Scott Fujingaga, sales executive for leisure sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau.



At Virtuoso Travel Week, Loews Hotels had a fun gathering. Shown here are Julia Marrek, Loews Regency San Francisco Hotel; Christie Holmes of Departure Lounge; Michelle Streicher, Vision Travel Solutions; Tamsin Parvus of Loews Hotel 1000, Seattle; Ann Harrison of Direct Travel; Claudine Pascal of Balboa Travel; Rosie Goldberg of Vanguard Travel; Kimberly Newbury of the Questex Travel Group and April Murena of Loews Hotels.



Silversea Cruises took home an award at Virtuoso Travel Week for "Most Innovative Itinerary." The cruise line's president of North America, Mark Conroy, was also named "Cruise Ambassador of the Year." Shown here are Silversea executives, Mark Conroy, Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio and Roberto Martinoli.



We visited Hotel Van Zandt in Austin and caught up with Chuck Moses, director of sales and marketing of the hotel, and Phil Novoa of Finn Partners.

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