

Business Traveller

MIDDLE EAST



Laps and claps

UAE heralds music and events season



Great Wall getaways

Rural retreats at Chinese icon



Pay it forward

Hotels boost CSR strategies



Weird food

Exotic dishes to test your nerves



Emirates celebrates 100th A380

Special Airbus report from Toulouse ahead of Dubai Airshow

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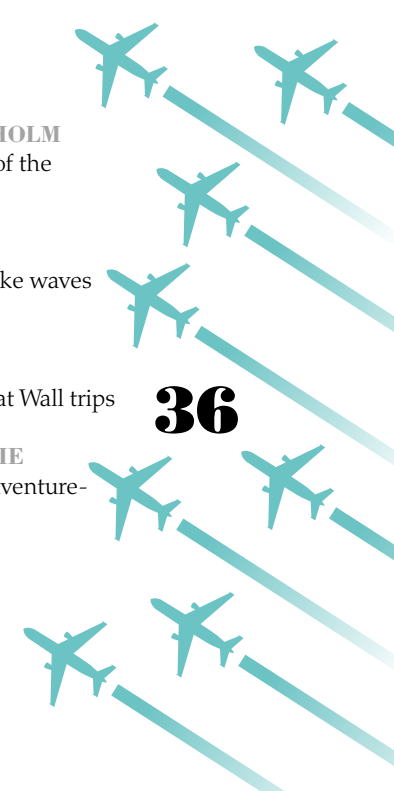
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SOME DREAMS CAN'T WAIT

KASBAH  TAMADOT
SIR RICHARD BRANSON'S MOROCCAN RETREAT



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It took me 17 years but I finally made it to Toulouse. After all the conferences, forecasts and aircraft order releases, it was interesting to see Airbus' commercial, defence and space operation at first hand.

Sometimes you toil away at angles and sometimes they land in your lap, and fortunately in this case, the chance to visit Airbus on the eve of Emirates receiving its 100th A380, and The Dubai Airshow 2017, was fortuitous timing.

Anniversaries are always a good time to reflect. I've been casting my mind back to the Dubai Airshow 2007, in what seems like another aviation era; it would be another year before Emirates received its first superjumbo, and at that time, it placed an order for 11 additional A380s, taking its overall tally to 58 aircraft.

Interestingly, while the double-deckers have been flying to DXB ever since, at the 2007 show Emirates ordered 50 A350s only to cancel them in 2014 – after it ordered a record 150 B777Xs at the 2013 Dubai Airshow (Back to 2017, and the A350 hangar looked busy with Asian and Gulf carrier customers).

There can be no doubt it has been the 'decade of the superjumbo' as far as Emirates is concerned, and its ongoing support has been pivotal to the model's production.

Airbus maintains the A380 is the only real solution to airport congestion as air travel is projected to double, but the debate between hub and point-to-point continues to rumble on, amid ongoing airspace and airport capacity challenges. Facing unending political, security and economic challenges, the Emirates A380 has continued to connect passengers to global hubs – and just as importantly, secondary cities – via DXB.

Without doubt, the A380 has served Emirates well in its first nine years – and I suspect premium passengers will still be enjoying a shower, and raising a glass at the onboard lounge, in 2026.

Dominic Ellis
Editor

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Emirates receives 100th A380, to unveil first class suites at Dubai Airshow and fly ‘one off’ superjumbo to Bahrain

EMIRATES WILL RECORD one of the biggest milestones in its 32-year history when it receives its 100th A380 at a special delivery ceremony at Hamburg on November 3 – only nine years after it received its first one.

The superjumbo has not only transformed Emirates’ business model but also redrawn the global aviation map with passengers transferring east, west, north and south via Dubai International

Airport – and the Emirates A380 has been instrumental in elevating the airport to top spot in the international passenger traffic league. Up to 60 per cent of passengers are prepared to make an extra effort to fly on the A380, according to Airbus.

After the Hamburg celebrations, the other widebody in Emirates’ fleet will take centre stage, when its eagerly awaited first class suites will be unveiled on a B777-300ER at the Dubai Airshow between

November 12-16. The six new suites will be configured 1-1-1, featuring two less seats than previously. The new Boeing plane will also boast a range of other new features in business and economy class. Emirates will fly a ‘one off’ A380 service to Bahrain on December 15 to mark National Day celebrations and Algiers increases to daily services from December 13.

• Turn to the Airbus special report on pages 28-33 for more on the Emirates A380

Pre-screening interviews start on US flights

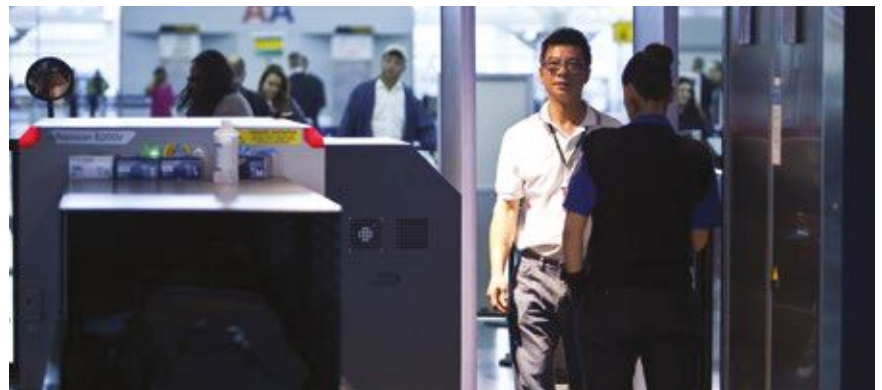
US-BOUND BUSINESS TRAVELLERS travelling on Emirates and Egyptair should factor in additional time as new interviews are introduced as part of enhanced pre-screening measures.

An Emirates statement said the new directive requires passenger pre-screening interviews at the check-in counter for originating passengers and at the gate for transfer and transit passengers.

“These measures will complement current additional screening measures conducted at the boarding gate (including those for electronic devices). Passengers should allow additional time to be checked-in and boarded if travelling to the US from Dubai International Airport.”

Air France, Lufthansa and Cathay Pacific are other carriers cited and Royal Jordanian will introduce the measures mid-January.

The TSA Pre✓ programme now covers 42 domestic and international carriers, with



All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific, Contour Aviation, Finnair and Korean Air recently joining the expedited screening program. But this is only open to US citizens, nationals and “lawful permanent residents” who can apply (\$85 for five years, or \$17 per year) and access TSA Pre✓ lanes, while foreign citizens must meet “specific

citizenship/residency requirements”. Pre✓ travellers do not need to remove items such as shoes, laptops and belts at 200 US airports.

Dubai Airports is planning to introduce biometric ‘smart tunnels’ that will enable travellers to complete immigration checks in just 15 seconds.



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Emirates flydubai codeshare takes off

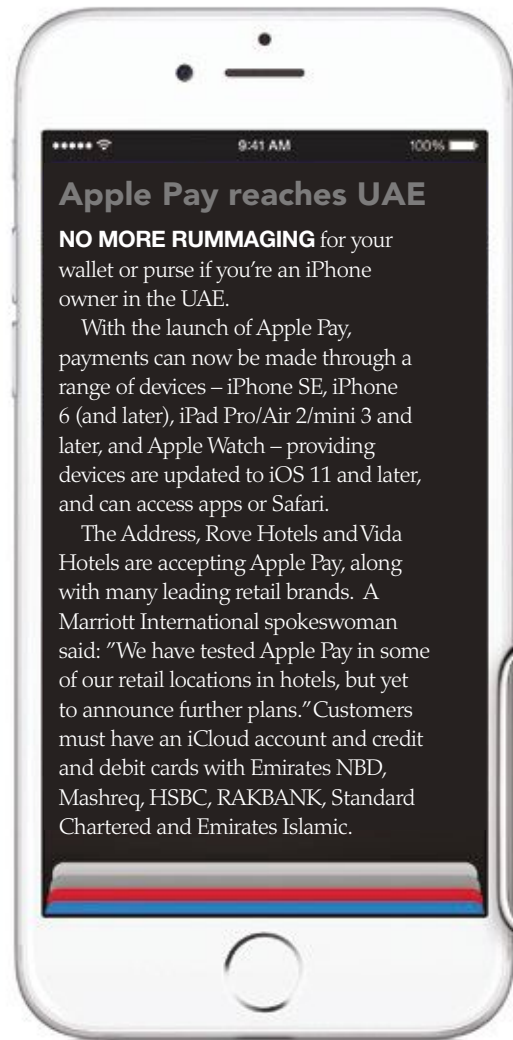
THE EMIRATES FLYDUBAI codeshare recently took off with 29 flydubai destinations now part of the Emirates network. These include cities where Emirates doesn't fly to or where flydubai enjoys strong coverage such as in Russia (six), Iran (five) and south-east Europe (Belgrade, Sarajevo, Sofia).

Emirates passengers who book flights under the codeshare receive free meals on flydubai and the same checked baggage allowance as normal in business and economy. The two aim to offer two-hour connection times between Terminal 3 and 2.

EK Skywards members earn miles on codeshare flights. Silver, gold and platinum members will enjoy 12kg, 16kg and 20kg respectively of checked baggage allowance on flights operated by Flydubai, and use the carrier's business check-in counters.

Gold members of Flydubai's Open programme can access business check-in desks and receive priority baggage tag and delivery for Emirates flights but not lounge or fast-track access at T3.

Future phases of the deal will see both carriers agree additional city pair codeshares and other frequent flier benefits.



Apple Pay reaches UAE

NO MORE RUMMAGING for your wallet or purse if you're an iPhone owner in the UAE.

With the launch of Apple Pay, payments can now be made through a range of devices – iPhone SE, iPhone 6 (and later), iPad Pro/Air 2/mini 3 and later, and Apple Watch – providing devices are updated to iOS 11 and later, and can access apps or Safari.

The Address, Rove Hotels and Vida Hotels are accepting Apple Pay, along with many leading retail brands. A Marriott International spokeswoman said: "We have tested Apple Pay in some of our retail locations in hotels, but yet to announce further plans." Customers must have an iCloud account and credit and debit cards with Emirates NBD, Mashreq, HSBC, RAKBANK, Standard Chartered and Emirates Islamic.

Saudi and flynas start Baghdad flights

SAUDIA RECENTLY started direct daily flights between Jeddah and Baghdad on A330s, marking its fifth international destination in 2017, which rises to double daily from November 15. The move comes amid improved relations between the Kingdom and Iraq; flynas has also begun flights between Riyadh and Baghdad with prices listed online from SAR399.



OCEC gears up for international events

THE OMAN CONVENTION & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) will host its first international events in December when ACI Airport Exchange 2017 will be followed by the UNWTO/UNESCO World

Conference on Tourism and Culture. It marks a coming of age for the large MICE facility which chalked up its first birthday in October and handled 750,000 visitors in its first 12 months.

Facilities coming up include a tiered theatre with 3,200 seats, a 450-seat auditorium, two ballrooms for banquets for up to 1,200 guests, 20 meeting rooms with a capacity of up to 360 delegates, hospitality suites and a VIP pavilion. The precinct includes a JW Marriott Hotel linked to the Convention Centre and Crown Plaza, representing 600 hotel rooms in total.



JLo to wow Dubai Airshow guests

SUPERSTAR JENNIFER LOPEZ will perform for 3,500 Dubai Airshow guests at the invitation-only gala dinner at Atlantis The Palm on November 15.



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RAS AL KHAIMAH, AL WADI DESERT

Rolls-Royce launches first Phantom in 15 years

LEADING MOTORING and lifestyle media converged on the idyllic northern shores of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland over a two-week period for the launch of Rolls-Royce's first new Phantom series in 15 years, reports *Gina Johnson*.

Months in the planning, executives from both Rolls-Royce's Goodwood home base and parent company BMW Group in Munich hosted a two-day event to showcase the new monarch of the automotive world, the Phantom VIII, which has been in almost continuous production for more than 90 years.

In accordance with the centurion status of the brand, guests were invited to participate in a series of curated luxury experiences such as a private tour of the Rosengart Museum – home to the largest private collection of Picassos in the world – and a boatbuilding tour with luxury boat makers Boesch on Lake Zurich.



The event included self-driving experiences that took in some of Switzerland's most iconic scenery on a half-day route that circumnavigated Lake Lucerne.

Rolls-Royce staged a take-over of the stunning lakeside Park Hotel Vitznau – defined as a 'health and wealth residence' – where several new-generation Phantoms, including the imposing purple-hued Belladonna model, were positioned

inside the lobby and on the lawns of the property. A highlight of the event was a private dinner designed by two Michelin-star chef Nenad Mlinarevic and guests of honour included some of the seven artists commissioned to create original designs set within the gallery of the new models.

The first Phantom VIII's will be delivered next month with a price point starting from around AED2million.



Salam Air flies twice daily to DXB

LOW-COST CARRIER Salam Air is pinning its hopes on strong loads between Muscat and Dubai International (Terminal 2) this season after launching the route last month – and it's wasted no time raising it to double daily. Prices start from AED252 one way.

CEO Mohamed Ahmed said: "The way the schedules have been designed, it's for leisure and business travellers," he said. Salam Air currently operates three A320s – it plans to acquire three more next year – on routes between Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Dubai, Jeddah, Medina, Sialkot and Karachi. "We hope to fly to more points in the Subcontinent," he said. "I wouldn't say Oman Air is competition, we complement each other – they are legacy and we are low-cost, we are tapping into markets that are underserved."

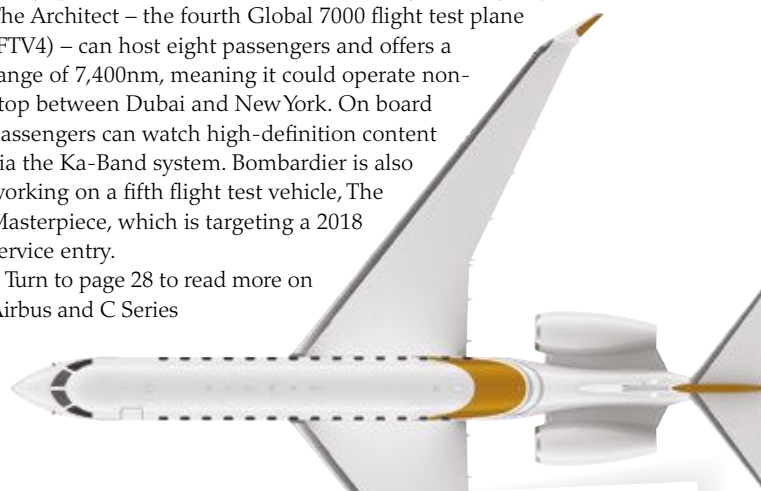
Muscat Airport on final approach

WORK ON THE new Muscat International Airport is nearing completion and November 18 is being mooted for a launch date to coincide with Oman National Day celebrations. But an Oman Airports Management Company official said no date has been confirmed yet. The new terminal will raise passenger capacity to 12 million passengers annually.

Bombardier unveils largest business jet

BOMBARDIER HAS LAUNCHED what is billed as the world's largest purpose-built business jet complete with four living spaces, full-sized crew rest area and gourmet galley. The Architect – the fourth Global 7000 flight test plane (FTV4) – can host eight passengers and offers a range of 7,400nm, meaning it could operate non-stop between Dubai and New York. On board passengers can watch high-definition content via the Ka-Band system. Bombardier is also working on a fifth flight test vehicle, The Masterpiece, which is targeting a 2018 service entry.

• Turn to page 28 to read more on Airbus and C Series



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Emirates loses compensation appeal

PASSENGERS OF NON-EU airlines who miss connecting flights due to delays will now be able to claim compensation, after the UK Court of Appeal backed a passenger who brought a case against Emirates over whether non-EU airlines should have to pay compensation in the event of missed connections.

Under European regulation EC261, passengers are legally entitled to up to €600 (\$700) compensation if they are delayed on the first leg of their flight, which causes them to miss a connecting flight, meaning they arrive at their final destination more than three hours late. However Emirates, along with three other non-EU airlines, had argued that if the missed connecting flight was

outside the European bloc, they were not liable to pay.

The ruling means passengers of non-EU airlines can now claim compensation whether the final destination is within or outside the EU. According to UK media reports, it could open the floodgates for more than a million passengers who had previously had their claims rejected.

Emirates said it is "seeking legal advice".

- Emirates is set to add three extra flights per week to Stockholm from December 8. The new flights on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays depart Dubai at 1500 and arrive at Stockholm Arlanda airport at 1845. The return leg departs Stockholm at 2110, arriving in DXB at 0630 the next day.



HOTEL NEWS

- **OBEROI HOTELS & RESORTS** will officially sign a contract to manage The Oberoi Luxury Resort and Spa Skadar Lake Montenegro, at a conference in Dubai on November 1.

- **INTERCONTINENTAL FUJAIRAH** – the brand's fifth UAE property – recently opened its doors. Classic Rooms Ocean View start from AED935, rising to AED1,062 for Deluxe Rooms and AED1,360 for Club InterContinental rooms.

- **FOUR SEASONS** has introduced a chat feature enabling guests to communicate before, during and after their stays.

- **SAROVAR HOTELS** has signed La Marvella Sarovar Premiere in Bengaluru. Previously La Marvella, the property will be taken over by November and will reopen as a Sarovar hotel. It is the hospitality group's fifth hotel in the city.

- **MELIA HOTELS INTERNATIONAL** has announced two new hotels in Italy, the 79-room Gran Meliá Ca' di Dio in Venice, opening late 2018 (pictured), and 171-room INNSIDE Porta Maggiore Rome, opening 2019.

- **IHG** plans to roll Kimpton Hotels' Karma Rewards programme into its IHG Rewards scheme from early next year.

- **CANOPY BY HILTON WASHINGTON DC** has opened, marking the lifestyle brand's first property in the US and second globally (first opened in Reykjavik).

- **INTERCONTINENTAL SINGAPORE ROBERTSON QUAY** is among the new attractions on the waterfront of the Singapore River – five minutes from Singapore's CBD and 25 minutes from Changi Airport.

- **ACCORHOTELS** plans to revive the Orient-Express Hotel brand. The chain has acquired a 50 per cent stake in the share capital of Orient Express, until now fully-owned by SNCF, and plans to build on the association with the Orient Express train.



AIRLINE NEWS

- **EMIRATES** will add a seventh daily London Heathrow flight (B777-300ER) on a temporary basis between the peak periods of December 15-17 and January 5-7, according to airlineroute.net.

- **ETIHAD AIRWAYS** will start three-times weekly flights between Abu Dhabi and Baku from March 2 2018, operating two-class A320s.

- **INDIGO AIRLINES** is to deploy its new ATR 72-600 aircraft on routes such as Chennai-Mangalore, Hyderabad-Mangalore and Hyderabad-Nagpur.

- **AIR INDIA** has taken delivery of its 27th B787-8 Dreamliner.

- **UNITED AIRLINES'** travellers connecting to flights operated by the carrier's 19 partner airlines can now receive their boarding pass on their smartphones when using its mobile app.

- **SINGAPORE AIRLINES'** daily Sydney service will be the first to see the airline's new-look A380 cabin from December 18. The revamped cabin will be unveiled on November 2 (suites, business class, premium economy and economy class seats).

Tech launch: Huawei Mate 10 Pro

FOLLOWING NEW releases from Apple and Samsung it is Huawei's turn to enter the rush for end-of-year sales with its Mate line, reports *Robert Anderson*.

The front of the device is dominated by a six-inch OLED display with the thin bezels that have come to define top-end smartphones this year, while the rear stands out from the crowd with an easy to hold curved glass design that gives the illusion of metal.

The back is also where you will also find the fingerprint scanner on the pro variant, with the standard Mate 10 boasting the sensor on the front. Another noticeable difference between the two is the lack of a headphone jack on the pro, which Huawei has done away with to introduce water and dust resistance.

Among the key selling points is the manufacturer's new Kirin 970 chipset, which has an on-board AI processing unit claimed to offer better speed and energy efficiency.

New functionality that may prove useful to the business traveller includes a translator app utilising the on-board AI chip. This can be used online to translate speech but also offline for text and images, meaning you can snap a picture of a menu and translated text will appear over the top, assuming you've downloaded the right language pack.





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High dining at 40 Kong Dubai

RENOWNED ROOFTOP LOUNGE bar 40 Kong Dubai, on the top of H Hotel, is repositioning itself as an intimate, sit-down dinner venue. Dishes include avocado shrimp cocktail and goat cheese beetroot salad; Chateau Briand with fine beans, shallots and chimichurri; and black cod marinated in miso, pickled red onions and a Yuzu sauce (garden roll sushi and rock shrimp tempura have been retained). Open daily from 8pm-3am.



Kempinski revamps Discovery programme

KEMPINSKI'S REVAMPED DISCOVERY Loyalty programme places greater emphasis on local experiences and personalisation. Top-tier guests have access to a private concierge and the "most selective" events. Amanda Elder, SVP Business Development at Kempinski Hotels, said it aims to build stronger connections with guests and be the "go-to choice for elevated luxury travel experiences".



Bleisure options from Tumi

TUMI'S ALPHA BRAVO Mayport Three Way Brief is suitable for bleisure trips as it comprises a briefcase, messenger bag and backpack. The briefcase starts from AED1,585 and backpacks from AED1,800-2,400. tumi.com



Saatchi Suite opens in London

HYATT REGENCY LONDON – The Churchill has unveiled its newly designed Saatchi Suite in collaboration with Vitra. The eighth-floor suite features a unique collection of Saatchi Gallery works by artist James Alec Hardy and blends reds, deep mahoganies, subtle greys and creams.

Celine Fitoussi's 2,000-bar soap installation creates a striking and interactive display in the suite's master bathroom.



Call your instagram butler

BUTLERS MAY BE synonymous with silver trays and pristine gloves but the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island is reinventing them for the social media age. It has introduced 'instagram butlers' to help guests take the best photos and introduced an #InstaTrail around the resort. Instagrammers can choose from one-, three- and five-hour itineraries incorporating F&B and nature.



Meliá makes a splash at Iguazu Falls

MELIÁ IGUAZU RECENTLY opened its doors, the only hotel in the heart of Iguazu National Park in Argentina. Following a rebrand, the 169-room hotel will be renovated next year. The property is close to Iguazu Falls, which contain more than 270 waterfalls and reach heights of 80 metres.

Work on the move

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE connected with the 2018 Range Rover Sport, which boasts up to 14 power points including a domestic plug socket to power up laptops, as well as two HD 10-inch touchscreens. Deliveries from early 2018.

landrover-me.com



La Ville Hotel & Suites City Walk, Dubai



BACKGROUND A welcome addition to the city's underserved boutique hotel sector, La Ville opened in March and is part of Marriott International's Autograph Collection.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The fifth-floor property, containing 77 rooms, 11 suites and 68 apartments, is a distinctive low-rise – certainly on a different scale to the JW Marriott Marquis Hotel and other prominent high-rise hotels. The designs are sharp and complemented by plenty of natural light, in line with the Collection's 'like-nowhere-else' ethos.

WHERE IS IT? In the heart of trendy City Walk, not far from Downtown Dubai and Sheikh Zayed Road. It's safe to say City Walk from Meraas has made the transition from construction project to lived-in retail and residential community – I was amazed by the crowds on the path next to the hotel on the night we stayed. New restaurants such as Galvin Dubai, Lima Dubai and Toro + Ko are helping draw footfall.

ROOMS We stayed in a one-bedroom residence on the fourth floor (#449, residences are to the right), which overlooked the main entrance and offered a partial City Walk view. The apartment was fully equipped for long stays with kitchen area, washing machine,



fridge, espresso machine, and lounge with pull-out sofa bed, adjoining the bedroom. Above the bed is an eye-catching black-and-white Dubai design and the en-suite bathroom is

large enough for a stand-alone oval bath, two sinks, walk-in shower and toilet around the corner (circular amenities from Moooi). Wifi was easy to connect to, and decent speed, while the large flatscreen TVs in both rooms give you the opportunity to connect your device.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS Quality rather than quantity, as befits the boutique premise. We enjoyed dinner at Graze gastro grill (pictured) which had an *al fresco* continental feel with the shutters pulled back, and it's a clever double draw – providing an appetising atmosphere for diners while targeting passing trade. Following a shared ceviche, I opted for Welsh Lamb Chops with mash potato, my partner went for the 12-hour slow cooked ribs (very tender) and son demolished the mini burger. Next door, Chival is an attractive space – we had breakfast on the terrace and alongside wholesome dishes are novel water flavours and healthy shots – and Grapeskin winebar on the corner is proving popular (beverages to suit your mood, and the upstairs area is ideal for corporate get-togethers). Other options include the bar at the LookUp rooftop venue – one for your instagram tallest tower photos – and Lobby Café.

MEETING FACILITIES Three venues are available, Boardroom 1 (525sq ft), Boardroom 2 (241sq ft) and The X Lounge (1,676sq ft).

LEISURE FACILITIES A small spa containing two treatment rooms and gym are on the fourth floor and LookUp features a linear pool. *Dominic Ellis*

VERDICT La Ville gets three large ticks for its boutique novelty, decent F&B and community-oriented access

PRICE Online rates for a one-bedroom residence in mid-November are priced AED2,000 a night, hotel Deluxe Rooms from AED1,150

CONTACT La Ville Hotel & Suites City Walk, Dubai, Al Multaqa Street, PO Box 414433, Dubai, UAE. Tel: +9714 4033111, marriott.com/hotels/travel/dxbvlv-la-ville-hotel-and-suites-city-walk-dubai-autograph-collection, livelaville.com

Dukes Dubai



BACKGROUND Dukes Dubai opened in April this year as the iconic British luxury brand's first venture overseas.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The hotel is decked out in the same classic décor as its London sister, though glitzy flourishes such as the lobby's 1,610 Swarovski-crystal chandelier do a good job of reminding you that you're in Dubai, not London. In contrast to its cosy, dimly lit lobby in London, the space here is tall and spacious, flanked by shelves of weathered novels and gilt ornaments, while in the central area, pairs of button sofas and silk armchairs cluster around coffee tables enlivened by pots of fresh white lilies.

WHERE IS IT? On the west trunk of the Palm Jumeirah, about 35 minutes from Dubai International airport (allow longer at peak times).

ROOM FACILITIES The hotel's 279 rooms, which include 64 suites, are spread across 15 floors. Still in the works are the upper 16th and 17th floors, though these are expected this December. An additional 287 studio and one-bedroom residences are also on offer for extended stay guests. There are 12 room categories ranging from the entry level Dukes rooms, situated on floors 1 to 13, to the lavish 203sqm Ambassador suites which can accommodate up to four people.

I stayed in a 32 sqm Superior room, regally decorated in rich navies and coffee hues, and brightly lit by a traditional lamp chandelier, deep mahogany fittings and artwork showing London cityscapes.

All rooms come with a wooden work desk, a 48-inch Samsung TV a Nespresso machine and tea making facilities. Ours had a cream sofa and armchair tucked into an alcove next to the bed. Bathrooms are fitted with sleek black and slate tiling and come with rain showers, and deep bathtubs in Superior rooms and above. The hotel has partnered with a number of well-known UK



brands including perfumers Floris, Andrew Martin furniture and Liberty fabrics in the 20 rooms on the women-only Duchess floor.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS The hotel has three restaurants, a cigar lounge and champagne and tea lounge, alongside the brand's iconic Dukes bar. Located on the ground floor is GBR, the hotel's all-day dining outfit, where an impressive breakfast is laid on each morning – highlights include the pancake and waffle station and a range of obscure tropical juices. The space is stylish and modern in design, featuring a monochrome checkered floor, half-crescent leather booths and whimsical lamp fixtures on the walls and surrounding columns.

Khyber is an outpost of the award-winning Mumbai flagship, a north Indian restaurant that has hosted the likes of Sir Paul McCartney, Richard Gere and Demi Moore. We had a fantastic meal there one evening, with an assortment of delicious curries and grill dishes.

The Dukes Bar juts out over the lobby on the mezzanine level, and is accessed by sweeping staircases that lead up from the lobby on either side.

MEETING FACILITIES The hotel has seven "British styled" meeting rooms and banqueting spaces with capacity to host between 10 to 150 guests.

LEISURE FACILITIES There is an 18-metre indoor pool and gym on the 14th floor. There is also an outdoor pool, alongside a 200-metre private beach and kids club. Yoga classes take place by the indoor pool each week. *Marisa Cannon*

VERDICT A classy option that stands out among Dubai's flashier five-star segment. Staff are eager to help with any request, and the dining offering is first-rate.

PRICE

Internet rates for a Dukes room in November started at AED964.

CONTACT

Dukes Dubai, Oceana Palm Jumeirah, Dubai. dukesdubai.com



WHERE IS IT? On Trinity Square, a couple of minutes' walk from Tower Hill Tube station, past the Citizen M hotel.

ROOMS The 89 rooms and 11 suites are on floors one to three. Somewhere in the building are also 41 private residences and a members' club, although I never found the secret door. Bathrooms in entry-level Superior rooms (28-34 sqm) have walk-in showers (some with baths), lots of pale marble and lovely Bottega Veneta toiletries; all other rooms also have

tubs. The best room categories are Deluxe (30-45 sqm), Premier (33-49 sqm) and Executive (53-67 sqm) – the last of these look on to a central atrium. All rooms come with iPads to control the air conditioning and lighting, free wifi, and tea and coffee.

Four Seasons London at Ten Trinity Square

BACKGROUND Four Seasons opened its new City property in January. It's the luxury group's second London hotel, complementing Park Lane.

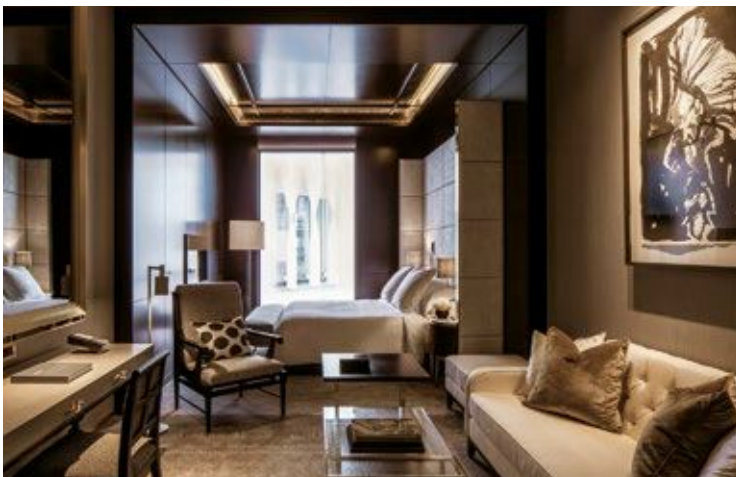
WHAT'S IT LIKE? First impressions are fairly daunting. The hotel occupies the Grade II Listed former Port of London Authority HQ, which originally opened in 1922, opposite the Tower of London. You can't miss the building's grandeur – it looks monolithic and memorial-like, with a façade constructed from giant blocks of Portland stone. There are usually several members of staff around the entrance. Inside, there's a small reception area to the right, while ahead is the domed Rotunda, lounge where you can take tea in the afternoon or have a drink in the evening. The colour scheme changes during the day, and there's live music as well.

The UN ballroom is where the inaugural reception of the General Assembly took place in 1946

RESTAURANTS AND BARS The destination restaurant is La Dame de Pic, which was awarded a Michelin star in October. I ate in Asian restaurant Mei Ume, which has Japanese and Chinese food with a Western-friendly menu and plenty of choice, and is in a superb art deco space. The Rotunda has excellent bartenders and a good list of cocktails.

MEETING FACILITIES The UN Ballroom, where the inaugural reception of the General Assembly took place in 1946, seats 150 people for a banquet. There's also the Merchants Hall and several smaller rooms.

LEISURE FACILITIES There's a large gym, an outstanding spa and a swimming pool. *Tom Otley*



VERDICT A top-class hotel with great facilities, flawless service and a building renovation that the developers can be proud of. In short, it's a Four Seasons – expensive, but worth it.

PRICE Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in December started from £525 for a Superior room.

CONTACT 10 Trinity Square; +44 (0)20 3297 9200; fourseasons.com

The Ritz-Carlton, Astana



BACKGROUND Four The hotel launched in June this year, in time for the opening of Astana's highlight Expo 2017 event. Part of a mixed-use development that is the first "green" building in Kazakhstan to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, it occupies the first 18 floors of one of the two Talan Towers smack in the middle of the city centre. Above it are Ritz-Carlton residences on floors 19 to 25, while it is also connected to a three-storey, high-end shopping mall.

WHERE IS IT? In the new city district, at the southeast corner of the large central square containing Astana's iconic Baiterek tower. All the major government and administrative buildings are within walking distance (or a short drive if the weather is inclement) – this is probably the best location for business of any hotel in the city.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The spacious main lobby, with its high ceiling, cascading central chandelier, sweeping staircase and combination of light marble, dark wood and gold accents, makes a statement from the moment you walk through the door. This property is all about top-end luxury and refinement.

Gold is used throughout the hotel as a nod to the country's ancient Saka (Scythian) culture, which developed the working of gold into a fine art more than 2,500 years ago. Interesting artworks from local galleries are everywhere – the owner of the building is an avid art collector with a large portfolio, and has contributed some international works.

ROOM FACILITIES There are 157 rooms and suites spread across the fourth to 17th floors of the hotel, comprising two room types (both 40 sqm) and four



suite types (ranging from 75 to 270 sqm). I was in an Executive Suite, a palatial space of 115 sqm with a cleverly executed entrance hall separated from the living room by golden lattice screens.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS Øzen Lounge on the ground floor is long and thin, offering all-lounge seating beneath a wooden slat design that runs like a huge wave or ripple along the whole lounge. This is a popular place in the evening with the city's well-to-do, who come for the cocktails – created by German mixologist Arnd Heissen – and Asian-Mediterranean food.

Mökki on the third floor is the all-day dining restaurant, offering "organic, cosmopolitan" cuisine.

MEETING FACILITIES The Club Lounge is on the 14th floor, open to all Club-level guests. A long, thin space split into a few areas, it has its own meeting room (available to use on request) and offers a good range of food offerings throughout the day. Staff here quickly learn to recognise you and use your first name, which is a good personal touch.

LEISURE FACILITIES These are all on the third floor. The Ritz-Carlton Spa has five treatment rooms plus a suite for couples, and offers locally themed treatments such as hot stone massages, algae and mud wraps, and salt and oil exfoliation. A salon is here too, and Espa products are used as per normal for Ritz spas. *Jeremy Tredinnick*

VERDICT Superlative service, an unbeatable location for business, great suites and a fantastic overall Club-level offering makes this the new benchmark hotel in Astana. Of course Ritz-Carlton's aim is to be the best of the best in this relatively new capital – and for the affluent business traveller I can only agree that it has succeeded.

PRICE Standard internet rates for an Executive Suite with Club Lounge access in mid-November start from 476,000 tenge (US\$1,399) including tax and surcharges

CONTACT 16 Dostyk Street, Astana 010016; +7 7172 734 000; ritzcarlton.com



Lays *and* Clays

From the Dubai Media City Amphitheatre to the du Arena, the UAE's outdoor calendar is swinging to a familiar beat, reports Dominic Ellis.

It doesn't really matter if you're a visiting business traveller or resident for decades, the Gulf winter is always a cause for al fresco fun and celebration. With summer packed away for another year, we can look forward to non-stop music, sporting and outdoor events for the next six months. Here are some key events in the next two months.



What's On Party in the Park

November 10

Award-winning artists and an into-the-night party atmosphere at the Dubai Media City Amphitheatre ensure What's On Party in the Park kick starts the outdoor events calendar in style. Former Oasis frontman Liam Gallagher will be among the crowd-pullers and he will be joined on the What's On Main Stage by UK electronica legends The Chemical Brothers, performing a special DJ set that will span the length and breadth of their illustrious career. Other acts on the billing include The Temples and local acts, The Boxtones, Sam Tring and Jaye & Foe. For an ultra-indulgent experience, don't forget to check out the popular Brunch Deck and VIP Area.

whatson.ae/dubai/partyinthepark/





Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix pit stops

November 24-26

We'll overtake Cipriani Yas Island, since we flagged it up in our last issue (page 52, Taste: Abu Dhabi) but here are 10 other Yas Marina favourites where F1 visitors can recharge their batteries.

Pit stop #1: Café D'Alsace

Hearty breakfasts, light bites, grapes and hops, this versatile F&B spot has all your needs covered between 8am-3am.

Pit stop #2: Rozanah

A modern twist on Middle Eastern dining complemented by all your favourite mezze, grills and shishas. Note this popular stop is a maximum two hours per table (10am-3am).

Pit stop #3: Stars 'N' Bars

Catch every manoeuvre on the 70 TV screens and unwind with the à la carte menu and beverages, DJs on from 10pm (10am-4am).

Pit stop #4: Diablito Food & Music

The rooftop terrace is one for your 360-degree photos and you

won't go hungry with more than 380 pizzas served up each day (12pm-2am)

Pit stop #5: Iris

Renowned for its chilled vibe, artisan cocktails, great views and smooth music – though it comes at a price (high tables start at AED5,000 and lounges range from AED10,000-25,000). You can pay on the door for AED250 which includes one drink.

Pit stop #6: Aquarium

Relax with the fish or on the outdoor terrace while enjoying top-notch seafood. Unwind with a live set from saxophonist MarciSax, followed by DJ Gilbert spinning the decks until 3am daily (8am-5am).

Pit stop #7: 1 OAK

We're informed the "renowned nightclub" is arriving in Abu Dhabi for the first time. Catch Moroccan-American hip hop recording artist French Montana live on the 26th, but note AED10,000 minimum charge on tables on the terrace (11pm-5am).



Pit stop #8: House of Debonair

This year the open-air terrace at the center of Yas Marina's promenade will be transformed into the House of Debonair (1pm-1am). Popular local and international DJs Kristian Valdini, Dan Chadwick and Danny Krivit will hit the decks throughout the weekend.

Pit stop #9: Yas Viceroy Savour an international buffet style on the trackside at Origins, feast on delicious mezzes and Arabic favourites at Atayeb, and savour sushi masterpieces, teppanyaki, robanyaki and tempura at Kazu.

Pit stop #10: Amber Lounge The see-and-be-seen place where international royalty, film stars and the F1 fraternity gather for live performances by iconic artists and DJ sets (25th and 26th, 11pm-6am).

PUTTING ON A SHOW

John Lickrish, CEO FLASH Entertainment, reflects on the growth of the Yasalam Festival and looks forward to the after-race concerts at du Arena this month

What are the most time-consuming elements – securing the artists or setting up the du Arena?

There are so many moving parts involved in putting on any large-scale event, from securing the artists and working with management teams, to venue operations and ticketing. Confirming an artist is a lengthy process and there are a number of considerations involved for example tour dates and routes, stage production set up and shipping and of course negotiation of fees. No part is more important than the other; you need great artists, of course, but you also need a stand-out marketing campaign and a venue experience that is second to none.

Can you describe the dynamic between the four After-Race concerts – is the objective to always create four different acts, or ones that complement each other?

The Yasalam Festival has grown and evolved hugely over the last eight years. In 2009, the first year of Yasalam, Beyoncé, Jamiroquai and Aerosmith played to thousands of excited race fans. Each year we've pushed boundaries to make sure the acts cater to the diversity of the audience that travel from within the UAE and from all over the world for the Formula 1™ Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. At this year's After-Race Concerts, for example, each night has a distinct personality. Kicking off the weekend on the Thursday night is electro star Calvin Harris, and Friday moves on to the beats of rap legend Kendrick Lamar, followed by a night of folk energy with Mumford & Sons' on Saturday. The weekend will close with what is sure to be an incredible performance by P!nk.

What would you say have been the most memorable acts or weekends in recent times?

With nine years to choose from, it's



John Lickrish, CEO FLASH Entertainment

hard to pick just one performance. I'm sure for those who were there for the first Yasalam Festival, Beyoncé in 2009 would be a real highlight. Prince in 2010 was a personal favourite of mine – he gave a surprise performance for fans at the SkyBar after his main show at du Arena. Sir Paul McCartney, Pharrell, Eminem, Kylie Minogue, Jay-Z, The Who, Amr Diab, Muse, Kanye West – the list of incredible performances from some of the music industry's most iconic artists goes on. I think if you ask every one of the tens of thousands of people who've been at a race weekend, you would end up with tens of thousands of different stories of incredible moments.

Are there new concepts you're working on – perhaps in concrete or digital – to enhance the off-track experience?

The Yasalam Festival is very close to our hearts at FLASH as it really is a chance for Abu Dhabi to celebrate the race and come together as a community. With that in mind, we work hard to make sure we're raising the bar in terms of the entertainment on offer. Four years ago, we introduced a grassroots fitness programme,

Get Driver Fit (GDF). In partnership with Daman's Activelife initiative, the programme has provided free fitness events and classes to thousands of UAE residents and helped promote an active and healthy lifestyle across the capital. This year we're excited to be bringing the first ever GDF Fitness Festival to Abu Dhabi. On Friday, 10 November, du Forum will be transformed into a complete fitness experience featuring everything from intense challenges to kids' fun. We'll also be crowning an overall winner of the GDF Fitness Challenge and naming Abu Dhabi's Fittest Person, who will take home an amazing prize of AED10,000. At this year's After-Race Concerts, we are making it possible for fans to get an exclusive front row experience with Golden Circle upgrades available for purchase with race tickets.

How do you think Yasalam compares with other entertainment on the F1 circuit?

I think what really sets us apart is the way in which the energy and the entertainment takes over the entire capital. Each year, we offer a diverse lineup of fitness, music and fun with programmes that run across the entire city and beyond.

How is access to and from the du Arena?

We're now in our ninth year of the Yasalam festival and each year provides new opportunities to learn and deliver the best concert experience possible. Having a long-standing partnership with du since its naming rights agreement in 2011 has allowed us to shape the consumer journey to and around the arena. Multiple entry points to a concert, smooth parking, better traffic management and transportation all work together to enhance the over-all experience for ticket holders to all of our du Arena events.



Yas attractions and Kids go free Friday

The 'GP Parks Pass' is a three-day package that allows unlimited access to Yas Island Parks – Ferrari World Abu Dhabi and Yas Waterworld Abu Dhabi– on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This special three-day ticket package starts from AED1,120 (for Abu Dhabi Hill). Visit ticketsyasmarinacircuit.com. With each three-day adult Grandstand ticket purchased, 'Kids Go Free' on November 24. The package allows four under 12s free Friday Grandstand access plus free entry to Yas Island Parks – Ferrari World Abu Dhabi & Yas Waterworld Abu Dhabi.



Dubai Fitness Challenge

The inaugural Dubai Fitness Challenge (DFC) kicked off with an action-packed weekend carnival in Safa Park and this month sees free events at SkyDive Dubai (November 3-4), Burj Park (November 10-11) and Dubai Festival City (November 17-18). Participants have the chance to try out more than 70 different sports and fitness classes, ranging from 'breakletics', 'boxercise' and ballet, to Sharmila dance, yoga and Zumba. Dubai Fitness Challenge encourages residents and visitors to commit to 30 minutes of daily activity for 30 days. dubaifitnesschallenge.com

Chillout at Jazz Garden

November 17, monthly

The second of seven events in the Jazz Garden monthly series from Chillout Productions, featuring local and international artists, will be held at Habtoor Grant Resort on November 17. On this month's billing are Lin Rountree featuring Beth Griffith and Sharrie Williams and the Band (6.30pm-11.30pm). The third and fourth events will be held on December 15 and January 19 respectively, to register visit jazzgardenseries.com



Emirates Airline Dubai Rugby 7s

November 30-December 2

Despite the ever-rising number of events, the Rugby 7s retains its prop-like grip at the top of the popularity league. Colourful, sociable, entertaining – and that's just the corporate chalets. The sevens has evolved off the pitch and warrants its family-friendly tag, but there aren't many more dynamic sights than a whole stand of adults rocking under the night lights. dubairugby7s.com



Mubadala World Tennis Championship

December 28-30

The 10th edition will serve up a host of star players including 12-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic, three-time winner Stan Wawrinka and 'The King of Clay' Rafael Nadal. Buy tickets at ticketmaster.ae or through Virgin Megastores. mubadalawtc.com



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Rotana is proud to announce the opening of Sundus Rotana, its first property in Muscat. Designed for both business and leisure travellers, Sundus Rotana combines classic architecture with elegant design, showcasing 215 contemporary rooms and suites as well as exciting dining, meeting and leisure experiences, creating a new focal point for the city's social scene.

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EMIRATES CELEBRATES 100TH AIRBUS A380

As the Dubai carrier prepares for its milestone superjumbo delivery this month, we look back at the double-decker's operational, passenger and commercial achievements

No matter how many times you see it, the four-engine A380 is an architectural and aeronautical behemoth, an aircraft which puts the 's' into scale; whether it's parked imperiously at the gate, pounding down the runway, gliding into land or taxiing past a narrowbody or corporate jet, there is something about its all-conquering size which raises a smile. One Emirates A380 Captain succinctly describes it as "a pilot's aircraft which handles beautifully, it's a very capable aircraft with oodles of power".

Emirates has three A380 configurations: the 489-seat three-class; 517-seat three-class and 615-seat two-class (the largest in the sky, although Airbus has certified an 848-seat plane). By virtue of longevity, the three-class is the one that most of us associate with the A380 although the cosy business class layout and lounge at the back of the two-class is gaining favour.

The two-classes tend to be newer aircraft and feature sharper screens and fittings than some of the older three-classes, although it's always a changeable picture as aircraft arrive and retire. Here are some key aspects worth trumpeting as the 100th A380 is scheduled to be delivered from Hamburg on November 3.

GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

The A380 is the world's largest passenger airliner and renowned for its hub-to-hub operations. They have become commonplace at airports such as London Heathrow and New York JFK – but they're not solely hub-flying aircraft; the fact you're just as likely to spot one at Birmingham or Munich is testament to its ability to connect travellers and suppliers in secondary cities globally. Economically, this has been one of its most influential contributions.

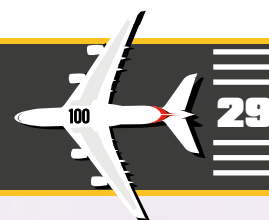
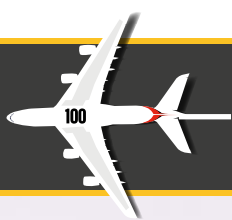
Together with its trademark B777-300ERs, Emirates is unique in flying a completely widebody fleet (although we wait to see if this may change once the new partnership with flydubai takes off). It's not just Asia-to-Europe or Subcontinent-to-States where the 380 excels; 'bringing the world to Australia and vice versa' could be another of its core slogans. The country is the third largest A380 destination for EK globally, connecting Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, and through its partnership with Qantas, Emirates' passengers can travel to an additional 55 Australian destinations. One shouldn't forget New Zealand either with A380 services to Auckland and Christchurch, illustrating its truly global reach.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The two passenger decks of the A380 have a total area of 550sqm – the same as three tennis courts
- The 280,000lb of take-off thrust across the wing is the horsepower equivalent of around 2,500 family cars
- An A380 takes off or lands every two minutes and there are more than 120 A380 routes across 60 destinations
- There are 240 airports globally which can accommodate the A380
- The 'A380' in Dubai Miracle Garden is the world's largest floral installation comprising more than five million flowers



Watch Emirates gears up for 100th A380 on YouTube.com



AIRCRAFT 'AHEAD OF ITS TIME'

Alex McWhirter, *Business Traveller's* Consumer Editor, reflects on the impact the A380 has had on global aviation. "Some people think the A380 is a giant aircraft but in reality it's not the same step up in capacity as against when the B747 replaced the B707/DC-8. It's a great aircraft but when it was designed (a process which can take years), nobody could foresee how aviation would have changed. So a good number of airlines would consider the A380 too costly to buy, too expensive to operate and of course there are restrictions as and when it can or cannot use certain airports. One could say it was an aircraft ahead of its time. Even though the A380 has huge passenger appeal most airlines think in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. Clever airlines would see they can offset its higher costs with higher loads and revenue."

PASSENGERS SEEK OUT A380S

Airbus has a dedicated A380 website, ifly380.com, which enables superjumbo-loving passengers to seek out operators' schedules and be redirected to airlines' sites for bookings.

A mobile app launch is imminent



which will further broaden its reach. Sir Tim Clark, President Emirates Airline said: "The A380 has been, and continues to be, hugely popular amongst our customers, many of whom deliberately plan their travel so that they can fly on it." Airbus reports up to 60 per cent of passengers are willing to make an extra effort to fly on the A380. ■

FOR HEDONISTS, WORKERS, SLEEPERS AND THOSE IN MEDICAL NEED

Samsana Ismail, Communications Manager at Airbus Africa Middle East, has been summoned to an important meeting at the A380 lounge. Reluctantly, she drags herself away from the IFE where, unbeknown to her, Airbus colleagues and media guests are hiding behind the curtain to wish her happy birthday. "Surprise, surprise!"

Glasses line the bar and Emirates crew take Polaroid photos as Samsana is presented with flowers and a gift; it's the first time I've experienced a party at 38,000 feet. The fun soon eats up an hour of the seven-hour flight to Paris and when I return to my seat, the passenger to my left is asleep on the flatbed; another is on a laptop; others simply watching films or listening to music. The space of the Emirates A380 premium section allows all these disparate experiences simultaneously.

Returning to Dubai, I was reminded of a more serious side to the A380. An Australian lady was wheeled into the Emirates Lounge at Paris CDG, her left leg in velcro plaster. She had been hit by a motorcycle at a pedestrian crossing. Surgery had been a success but her leg had to be kept straight and a porter was helping with boarding arrangements. Every airline may carry passengers with medical needs but there is something about the cabin space of the A380 which looks particularly equipped to deal with these kind of challenges. Moreover, thanks to the breadth of Emirates' A380 network, the passenger would be flying the superjumbo all the way home (also on the Dubai-Sydney sector).



SEATS OF POWER

With its C Series acquisition, first A330neo taking off and landmark 100th A380 delivery for Emirates this month, Airbus is ending the year on a high, reports **Dominic Ellis**

It feels like a return to summer with three days of blue skies over Toulouse, the red and yellow leaves lining the river Garonne providing the only signs we've skipped into autumn. Mirroring the favourable weather, Airbus has been basking in its majority ownership announcement in the C Series, providing Bombardier with a brighter outlook after all the uncertainty over the programme and US tariff disputes – and it ended the week seeing off its first A330neo test flight. The European manufacturer will arrive at the Dubai Airshow with a glow this month.

Singularly and collectively, there was much to take in. From aircraft, corporate jet and urban mobility presentations, to campus walkabouts and coach trips encompassing different parts of this vast site – and even a day behind the scenes at Defence and Space learning about the complexity of satellites – the diversity of Airbus' operation was self-evident. I can't

remember showing my passport so often without leaving the ground, but that was only to be expected in these hardware and data-protecting times.

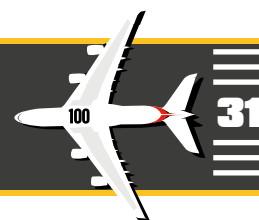
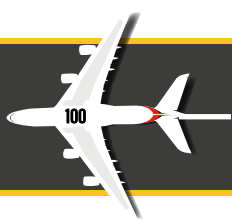
AIRBUS RAISES SINGLE-AISLE PROFILE

It was a week when what we saw and what we read didn't always tally. Most of the week saw widebodies in the viewfinder, but single aisles grabbed the limelight with Airbus announcing it will take a majority stake (50.01 per cent) in C Series Aircraft Limited Partnership (CSALP) with Bombardier and Investissement Québec owning around 31 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. The deal aims to complete by the second half of 2018.

CSALP's HQ and primary assembly line and related functions will remain in Québec with the support of Airbus' global reach and scale, but Airbus will expand Final Assembly Line in Canada additional C Series production at its Alabama manufacturing site.

Main: The first A330neo flight takes off from Toulouse





While outwardly a great deal for Bombardier's embattled C Series, it looks a shrewd move by Airbus too, since it has committed only sales, marketing and procurement "but no upfront investment," according to Chief Executive Tom Enders. Alain Bellemare, President and CEO of Bombardier, highlighted Airbus' global scale, strong customer relationships – you find inspirational posters lining no end of office walls – and operational expertise as key reasons behind the deal. "This partnership should more than double the value of the C Series programme," he beamed.

The partnership breathes new life into the 100-150 seat market for Airbus, since it hasn't sold any A319s for five years. "Now we know this is a terrific aircraft and sits very well with our single-aisle range," added Enders. "There are quite a few C Series customers out there but have held back . . . these customers will now be convinced."

With 5,520 A320s in backlog, Airbus certainly doesn't need convincing about the prospects of single-aisle aircraft demand, although it will be interesting to see how much spare capacity it will have should Enders be right, and a raft of C Series customers start queuing up. As much as the deal is a lifeline for Bombardier's programme, perhaps the sheer weight of demand necessitates the tie-up; it's not just in Toulouse where narrowbodies are being churned out; the first A320neo assembled in Tianjin was recently delivered to Air Asia.

In its *Growing Horizons* 20-year forecast, Airbus



Above: A330neo
Airspace Economy
Class

predicts single aisles will account for 71 per cent of units and top 24,810 planes, significantly more than twin-aisle (8,690) and very large aircraft (1,410). As for the Middle East, fuelled by 3.4 per cent real GDP growth, Airbus anticipates 2,526 new deliveries in the next two decades with single-aisle planes also accounting for the lion's share (1,082), significantly more than demand for 402 very large aircraft. Currently with Middle East orders, the A320ceo and A320neo are stand-outs, accounting for 268 and 263 planes respectively.

Commenting on the current Middle East market, Bob Lange, Senior Vice President, Head of Market and Product Strategy for Airbus, said: "There have ▶





been short-term disturbances for all concerned but the growth you're losing temporarily doesn't disappear – people still travel. We expect this will be a level of adjustment for a year or two before the Middle East comes rebounding back. The potential for Middle East economies to build away from oil and gas-based revenues to trade, tourism, commerce and manufacturing will continue."

Airbus' Middle East forecast includes Iran, which is widely expected to grow its aviation industry despite current US tensions, and Lange didn't see any threat to Gulf carriers. "For a country which has been starved of the potential to grow air traffic, I'm not sure their priority is to go head-to-head with other ME carriers but grow their own industry. The density of population, topography and potential to grow is tremendous – in strongest growth circles, Iran could mirror Turkey."

Turkish Airlines is among Airbus' biggest customer regionally, operating 68 A321-200s, 37 A330-300s, 24 A320-200s, 17 A330-200s, nine A319-132/1000s and four A340-330s.

WILL AIRLINES BUY A380PLUS?

Emirates remains integral to Airbus' VLA programme – that message was clear inside and outside – but doubts continue to circulate over the aircraft's future. Airbus has delivered the A380 to 13 customers and maintains it has orders until the end of 2019, but concedes production has slowed. "Of course we are not delivering as before – we'll deliver one per month next year," said Fouad Attar, Head of Commercial Aircraft, Africa and Middle East. "All the teams are working to have more backlog after 2020. Today we are all working to push this aeroplane, it's needed for the industry and the only one that can answer to airport congestion."

Airbus is pinning hopes on a reconfigured 'A380plus', which offers fuel-saving winglets, up to 80 more seats and the option of a nine-abreast

Above: The A350-1000, currently undergoing flight tests, has secured 169 orders and will seat 366 passengers.

premium economy section. Sir Tim Clark has said it is a cabin it should "take seriously" and all eyes will be on Emirates to see if a signature follows the words, possibly at this month's Dubai Airshow.

Attar is hopeful the adjustments will reassure its biggest customer and is keen to stress it provides airlines more opportunity for segmentation. "For the ultra-long ranges, we may see some first class, but all airlines are reducing it and today business class is very comfortable and more airlines are looking at premium economy – which is like the old business class. Plus we have options for new cabins such as low-cost economy."

FIRST A330NEO TEST FLIGHT TAKES OFF

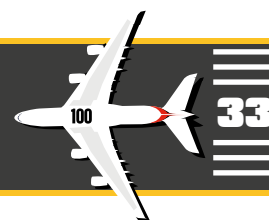
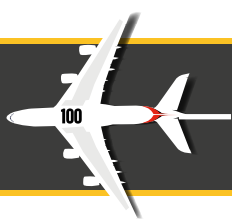
As I was about to board my Air France flight back to Paris, the first A330neo took off (-900) on its four hour 13 minute maiden test flight, and the new engine option is due to enter service in 2018. To date 12 customers have placed orders for 212 A330neos.

Against overcast skies, the event generated plenty of colourful exchanges on Airbus Live Twitter, as befits the instantaneous media age when you're as connected on the other side of the world as much as the other side of the runway.

This flight test aircraft, featuring Rolls-Royce Trent 7000 turbofan engines, nacelle, titanium pylon, new wings and an Airspace by Airbus cabin, will be joined by two more in the next year for the A330-900 and A330-800 versions.

The larger A330-900 will accommodate up to 287 seats in a typical three-class layout, while the A330-800 typically will seat 257 passengers in three classes. The 330neo provides airlines with increased range of 400nm and Airbus claims it cuts fuel consumption by 14 per cent per seat. Other Airspace by Airbus cabin changes include:

- customised ceiling and lighting panels in the entrance area



- larger bins with more overhead storage
- 4G IFE with HD viewing resolution and high-bandwidth connectivity

There are 858 A350XWBs on order and 744 in backlog and so far 114 A350-900s have been delivered, including most recently, the first of six to Air Mauritius (28 business class seats, 298 economy seats).

The A350-1000 made several test circuits during the course of the week. It is 7m longer than the -900 meaning it can hold 40 more seats in a typical three-class configuration.

SUM OF ITS PARTS

Airbus is a cross-continental company with complex multi-modal transport needs covering air, sea, river and road. Special trucks and trailers are used for transporting large parts to Blagnac – every two-to-three weeks, roads are closed and the next shipments will be mid-November – and I spotted a pair of Belugas staring large-nose-to-large-nose on the final morning; these distinctively shaped planes fly in most components of the A380 (with the exception of six parts).

It's no surprise that the A350 hangar was busier given the order volumes; theoretically Airbus can make four A380s a month but currently it's one. An enormous tailfin soared above us, waiting for

Above:
Air Mauritius' A350-900

Below: Chadi Saade, Airbus' Vice President Commercial for Airbus Corporate Jets



assembly. Operators drill 19,000 holes to join the three fuselage sections – 2,000 for the wings – and are supported by mobile lasers. On completion, they reverse out and fly to Hamburg for cabin fit-outs.

TLS has two runways, one covering 3,000m and the other 3,500m, and Airbus accounts for around 10 per cent of airport traffic and employs 21,000 people locally (55,000 worldwide).

Airbus partners with many local organisations and in the UAE, Strata produces composite components for the A330, A330neo, A350XWB and A380. A 'Future Scientists' programme, with Al Bayt Mitwahid, aims to provide 21 Emirati high-school

“Today we are all working to push this aeroplane (A380), it's needed for the industry and the only one that can answer to airport congestion.”

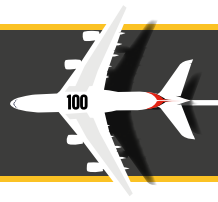
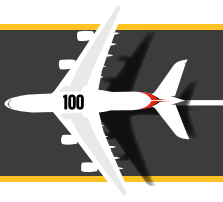
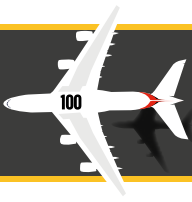
students with the opportunity to study aeronautics over three years and on completion, they will receive an internship at Airbus or its industry partners' facilities in the UAE.

ACJ TARGETS AIRLINES TRADING UP

Airbus Corporate Jet recently won a new A319neo order from an Asian customer “trading up from a traditional business jet” and believes the model is perfectly placed to capitalise on demand for larger cabins. Three A319neos and six 320neos have now been booked by Acropolis Aviation, Comlux, K5 Aviation and “undisclosed clients”. Deliveries of the ACJ320neo will begin at the end of 2018 and ACJ319neos from Q2 2019. The ACJ320neo can fly 25 passengers up to 6000nm, while the 319neo is designed for eight passengers up to 6,750nm. Chadi Saade, Airbus' Vice President Commercial, said: “My main market is to upgrade people from Gulfstream to ACJ319s, from Global 6000 to ACJ320s.”

FOREFRONT OF DATA, DIGITAL AND SATELLITE COMMS

I'm dressed in a light blue lab coat, hairnet and slippers and face-to-face with an \$150 million electric propulsion satellite. It's not quite how you imagine it in space – more a cross between a school project and large festive gift with colourful coatings and protrusions – but the solar panel is clearly visible and when fully extended, will be wider than an A320's wingspan. Walking around the airline hangars yesterday was comprehensible (even if I could only guess at the



engineering jigsaw) but here, in the Defence and Space section, I'm lost in space. On every cognitive level – visually, technically and scientifically – I'm struggling to keep up, but it's a fascinating insight into the complex work that's providing the foundations for 21st century data and communications.

The Dubai Airshow has announced some of the speakers and presenters at the Space Conference, a new feature for 2017 taking place 13-14 November. Among them are Apollo 15 Command Module Pilot Col. Al Worden, USAF-Ret; George Whitesides, CEO of Virgin Galactic; H.E Dr Mohammed Al Ahababi, Director General of the UAE Space Agency and Omran Sharaf, Project Manager, Emirates Mars Mission, Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC). UAE's investments in space technologies have already exceeded AED20 billion while its ambitions include the Mission to Mars Hope mission planned for 2021.

SKYWISE JOINS THE DIGITAL DOTS

Airbus is patently a company where data technology is as key as aircraft hardware, and its digital remit isn't restricted to operations in Toulouse. Its Skywise programme is designed as a single aviation data platform in collaboration with Palantir Technologies.

The combination of global data and aerospace experience aims to reduce flight disruptions;

Above:
CityAirbus aims to take flight in 2018

decrease maintenance cost through predictive maintenance; optimise flight operations; transform cabin and ground operations; make faster decisions to cope with unexpected events; and optimise fleet management by interpreting high volumes of fleet and flight operations data.

"For some time we've been delivering digital planes," said Matthew Evans, Vice President Digital Transformation Programs. "Data is not a new subject for Airbus – going back to the A300 and even the A320 designed nearly 30 years ago was built with 24,000 sensors and today, the A350 has over 250,000 parameters. But historically data has been fragmented. When airlines share data, they have access to the core functionalities of the platform. We see Skywise as the centre of a more digital, more connected aviation industry."

CITYAIRBUS TARGETS URBAN CONGESTION

Urban mobility is a hot topic from Dubai to Donauwörth and Airbus is busy working on projects designed to tackle urban congestion. The CityAirbus vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) air vehicle, billed as the 'air taxi of the future', can carry up to four passengers. Airbus Helicopters' Donauwörth facility (overall system) and its Ottobrunn/Munich site (electrical propulsion) are working on the project and the first flight is targeted for 2018. ■



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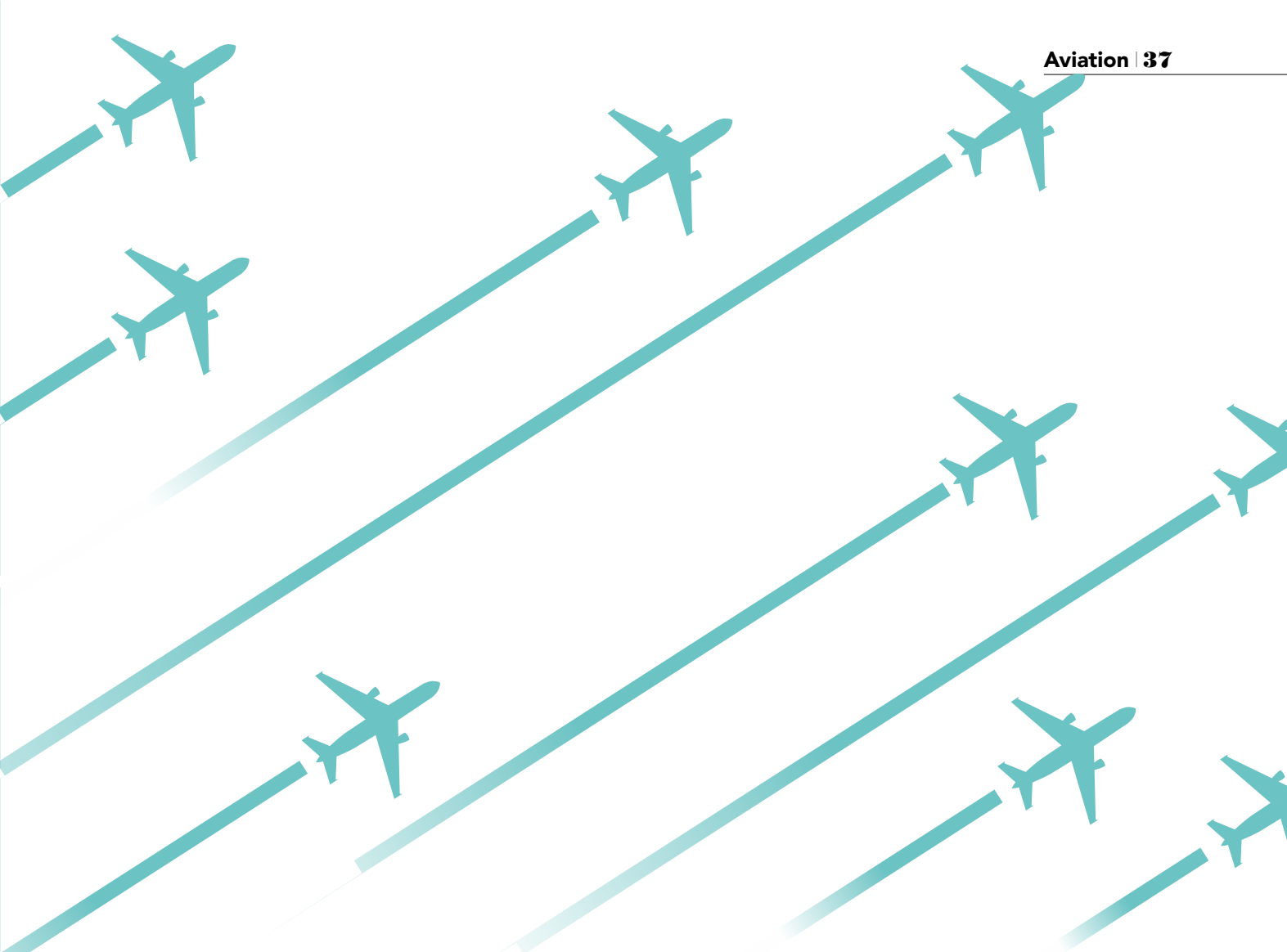


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BATTLE FOR THE ATLANTIC

Low-cost carriers are providing serious competition to traditional airlines in the all-important transatlantic market, reports Alex McWhirter



As I write these words in late September, investment bank Morgan Stanley has downgraded British Airways owner IAG. Why? Because the outlook for traditional airlines plying the Atlantic has seldom been gloomier.

Back in 1977, Sir Freddie Laker's Skytrain broke the transatlantic cartel of British Airways, Pan Am and TWA by ushering in a low-fares revolution. One-way tickets from London Gatwick to New York JFK with Skytrain cost £59 on a first come, first served basis. At the time, I remember people from the regions travelling to London on overnight trains and buses so they could obtain a good place in the queue at Victoria station.

Laker was followed a few years later by US low-cost carrier People Express – I remember buying a Gatwick-New York Newark flight (with confirmed seats) in September 2004 for about £130 return. Bear in mind that taxes, fees and charges in those days were just a few dollars.

Back then, it was thought that low transatlantic fares were here to stay. But we were wrong. Skytrain and People Express messed up their sums. Both failed for a variety of reasons, one of which included predatory pricing by rivals. For decades thereafter, cheap fares were only available if you travelled out

of season and met restrictions. Those fairly flexible Skytrain/People Express fares never returned.

Some 30-plus years later, it's all change. The environment for budget airlines is benign. Low fuel prices, liberal aviation treaties and the advent of smaller, more economical aircraft mean the low-cost carriers (LCCs) and other budget operators have returned in a big way.

Quoted on proactiveinvestors.co.uk, Morgan Stanley says: "A new generation of carriers is taking on the legacy [traditional] groups with a fresh twist on the low-cost, long-haul model. The rise of Norwegian, as well as the likes of Wow Air and

Hand baggage-only fares are commonplace within Europe but are now being extended to long-haul routes

Westjet, has forced the hand of the legacy carriers on both sides of the Atlantic into adapting their own business model to suit this new reality."

According to Morgan Stanley, the final quarter of this year points to a 30 per cent year-on-year capacity increase across the Atlantic, which for most ►

airlines is their most profitable area of operation. BA is particularly exposed as transatlantic is its most profitable area of operations, generating a large share of its revenue.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

It is the new generation of narrow-body aircraft capable of flying long-haul – the B737 MAX 8 and the forthcoming A321LR neo – that are providing LCCs with cost advantages. So how are their rivals responding? Rightly or wrongly, they are answering the challenge by downgrading economy class standards in a bid to match the LCCs.

September saw a further economy class downgrade. IAG's Aer Lingus followed in the footsteps of TAP Portugal in launching a basic "Saver" hand baggage-only fare with the elimination of some frills. Onboard catering, for now at least, is still provided. (Normal "Smart" economy fares remain on sale but at a slightly higher price.) Such hand baggage-only fares are commonplace within Europe but are now being extended in other markets.

American Airlines, the joint venture partner of British Airways, is likely to follow. In a series of media interviews in August, Don Casey, AA's senior vice-president of revenue management, indicated that the airline was seriously considering introducing these basic economy fares. They could be applied as early as next year, Casey indicated. If that is the case, then, as we have seen with hand baggage tariffs within Europe, we can expect others to follow.

Indeed, Etihad Airways is trialling a new hand baggage only 'Deal Fare' on two key routes this winter, for bookings until December 18, allowing travellers to purchase lower fares in economy class if no checked baggage is required. The trial fare, comprising a carry-on baggage allowance of 7kg, is available on flights between Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Kuwait for travel until March 31.

Etihad Airways Executive Vice President – Commercial, Mohammad Al Bulooki, said: "Passenger feedback and travel habits show that many of Etihad Airways' customers, especially those travelling for business, weekend getaways or day trips, don't require checked baggage, so we are testing a new lower fare on these key routes. As well as a great proposition for customers, this trial is an effective tool for gauging customer reaction in the real world and testing the product's viability for wider implementation."

Slightly lower hand baggage fares give airlines a better display in the all-important booking systems. This matters a lot because the airline with the headline price gets the business. What must worry the traditional carriers is that younger travellers – the generation that will fill airline seats in the future – have warmed to LCCs and their no-frills policies.



Above: Vittal IAG's Aer Lingus followed in the footsteps of TAP Portugal in launching a basic "Saver" hand baggage-only fare with the elimination of some frills.

Younger travellers tend to fly more than the older generation and have readily adapted to hand baggage fares, even for long-haul. That is why, I believe, traditional airlines are copying the LCCs rather than devising something different.

The Icelandic carriers capitalise on their country's geographical location to provide dozens of links between Europe and the US

WINDS OF CHANGE

Are the low-cost carriers threatened? It's doubtful. Like Sixth Freedom airlines (which have the right to fly from a second country to a third country provided they make a stop in their own country), they are creative and stay one step ahead of the game. They are adding services not only to main gateways but to secondary or hinterland cities, too.

These new departure and arrival points are on both sides of the Atlantic. So we see Norwegian launching B787 services to Seattle, Denver and Austin, and flying transatlantic from Edinburgh and Belfast with B737 MAX jets to smaller airports well-placed between New York and Boston.

The Icelandic carriers capitalise on their country's geographical location to provide dozens of links between Europe, the Nordic countries and North America. While flight times are lengthier (there's a plane change in Reykjavik), Icelandair and Wow Air operate to and from many regional airports, making it convenient for locals.

Over the past couple of years, the rise of these airlines has been an unsung story. Icelandair grew out of Loftleidir (which started transatlantic service



AIRCRAFT GUIDE

B737 MAX

The fastest-selling plane in Boeing's history

3,900
Firm orders

91
Number of airlines that have ordered the B737 MAX

4
Number of B737 MAX variants (B737 MAX 7, 8, 9, 10)

40%
Less noise than other single-aisle aircraft

6,510 km
Range of the MAX 8

in 1952) so it has staying power. Although it has been around for decades, it is only in the past few years that its network has expanded to serve some 20 North American destinations from a wide range of cities on this side of the Atlantic.

Icelandair will start to take delivery of B737 MAX 8 aircraft in February. Chief executive, Birkir Holm Gudnason, says: "The MAX will add flexibility in terms of adding service to new destinations, making it possible to operate markets all year round that we have not been able to do on larger aircraft. Cleveland [starting next year] is a good example." Last month, Icelandair also announced hand baggage-only fares.

With their premium classes, both Norwegian and Icelandair are good options for cost-conscious business people. Norwegian's B787s are in a two-class configuration, although its B737 MAX 8s are one class. Icelandair has conventional classes (economy, Economy Comfort, Saga Class) on its B757s and this configuration will be carried over to its B737 MAXs.

The budget airlines are making all the running. And as we have seen in Europe, the traditional carriers haven't yet devised an effective response. What can go wrong? A hike in fuel prices, overcapacity (too many seats chasing too few passengers) and any future economic downturns are issues that could upset the apple cart.

Consumers will be hoping that the operating environment remains benign. ■

With so much to see in the British capital, it's best to see the sights in twos

LONDON



1 V&A MUSEUM AND KENSINGTON GARDENS

Not as widely known as the British or Natural History museums, the Victoria and Albert Museum is a favourite among Londoners, focusing on human creativity through art and design, and staging regular exhibitions on a diverse range of subjects, from plywood to Pink Floyd.

A short walk north on Exhibition Road brings you to Kensington Gardens, one of London's royal parks, whose peaceful green spaces contain statues ranging from the grand Albert Memorial to the cutesy Peter Pan beside the Long Water. Other popular stopping points are The Orangery Restaurant in Kensington Palace, and the princess Diana Memorial Fountain. Access via South Kensington station on the London Underground.

2 TOWER OF LONDON AND ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Few cities have a castle as historic as this right at their heart. The UNESCO World Heritage site is replete with fascinating sights and stories – home to the Crown Jewels (valued at more than £20 billion/US\$25.8 billion), site of Britain's last execution in 1941 (a German spy)... and so forth.

A ten-minute walk down Eastcheap – through the UK's banking nexus – will reveal the city's most iconic church: St Paul's Cathedral. The world's second-largest dome (after St Peter's in Rome) is impressive, but the interior is even more so. Make time to climb up to the Whispering Gallery and descend into the crypts. Access via Tower Hill station.



5 OXFORD STREET TO PICCADILLY

The city's most popular retail thoroughfares (whether you're buying or just window shopping) surround and crisscross the West End district of Mayfair. In general, more affordable outlets can be found on Oxford Street and Regent Street, while Piccadilly, and the narrower boulevards of New and Old Bond streets, Saville Row and Burlington Arcade offer rarefied acquisitions out of the financial reach of the majority. Access via Oxford Street or Piccadilly stations.



6



DOUBLE

3 CAMDEN MARKET AND REGENT'S PARK

Probably London's most famous market (sorry Portobello Road), the stalls around Camden Lock and Regent's Canal offer a cornucopia of arts and crafts, collectibles, fashion items and musical treasures.

A short walk up Parkway from Camden High Street brings you to the northeast corner of Regent's Park, which harbours London Zoo, an open-air theatre, a boating lake and central London's largest outdoor sports area. Access via Camden Town station.



4 GREENWICH ROYAL OBSERVATORY AND CUTTY SARK

Over in Greenwich in London's southeast, the magnificent *Cutty Sark* is the last remaining tea clipper, a sailing ship that in its day was the fastest in the world. You can walk around, inside and under it now that it's been restored and raised three metres above the ground.

Fifteen minutes' walk south through Greenwich Park is the Royal Observatory, location of the Prime Meridian Line (from which all time zones are calculated), the UK's largest refracting telescope, a planetarium and a museum explaining how the early scientists mapped the stars and seas. Access via Cutty Sark for Maritime Greenwich station on the Docklands Light Rail line.



ACTS

SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE AND TATE MODERN

The South Bank of the Thames is lined with enjoyable attractions of every type, from the London Eye to the National Theatre. A casual walk east of these along the riverfront promenade reveals two major London destinations that offer vastly different experiences. The Tate Modern is a globally recognised institution presenting contemporary art and film to inspire and propagate artistic discussion. Next door, the meticulously reconstructed, thatched-roofed Shakespeare's Globe allows audiences to experience the Bard's classic plays exactly as 16th-century crowds would have. Access via St Paul's station and the pedestrianised Millennium Bridge.



RONNIE SCOTT'S AND AMUSED MOOSE SOHO

For sublime music and irrepressible laughter, these two hotspots take some beating. Since opening in 1959, Ronnie Scott's in Frith Street has been the venue to listen to great jazz, soul and blues music, its cool setting playing host to greats such as Sonny Rollins and Chick Corea, as well as contemporary stars both domestic and international.

The Sanctum Soho Hotel on Warwick Street (near the bottom of Carnaby St) is home to the award-winning Amused Moose Soho comedy club, which provides a stage for many of the nation's top comedians – such as Jimmy Carr, Eddie Izzard and Bill Bailey – to test new material. Access via Piccadilly station.

Pay it forward

Executive suites and fine dining might be what we sign the cheque for, but our travel dollars are also being put towards altruistic endeavours, reports **Valerian Ho**



In these complex modern times, there are people and animals all over the world in dire need of help, and the natural environment also needs serious protection. As individuals, there are limits to what we can do. But when large businesses invest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, they can have a major positive impact.

As business travellers, the hotels you stay at usually have CSR initiatives designed to contribute to the local community or wider global issues, but these behind-the-scenes programmes often remain unsung heroes – particularly those on a smaller, local scale. Here we cast a spotlight on worthy programmes around the region to highlight some of the issues and celebrate the innovative and inspirational projects under way.

CHILD CARE

Education is one of the most powerful tools to give children a future and lift them out of poverty. But many people in developing countries have difficulty in buying food, never mind finding funds to pay for schooling. In Siem Reap, Cambodia, a hundred young women are now able to continue their secondary school education thanks to **Rosewood Hotel Group's** partnership with Room to Read. This programme helps to transform the lives of children in low-income countries by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Its Girls' Education Programme reinforces girls' commitment to their own education, works with them to develop essential life skills, and increases support for their education among parents, school staff and communities.

In Taiwan, the **Mandarin Oriental, Taipei** designed and sold 400 limited-edition stuffed pandas at charity events to raise money for local schools in remote areas. The Love Share initiative was supported with handmade cookies baked in the Mandarin Cake Shop. As a result, the Shan-Mei Elementary School in mountainous Alishan County and the Qin-Ai Elementary School in Nantou have been able to buy new school equipment and musical instruments.

The month-long Love colors – My Colorful World art exhibition at **Hyatt Place Shenzhen Dongmen** was a special art project showcasing the talents of 30 children – some of whom have autism. The children created works such as tie-dye bags and handkerchiefs, referencing the ancient folk craftsmanship of Yunnan province, which were then sold to the public. The proceeds were donated to the Rainbow Animation and Cartoon R&D Centre, which supports disabled children. "This activity perfectly matched our brand personality, which demonstrates youth, vitality, colourfulness, and being creative and trendy," said the hotel's general manager Maria Yue. "It's a very meaningful event, allowing the public to get to know these special kids and their talents. The whole of society should learn to understand, respect and care about them. This has been the third continuous year and we'd like to make it happen every year."



FOOD DONATION

When you think about all those people around the world who can't afford to feed their families, it can be galling to see the profuse waste from hotel buffets and large-scale events. In Singapore, welfare homes, children, senior citizens and needy families benefit from the **Mandarin Oriental's** "Food from the Heart" programme, which distributes surplus pastries and breads to those in need. In addition, flowers from large events are also donated to Happy Flowers, a charity that repacks and sends bouquets to those in hospices and nursing homes.

In Hong Kong, both **The Langham, Hong Kong** and **Cordis, Hong Kong** participate in the Food Link and Food Angel programmes, which turn leftover vegetables and pastries into hearty meals to distribute to underprivileged and low-income families. They've also signed up to the Green Luck Banquet initiative by Green Monday, which donates leftover food from events to local charities.

AGRICULTURE REVOLUTION

As the saying goes, give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach him how to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime. This is exactly the philosophy being adopted by **Shinta Mani** in Cambodia. As part of its efforts to empower the local population, the hospitality group has invested in "home-farming" initiatives. This has involved researching how to grow new crops and creating model home gardens that families can re-create, with particular emphasis on plants that produce healthy vitamins such as folic acid. The next stage of the project will be looking at how to scale this into commercial endeavours that can again be re-created in poor local villages. In a similar vein, **Angsana Lang Co, Vietnam's** Meet for Good programme offers local farmers land to grow produce that is then sold back to the hotel for use in its kitchen and spa.

Opposite page and above: Hyatt Place Shenzhen Dongmen hosts a children's art exhibition; and The Langham partners with the Green Luck Banquet initiative



SOAP RECYCLING

Often when you check out of a hotel, you leave leftover shower gels and soap in your room. Across a hotel's entire room inventory, this can represent a lot of waste. But certain companies are employing socially conscious and ecofriendly recycling alternatives. **The Ritz-Carlton** group collaborates with Clean the World, a nonprofit organisation that collects partially used soaps and other hygiene amenities from the hotel. The soap is then sanitised and redistributed to communities in need, while other products are repurposed and used in the production of fibre-optic cables.

In Phuket, all **Accor** hotels operate a Soap for Hope programme, where leftover soaps are restored and donated to locals, who can then sell them to make an income. The recycled soap is also sold to hotel guests, with the proceeds distributed to local communities and schools.

FUNDRAISING

Many hotels organise fundraising activities for their charity partners. Every year, **Marina Bay Sands** holds the Sands for Singapore Charity Festival, which involves activities such as the Sundown Picnic, sponsored walks and live music performances. Since its inauguration in 2013, the festival has raised more than S\$16 million (US\$11.9 million) for local charities including the Dyslexia Association of Singapore, Association for Persons with Special Needs, and Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore.

Fundraising initiatives often provide opportunities for guests to actively get involved in the action. Cycling enthusiasts, for example, can enter sponsorship packages in the **Anantara Hoi An Resort** and **EMM Hotel Saigon's** Yaana Bike Challenge. The three-day, 226km ride from Quy Nhon to Hoi An raises funds for Operation Smile, an organisation that provides free surgery to children born with a cleft lip or cleft palate.

From top left: Accor Phuket's Soap for Hope; releasing baby turtles at Banyan Tree Bintan; coral planting at Shangri-La Mactan Resort; and Marina Bay Sands' Sands for Singapore Charity Festival



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

With deforestation rates at an all-time high, it's heartening to know there are organisations committed to rebalancing the scales. In 2011, **Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts** launched its Earth Week initiative, which included a commitment to plant ten million trees around the world. **Banyan Tree** is also a firm believer in long-term tree planting initiatives and encourages guests to get involved. So far, 25,000 trees have been planted thanks to efforts by hotel staff, guests and local community members.

Replanting of another kind is taking place under the seas at a number of resorts around the region. At **The Andaman Langkawi**, an onsite Coral Nursery is dedicated to repopulating local reefs that were devastated by the 2004 tsunami. Guests are encouraged to get involved, by supergluing pieces of coral into protected pools monitored by the hotel's onsite marine biology staff, before being replanted in the ocean. The **Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort** is also committed to underwater gardening, with a Coral Adoption Programme that helps to educate guests and accelerate the regeneration of the atoll reefs. More than 60 species of fish have been reintroduced to the corals around the resort since the programme was launched.



ANIMAL AWARENESS

There's been a lot of press in recent years about the plight of elephants in Asia's developing nations, but there are those fighting to combat the injustices. Anantara is one such hero. Street elephants are regularly rescued and transferred to the **Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort** in Thailand, where they live in a forest environment and receive proper veterinary checks and healthy diets. Anantara also launched the annual King's



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Cup Elephant Polo Tournament to raise awareness of and money for the initiative.

Elsewhere in Thailand, baby turtles are nurtured by the Mai Khao Marine Turtle Foundation. The charity was launched with a donation of US\$45,000 from **JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa** and the **Minor Hotel Group**, who focus on providing a safe environment for the hatching season (November to February) as well as rehabilitating turtles injured by fishing boats. For those looking for a more hands-on experience, guests can get involved with releasing three-month-old turtles back into the wild at **Banyan Tree's** Bintan property. ■

■ St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi joined forces with Damas to support children's medical treatment last month and a proportion of the proceeds from the Afternoon Tea supported Al Jalila Foundation's Farah project.

■ Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa was selected as one of the top three applications for its two CSR programmes, Embrace, which is part of Shangri-La's Care for People, and Sanctuary, the resort's Turtle Care project.

■ TIME Hotels recently picked up the Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry CSR Label Award for the third year in succession. Further Q4 plans include a walk to support breast cancer awareness and diabetes, blood donation and community clean-up. The operator also organises a talent day, annual waiter race and car-free day.

■ Gloria Hotel, Dubai recently won The Arabia Corporate Social Responsibility CSR Network award for its work with waste collection, recycling, voluntary work and publishing.



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1



WE WILL HAVE A NEW ROLEX SUBMARINER

I have been telling anyone who'll listen that "next year, there's going to be a new Submariner" for two years, and while it hasn't happened yet, as time passes my odds increase of being right. So I'm doubling down on this one – a new Sub to be revealed at Baselworld 2018 in March, causing a total frenzy among Rolex nerds.

4

1980S STYLE

There is zero chance that big watch companies will stop mining the past for ideas, but I think we will see them move away from the 1960s and '70s to dig up some of the more interesting looks of the 1980s – the more switched-on, such as Audemars Piguet, have already.

2

SOCIAL SALES



By the end of 2018, at least one major brand will open up Instagram as a regular sales platform. We've already seen Omega use it to stoke interest for a limited-edition Speedmaster, and other lifestyle brands are wise to the one-tap buying potential of Insta.



Five
predictions
for
2018

3

NO MORE COMPLICATED WATCHES

This was a fairly quiet year for a lot of the usual purveyors of complex watchmaking, as brands have shied away from the investment needed as sales dropped. Business does seem to be picking up, but the time taken to develop new watches means it could be 2019 before we see much in the way of fancy new tricks.



5

A SERIOUS SWISS SMARTWATCH

Call me cynical, but I don't quite believe the hype around the smart efforts by TAG Heuer, Montblanc et al so far. If there is a luxury Swiss smartwatch that can genuinely rival Apple, it hasn't surfaced yet. In 2018, it just might, but don't ask me who's going to make it.

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Shanghai

Beyond the Bund there are plenty of historic districts, modern enclaves and ample shopping opportunities to explore, writes **Craig Bright**

1 NANJING ROAD

China's most famous shopping street is a five-kilometre stretch of retail wonder with hundreds of outlets to peruse. Start near the iconic Fairmont Peace Hotel that sits on the Bund (Ok, we said "beyond the Bund", but really it would be madness to visit Shanghai without drinking in the sights at least once!), and from there work your way west. You'll find fashionable local boutiques, high-end brands from Tiffany to Mont Blanc, as well as plenty of cafés, restaurants and bars. The section from the Bund to People's Park can get extremely crowded – sometimes it feels like the whole city is on one street.

2 PEOPLE'S PARK

After giving your wallet a work out, leave Nanjing Road and enter People's Park. This green oasis is a favourite with locals and a great place to observe charming scenes of everyday life, from local card tournaments to practising t'ai chi. Hidden in the woods you'll see the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, which hosts rotating modern art and design exhibitions throughout the year. Current exhibition "Apple+" features the lifework of Japanese designer Ken Miki, specifically summarising his "Learning to Design, Designing to Learn" theory on design education, through the simplistic form of an apple. Entry to the museum costs RMB80 (US\$12); open 10am-6pm daily; mocashanghai.org

3 XINTIANDI

If you haven't managed to get your fill of shopping on Nanjing Road, then the slightly more upscale offerings just south of Huaihai Road in the city's trendy Xintiandi district are a safe bet. Beginning just south of People's Square, head down Madang Road past The Langham and Andaz hotels to explore the European-cum-Chinese Xintiandi entertainment district. Small shops, art galleries and restaurants with indoor and outdoor seating are dotted throughout the area, and its thin alleyways comprising old brickwork buildings can be a joy to explore on foot.

4 TIANZIFANG

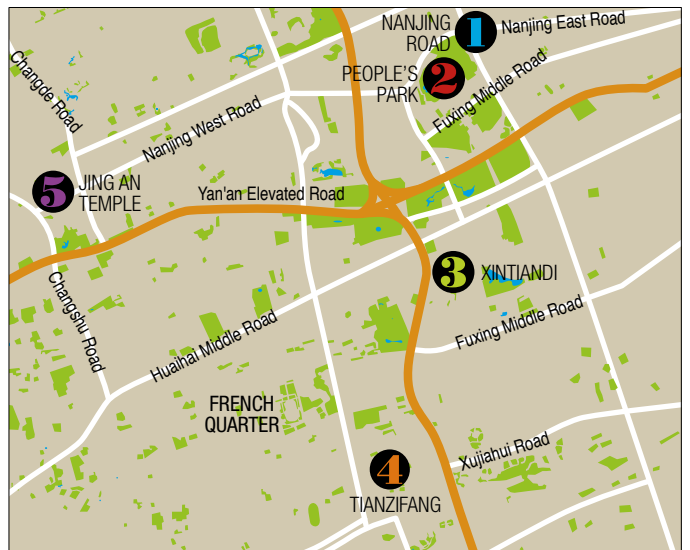
From Xintiandi, head southwest farther into the French Concession – a historic area with picturesque buildings and large, leafy avenues. There's plenty to explore, but a highlight is Tianzifang, an arts and crafts enclave that has been repurposed from a traditional residential area. The entrance is subtle, but enter and you'll find a maze of narrow alleys, populated with small dwellings housing modern coffee shops, cafés, galleries, boutiques, restaurants and bars. Address: Lane 210, Taikang Road.

5 JING'AN TEMPLE

Compared with heritage-laden Beijing, Shanghai is certainly lighter on historical sightseeing opportunities, but



Jing'an Temple proves the city is not devoid of offerings. A 15-minute taxi ride from Tianzifang will get you back to West Nanjing Road where it is located. Tracing its origins back to the third century AD during China's Three Kingdoms period, the Buddhist temple has been relocated, refreshed and rebuilt a few times, but is nonetheless unmistakable for its red walls, golden roofs and towering spire. Comprising multiple buildings that enclose a central courtyard, this is a good place to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the Jing'an business district. Open 7.30am-5pm daily, entrance fee RMB50 (US\$8). ■



Going for gold

From chilled surfing hotspot to host of 2018's upcoming Commonwealth Games, Australia's Gold Coast is banking on a sunny future for both tourism and the events industry. Valerian Ho investigates

A short hop south of Brisbane on Australia's eastern coast, the 57km stretch of pristine beachfront coastline known as the Gold Coast is bathed in glorious sunshine for more than 300 days a year. Behind its beachfront visage, however, the once sleepy seaside town has grown into a booming metropolis – the sixth largest in Australia.

Served by two international airports – Gold Coast International Airport (OOL) and Brisbane International Airport (BNE) – the city welcomed a record-breaking 1.1 million international travellers for business and leisure last year.

In April, the Gold Coast will gain even more international exposure when it hosts the 2018 Commonwealth Games. The 11-day elite competition will be the second-largest sporting event ever held in Australia (after the Sydney Olympics in 2000), welcoming 6,600 athletes and team officials from 70 nations and territories.

As a global event of major significance, it has received more than A\$1 billion (US\$785 million) in government funding for the construction of venues such as the Commonwealth Village and Carrara Sports Precinct. Major infrastructural upgrades have also taken place, including



This page from above: Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre; and the Surfers Paradise coastline
Opposite: Sun, surf and a city skyline

a light-rail extension and various road improvements, while private sector investments have followed thick and fast, with a raft of new accommodation venues, event facilities and entertainment options.

This burst of activity has fuelled a boom in the city's three dominant economies – tourism, construction and real estate – as well as providing lucrative opportunities for other rapidly emerging industries.

One sector primed to make the most of the spotlight is the meetings, conference and events (MICE) sector. "The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games is the largest event Australia will see this decade, and the opportunities for business events to tap into the spin-off benefits the event generates are very exciting," says Anna Case, director of Gold Coast Business Events.

The Games couldn't come at a better time for the MICE industry, which is already strengthening at pace. The number of meetings and conferences in the Gold Coast last year increased 21 per cent in the 12 months up to June 30, 2016, in the process injecting an estimated A\$565 million (US\$443 million) into the local economy – not including pre- and post-event spending.

The health and medical sectors in particular seem to enjoy the Gold Coast's appeal, contributing more than A\$1.5 billion (US\$1.2 billion) in annual revenue according to Lauren Mcgann, business development manager of the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre (GCCEC). "The medical and science markets are growing and becoming more popular in Gold Coast, because it has facilities such as the hospital, four universities and a Health and Knowledge Precinct," she says.





Indeed, some of the largest conferences the Gold Coast has hosted have been in the health industry, a highlight being the 7,000-strong delegation from Amway China, with more planned for the coming year including the Nu Skin Korea BDMS Success Trip scheduled for April 2018.

VENUES PRESENT AND FUTURE

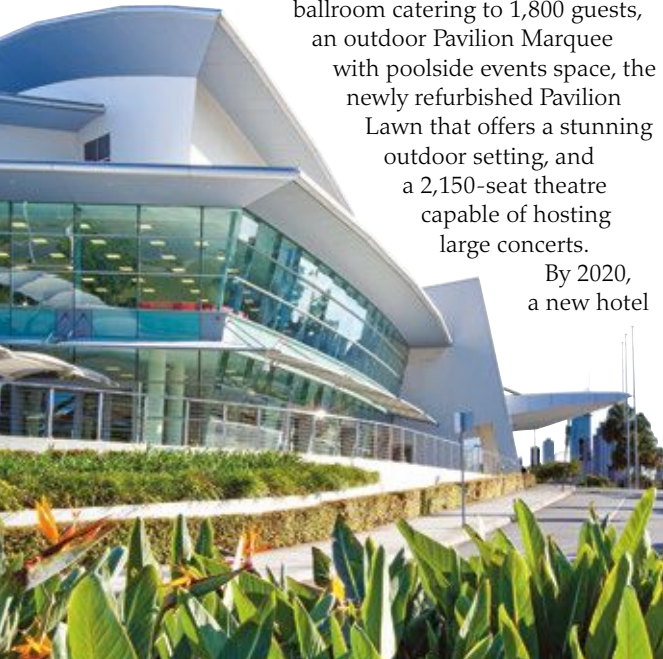
Broadbeach is the main business district and home to the GCCEC, which rakes in over A\$200 million (US\$157 million) annually. The 10,000 sqm exhibition centre features four exhibition halls, 22 meeting rooms and a massive arena which can accommodate 6,000 guests. It also has 2,000 sqm of parkland space for all kinds of activities, from cocktail parties on the front lawn to riverside events.

Another key facility is Seaworld Resort and Conference Centre. Not many venues can match Seaworld when it comes to post-meeting wind-downs. The resort provides a range of unusual experiences, from exclusive dolphin shows to a local school choir performance – and special guests can even be greeted by a sea lion. The theme park’s rides and characters also provide a special treat for post-conference and incentive groups.

However, with the momentum driven by the Commonwealth Games, a slew of new facilities are in the offing. “We’re seeing an incredible injection of new infrastructure that will bring a lasting legacy to the business events industry with new event space and upgraded venues,” says Case.

Connected to the GCCEC by a covered walkway is The Star Gold Coast (formerly Jupiter’s Hotel – a Gold Coast institution since it opened in 1985). The rebranded facility offers a pillarless ballroom catering to 1,800 guests, an outdoor Pavilion Marquee with poolside events space, the newly refurbished Pavilion Lawn that offers a stunning outdoor setting, and a 2,150-seat theatre capable of hosting large concerts.

By 2020, a new hotel



and residential tower is set to open, representing an investment of A\$850 million (US\$667 million). Additions will include a “six-star luxury hotel”, due to open before the Games, plus an additional hotel and apartment tower to bring the resort’s total number of guestrooms to almost 1,400.

Also in the pipeline are another couple of gems, which will bring new accommodation, entertainment and event space to the area. The giant Chinese conglomerate Wanda Group is set to open the Jewel in 2018, a mixed-use development building spread over three towers that will offer a five-star Wanda Vista Hotel and serviced apartments. Other facilities will include conference rooms, restaurants, bars and entertainment facilities.

Another A\$1.4 billion (US\$1.1 billion) integrated residential and resort project called Ruby will also be a game changer when it opens in time for the Commonwealth Games, adding over a thousand apartments to the Surfers Paradise area plus event space and entertainment choices such as an ice-skating rink and climbing wall.

INSPIRATIONAL INCENTIVES

Aside from infrastructure, what the Gold Coast really has in spades is a ready-made arsenal of tempting incentives to treat large event groups or individual travellers. From golden beaches that host the legendary Quiksilver Pro Gold Coast surfing championships each year, to World Heritage-listed rainforests teeming with biodiversity, the city is blessed with beautiful natural

This page from top: A suite in The Star Gold Coast; The Star’s theatre; and the GCCEC **Opposite:** The Star’s Pavilion Lawn



assets just a 30-minute ride from the city centre. It also boasts a huge concentration of attractions, from theme parks to animal sanctuaries and water activities.

Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan have all shown strong appetites for the sun, surf and sand that the Gold Coast has in abundance, but China in particular is leading the way. In a recent survey by Ctrip, China's largest online travel agent, both Chinese leisure and business travellers voted the Gold Coast as one of their top ten destinations in the world.

In May, the city is set to welcome its biggest incentive group ever, with 8,000 delegates from Infinitus China – one of the largest personal health care companies in China. The week-long incentive programme is expected to generate more than A\$50 million (US\$39 million).

The itinerary is being prepared by Gold Coast Business Events and has been designed to showcase the highlights of Australia, from native animal experiences like feeding kangaroos and cuddling koalas, to barbecues on outback farms. Delegates may also find themselves rolling up their trousers to catch mud crabs from the river, whale spotting at Point Danger, climbing the Skypoint for 360-degree views of the coastline, planting gum trees for the Save Koala foundation or donning a wetsuit and heading for a surf lesson.

"We're in the best position now to take advantage of the international focus on the Gold Coast with a renewed offering for groups to meet here," says Case. "Our city has never looked better and in 2018, delegates will experience the unmistakable buzz of the city chosen to host the biggest event in Australia this decade." ■

WHERE TO STAY



■ Crowne Plaza Surfers Paradise

Located between the CBD and famous Surfers Paradise strip, the hotel offers 370 guestrooms, suites and self-contained studio or one-bedroom apartments. Other facilities include two swimming pools, a tennis court, four restaurants and a range of meeting facilities.

Special meeting offer: A\$179 (US\$140) per room (including breakfast). Free one-hour cocktail reception.

crowneplazasurfersparadise.com.au

■ Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort & Spa

One of the key conference destinations on the Gold Coast, the Marriott property offers 2,000 sqm of event space. This ranges from the grand ballroom and boardrooms to a stunning poolside venue, all serviced by on-site audiovisual company Microhire. The hotel offers 304 rooms, plus two signature restaurants including a Japanese teppanyaki establishment.

Special meeting offer: From A\$299 (US\$235) per room (including breakfast). Free coffee cart.

marriott.com

■ Mercure Gold Coast Resort

Located near the green belt of golf courses, this attractive resort-style property is well situated for a business/leisure mix. It has 292 rooms and offers 11 flexible indoor conference options for up to 600, plus four outdoor spaces and a spa.

Special meeting offer: From A\$149 (US\$117) per room (including breakfast). A\$500 discount on AV packages.

mercuregoldcoastresort.com.au

■ Sofitel Gold Coast Broadbeach

The hotel features 296 rooms, including three executive suites and 17 luxury ocean spa rooms. Event facilities stretch across ten function rooms catering for up to 350 delegates. Other facilities include the Room 81 restaurant and bar, poolside restaurant Bistro On3, TC's Bar, plus two pools.

Special meeting offer: From A\$250 (US\$196) per room (including breakfast and wifi). Free coffee cart.

sofitelgoldcoast.com.au

A number of boutique experiences have emerged to offer off-the-beaten-track adventures of the Great Wall – the ultimate way to experience China’s most iconic attraction. British explorer William Lindesay (who once ran the entire length of the Great Wall alone and unaided), organises weekend walking tours from his farmhouse home. The kind of insight Lindesay is able to offer comes from three decades of studying, exploring, photographing and documenting the Great Wall, a project that earned official honours from the Chinese and British governments.

It’s a source of amazement to me that people come to Beijing and don’t go to the Great Wall. It’s a bit like going to Hong Kong and not seeing the harbour, or Sydney and not seeing the bridge.

A lot has changed since the old days when you were forced to go on a bus tour and stop at the awful Ming tombs on the way. A number of boutique experiences have emerged to offer “off-the-beaten-track” adventures – the ultimate way to experience China’s most iconic attraction.

British explorer William Lindesay (who once ran the entire length of the Great Wall alone and unaided), organises weekend walking tours from his farmhouse home. The kind of insight Lindesay is able to offer comes from three decades of studying, exploring, photographing and documenting the Great Wall, a project that earned official honours from the Chinese and British governments.

“It is the largest building project in history,” says Lindesay. “So huge that it was the first man-made structure to show up on world maps.

“It took more time to build than any other project in history and, in addition, most of it goes through mountain terrain, really hostile territory, but the Chinese were prepared to go to any lengths to defend their civilisation. It is the ultimate wonder of the world and it will never be surpassed.”

The Wild Wall Weekends are not for everyone: accommodation is basic, the food simple and the terrain often tricky. But the hiking-and-history combination is without a doubt the most extraordinary way to fully appreciate the magnificent structure.

The stretch near Lindesay’s rural retreat has not been restored; parts have been reclaimed by nature, other bits have crumbled. Nonetheless, its majestic grandeur and monumental scale are barely diminished.

“I like it with all its warts and defects,” says Lindesay. “The wall was built to different levels of quality – first, second or third class – depending on the threat of invasion. The bits that are geared for mass tourism I liken to having had plastic surgery, they are not real or genuine.”



Great Wall getaways

Staying at a rural retreat offers the chance to appreciate
China's engineering marvel, writes Mark Graham





Clockwise from above: British explorer William Lindesay running the Great Wall; High tea cruise with the Sunrise Kempinski; Yangqi Hotel managed by Kempinski; The Brickyard Retreat at Mutianyu; and Commune by the Great Wall

The get-togethers take place in the warmer months at the farmhouse location, fondly nicknamed The Barracks, after the British term for simple military-style accommodation (wildwall.com, price for weekend stay US\$550 per person). Included in the cost are several extensive hikes along the wall – at dawn and dusk – all meals and an endless string of fascinating anecdotes from the host.

Another long-term expat resident offers a significantly more luxurious way to experience the wall close up. American Jim Spear quit the corporate world to focus on restoring traditional village houses around the Mutianyu area of the Great Wall.

The refurbished homes were snapped up by well-off Beijingers seeking a rustic retreat with modern plumbing and appliances. Spear reasoned that a boutique hotel would also be popular with discerning city folk, tourists and conference organisers – a hunch that proved correct.

The Brickyard Retreat at Mutianyu has 25 rooms and 11 vacation villas, all offering views of the Ming Dynasty section of the wall (brickyardretreatatmutianyu.com, rooms from US\$200).

As the name suggests, the compound once housed a working glazed tile factory whose buildings have been transformed into international-level accommodation. The restaurant at the property specialises in using organic produce, wherever possible, sourced from farms in the vicinity. It is a popular spot for corporate retreats, weekend getaways and discerning overseas visitors who want to really experience rural China. There are various ways up to the wall itself and other walks in the vicinity, all documented in a book compiled by one of Spear's daughters.

"Our guests are looking for privacy, discretion, and real hospitality," says Spear. "The Brickyard is an intimate retreat in a park-like setting with stunning views of the Great Wall and surrounding mountains, forests and orchards.

"We offer a range of activities to complement a stay with us near the Great Wall, ranging from treatments in

our spa, soaking in our outdoor jacuzzi, cooking lessons, visiting artisanal food producers, biking around the area, and so on."

Staying close to the wall means that visitors can arrive at the main Mutianyu entranceway long before the big tour buses arrive from the city, and be back in time for a leisurely Brickyard lunch. Taking the metal toboggan slide back down from the wall makes the trip even faster: it's a thrilling, madcap ride which has just one safety feature – local peasants stationed at sharp corners shouting their only two words of English: "slow down, slow down."

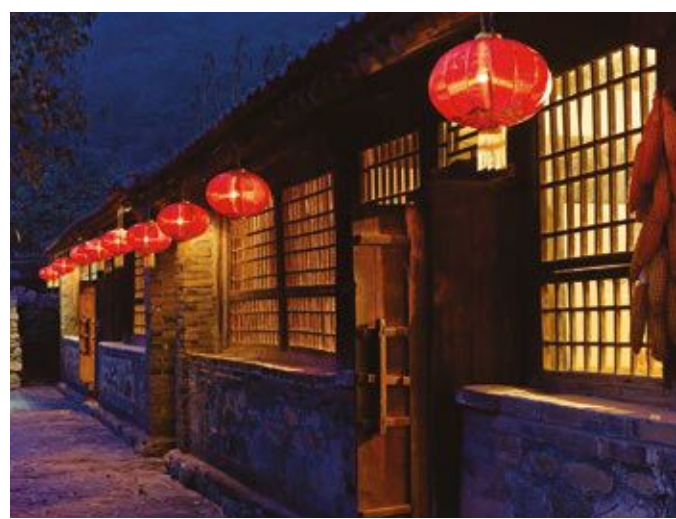
Farther along, guests at the Commune by the Great Wall are given exclusive access to a private path leading to battlements and walkways on a section that sees barely any tourist traffic.

The project is a shining jewel in the portfolio of property giant SOHO, one of the nation's most successful developers. With the Commune by the Great Wall project, the emphasis was on allowing creativity to flourish: 12 architects from Asia were asked to let their imaginations run wild, dreaming up a design they thought appropriate for the setting.

The result was a series of buildings like no others in China – or anywhere else for that matter, with names such as Airport House, Bamboo Wall House, Cantilever House, Furniture House and Suitcase House. Within the expansive grounds of the leafy estate are a total of 175 suites, three restaurants and an outdoor pool.

It is geographically close to the tourist scrum of Badaling, where it sometimes seems China's entire 1.4 billion population are out on a day trip, but located in a spot where tour buses do not venture (communebythegreatwall.com, weekday rooms from US\$250 including breakfast).

Another stunning architectural marvel located within easy reach of the wall is a venue that had its moment of international fame during the APEC summit a couple of years ago, when all visiting heads of state stayed there – including presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin.



It boasts one of the longest names in the hospitality world – the Sunrise Kempinski Hotel Beijing and Yangqi Island – reflecting the wide choice of accommodation options available. There is the main hotel building, plus various boutique and villa options in the immediate vicinity, all managed by the German group.

The hotel itself is a cross between a chocolate whorl and a giant snail – no doubt one of the wacky modern buildings President Xi Jinping was thinking of when commenting disapprovingly on the proliferation of zany architecture in and around Beijing. Its design was inspired by an “oriental sunrise” and is meant to blend harmoniously with its natural surroundings.

The size of the project – Kempinski’s largest in China – means there are myriad choices when eating out, including Western fine dining, German pub food, Cantonese cuisine, a European deli and a wine bar. The top-floor bar offers a magnificent view of the lake itself and the hills beyond.

A drive to the Great Wall takes less than half an hour, allowing a visit there in the morning followed by an afternoon of horseback riding, water sports on Yangqi Lake, or golf. Also in the vicinity is the ancient Hong Luo Temple, Qinglong Gorge and Baiquan mountain

(kempinski.com; rooms from US\$290).

All options are worth considering for the luxury of being able to take one’s time and truly appreciate one of the genuine wonders of the world, instead of a cursory stroll-and-snap visit. It is a structure that exceeds expectations and – unlike, say, the Taj Mahal or Eiffel Tower – it changes radically by the season, flanked by pink blossoms in spring, surrounded by orange-red foliage in the fall and blanketed by snow during the harsher winter months.

Wild Wall William has seen almost every aspect of it during his lifetime of study. His research indicates that all the various sections of wall ever built, from Qin to Ming, would total something like 50,000 kilometres and Lindsey has likely tramped tens of thousands of kilometres himself – including running 2,500 kilometres on that very first expedition.

Despite enduring blisters, sunburn, stomach upsets, arrests and even deportation during that first, fateful ultra-marathon, Lindsey says: “It was a major adventure to a place that was little known. In fact the moon was more familiar – I could name more places there than I could in China. At the end of the run, my feeling was: this is an amazing wall. I still think the same way.” ■

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Try before YOU DIE

For those who dare, the world offers a host of strange and exotic dishes to test your nerves as well as your palate, writes Dominic Bliss

Beware the dreaded *fugu* puffer fish. This aquatic delicacy, which you'll find on restaurant menus all over Japan, contains a lethal neurotoxin called tetrodotoxin. Japanese chefs have to undergo years of training, pass a tough exam and obtain a licence before they're allowed loose on the creature – which is reassuring to know, since just one slip of the knife can result in death at the dinner table.

Organs within the puffer fish, such as the liver, contain the toxin, small amounts of which will paralyse your muscles, stop you breathing and ultimately asphyxiate you.

Tetrodotoxin is tasteless, odourless and there's no known antidote. One of the most famous cases of death by *fugu* was in 1975, when celebrated Japanese actor Bando Mitsugoro VIII insisted on being served the fish's liver, claiming he was immune to the poison. It was to be his finale.

Nowadays, thanks to strict regulations, deaths are rare – but not unknown. Cocky amateur chefs and fishermen who confuse species come a cropper from time to time.

The attraction of *fugu* is hard to fathom – it doesn't even taste that good, and has a chewy texture, like a raw cartilaginous fish such as skate.

Donald Richie, the (late) author of *A Taste of Japan*, summed it up well: "There is a sense of occasion when you go to eat it, heightened by the chance that it could be the last supper. It's also a form of gustatory conspicuous consumption because *fugu* is expensive. I suppose you could call it 'event eating'; the chef has an 'off' night and you're curtains."

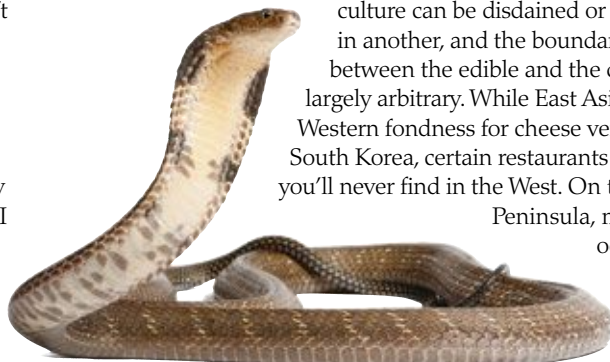
Above: Organs within the puffer fish contain tetrodotoxin, small amounts of which will paralyse your muscles

At least *fugu* is dead when you eat it. Some foodstuffs are consumed while still alive, oysters being an obvious example. In China, you might see "drunken shrimp" on the menu – live freshwater prawns served in alcohol. In Japan, there's a method of presenting sashimi called *ikizukuri*, whereby fish are presented still moving at the table. On the Italian island of Sardinia, locals swear by a cheese called *casu marzu*, which is eaten along with hundreds of wriggling fly larvae, whose excretions supposedly add to the flavour. Although banned by the European Union, black market supplies can be found by locals, some of whom claim it's an aphrodisiac. Just be sure to chew before you swallow or risk having maggots wriggling inside your stomach.

In South Korea, they're used to a bit of wriggling – they eat a raw baby octopus dish called *san-nakji*. The cephalopod is cut into pieces before consumption, but nerve activity causes its tentacles to writhe, and its suckers to keep on sucking after death. Forget to chew and said suckers can latch on to your throat as they go down.

Below: 'The snake heart, still beating, is placed gently into the white cup and offered to me. I bring it to my lips'

Foods that pass for everyday in one culture can be disdained or even taboo in another, and the boundaries we create between the edible and the disgusting are largely arbitrary. While East Asians find the Western fondness for cheese very peculiar, in South Korea, certain restaurants serve a dish you'll never find in the West. On the Korean Peninsula, man's best friend occasionally becomes



man's next supper. Not just any dog, but one that's bred for human consumption: *the nureongi*. Fortunately, international criticism means there has been a clamp-down on its production, ahead of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

In his book *The Year of Eating Dangerously* food writer (and son of Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall) Tom Parker Bowles spends an uncomfortable few days in Seoul psyching himself up and eventually eating dog soup. "The meat is chewy and stringy, but fairly innocuous with a slight gamey tang," he writes. "It could be cheap beef brisket."

If you're feeling really adventurous you could head to Vietnam where you can consume the gall bladder – or indeed the beating heart – of a snake (supposedly another aphrodisiac). American food writer Anthony Bourdain describes this speciality in his book *A Cook's Tour*. (If you're squeamish, look away now.)

"The handler takes the scissors," he writes, "inserts a blade into the cobra's chest, and snips out the heart, a rush of dark red blood spilling into the metal dish as he does so. The blood is poured into a glass and mixed with a little rice wine. And the heart, still beating, is placed gently into the small white cup and offered to me. It's still pumping, a tiny pink-and-white object, moving up and down at a regular pace in a small pool of blood at the bottom of the cup. I bring it to my lips, tilt my head back, and swallow. I give it one light chew, but the heart still beats... and beats... and beats. All the way down."

Cobra heart may seem like the easier option if you've ever tried Icelandic dish *hakarl*. Meat from the Greenland shark, is poisonous to eat when fresh but Icelanders solve this problem by burying it beneath gravel for a few months, then slicing it into strips and hanging it out to dry for several more months. The end product has a viciously pungent ammonia smell to it, and is eaten in sugar cube-sized lumps as a bar snack.

On the American TV show *Bizarre Foods*, Andrew Zimmern said the smell of *hakarl* reminded him of "some of the most horrific things I've ever breathed in my life. That's hard-core," he emphasised.

Talking of hard-core, what about extra-strong chilli peppers? Their heat is determined by the concentration of capsaicin, usually in the pith and seeds. The more vicious chilli species can burn lips, mouths and stomachs, and cause tears, profuse sweating, vomiting, and even body spasms.

Capsaicin content and chilli ferocity can be measured according to the Scoville scale. Paprika comes in at between 100 and 1,000 SHU (Scoville Heat Units), while cayenne pepper measures between 30,000 and 50,000. According to the Guinness World Records, the hottest chilli ever recorded was a variety called the Carolina Reaper at a whopping 1.57 million SHU. But Pepper X has since superseded this at 3.18 million SHU – yet to be ratified by Guinness.



Above: Dog is sometimes eaten as a celebratory meal in a few countries in East Asia

Perhaps "weird" food is something we're going to have to get used to. As the world's population grows, and we have more and more mouths to feed, we're going to have to overcome some of our culinary prejudices. One solution to our expanding global population might be to start farming insects on a grand scale.

French chefs Clement Scellier and Bastien Rabastens are already one step ahead of the game. They rear insects in the Netherlands and market them as snacks for human consumption under their brand Jimini's. Within the range are whole grasshoppers, mealworms and crickets, as well as fruit and almond bars containing cricket flour. They point out how insect farming uses far less food and water than meat farming, and "generates 99 times less greenhouse gas emissions". We'll all be eating insects one day very soon, they claim. It's just a question of training our palates.

"European consumers are not used to eating insects but it does not mean they will never do it," says Scellier. "Fifteen years ago, raw fish was not a tradition in Europe. Nowadays, people eat sushi regularly and it is no longer considered adventurous. It shows that tradition can be changed."

But what do they taste like? Insect-shy consumers will be glad to hear the snacks are strongly flavoured with the likes of smoked onion, paprika, soy sauce, garlic and cumin. There are, however, a few wings to contend with. ■

Below: Crispy tarantulas – a gimmick for the tourists, but edible



FOOD TREND: THE JELLYFISH

While academics and policymakers wring their hands over the food security of our nations and planet, there's one foodstuff we'll never be short of: jellyfish. Eaten by the Chinese for millennia and served as sashimi in Japan, the world's warming oceans are increasingly replete with this under-appreciated animal. Fuchsia Dunlop, the leading writer on Chinese food, says: "Jellyfish has no taste at all. In China, it is prized for its slippery-crisp texture. The smooth hood of the creature, known as 'jellyfish skin' is usually cut into ribbons, dressed and eaten like a salad appetiser, while the frilly oral arms, known as 'jellyfish head', have an even crisper texture and are served as they are, with a sprightly vinegar dip." Just make sure you can identify the edible species correctly: some, such as the Portuguese man o' war, has tentacles so venomous that they can cause death.

2017 Raffles Dubai celebrates 10th anniversary

The distinctive pyramid-shaped hotel marked the first Raffles outside Asia when it opened in 2007

Raffles is a brand synonymous with history and while its Dubai hotel can't quite match the flagship

Singapore property – which celebrates its 130th anniversary this year – it is chalking up an important milestone of its own as it celebrates its 10th anniversary this month.

The opening of the pyramid-shaped Raffles Dubai in 2007 marked another key landmark at the time, as it was the first Raffles Hotel outside Asia, and today the luxury brand – now part of the Accor Group, following its acquisition of Fairmont Raffles Hotels International (FRHI) last year – has 11 properties (see box).

The hotel's location and services provide wide-ranging appeal, luring GCC shoppers looking for a convenient base next to Wafi Mall and business travellers seeking a comfortable base close to Dubai International Airport. Japanese and Italian food lovers frequently head to TOMO and Solo Bistronomia & Vino Bar respectively.

To celebrate the anniversary, the hotel has launched a '10 Years of Luxury' experience, offering accommodation in a premium suite, private in-suite dining, deluxe Egyptian Gold & Caviar facial treatment for two and VIP airport transfers – which start from AED9,000.

But if that's beyond your budget, you can book Signature rooms for a special rate of AED1,000 before the



end of November, complete with private balconies offering striking city views.

In another fitting touch, mixologists have come up with a 'Straub Fizz' cocktail, in honour of Mr Straub who was the first guest, and he will return this month to toast the anniversary.

As part of the celebrations, the hotel will unveil 'the world's most expensive shoe', with the diamond artpieces created by Debbie Wingham valued at \$15 million (AED55 million). ■

RAFFLES HOTELS & RESORTS' OPENINGS

1887	Raffles Hotel Singapore
1997	Raffles Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh, Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor, Siem Reap
2007	Raffles Dubai
2010	Raffles Makkah Palace, Saudi Arabia, Le Royal Monceau Raffles Paris
2011	Raffles Praslin Seychelles
2012	Raffles Makati
2013	Raffles Hainan
2014	Raffles Istanbul
2015	Raffles Jakarta

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