

M/V ANTARCTIC DREAM

Modern Day Explorers Wanted by Antarctic Dream Expeditions



ABAV
Brazilian Travel
Agents Fight the
Good Fight



Brazilian Travel Agents Fight the Good Fight

The 34th annual congress of the Association of Brazilian Agents featured glorious beaches, exciting cities, a rich culture, a fast-evolving airline environment and a whopping good stand against the zero commission phenomenon.

BY MARK ZUSSMAN

The Feira das Américas, the trade show component of the annual congress of the Association of Brazilian Travel Agents, or ABAV, has long provided a rough — but nevertheless extremely telling — indicator of who's feeling his oats in Brazil. Enter the main pavilion. Embratur, the federal entity for travel and tourism marketing, can reliably be counted on to occupy the large space immediately opposite the door. But what entity has sprung the big bucks to occupy the equally high-visibility space directly opposite Embratur?

A couple of years ago it was Búzios, the little resort town on the coast of Rio de Janeiro state that rightly or wrongly styles itself the Brazilian answer to Saint-Tropez but, one way or another, has, despite its minuscule population, risen to the rank of number seven destination for foreign tourists in all of the vast country.

In ABAV's recently concluded 34th annual edition, the muscle-flexer facing down Embratur was the Northeastern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte.

Do not confuse Rio Grande do Norte (the Big River of the North, to translate the state's name literally) with Rio Grande do Sul (or again, to translate literally, the Big River of the South.)

Rio Grande do Sul is an extremely prosperous state way way down on Brazil's temperate-zone border with both Argentina and Uruguay and, if this doesn't make intuitive sense, best get out a map. Rio Grande do Sul, as it happens, is home to Brazil's single longest beach, 131 miles end to end, more than a touch monotonous frankly — not even the people who use it deny that — and with cold waters and sometimes nasty winds. RS was itself amply represented at ABAV, but, since beach isn't what people go down that way for, beach is not what RS was selling. RS was promoting its scores of vineyards with their excellent (though underpromoted) reds and their world-class sparkling wines, its storybook mountain towns, its culturally rich capital of Porto Alegre, its dude ranches, and its unique cowpunching frontier culture.

Rio Grande do Norte is something else altogether and, if Brazil were to be compared with Europe, the two states might be said to be as different from each other, despite their speaking approximately the same language, as, say, Italy and Denmark. RN is up in the Brazilian tropics. It's a lot less rich than RS. No one will fight you on that one. RN would also fit

into RS about five and a third times.

So what makes RN so spunky this year?

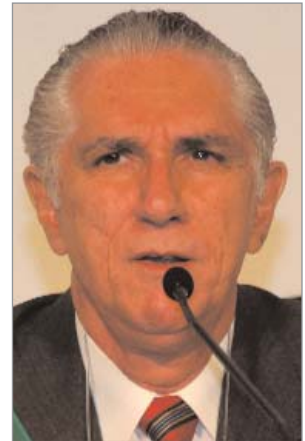
Heard of Pipa?

Nothing against Rio Grande do Sul. RS is a destination that at least a few Americans should get to know. The rewards there are high. But there's always one hottest beach in Brazil.

There was a time when that hottest beach in Brazil was Jericoacoara in the Northeastern State of Ceará. Jeri's watershed year was 1994, when the Washington Post, more or less out of the blue, pointed to that particular stretch of sand and dune and savage rock as one of the ten most beautiful beaches on the planet. Jeri, as the bird flies (not that it's anything like as easy by land), is a few hundred miles up the coast from the northern border of RN, and Jeri, unsurprisingly, is still one of this world's great head-turning escapes.

For the past however many years, nevertheless, the beach that has probably been the hottest of the hot in all of great Brazil is Pipa, give or take some 50 miles south of the RN capital of Natal, where the U.S. once, for a certain spell in WWII, operated its busiest air base anywhere in the world. (Natal, given its projection out into the South Atlantic, was the inevitable refueling point for the aircraft of the era on the route from the Southern U.S. to Dakar to North Africa and Europe.)

Just how Pipa became (arguably at least) Brazil's current hottest beach is not exactly easy to say. But, no question, Pipa has been discovered. It's been discovered by Brazilians — and not just locals, either. It's been discovered by Italians, by South Africans, by Australians, by Israelis, by the French, by the Dutch. Even by a few Americans. Everyone — or nearly — needless to say is gorgeous at Pipa. Everyone — or nearly — is young. The routine: beach, under the cliffs or inside a cove, by day. The beaches in fact are many. They include the Praia do Amor (of Love — it's heart-shaped) the Praia dos Afogados (of the Drowned Ones), the Praia do Moleque (of the Ragamuffin), and so on. The crowd, being young, nourishes itself to a large extent on inexpensive crepes, not that



JOAO MARTINS

there aren't Italian and French restaurants and restaurants of many another national stripe for the more mature and those with money in the bank and credit cards. Music in the bars — Brazilian pop, jazz, reggae — goes on till dawn.

Nor is RN only Pipa. No room to detail them here, but there are gorgeous beaches, all with top-notch hospitality infrastructure, everywhere on this tropical coast.

A Different ABAV?

Check me on this, someone else who has been attending ABAV congresses virtually since the Year One, but didn't this last October's event seem just a touch lackluster overall? And, if so, was it that the Northeastern state of Bahia, always the life of this or any other party, behaved this year as if it had taken the pledge? Unless I'm mistaken, caipirinhas, the uniquely powerful Brazilian cocktail, flowed less liberally at the Bahia installation than they usually do. Unless I'm mistaken, the Bahianas, the heavy-set dark-skinned ladies in immaculate white turbans and equally immaculate hooped dresses, were less aggressive in tying Bonfim ribbons onto visitors' wrists than usual.

(Bonfim ribbons, for those who don't know them, have to be the most ingenious promotional item ever invented. They are little strips of colored cotton fabric on which are printed the name of our Lord of Bonfim, simultaneously, under the terms of Bahian syncretism, Jesus and the African deity Oxalá. If the cost of producing one of these things is a penny, it's a lot, but once a Bahiana has tied the thingamajig onto your wrist and you've made your wish, you have to leave it on until, months later, it has worn so thin that it at long last washes off in the shower. Get it off any other way and, instead of having your wish realized, you risk a mighty torrent of bad luck.)

Bahia of course is as fabulously exotic and elegant as ever. Not for nothing is Bahia's capital city of Salvador known as the black Rome, for nowhere else in the world have Catholicism and African faiths interwoven with each other to make such gorgeous patterns. Bahia's Carnival, moreover, totally different from Rio's, is Brazil's single greatest rival to Rio's and many people, depending on musical tastes and other criteria, actually prefer it.

Bahian voters, however, have just opted to put a new political party in the statehouse for the first time in 16 years. It's to be hoped that the new state government appreciates what the old state government accomplished in the area of tourism promotion. It's to be hoped that, in their search for new directions, they do not throw out the baby with the bathwater. One way or another, though, the transition in Bahia may possibly account for some of ABAV's seeming mutedness this year.

Still, it was not just Bahia that seemed to be on tranquilizers at the recently concluded congress. The host city of Rio de Janeiro showed up at its own Riocentro Convention Center — the largest facility of its kind in all of South America — with-

out a towering paper maché replica of the Corcovado Mountain Christ statue, one of the 21 finalists in the current New Seven Wonders of the World competition, and neither did Rio haul in, as it has in the past, a monumental plywood and paint replica of the Lapa Arches, once an aqueduct, now the roadbed for a quaint trolley, that are the symbol of the city's bohemian nightlife district. Foz do Iguaçu kept good company by showing up without any replica of the great falls. ABAV this year was in fact so low key, so lacking in institutional swagger, that it might have been taken more for a workshop than for the great party it has always been in the past.

Stepping in for Varig

The bright side: ABAV was less like a party than usual and therefore less fun. But — the promised bright side — it was more businesslike. And nowhere was it more businesslike than in the airline department. For anyone who may have been blinking, there were names that had to have been unfamiliar — TAF (with a niche market in Northeast Brazil and Cayenne in neighboring French Guyana, hence the in-flight magazine in Portuguese and French, sorry, no English), WebJet (serving Belo Horizonte, Salvador, Porto Alegre and Curitiba from a hub in — a rarity nowadays — not São Paulo but Rio), OceanAir (about which, more below).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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ABAV FROM PAGE 3

The reason for the atmosphere at once exciting and businesslike in the airline department was the recent near-death experience of Varig Brazilian Airlines. Varig was once Brazil's airborne pride and joy in the same way that Pan American was once the airborne pride and joy of the U.S., and just as an American in trouble abroad may once have thrown himself on the mercy of PanAm even before that of the closest U.S. embassy, so might Brazilians have done with Varig. Varig in its heyday may have been running as many as 7000 seats a week between the U.S. and Brazil and that, just so that there's no ambiguity, would have been in each of the two directions.

Since Varig's near death experience and subsequent restructuring, Varig's international destinations number exactly four — Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Caracas, Frankfurt. Varig still exists — or something like Varig exists under the old name — but there's no getting around the truth. The company isn't what it used to be, and Varig's name no longer appears on departure boards anywhere in North America. Just like that, thousands of seats disappeared from the skies between the U.S. and the largest country in South America.

So how do you now, under the new regime, get your Brazil-bound clients down to Pipa Beach — or to wherever else they may happen to be heading in our all but boundless *Brasilzão*?



GOL Airlines – it may not be known yet in the U.S. but it's a phenomenon in Brazil and throughout South America.

Four U.S. carriers do the job at least on the trunk routes. They are American, United, Continental and Delta. But that's just to begin to explore the possibilities.

Muscular TAM, Brazil's new number one carrier, provides several daily frequencies, with extravagant front-cabin service, southbound both from Miami and from New York, and once in its own homeland TAM provides ongoing service to dozens of domestic destinations as well as to Argentina and elsewhere.

More Carriers

Agents should also not overlook third-country carriers. JAL provides non-stop service out of JFK. Air Canada provides service via Toronto, AeroMexico and Mexicana via Mexico City, TACA via Lima, Copa via Panama, LAB Bolivian via Santa Cruz, Aerolineas Argentinas

via Buenos Aires, and LAN via Lima and Santiago and, though this is more than to scratch the service, it is not to exhaust the options.

Adventuresome students in the New England area might, for example, be tempted to catch TACV's weekly service from Boston to Cabo Verde, once a watering station for Portuguese sailing vessels on their way to Brazil (and other newly discovered treasure lands), then continue on with TACV to Fortaleza, a mere three and a half hours in flying time from Cabo Verde, in the aforementioned Northeastern Brazilian state of Ceará. From there, overland, up the coast to Jericoacoara? Down the coast to Pipa?

As for OceanAir, watch for this ambitious young Brazilian carrier to turn up in Los Angeles sometime next year. With OceanAir's plans to open routes to Jo'burg, Lagos and Luanda, OceanAir will likely be the ideal carrier for U.S. West Coast travelers not merely on their way to Brazil but also on their way to Sub-Saharan Africa.

GOL, the number two Brazilian carrier, a phenomenon whose publicly traded stock has recently landed another four Brazilians on the Forbes Magazine list of the world's billionaires, has not yet announced plans to inaugurate service to the U.S. GOL right now is busy consolidating its route network throughout Brazil and the neighboring

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South American republics. GOL is also getting ready to inaugurate service to Mexico City. GOL's planting its flag in the U.S., though, can only be a matter of time.

ABAV this year drew something on the order of 700 exhibitors from all the many corners of Brazil, from the neighbor republics of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela but also from as far away as Turkey and Israel, Qatar, India, Thailand. Rich Brazilians have a lot of money. They travel extravagantly. Who wouldn't want to make a pitch for their business? The total number of travel professionals in attendance was said to be 23,000.

Agents Fight Back

In one plenary session having to do with the fate of travel agents not just in Brazil but worldwide, ASTA president and CEO Cheryl Corey Hudak warned that the "zero commission" phenomenon was sooner or later going to catch up with Brazil, too. She had good advice for Brazilian agents, moreover, on how they could survive and even prosper in a zero-commission environment. In fact, though, Brazilian travel agents are still selling some 80 percent of all air tickets in the land (by contrast with travel agent sales of something like 50 percent of all air tickets in the U.S.), 95 percent and more of cruise ship passages (by contrast with approximately 87 percent by way of travel agents in the U.S.), and so on.

In addition, Brazilian courts have held travel agents' commissions on air fares at a minimum of 7 percent on domestic flights and 6 percent on international flights, and there is a scheme afoot to establish a minimum 3 percent commission by law. Brazilian travel agents are also astonishingly articulate on how so-called Comissão Zero isn't even grammatical — or, as we would say in English, it's a contradiction in terms.

To be on the safe side, Brazilian agents are already, nevertheless, rebranding themselves as travel consultants and as advocates of the consumer as against the occasionally dubious practices of the airlines. One initiative of the Brazilian travel agents is, for example, a bill under which, when an airline sees fit to make a too-good-to-be-true pricing offer, the airline will be required to disclose the number of seats available at the price.

This way the traveler does not wind up sitting at his computer all night in a futile effort to locate product that sold out in the first half hour. Count on the tug of war to continue in Brazil for a long time to come.

Finally, there are grumblings that the Rio city fathers, the Rio travel trade and the directors of Riocentro have been less good hosts to ABAV than as promised when ABAV gave up its itinerant ways and settled into Rio and Riocentro as permanent congress home not so very many years ago. Like where's that promised air conditioning? Some abavianos are ready to move on to São Paulo. Others would just as soon go back to roving. The next ABAV congress is nevertheless scheduled to

take place in Rio, at Riocentro, from October 24 to October 27, 2007.

ABAV, www.abav.com.br

SOUTH STAR TOURS RELEASES NEW 2007 CATALOG

South Star Tours, the West Coast - Los Angeles based Tour Operator specializing in travel to Central and South America, has just released its new catalog for 2007. South Star Tours has been in business for over 16 years and organizes tours for individual travelers as well as groups.

The new catalog features classic tours such as Inca Empire (seven-days/six-nights) which includes a visit of Machu Picchu (priced at \$1,059. per person), as well as new tours such as the exclusive Shore Excursions, which, for example, offers tours in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and the Falkland Islands including transfers from and to the port, or the "Rio's Carnaval Extravaganza," a seven-day once-in-a-lifetime experience during carnival in Rio de Janeiro (priced at \$ 1,699 per person including airfare from Miami). Travel Agent commissions start at 11 percent and can be as high as 13 percent for bookings of 15 or more passengers. To celebrate the new season, they are also offering a \$50 bonus for any bookings until the end of April.

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Modern Day Explorers Wanted by Antarctic Dream Expeditions

Visit the Most Beautiful and Unexploited Areas of Antarctica and South Patagonia Aboard the *M/V Antarctic Dream*.

BY JENNIFER M. LANE

Antarctic Dream Expeditions' new season will feature two expeditions to South Patagonia and the Antarctic. The company, a visionary and pioneer in Chilean Antarctic Tourism, has combined its best energies, resources and professionals to provide the expedition cruise of a lifetime. They believe in embracing nature, not destroying it, and guests will visit some of the purest and most beautiful unexploited areas of the planet.

The Antarctic Dream

The "Antarctic Dream," is an Antarctic passenger ship that was reconditioned with the best available technology and comfort. Antarctic Dream was built for expeditions and has a 100 A strengthened hull for navigation in ice. A former Chilean naval ship (Piloto Pardo) also has four decks, 39 staterooms (all outside) with four suites, 16 superior staterooms and 19 standard outside. Guests will be awed while navigating between fiords and channels with unspoiled landscapes, full of native forests, glaciers and majestic millennial icebergs.

"We at Antarctic Dream Expeditions provide a luxury destination, Antarc-

tica, and Patagonia along with a premium experience on board the Antarctic Dream," states David Randon, Director of Sales North America, Antarctic Dream Expeditions. "Comfortable staterooms and fine dining is what our "Guest Explorers" will find upon return from their expeditions."

Antarctic Dream Expedition

Depart for the Antarctic from Ushuaia, Argentina. Wandering albatrosses, storm petrels and other seabirds will escort the vessel as it sails south across Drake Passage. King George Island, the biggest island of the South Shetlands, gives guests a taste of what the Antarctic really is. Prior to departing, and if the weather is good, passengers are offered a short helicopter over-flight to admire the landscape.

Besides the magnificent scenery, expect to see a variety of native wildlife. Birds to look out for are blue-eyed shags, gulls, cape petrels, skuas, snowy sheathbills and Antarctic terns. Marine mammals include Weddell crab-eaters and leopard seals while orcas, humpback and mink whales may be spotted at close range. The program includes

the first landing on the White Continent (Neko Bay) and another on Port Lockroy (Gaudier Island).

The cruise continues sailing south through the narrow Lemaire Channel whose high, sheer cliffs suggest that no passage could be found. Once through the channel, known as one of the most beautiful places in the world, and provided climate and ice conditions are good enough, visit Petermann Island which is the most southern land point of the expedition. Here, disembark and see the colony of Gentoo penguins. At Pleneau there should be the opportunity to take zodiacs (rubber rafts for 20) out and visit impressive ice formations.

At Paradise Bay - Cuverville Island if weather permits, explorers will disembark or use the zodiacs. Beside its dramatic scenery, Cuverville Island it is home to one of the largest colony of Gentoo penguins and skuas. Deception Island is the largest active volcano in the area. Disembark in Whaler's Bay and Pendulum Cove, where adventurers can take part in the unique experience of swimming in this water.

South Patagonia Expedition

The South Patagonia Expedition takes guests through places of incomparable beauty, starting from the port of Punta Arenas, Chile. During the expedition, navigate the Straits of Magellan, the channels and fiords zone, and then visit the Port of Ushuaia in Argentina and the mythical Cape Horn.

The journey begins by sailing to the Kyats Fiords, and then to the Martinez and Hyatt Fiords. At The Darwin Mountain Range, marvel at the glorious glaciers that have been sculpted over thousands of years. Board the zodiacs

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and venture to the beach to appreciate the rich vegetation and birdlife. Sail through the Whaler's Channel towards the Garibaldi Fiord. The Garibaldi Fiord is surrounded by high mountains; guests make their way through a narrow channel and arrive at the spectacular glacier which is situated in the Alberto D'Agostini National Park. Afterwards, sail through the north-western branch of the Beagle Channel, known as "Glacier Avenue."

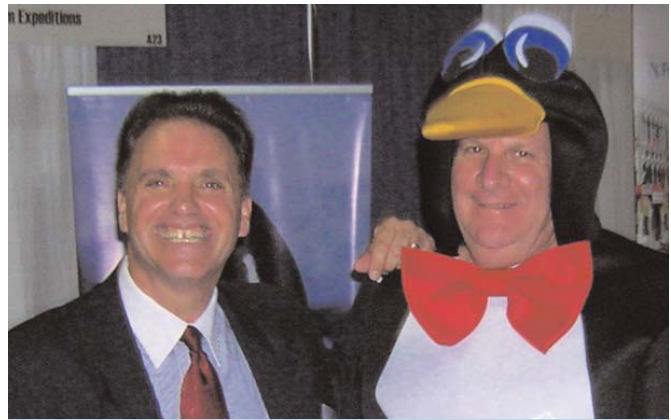
After stopping in Ushuaia, the southernmost port in Argentina for some sightseeing and shopping, the Antarctic Dream will continue sailing through the Beagle Channel crossing Nassau Bay and stopping at Calera Leon in Cape Horn, the southernmost spot on the continent. Depending on weather conditions, a visit to Cape Horn may be possible, home to the National Park and the great Albatross Monument which honors all sailors who have died in this area. After this unique experience, head back to Picton Island to take a walk and see the beauty of the sub-Antarctic.

Continue sailing through the Beagle Channel, disembark on one of the fiords, approach incredible glaciers from the zodiacs, and behold the beauty and splendor of the surroundings. On the return and weather permitting, enjoy unsurpassed aerial views of the D'Agostini National Park on a helicopter flight.

Live Like an Explorer

Cruise expeditions to these remote areas are not for everyone. One reason is that it is cold! In general, the coldest temperature on the Peninsula is at freezing 32 F (00C), but with wind and weather conditions, it can seem much colder. Also, participants will be walking on ice fields and riding zodiacs to destinations most people could only imagine, and those with physical limitations (difficulty walking/climbing), may not be able to take part in the explorations.

Passengers on a typical voyage range from their 30s to their 80s. The expeditions attract independent-minded travelers from around the world, interested in exploring remote regions.



Dave Randon, Director of Sales North America and Steve Kravitz (Penguin), PR Consultant for Antarctic Dream Expeditions at a recent National Tradeshow.

During the voyage, new landing places are often discovered. The exact route and program varies according to ice and weather conditions and the wildlife encountered. Flexibility is the key to success for this expedition.

Explore in 2007-2008

2007 departure dates for the 11-day Antarctic Dream Expedition are November 9, 19, 29, and December 9, 19, 29. In 2008, departures are January 8, 18, 28, and February 7, 17, 27. Rates Start at \$5,990 (double).

Rates for the eight day South Patagonia Expedition Start at \$1,600 (double) and departures in 2007 are September 15, 22, 29, October 6, 13, 20, 27, and November 3. In 2008 departures are March 15, 22, 29 and April 5.

Mr. Randon extends the call to all travel partners for 2007: "We are in a growth mode and see more expedition ships in the future. Our goal in 2007 is to provide an aggressive reduced rate for our travel partners. With all the hype in Hollywood, March of the Penguins and Happy Feet, the level of interest and bookings are quite good. The profit margins for selling our product are huge!"

Antarctic Dream Expeditions, 877-972-3531, drandon@optonline.net, www.antarctic.cl

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IGUAZÚ GRAND HOTEL RESORT & CASINO WINS WORLD TRAVEL AWARD

Iguazú Grand Hotel Resort & Casino in Argentina received the highest World Travel Award as South America's Leading Casino Resort for the year 2006 by 165,000 travel agents from 14 countries worldwide.

Owner and President, James J. Shasha acquired Iguazú Grand Hotel Resort & Casino in 2002, then refurbished and developed it and it was accepted as a member of the prestigious Leading Small Hotels of the World. It is now a winner of the acclaimed international World Travel Award.

The 107-room hotel is the newest and most luxurious hotel in Argentina at Iguazú Falls, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Iguazú Grand is the only hotel on either side of the Brazil-Argentina border to offer a casino, gourmet dining, and live theatrical entertainment.

World Travel Awards were established 13 years ago to acknowledge, reward, and cel-

brate extraordinary achievements in all sectors of the global travel, one of the fastest-growing industries on earth. Dedicated travel professionals, and their clients as well, regard the World Travel Award as the gold standard of industry excellence.

Iguazu Grand Hotel,
www.iguazugrandhotel.com

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Open Door is an independent incoming tour operator with Dutch management, specialized in organizing travel arrangements and eco-friendly tours within Brazil with high quality service and competitive prices for tailor-made FIT, Groups and Series bookings.

Open Door provides free custom designed programs offering personalized and exceptional level of service that allows travelers to decide their own route and schedules. They supply various travel services in Brazil ranging from tour-packages, airport transfers, hotel-reservations, daily excursions, domestic flights, multi-destination programs and more.

Open Door is operating programs to Brazil, one of the most fascinating countries in the world, full of magnificent places, both natural and man-made, certified by UNESCO as "World Heritage Sites."

Open Doors group of experienced and creative industry professionals is fluent in English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. They offer advice, program improvements and alternatives where necessary. Most of their customers are travel agents from all over the world for whom they operate as a destination management company for the whole country or as incoming specialist for tours to the Central West Region only. However, with technology such as the internet they are also offering individual travel packages online.

The main target in all their operations and routes across Brazil, is to proportionate the entire satisfaction of travelers.

Open Door, www.opendoortur.com.br

AMILIK LUXURY SPA IN PATAGONIA TO REOPEN AS ZULIKA

After months of deliberation, EcoTulum Resorts has made the decision to weather-proof Amilik, its luxury spa lodge in South America, and revise the project, renaming the resort Zulika and converting the hotels wilderness tents into all-season structures equipped to pamper guests 365 days a year. The changes come with the growing demand by travelers to experience all of Patagonia's seasons.

The upgrades to the 10 luxury accommodations will include durable, insulated walls (instead of tented rooms as originally proposed) and manually controlled heating systems so guests can determine the temperature in each individual cabin. Though many initiatives from the original proposal are still under way, some aspects of the Amilik project will be sculpted to fit the Zulika concept, the details of which are still pending.

Developers project that the weather-proofing enhancements will push back the resorts launch date until fall of 2007. The good news for travelers is that a second property called Ulaa, located on the same 586 acres of wilderness opened in December 2006. Ulaa is the ideal destination for travelers seeking an all-seasons wilderness retreat.

The resort, an eco-adventure property hidden deep in the Andes Mountains, features seven rustic, yet comfortable cabins tucked away far from civilization. By day, guests are encouraged to indulge in wellness treatments courtesy of Maya Spa, or engage in a number of featured activities, to include adventure boating, hiking through the surrounding forest, exploring the village culture of nearby Segundo Corral, canoeing in the property's two lakes and river, horseback riding with local guides, mapping the stars at night, farming the organic gardens, and cooking lessons that allow guests to harvest ingredients from the organic farm.

Ulaa, www.maya-spa.cl; Zulika, www.ecotulum.com; EcoTulum Resorts & Spa, 888-898-9922, ecotulum@eco-res.com, www.ecotulum.com

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MISTRAL TO STAY IN SERVICE UNTIL SUMMER 2007



M/Y Mistral

Quasar Expeditions has announced it will keep its 12 passenger motor yacht, *M/Y Mistral* in service through June 30, 2007. This means that her inventory is now open for bookings from the beginning of January 2007 through June 30, 2007.

Bookings are on a first come, first serve basis with preference given to charters, especially for the first two weeks of January 2007.

Quasar had intended to take the yacht out of service at the end of 2006, but Quasar's fleet is nearly sold out through April 2007, with some space selling well into 2008.

2007 retail pricing for the *Mistral* is \$27,500 for charters and \$2,490 per pax FIT. The *Mistral's* inventory will be posted online. Quasar Expeditions, www.quasarex.com

SPECIAL PRE- AND POST- TOURS WITH SPORTSTOUR CHILE

Sportstour has created three pre-/post-tours alternatives for all *Travel World News* readers in order to mutually increase cruise related business through such programs. Special amenities on Sportstour net rates will be applied for all agents with firm bookings this month.

The Atacama Desert (five-days / four-nights) addresses outer planetary sceneries, culture and archaeology, and exploring an oasis in the middle of the driest desert in the world. Considered to be the center of the "Atacameña" culture, San Pedro has experienced an extraordinary growth in recent years due to its attraction for tourists from all over the world. Guests will take part in excursions to see the surroundings of this oasis in the middle of the desert, including the Moon Valley; El Tatio Geysers; the small villages of Caspana and Chiu-Chiu; and Toconao Village and Atacama Salt Flat, to observe the wide variety of birds that inhabit the salty lagoons, especially pink flamingoes.

The Wine Country (five-days / four-nights) takes in eight wineries, with six wine varieties in four days, in three valleys in one country. Visit three of the most important vineyard valleys.

The Casablanca Valley is one of the most important wine

producing regions of the country. A cool coastal climate makes this area ideal for white wines. Trip will visit Viña Mar and William Cole wineries.

Stay in Santiago and visit Cousiño-Macul vineyard located in the heart of the Maipo Valley. It has kept the traditional storage combined with new oenological techniques and is one of the best-known vineyards in South America and throughout the world.

The Concha y Toro winery is one of the largest exporters of fine wines in Chile, famous all over The World for its Casillero del Diablo.

A journey through Chile's Sixth Region - Colchagua Valley is the green heart of the country and home to more than 70 vineyards.

Spend one night in Santa Cruz to visit Casa Lapostolle, Bisquertt, Los Vascos and Viu-Manent wineries and the Colchagua Museum. The last day will finish with a cultural city tour in Santiago.

Easter Island (four days / three nights) showcases Rapa Nui Culture, hiking, diving and more. A full day excursion starts with a visit to Vaihu, an ancient site in ruins. Continue towards Ahu Akahanga, a large Ahu (platforms) with four big faller statues and where, according to legends, the tomb of the first king of the Island is in this area. From there visit the Rano Raraku quarry, a classic symbol of the Island and original factory of the moais, the gigantic symbolic statues of Rapa Nui. Lunch will be served at Akanakena beach.

A half-day tour starts with a three hours visit to Vinapu with its incredible stone walls similar to those built by the ancient Incas. From there, enjoy an opportunity to see most of the Island, as well as its reed-covered lake. On the West side of the slopes there is an impressive view of the Islets Motu Nui, Motu Iti and Motu Kao-Kao.

There is also a three hour tour to the famous Ahu Akivi, where seven statues overlook the sea from the Island, closely together in their original standing position. Also visit the local museum.

Sportstour, www.sportstour.cl, mailbox@sportstour.cl

CRILLON TOURS "INTENSIVE TITICACA" FROM \$29

Crillon Tours features a special launching offer until the end of January: half-day "Intensive Titicaca" at \$29 per person.

This includes the Islands of Pariti, "The new archaeological discovery on Lake Titicaca," and the local Museum of Pariti displaying over 100 of the finest Tiwanaku ceramic pieces. Kalauta Island is the largest ancient necropolis on Lake Titicaca; navigate through swinging Totorá reed canals and visit Chullpas-Mortuary Towers.

The Urus-Iruitos Floating Islands and the Quewayá Sustainable Project is chance to step back in time through 5,000 years of history. This Sustainable Tourism Project is designed to contribute to the preservation of both local indigenous and nature.

Also take in the unforgettable view of the everlasting snow peaks of the Andes Cordillera.

Crillon Tours S.A., ngutierr@titicaca.com, titicaca@entelnet.bo

KIANA RESORTS AT PLAYA DOMINICAL PLANS FOR 2007 SOFT OPENING

In mid-2007 a new world-class boutique resort will be unveiled on Costa Rica's Southern Pacific Coast and mountainous rainforest: Kiana Resort at Playa Dominical.

The resort is comprised of 26 beachfront villas grouped into four "village clusters." It features a full service spa, an oceanfront gourmet restaurant, four pools and a fitness gym, all surrounded by a nature preserve filled with exotic wildlife.

Kiana is set amidst more than 2,000 acres of mountainous rainforest, 80 percent of which will remain jungle green space. Kiana guests will be able to leave their door to nearly empty beaches or to explore the jungle. This unique setting will lure outdoor enthusiasts with activities including surfing, horseback rides through the jungle, canopy tours, sunning on the beach, and trips to the Osa Peninsula, which National

Geographic called "the most bio-diverse place on earth".

The living and entertainment spaces will have a "Tropical Modern" theme and the open floor plans feature full kitchens along with decks and covered terraces. Guests have the option to reserve a two-bedroom villa. Villas can also be divided and booked as a one-bedroom suite or guestroom with a king size or two twin-size beds.

Cuisines will be sourced with seasonal and local ingredients. Guests will enjoy culinary creations from the main restaurant's open-stage kitchen, as well as in-villa dining, beachside dining, private caterings small group functions.

Additional amenities and services offered at Kiana include in- villa and resort-wide concierge services, a multi-purpose library and boardroom, daily and evening house-keeping services, laundry valet service, private tour guides, and educational presentations and programs.

Kiana Resorts at Playa Dominical, www.kiana-dominical.com

learn about the history, techniques, symbolism and use of many different textiles and folk art. From small remote Maya villages to world famous museums, guests are accompanied by specialist guides and enjoy privileged access into Guatemala life. Visitors can delve deep into the rich cultural tapestry of this fascinating country.

The tour begins in Guatemala City where guest enjoy a private, behind the scenes viewing of the famous Ixchel Textile museum, guided by the museum's curator. This tour focuses on textiles and naif art and provides a foundation for the rest of the tour. Next is the romantic colonial town of La Antigua to learn about Spanish colonialism and visit some colonial architecture, as well as exploring both colonial and contemporary art galleries. Up next are the traditional Maya Highland areas of Guatemala and visits to small villages to visit weaving cooperatives where traditional natural methods of dying and weaving are still employed. View small naif artists at work in their home studios and also learn about Maya spiritualism. The tour also visits colorful markets where guests can barter for crafts.

Guests visiting during the month of June will also be able to visit the prestigious Juannio Art Exhibition in Guatemala City. After soaking up all the cultural and artistic experiences of the Guatemala Highlands, guests can also choose to extend their trip to fly up into the northern rainforest area of Guatemala.

Viaventure, info@viaventure.com, www.viaventure.com

VIAVENTURE OFFERS GUATEMALAN ART TOUR

Guatemala is a haven for art enthusiasts of all kinds. From traditional textiles to naif art to woodcarving to contemporary artists, Guatemala offers guests a way to experience centuries old artistic techniques and styles and see them still in use in modern day life.

Viaventure offers a seven day tour with a specific focus on art so that guests can

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DISCOVERY, EXPLORATION AND RELAXATION AT CHAN CHICH LODGE IN BELIZE

Chan Chich Lodge is located on Gallon Jug Estate in north-western Belize. This lies within the largest contiguous forest north of the Amazon basin. Conservation efforts to sustain and preserve the tri-national Maya Forest ("La Selva Maya") are underway with collaborative efforts undertaken in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico. Thanks to the efforts of owner, Barry Bowen to control hunting and other illegal activities over the past 20+ years, wildlife has thrived.

The Lodge is reachable by a 30 minute charter flight from within most locations within Belize, which can be arranged upon booking.

They also provide a vehicle transfer, and a road/river day-trip coming in to Gallon Jug via the New River, stopping at the ruins at Lamanai, and then onward to

Chan Chich. Auto rentals are available and the drive takes approximately three and a half hours on all-weather roads.

The lodge consists of 12 cabanas and one two-bedroom Villa. With a screened-in pool and Jacuzzi, fully stocked bar and excellent cuisine, guests' every desire will be fulfilled by the exceptional facilities and outstanding service provided.

Retrace the footsteps of the Maya, wander the extensive trail system, and discover the flora, fauna and Maya history unique to this tropical paradise. With an unparalleled abundance of wildlife (and the best chance to see the elusive jaguar in its natural habitat) Chan Chich is an extraordinary destination for naturalists, birders, and for those seeking an authentic retreat to the jungle.

After an exciting day of discovery and exploration, relax at the well-stocked bar, take a dip in the pool watching the monkeys swing by, watch the sun go down in the Jacuzzi, or just lay in the hammock.

Using fresh produce grown locally (seasonally dependent), Chan Chich offers a balance of both traditional Belizean meals and exceptional international cuisine.

Activities in addition to walking, vehicle tours and birdwatching, include horseback riding, canoeing, and day-trips to La Milpa, a Mayan site located in the Rio Bravo Conservation Area run by Programme for Belize, and to the significant ruins at Lamanai, the second largest Mayan site in Belize. The Lamanai transfer may be done entirely by road or in conjunction with a one hour boat ride down the New River from Orange Walk to the site. They highly recommend the road/river option - this is their most popular external trip.

Rates start at \$205 (double) and \$795 for the villa (double). No charge for children under 12.

Chan Chich Lodge, 800-343-8009, reservations@chanchich.com, info@chanchich.com, www.chanchich.com

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HACIENDA DEL MAR RESORT & SPA NAMED A "TOP RESORT" IN MEXICO

The readers of Condé Nast Traveler have named the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Resort & Spa, Los Cabos, among the 15 "Top Resorts" in Mexico, according to the annual Top 100 Reader's Choice Awards published in the magazine's November issue.

"The readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* are a discerning group and we are honored that they consider our resort to be among the best not only in Los Cabos but in all of Mexico," said Marcelo Moretti, General Manager of the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Resort & Spa, Los Cabos. "With improvements such as our recent spa expansion, we will continue to exceed guests' expectations."

Readers picked 15 resorts based on activities, facilities, food and dining, location, overall design, rooms and service. Since 1988, a select group of Condé Nast Traveler readers have taken the annual sur-

vey. Approximately 27,957 readers participated in the 2005 survey, conducted by New York-based Mediamark Research, Inc. Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Resort & Spa, www.sheratonloscabos.com

NEW RIU PROPERTY OPENS IN VALLARTA

RIU has officially opened its newest resort: the Riu Vallarta in Vallarta, Mexico.

The Riu Vallarta, a five-star beachfront hotel, is RIU's second property in Puerto Vallarta and its twelfth in Mexico. Built in close proximity to Riu Jalisco, Riu Vallarta features 550 guestrooms and suites some with their own Jacuzzis as well as RIU's renowned All-Inclusive concept and legendary personalized service.

Located on Flamingo Beach, Riu Vallarta is close to Flamingos Golf Club, one of the finest 18-hole championship golf courses in the region and all of the shopping, nightlife and points of attraction in downtown Puerto Vallarta. True to the All-Inclusive by RIU concept, the resort features 24-hour

food and beverages as well as unlimited drinks and meals at a number of bars, gourmet buffets and theme restaurants on-property.

Besides extensive activities program for adults and children, the Riu Vallarta is also an ideal address for meetings, conventions and incentive travel with an array of business and meeting-related services and two conference rooms.

"Puerto Vallarta is truly a unique destination with a charm, personality and magic of its own," said Luis Riu, Chairman of Riu Hotels & Resorts. "We are very pleased with the success of our Mexican resorts. It encourages us even more to continue our growth in this marvelous country. I would like to use this opportunity to say "thank you" to all our loyal partners, to our guests, the great travel agents and our tour operating partners. Thanks for trusting Riu Hotels & Resorts."

Riu Vallarta, www.riu.com/en/hotel-riu-vallarta-mexico.html; Riu Hotels & Resorts, www.Riu.com

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MEXICO TOURISM BOARD CONGRATULATES WORLD HERITAGE ALLIANCE ON ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Mexico's Tourism Board extended their congratulations to the new members of the Alliance and as well as to the World Heritage Alliance (WHA) on their first year in operation. The WHA is an industry-leading initiative that was jointly formed by Expedia and the UN Foundation in 2005 to promote sustainable tourism and awareness of World Heritage sites and communities around the world. Expedia, Inc. and the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation) celebrated the one-year anniversary of the WHA by announcing the addition of 10 new members and four new associate partners at an event in Los Angeles.

Mexico Tourism Secretary and Rodolfo Elizondo and Mexico Tourism Board CEO Magdalena Carral signed a letter of intent with the representatives of the World Heritage Alliance to jointly promote and preserve Mexico's 26 World Heritage sites. The signing, which marked the first time a national tourism secretariat made such an agreement with the Alliance, took place in March during Mexico's largest and most important travel trade fair, Tourism Tianguis 2006.

Mexico's governmental tourism entities joined the founding members of the World Heritage Alliance, Expedia, Inc. and the United Nations Foundation, to educate travelers and the travel industry about the importance of responsible tourism and World Heritage conservation; encourage community-based sustainable tourism development in and around World Heritage sites; and promote the beauty and significance of Mexico's cultural and natural World Heritage sites around the globe.

The nine new members joining the WHA are: Camino Real Hotels, Club Méditerranée (Club Med), El Sueño Hotel and Spa, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, Maroma Resort and Spa, Mayaland Resorts Group, Paraiso de la Bonita Resort and Thalasso, Radar Tours, and Solimar Marketing and Travel. Several of the new members will begin their work in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, home to five of Mexico's 26 World Heritage sites.

The WHA offers two levels of partnership, each being committed to advancing the WHA mission: WHA members and WHA associ-

ALTA TRADE SHOW



200 + retail travel agents plus 30 worldwide destinations, airlines and travel suppliers attended the ALTA Trade Show, October 5, 2006, at the Crowne Plaza Meadowlands Hotel, Secaucus, NJ.

Use of travel agents is expanding in Hispanic communities. ALTA was founded in 1971, and has transformed itself into a major player in the Hispanic Market with members in the Tri-State areas of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, as well as in other major metropolitan areas in the U.S. ALTA membership is more than 140 members with an annual estimated sales volume of \$170 million.

They are an open and independently run organization, offering representation to its members in the travel industry and providing a response to the needs as travel professionals.

Left to right: Angela Vecco, Universal Travel, N.Bergen, NJ; Joaquin Pradas, Executive Director, Alta; Natalia Quesada, American Airlines, NYC; Anthony Marra, AA Vacations, FT Worth TX.

ALTA, www.altatravelusa.com

ate partners. WHA members consists of travel industry companies, such as hotels, tour operators, travel agents, airlines and cruises, among others. WHA associate partners are NGOs, civil society groups, government bodies and other organizations not exclusively devoted to tourism.

Mexico Tourism Board, www.visitmexico.com;

Expedia, www.expedia.com/worldheritage



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HISTORIC HACIENDA INNS NOW OFFERING EQUESTRIAN TOURS IN TEQUILA VALLEY



Historic Hacienda Inns of Western Mexico is offering a series of horseback excursions to see the back roads of Jalisco and Zacatecas.

The restored haciendas and ranches used as lodgings are in the World Heritage Site of the valley of Tequila. They are the latest addition to Historic Hacienda Inns of Western Mexico's initiative to promote rural tourism.

The tours have been designed to guide riders through remote mountain trails, passing through fields of blue agave, cane, and high sierra forests. In addition to the back trails, the archaeological sites of Guachimontones are included along with the petroglyphs of Mascota and the boulders of Piedras Bolas.

The 10 participating haciendas, mansions, and ranches are the home base for the excursions. Some have full service spas and offer yoga and spa treatments, not to mention tequila to unwind.

Each property is paired with another to allow the guest to experience more than one region. More than one tour can be linked. The guides are bi-lingual local cowboys who know the best trails.

The rides include cattle round ups on working ranches, riding with Mexican charros, learning to make tortillas over a campfire, and trying local drinks beyond the famous tequila. Tours can be adapted to all levels of riders and groups up to 12. The tours are from four to 10 days and begin at \$400 all inclusive.

Historic Hacienda Inns,
www.historichaciendainns.com

FRANCISCO XAVIER LOPEZ MENA TO HEAD UP MEXICO TOURISM BOARD

Tourism veteran Francisco Xavier Lopez Mena will be heading up the Mexico Tourism Board (MTB), focusing on consolidating the strong growth that has positioned Mexico as one of the top travel destinations worldwide.

Lopez Mena was appointed the MTB's CEO by incoming president Felipe Calderon. He succeeds Magdalena Carral, who occupied the position since early 2006.

Mr. Lopez Mena brings with him decades of public and private sector experience in tourism and related sectors in Quintana Roo State, home to important tourism destinations, including Cancun, Cozumel, Isla Mujeres, the Mayan Riviera and the

Costa Maya cruise port.

Lopez Mena's past positions in the tourism industry include President of the Cancun Tourism Board and President of the Chamber of Deputies' Tourism Commission, as well as President of the Board of both the ground transportation company Autocar Cancun and the travel agency Excell.

In addition to a distinguished career in tourism, Lopez Mena has also been recognized for his work with the Mexican Red Cross, high-level positions at La Salle University and Board positions at several banks.

A native of Merida, Lopez Mena received an undergraduate law degree from Mexico's Iberoamerican University and also completed additional coursework at Harvard and Tulane Universities in the U.S. as well as at the Instituto de Empresas in Madrid, Spain.

Mexico Tourism Board, www.visitmexico.com

5-STAR LA PUNTA PAPAGAYO PLANNED FOR COSTA RICA

Kirchert Pakonen Development and Regent Hotels & Resorts have announced plans for La Punta Papagayo, a 60-acre, five-star luxury resort that will introduce the style, amenities and services of a world-class getaway to the country's seacoast. The Costa Rican government has granted 60-acres of concession land for the development of the project.

Regent Hotels and Resorts has been named as the hotel management company.

La Punta Papagayo is a joint venture of Blaine Kirchert and Rich Pakonen of Minnesota-based Kirchert Pakonen Development, LLC. It will feature a world-class restaurant, as well as a luxury spa and wellness center. It is scheduled to open in 2009.

Regent Hotels & Resorts, www.theregentexperience.com

ALTA MEMBER AIRLINES TRAFFIC FALLS IN OCTOBER

The Latin American Air Transport Association (ALTA, formerly AITAL) announced that its Member Airlines traffic decreased 7.4 percent in October vs. the same month of last year, while capacity was cut by 3.1 percent.

Reductions in traffic and capacity are mainly due to cutbacks in the number of flights operated by Varig, one of the biggest airlines in the region. The Passenger Load Factor decreased 3.2 percentage points, reaching 68.3 percent.

ALTA Member Airlines carried 7.6 million passengers in October, up 0.4 percent from the same month of last year. The number of passengers carried year-to-date (January '06 -October '06) increased 4.3 percent versus the same period of last year, reaching 76.7 million passengers. During the aforementioned period the traffic remained equal, capacity decreased 0.2 percent, and the passenger load factor reached 71.2 percent, 0.1 percentage points higher than last year.

ALTA (formerly AITAL), www.alta.aero

LATIN AMERICA

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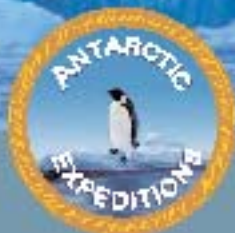
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