PERU: One of the World's Highest Trains Is Back On Track
A WINDOW TO PERU

Machu Picchu

Cotahuasi Canyon

Paucartambo

Ancient Presence

Ten thousand years of history in more than 5,000 archeological sites that have resisted the march of time and whose mysteries are still being solved and revealed to the world.

Overwhelming Geography

With 1,769 glaciers and more than fifty mountains that tower over 5,000 meters, a 3,000 kilometer long Pacific coast, and rivers, snow-capped mountains, beaches, deserts, canyons, and trails that are the backdrop for the most exciting adventure sports.

Ancient Traditions

A rainbow of sounds, tastes, textures, and colors that are seen in 1,300 genres of music and more than 3,000 festivals, masses, religious processions, parades, and dances. A diversity of races, cultures, and customs that mix together their particular way of understanding and enjoying life.

Country of experiences and senses

COME TO PERU
Just like in the famous book, “The Little Engine That Could,” Peru’s Central Andes railroad is all set to play a starring role in the area’s efforts to bring more visitors not only to sky-high Huancayo but to its high-in-the-sky neighbor, Huancavelica. The railroad was built in 1870 (137 years ago) to support mining industries in the area and is an extraordinary engineering achievement.

Overseeing the construction was Henry Meiggs, a New York contractor who had been involved in the construction of a railroad in Chile. At times there were more than 10,000 men working on the railroad and hundreds of llamas and mules were used to carry tools and building material.

The train starts its journey from the Desamparados station in downtown Lima at 7:00 am and arrives in Huancayo at 6 pm. Following the Rimac River it climbs to a height of 15,686 feet, passing through 60 tunnels, doing 12 or 13 zig-zags, crossing 41 bridges and chugging through the Galera tunnel as it reaches the summit of the Andes, a distance of 206.17 miles. A branch of the train reaches even greater heights, topping 15,863.63 feet.

Incas del Peru

The railroad is called, “The Central Railway of Peru” and one of the train’s staunch supporters is Lucho Hurtado of Incas del Peru, a dedicated, regional tour operator who, despite nay-sayers, has been fighting for years to get the tourist train back on track. He finally succeeded.

“Many thought it was a useless fight,” said Mr. Hurtado, “They said the era of the train is over and these are modern times so don’t waste your energy—it’s not going to run anymore.” Undaunted, he stepped up his campaign. The continuing successful operation of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
Machu Picchu train was the incentive he needed to get one of the highest trains in the world operating again.

“When the Central Andes passenger train stopped scheduled runs,” continued Mr. Hurtado, “I promised myself I would do all that was necessary to bring it back. How foolish I was, with no money and not much life experience, but only good intentions and passion. The newly refurbished coaches are very comfortable and the best part is the bar and open coach at the back. Surely, they will be popular!”

Mr. Hurtado’s enthusiasm is catching, “Excuse my passion for this historic train,” he says, “It is the ONLY UNIQUE AND HISTORICAL HIGHEST TRAIN IN THE WORLD!” (The caps are his.)

“If you have clients traveling to Peru encourage them to take time to make this special trip,” says Mr. Hurtado, “so they don’t miss out on one of the best Peruvian highlights right here in the heart of the Andes.” He also believes new winds are blowing, the sun will shine and he is happy that new coaches, together with the old ones are, “are crossing the Andes again.”

A Little Background

Mr. Hurtado grew up in and around Huancayo and from an early age traveled to different regions of Peru. His mother’s family is from the mountains and his father farmed in the jungle. His wife, Beverly, is from New Zealand and assisted in starting the “Incas del Peru” company.

In addition to adventure tours, they sponsor “Home Stay Programs,” working with rural families in the Mantaro Valley and urban families in the city of Huancayo. Home-stays include three meals a day (at set hours). On home-stays, if a guest feels uncomfortable in a family’s home they offer them another home or other accommodations. The active couple’s latest venture is promoting exchanges between craftspeople from other countries and those from their area. And, while providing travelers with hiking and biking trips they also sponsor walks through the countryside and bicycle races for local children to increase their appreciation of the beauty of their surroundings. Upon request, they also offer visitors courses in Spanish, Quechua, gourd carving, weaving, dancing, Peruvian cooking and other Peruvian arts.

Classic or Tourist Packages

There are two classes of service on the train, Classic, the least expensive for $185. and Tourist for $285. Fare includes delivery of tickets to your client’s hotel in Lima, transfers, maps and information about the trip; welcome dinner, two full day tours, an Artesan Circuit and an Archaeological Circuit, 3 night accommodation in La Casa de la Abuela or Las Lomas Hostal on the Classic ticket and on the Tourist ticket, (the most expensive) hotels include the Presidente, the Turismo or El Marquez Hostal.

The difference between a “Classic” and a “Tourist “ticket (the most expensive) is the seating. Tourist class cars have couches similar to Pullman bus style and your clients have access to the Infiernillo Bar located at the end of the train.

Round trip “Classic”fare-only ticket is $80 and one-way is $50.Prices for “tickets only,” round trip tourist is $120; one way $80.

Optional Huancavelica

Extensions to Huancavelica, south of Huancayo are also available with accommodations in a basic hotel. A mining town, it is also known for its beautiful churches, colonial art and medicinal springs. The altitude is 11,483 feet.

LARC/Peru Chasquitur, 800-327-3573, latinamerica@verizon.net
Not all beachfront hotels in Rio de Janeiro are the same, and the ones flying the flags of famous international brands are not necessarily better than the independent ones or the ones belonging to smaller brands whose names a North American traveler may very well not recognize. Over the years, my wife and I have checked into — who knows? no one has been counting — maybe 30, maybe even 40 different hotels in Rio.

The Porto Bay Rio Internacional, formerly simply the Rio Internacional, on beachfront Avenida Atlântica, corner of Duvivier, in Copacabana, is one that, until recently, we had not checked into.

Pity.

The building itself, dating from 1989, has been hard not to take notice of. Though at 20 stories it is hardly the highest structure on the beachfront, it is of an unusual stand-out-from-the-pack color that, from a distance, appears copperish, but get up close, study the building closely, you discover that the copperish effect is the result, really, of a lot of dark window glass set off against red-painted steel columns at once structural and decorative. The corner of the building is gently rounded, a nice softening touch. At the top, there is a logo that has always looked to me like a lazy, sensuous sort of letter M. But there is no M either in the name of the hotel itself or in the name of the hotel group that owns it. A letter M would make no particular sense. I now have it on good authority that the two gently rounded humps are in fact meant as an impressionistic rendering of Rio’s trademark Sugarloaf Mountain and attendant and somewhat shorter Urca Mountain.

Of the hotel 117 guest accommodations, 13 are suites with wrap-around floor-to-ceiling windows, furnished outdoor balconies, and cinematic views that extend from Sugarloaf on the far left, along the broad crescent of always busy beach, to the Copacabana Fort on the far right. Superior and deluxe rooms also, if they’re high enough up, look out across the beach and a swath of the salt sea to the point on which Copacabana Fort sits, and the vast majority of these rooms also have furnished outdoor balconies.

Public spaces — the rooftop pool and bar, the fifth-floor La Finestra restaurant, the Limone Bar off the lobby — have an intimate feel, even a kind of peaceful Zen feel, in lieu of grand hotel extravagance and formality, and the enormous low center table in the lobby comes pretty close to capturing what I’ve always imagined as the essence of Zen cool. Even for a hotel of this caliber, the staff is unusually attentive and courteous.

What, then, is Porto Bay?

Porto Bay is a Portuguese company but more specifically a Madeira company, Madeira being an Atlantic island, some 360 miles off the coast of Morocco, that the Portuguese discovered for themselves in the early 15th century and subse-

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subsequently used as a forward base for their epoch-making forays down the west coast of Africa, around the Horn and up the east coast to India, and across the briny to Brazil. Madeira may not figure in the travel plans of a lot of North Americans. North Americans may not even make much of the name except as a fortified wine that is the island’s most famous export product. The island figures extremely importantly nevertheless in that alternate universe of sun-sand destinations to which Northern European snowbirds flock. Total room nights slept in Madeira in 2006 counted out at in excess of 5.7 million, with U.S. visitors responsible for only slightly more than 30,000 of them.

Porto Bay’s rather extravagant hotels in Madeira include the 201-room five-star flagship Cliff Bay, the Porto Santa Maria, and the Vila Porto Mare Resort, which incorporates the Suite Hotel Eden Mar, the Hotel Porto Mare, and the Residence Porto Mare. Porto Bay’s first property on the Portuguese mainland, the 310-room Porto Bay Falésia, atop a cliff immediately above a five mile long beach in the town of Olhos de Água in the southern Algarve region, is due to open in March 2008.

Porto Bay acquired the Rio Internacional — its first foray beyond Portuguese territory — in January of this year, and then in the month of June of this year it acquired an upscale pousada, the 14-suite Glenzhaus, in the resort town of Búzios at a distance by car or van of just over two hours from Rio the city. The idea, at least in part, was to be able to offer guests in Rio, business travelers and leisure travelers alike, a second version of the Brazilian experience, a complementary one, in a setting as low-key and relaxed as Rio itself is dazzling and intense. Nor has Porto Bay necessarily come to the end of its current expansion phase. The company is currently examining options to acquire or build in as yet undisclosed locations in the Brazilian Northeast.

To return to the Porto Bay Rio Internacional, two bonuses. More or less directly across the street from the hotel, just off of Rua Duvivier, there is a little dead-end allyway, the Beco das Garrafas, that once upon a time was to Brazilian bossa nova what West 52nd Street in New York City was to North American jazz.

The clubs that hundreds of Brazilian immortals played in are gone now, but just at the entrance to the allyway there has recently sprung up a CD and music book store, Bossa Nova by name, that pays homage to the glorious past of this place, and it deserves the attention of anyone susceptible to infectious Brazilian rhythms. The restaurant Pampa Oceano, also directly across from the hotel on Duvivier, is a palace for seafood lovers. The setting is of white-tablecloth elegance, but the formula is of the down-and-dirty all-you-can-eat-variety, and the price for the mountains of shrimp, lobster, oysters and caviar is an astonishingly reasonable one.
OPEN DOOR TAKES VISITORS TO THE PANTANAL

The Pantanal is the world's largest interior wetland. The abundance and diversity of its vegetation and animal life are spectacular. Exploring the Pantanal is like being in the world's largest zoo.

While the mammals are impressive, it is the amazing abundance of birds that gives the Pantanal its fame. The ease with which the birds can be seen is a bonus for the experienced birder and first time nature tour participant.

For those interested in visiting the Pantanal, Open Door suggests visiting Mato Grosso do Sul. The primary gateway to this region is via Campo Grande.

From there, begin the adventure into the Pantanal wetlands and on to Bonito. The main activity here is diving. Snorkeling, scuba diving, light rafting, abseiling, horseback riding, caving, mountain biking and trekking are other activities offered. Bonito is the number one destination for ecotourism in Brazil.

Few places in the world have kept nature so pure and generous. Open Door, with a professional and experienced international staff, is the major incoming tour operator for customized tours to this region, with main office in Campo Grande and a support-desk in Cuiaba.

Their English speaking guides guarantee an unparalleled experience, during which travelers will learn as much as they desire about the unique culture and biodiversity.

In addition, Open Door has its own network of reliable contacts throughout Brazil to arrange visits to any other destination in Brazil.

Open Door, info@opendoortur.com.br, www.opendoortur.com.br

SOUTH STAR TOURS ANNOUNCES GALAPAGOS AND CARNAVAL PACKAGES

Ecuador offers a large variety of things to do and see, in addition to the Galapagos Island which is the country's main destination. South Star Tours, Inc. is now offering November and December 2007 departures to this region at year ending rates.

Their seven-day/six-night programs (three nights mainland and three nights in Santa Cruz Island or on board a cruise ship) start at $1,557.

The three nights in Santa Cruz is a perfect alternative for those afraid of cruising.

The eight-day/seven-night programs (three nights mainland and four nights cruising) start at $1,997. Passengers will visit the colonial capital of Quito and modern Guayaquil, before and after flying to the Galapagos Islands.

On board the cruise/yacht, full board meal plan and shore excursions guided by certified naturalist are included. Availability is limited. International airfare and U.S. departure taxes are not included and available from any U.S. gate upon request.

The world famous Carnival in Rio de Janeiro is fast approaching, and South Star Tours is offering two options for those who wish to attend and embrace the World’s Greatest Party.

To allow revelers to freely explore the celebration that unfolds in the heart of Rio, a seven day trip beginning on January 31 will include a choice of hotel accommodations ranging from four to five stars and the opportunity to see and experience the Carnival first hand.

For those interested in experiencing the greatest highlights of South America, South Star Tours also offers a 12-day trip to Buenos Aires and Iguassu ending in Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival. Departing on January 26, this is a great opportunity to visit famous Brazilian Carnival, the Falls, and to experience cosmopolitan Buenos Aires.

Rio’s Carnival 2008 from January 31 - February 6, 2008 (seven-days/five -nights) starts at $1,999 and up, depending on choice of hotel. Rio Carnival, Iguassu & Buenos Aires, from January 26 – February 6, 2008 (12-days/10-nights) is priced at $3,179 per person. Both packages depart from Miami; other departure gates are also available upon request and at additional cost.

Airport taxes not included. South Star tours is offering $100 LAX add-on during September; a $50 savings off the regular add-on charge.

South Star Tours, Inc. specializes in custom designed FIT and group packages for clients throughout Central and South America. Eleven percent commission is guaranteed.

South Star Tours, 800-654-4468, info@southstartours.com, www.southstartours.com

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SPORTSTOUR BRINGS VISITORS TO THE MAGICAL DESTINATION OF PEULLA

In the south of Chile, where lakes, volcanoes and rivers are the main attraction, a unique and magical destination invites travelers to find the perfect balance between human beings and nature. This magical destination is Peulla. Located approximately 16 miles from the border with Argentina, this ecological settlement with just 200 inhabitants showcases a variety of unbelievable scenery, including lakes, rivers, majestic hills and volcanoes.

This is an unequalled environment, surrounded by the Andes with abundant evergreen forests. The existing vegetation is home to a large variety of animals, with 33 species of mammals and 117 species of birds.

The two existing hotels in the area, Peulla and Natura, both offer excellent service and comfort. From here, travelers can discover nature and participate in activities like canopy tours, horseback rides, and sailing. Seasonal tours include air tours, fly fishing, and trekking to Cerro Rigi, among others.

The fishing season begins in November and continues through May, and Peulla boasts many top spots including the Peulla, Negro and Blanco Rivers, as well as Lake Todos los Santos, which is known for the emerald green color of its water. The predominant species in the Peulla River are rainbow and fario trout. The Negro River has ideal conditions for rainbow, fario, and brook trout.

One of the best ways to take in the scenery of Peulla is by horseback. Guests can choose from horseback rides to El Encanto, Rigi, Las Mellizas, and Los Helechos. The first two can be made regularly throughout the year and the other two only if the weather conditions permit. On tame horses and under the guidance of professionals, riders can go through different places in the valley, learning about the history, the plants, and the animals. The duration of the El Encanto and Rigi horseback rides is approximately two hours, and since the South of Chile is characterized by its rainfall, making this ride under a soft rain enhances the surrounding greenery even more.

Sportstour can make arrangements for these excursions to Peulla and more.

AEROLINEAS ARGENTINAS FINALIZES RETURN TO ALTA

As part of its new domestic and international corporate objective, Aerolineas Argentinas/Austral has announced its return to ALTA, the Latin American Air Transport Association, previously known as AITAL.

During a meeting, celebrated by the President of Aerolineas Argentinas Dr. Esteban Maccari, and the Executive Director of ALTA Alex de Gunten, the airline finalized its return to the association in which Aerolineas Argentinas was a founding member.

Alex de Gunten welcomed Aerolineas Argentinas’ return to ALTA: “We are looking forward to welcoming one of ALTA’s founding members – and Argentina’s largest airlines – back to ALTA.”

ALTA gathers the principal companies in Latin America and the Caribbean and was lacking a representative member in the Argentina Republic.

The association aims to express the points of views of the Latin American air transport industry in concert with international arenas, and also strengthens the technical cooperation among its associated companies by sharing common interests and developing conferences. Also important is cooperation in operational matters and leading concrete negotiations with the principal suppliers in matters such as insurance, fuel and systems.

ALTA, www.alta.aero;
ALL INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS AT REMOTA IN PATAGONIA

A new road opened in June 2007 to shorten the breach between Puerto Natales and Portia Serrano, the southern entrance to Torres del Paine National Park in Southern Patagonia. This new road reduces the traveling time to 45 minutes from the two hours that took the road by Cerro Castillo. The new journey passes across natural beauty from the area such as the Milodon Cave, Cerro Tenerife, Ventisquero River, Rincon, Porteño and Toro Lakes before entering the park near the town of Serrano. Observation rest areas have been built to facilitate contemplation to the natural environment.

Remota offers three and four night all inclusive programs in the outskirts of Puerto Natales, the gateway to the Torres del Paine National Park, with magnificent views of the Ultima Esperanza fjord, near Patagonia’s Southern Ice Field. Get picked up at the airport, and brought to this oasis with splendid water views at the very southern tip of the Andean Mountain Range. Included daily excursions are privately guided for hotel guests only and range from Torres del Paine trips for hikers and nature observers, to horseback riding and sheep herding with a real local “baqueano,” to glacier viewing in the nearby fjords of the Southern Ice Field. Other programs include more leisurely activities like a typical Patagonian barbecue prepared by a local landowner in the area or visits to indigenous paintings in the nearby Cerro Benitez. The hotel also has a well equipped Spa with a lap pool.

Remota, 866-431-0519, www.remota.cl

IHG ANNOUNCES OPENING OF THE CROWNE PLAZA LIMA

IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group) has announced that the Holiday Inn Select Lima hotel in Peru has become the Crowne Plaza Lima. The hotel is ideally situated in the heart of the financial, commercial, cultural, and tourist district of Miraflores, near to the best tourist attractions, beaches and recreational areas, as well as some of the best restaurants Lima has to offer.

Led by a team of expert architects and designers, the hotel’s expansion and transformation into a Crowne Plaza was developed with the intention of upgrading and revalidating the property to meet Crowne Plaza’s brand standards.

“The Crowne Plaza Lima enjoyed a great deal of success as a Holiday Inn Select, and IHG has honored it with numerous recognitions, including the company’s most coveted Torchbearer Award for excellence in service, amenities and the region’s highest customer service ratings,” said Alvaro Diago, Area President, Latin America, IHG. “We are extremely proud of these achievements, and look forward to the property attaining even greater successes as a Crowne Plaza hotel in the years to come.”

The major renovations throughout the hotel include the expansion and redesigning of the lobby. Additionally, every room and floor has been transformed. Construction of an additional floor was completed, adding 13 new guestrooms. Three floors have also been designated Club Floors offering a lounge that serves gourmet breakfasts and afternoon hors d’oeuvres. The hotel’s restaurant has also been expanded and the business center was converted into a Cyber Café. Additionally, the hotel will soon be offering a full service first class spa.

The seventh floor was also converted into the Crowne Plaza’s Quiet Zone, which is part of the renowned Crowne Plaza Sleep Advantage program. The program is available at all Crowne Plaza hotels in the Americas and encompasses the entire sleep experience, from training staff on how to create and maintain a restful environment, to providing innovative products and services.

Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts participates in Priority Club Rewards, the first, largest and fastest-growing guest loyalty program in the hotel industry.

Crowne Plaza was recently recognized by Lodging Hospitality magazine as one of the industry’s top growing brands. As part of the IHG global portfolio, Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts has more than 275 hotels in more than 48 countries, and are located in major urban centers, gateway cities and resort destinations.

Crowne Plaza, www.crowneplaza.com

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Mexico: Grand Velas All Suites & Spa Resort – Luxury of the All-Inclusive Kind

Gracing Nuevo Vallarta’s Pacific Coast, this award-winning resort seduces the senses with style, service and, oh yes, sunshine galore!

MARY ELLEN SCHULTZ

A long Mexico’s Pacific Coast on the edge of Banderas Bay in the upscale development of Nuevo Vallarta in Nayarit state — 15 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta International Airport — is a 5-star tropical getaway that is also a member of Leading Hotels of the World: Grand Velas All Suites & Spa.

Named 2007’s top Latin American Spa Resort by Condé Nast Traveler, Grand Velas also received the AAA Five-Diamond Lodging Award — the only all-inclusive in Nuevo Vallarta and Puerto Vallarta, as well as the only North American family-friendly one to do so.

Mexican-born owner Eduardo Velas says, “We’re not just selling rooms; we’re selling experiences.” His vision and the hotel’s mission: to provide first-class experiences that seduce the senses.

About the Resort

With a soaring thatched-roof lobby, curving corridors and elegantly airy style, Grand Velas merges Mexican warmth with contemporary cool in its 267 spacious suites and Spa. Five restaurants feature inviting décor and delicious Mexican and international cuisine.

Tiered, three-temperature infinity pools, a children’s pool, fitness center, Spa, a 12,702 sq ft. meeting space and a resident peacock strolling the grounds complete the resort. A crowd-free sense of space prevails, even at Grand Velas’s usual 75% capacity.

General Director Oscar Cruces credits this high rate to three elements: comfortable suites, gourmet dining and superlative service, noting, and “Our gold-star service in a five-star setting — featuring hospitality with a capital ‘H’ — is the most important thing we offer. It’s a 365-day, 24/7 job, with year-round staff training to provide seamlessly attentive guest care.”

About the Suites

Large, terraced suites boast sweeping ocean views, enchanting local art and big, amenity-filled marble bathrooms. Book your clients the fourth/fifth floor middle rooms, and front rooms on floors six–nine for spectacular sunsets. Need something even more special?

Recommend the popular Ambassador Grand Class Spa Suites in the resort’s new tower — 1,865 square feet decorated in soothing neutral tones and teak accents, with interior and exterior Jacuzzis (think: a nightly soak on the terrace while looking up at the Milky Way); the cozily elegant one- and two-bedroom Governor’s Suites; and — for la-di-da luxury — the sumptuous, two- and three-bedroom Imperial Spa and Presidential suites, complete with steam room, massage area and personal staff.

About the Restaurants

Mr. Cruces believes a highlight of the Grand Velas experience is the cuisine — a palate-pleasing selection from around the world at the property’s five restaurants, three of them gourmet.

Frida features the Mexican dishes prepared by renowned chefs such as Henry Morgan, Sir Francis Drake and others who plundered treasure, gold, pearls and more from the heavily fortified forts and cities of Panama. Join their spirits in a swashbuckling adventure of your own to reveal the True Treasures of Panama!

Follow in the footsteps of the True Pirates of the Caribbean in Panama aboard the MV CORAL STAR!

Captain Henry Morgan, Sir Francis Drake and others plundered treasure, gold, pearls and more from the heavily fortified forts and cities of Panama. Join their spirits in a swashbuckling adventure of your own to reveal the True Treasures of Panama!

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www.travelworldnews.com • Travel World News
artist Frida Kahlo for her lover, the legendary Diego Rivera; Lucca serves up fine Italian-Mediterranean specialties, and Piaf presents classic French cooking. All-day fare (from scrambled eggs to sushi) is available at Azul and the poolside Selva del Mar.

About the Spa

The Grand Velas’ Spa — a member of the Leading Spas of the World — is a 16,500 sq. ft. splashing-fountained oasis designed to soothe body and spirit, offering 80 treatments and 20 treatment rooms.

Suggest clients try the deliciously anti-depressing Chocolate Wrap, rejuvenating Ocean Spa peeling, skin-refining Solar Body Scrub or the decadently hydrating Gold Bath (yes, real gold powder!). In-room Spa options include massages, aromatherapy and flower-petalled bath rituals. (All treatments extra charge.)

About the Weddings

For clients wishing to tie the knot south of the border, Grand Velas’ romantic wedding package (2–700 attendees) includes all paperwork, setup, cake, flowers and ceremony with translator for $1,800 plus accommodations; special requests welcomed. (Suggest a sunset beachside ceremony and candlelit reception under the stars.)

About the Activities

Surrounded by lush jungle, the Sierra Madre Mountains and one of the world’s largest natural bays, Nuevo Vallarta offers activities galore. Beyond Grand Velas’ roster of on-site adults/kids programs (the new Grand Kids Club covers all the younger vacationers’ bases, from supervised land/water activities and crafts, to gaming and movies), guests can tee off at three pro-level golf courses; explore nearby Puerto Vallarta’s cobblestone streets, art-galleries and markets; go tree-canopy ziplining, deep-sea fishing and dolphin-riding; do a helicopter tour to San Andrés Coahimata, a remote village inhabited by members of the regional Huichol Indians; or drive to Mismaloya, where the film that put the region on the map — “Night of the Iguana” — was filmed and visit the original movie set.

Even with a superb location and service par excellence, General Director Cruces continues planning luxe-life experiences for clients, saying, “We’re proud of our awards, but we’re definitely not content to rest on our laurels. We’re committed to constantly evolving to maintain our position as being the best of the best for our guests.”

About the Rates

Agent 10% commissionable rates are $430–$1600 per person (per night/double occupancy), depending on the category and the season; the two-bedroom, art-filled Colunga Spa suite (max. 4 people) is $6,500. High season is Christmas through Easter, July–August.

About the Packages

Grand Velas offers a plethora of packages; per person/per night rates listed here.

The “Grand Velas Special” features daily tee-time and rejuvenating spa treatments; rate is $349 ppdo, available through October.

The “Family Golf” package offers tee-time for all, along with spa-ahing for adults/Kids Club for children; cost is $534 per adult/$75 per child (ages 2–12).

The “Great Outdoors – Puerto Vallarta” package includes private charter deep-sea fishing excursion and daily golf round; price is $569 pp/do; $901 single.

Available through December, the “Ultimate Divorcee Vacation,” features a 4-hour “Diamond” spa treatment and private jeweler consultation to explore disposing of any leftover “bling.”

Rates are $537 ppdo/$879 single. If the settlement is high, suggest your client upgrade to the three-bedroom Imperial Suite for $6,238/night.

Or, for the ultimate girlfriends’ getaway, the $19,434 “Glam it Up!” 3-night extravaganza swathes in luxury up to six guests booking the Imperial Spa Suite, with the above-mentioned “Diamond” spa experience and tee-time for all.

Grand Velas All Suites & Spa Resort, 877-398-2784, sales@grandvelas.com, www.grandvelas.com

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EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF PANAMA SAILING ON A “JOURNEY BETWEEN THE SEAS”

Panama Marine Adventures, Inc. (PMA) was founded in 2003 and has become the leading Panama Canal Transit Tour operator in the country. Its new expedition cruise product “The Journey Between The Seas – Panama Exploration Cruise” is an eight day cruise which takes passengers along Panama’s inter-oceanic route navigating from one ocean to the other.

The exploration will take place on board the M/V Discovery. Discovery is a 33m, purpose-built catamaran providing eight queen and four twin cabins. All cabins have individual climate control, ensuites, and large windows which extend along the length of the cabin allowing passengers to enjoy the scenery in complete privacy.

Passenger numbers on Discovery are limited to just 24 people ensuring everyone can enjoy the serenity and a peacefulness of a true journey between the seas.

Ten crew members are carefully selected and trained and are in charge of assuring a perfect journey.

Onboard the Discovery, passengers will find enthusiastic expedition leaders that will provide insight and profound understanding about the adventure. They are experienced and well trained naturalists ready to share their vast knowledge. They will introduce guests to native human groups that still preserve their customs and traditions and to a world of stunning natural beauty and rich history unknown by most. They are experts in their fields and they will make the journey onboard the Discovery an unforgettable experience.

On the itinerary, highlights include the Darien Jungle, and a journey into the lives of the Embera Indian Tribe; the Pearl Islands – San Telmo for snorkeling, swimming and diving; a Panama Canal Crossing for a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience up close the history and operation of this engineering marvel; Panama Canal - Gatun Lake to witness the splendor and excitement of the jungle; Chagres River - Fort San Lorenzo; and the town of Portobelo, rich in history. The 2007 Panama Canal Adventure Cruise Northbound departure (Flamenco Marina/Pacific Ocean - Portobelo/Atlantic Ocean) is December 22, 2007. The Southbound Panama Canal Adventure Cruise (Portobelo/Atlantic Ocean - Flamenco Mariana/Pacific Ocean) departs December 29, 2007. There are 15 departures scheduled each way in 2008 from January to August.

Panama Marine Adventures, 507-226-8917, info@pmatours.net, www.pmatours.net
BRING THE ENTIRE FAMILY TO BEAUTIFUL PARQUE MARITIMO EL COCO IN NICARAGUA

Parque Marítimo El Coco is an exclusive resort situated on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, approximately 93 miles from the capital city of Managua and approximately 11 miles from the seaside town of San Juan del Sur. The park is located within the boundaries of the Wildlife Refuge “La Flor” which features outstanding scenic beauty. At the present time they offer eight houses, three bungalows and eight apartments for rent with a capacity for 102 guests. It also features several residential homes: Casa De La Jara, Casa Morini, Casa Piancito and Casa Panamá.

Parque Marítimo El Coco provides an atmosphere of peace and relaxation. It is the ideal place to visit with the entire family because the beach is large and safe. They offer a wide range of activities including excursions by horse or bicycle to the nearby villages, football or volleyball on the beach, boat trips to Isla Bolaños, or a visit to Playa La Flor, where thousands of Paslama sea turtles arrive to lay their eggs.

Their restaurant Puesta del Sol (sunset) is situated on the seashore of Coconut Beach and every evening it offers a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean sunset. Nicaraguan and international dishes as well as Austrian specialties are served.

Parque Marítimo El Coco has several tours available. Guests can travel by horse to “finca La Esperanza” (the farm) through a dense tropical dry forest populated by howler monkeys and white faced monkeys, magpie-Jays, nightjars, owls, hummingbirds, doves, and many other birds. At the end of the forest, arrive at the rural community of Collado to interact with the people and get to know their traditions and way of life. The entire trip takes four to six hours and prices range from $27 - $36 per person.

The tour by boat to Bolaños Island takes one hour. Once on the island, visitors will climb to the bird nesting area of pelicans, tijeretas and gaviotas. On the way back to the hotel, lucky visitors can observe dolphins swimming next to the boat. Prices range from $21 - $48 per person.

There is also a vehicle tour to the Wildlife Refuge La Flor regarding the egg-lay and turtle birth. This tour includes transfer to and from the hotel to La Flor and the fee for entering, where a guide will explain why the turtle nest there and other interesting facts about the turtles. Prices range from $19 - $25.

Parque Marítimo el Coco, parquemaritimo@playaelcoco.com.ni, www.playaelcoco.com.ni
PARADISUS PLAYA CONCHAL RESORT HONORED WITH “WORLD’S BEST LUXURY HOTELS FOR FAMILIES”

Paradisus Playa Conchal Resort, the five-star, all-inclusive located in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, was recently voted “World’s Best Luxury Hotels for Families 2007” by Five Star Alliance.

Five Star Alliance is a leading online travel agency; their collection of luxury hotels includes the most renowned names in the world. Five Star Alliance assists upscale travelers find and book accommodations by providing them with recommendations. Winners were selected in eight categories based on feedback from customers, website popularity, and Five Star Alliance’s own research and experience.

“Receiving an award based on the experiences of such discerning travelers is an immense honor,” stated Susanna Mander, Director of Brand Management for Paradisus Resorts. “The winners include a “who’s who” of the world’s most luxurious hotels, this award is further testament to Paradisus Playa Conchal Resort’s unique position as a leading, all-inclusive luxury resort possessing the highest standards of service and uncompromising excellence. This is a welcome addition to the resort’s ranking as a member of “The Leading Hotels of the World.”

Paradisus Playa Conchal Resort’s triumph in the family category is attributed to its one-of-a-kind Family Concierge program. Designed to meet the needs of today’s travelers, the service provides families seeking a carefree, luxury vacation with the ultimate stress-free, five-star experience. A dedicated family-only reception area includes a mini-check-in for the kids complete with downsized furniture, welcome amenity kits for the children, and a dedicated Family Concierge butler, reachable via walkie-talkie and available to coordinate personalized resort activities, excursions, and reservations.

The resort’s Family Concierge suites are spacious with separate living quarters, a sofa bed and adjoining suites. In-room amenities include children-sized bathrobes and slippers, children’s pillows and towels, kids’ bath products, weekly kids’ activity menu, and a fully stocked mini bar offering juices, and chocolate and strawberry-flavored milk. Services include turn-down service with cookies and milk. Parents also have the option of adding a PlayStation to their room at no extra charge.

Located on 2,400 acres, Paradisus Playa Conchal Resort offers guests all-suite accommodations, signature adults-only Royal Service with personal butlers, private lounge and restricted beach and pool areas. The resort’s gourmet dining selections include Asian fusion, Northern Italian and American cuisine. Other amenities include four tennis courts, a spa and fitness center, non-motorized water sports activities, and nightly entertainment.

Paradisus Resorts include Paradisus Palma Real Resort in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic; Paradisus Punta Cana Resort in the Dominican Republic; and Paradisus Riviera Cancun Resort in Mexico. Three of the properties, Paradisus Playa Conchal Resort, Paradisus Riviera Cancun Resort, and Paradisus Palma Real Resort are members of "The Leading Hotels of the World." As an innovative leader of the hospitality industry, Paradisus Resorts recently introduced Experience Managers, staff specifically trained to completely orchestrate the guest experience. Each resort also offers an array of sophisticated activities that help stimulate the senses, such as photography, star-gazing, sushi-making, cooking classes, flower arrangement and candle making lessons.

Paradisus Resorts, 800-33MELIA, www.paradisusresorts.travel
**PRINCESS CRUISES SHOWCASES PANAMA CANAL IN 2008-09**

The Panama Canal never fails to be a “must see” wonder for cruisers, and Princess continues to lead the way with three ships transiting this engineering marvel for the 2008-09 season. The line offers passengers a full range of itineraries to one of the greatest achievements of the 20th Century. Sister ships Coral Princess and Island Princess, both purpose-built for Canal cruising, will offer full Canal transit voyages as well as convenient roundtrip partial transits. In addition, the 670-passenger Pacific Princess will sail on one 20-day Grand Canal adventure.

Princess offers both east and west coast routes featuring the convenience of a roundtrip itinerary. The Roundtrip Panama Canal trip is sailed by both the Coral Princess and Island Princess on a 10-day itinerary from Ft. Lauderdale, with calls in Aruba, Cartagena, the Panama Canal partial transit, Cristobal, Limon (Costa Rica), and Ocho Rios. Coral Princess will offer four departures on this itinerary (October 2 and 12, 2008, and February 3 and 13, 2009), and Island Princess will sail on 11 cruises (October 27, November 6, December 14, 2008; January 3 and 13, and February 22 through April 13, 2009.) Island Princess sails on this 18-day cruise on September 25, 2008, while Coral Princess offers a 19-day sailing on April 23, 2009.

The full grandeur of the Panama Canal is the highlight on five transit itineraries, offering 10- to 20-day escapes. Exotic Panama Canal is the hallmark of Princess’ full-transit Canal program offering a 14-day journey between Los Angeles and Ft. Lauderdale featuring calls at Huatulco, Guatemala (Puerto Quetzal), Nicaragua (Puerto Corinto or San Juan del Sur), Costa Rica (Puntarenas), Panama Canal, Cartagena, and Aruba. Coral Princess features 10 sailings on this route (September 18, October 22, November 5, December 9 and 23, 2008; January 6 and 20, February 23, March 9, and April 12, 2009), while Island Princess features four departures (October 13, November 16 and 30, 2008 and April 23, 2009).

The Panama Canal Adventurer between Ft. Lauderdale and Acapulco is a 10-day cruise with calls at Ocho Rios, Panama Canal, Fuerte Amador, Costa Rica (Puntarenas), Nicaragua (San Juan del Sur or Puerto Corinto), Guatemala (Puerto Quetzal), and Huatulco. Coral Princess and Island Princess each offer four sailings on this route (the Coral on November 19 and 29, 2008 and March 23 and April 2, 2009, and the Island on December 24, 2008 and January 3, February 2 and 12, 2009).

For the Grand Panama Canal, three ships offer full Grand Canal transits between Ft. Lauderdale and Vancouver. Coral Princess departs from Vancouver on a 17-day journey beginning September 15, 2008 with calls at Huatulco, Guatemala (Puerto Quetzal), Nicaragua (Puerto Corinto or San Juan del Sur), Costa Rica (Puntarenas), Panama Canal, Cartagena, and Aruba. Island Princess offers an 18-day voyage on a similar itinerary adding a call in Victoria and Los Angeles that departs on April 23, 2009. The intimate Pacific Princess offers a 20-day transit that departs April 24, 2009 and includes calls in Aruba, San Blas, Panama Canal, Fuerte Amador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Acapulco, Cabo San Lucas and San Francisco. Early booking fares for Princess’ Panama Canal 10-day sailings begin at $1,199 ppd.

**NEWLY OPENED MACHACA HILL LODGE OFFERING 25% OFF REGULAR RATES**

The eco-chic Machaca Hill Lodge, nestled in the landscape of the Toledo District in southern Belize, opened its doors on April 14, 2007 and is celebrating its long awaited debut by offering an opening special of 25 percent off normal rates for rooms, meals and tours.

One-bedroom cabanas are priced at $120 per night for single occupancy and $160 per night for double occupancy. With the 25 percent discounted opening special, the price drops to a nightly rate of $90 and $120, respectively.

Activities and tours are also included in the opening 25 percent off special. The limited-time, opening promotional rate is based on availability and is subject to blackout dates.

The rate is valid only for travel through November 12, 2007, and a three night minimum stay is required. Situated on the 11,000 sq. ft. private Laughing Falcon Reserve in Belize’s Southern most Toledo District, Machaca Hill is a world class adventure getaway for active travelers looking for an eco-retreat.
Could you ever get tired of this?

Actually you could, it is a good thing you can do much more in Panama.

www.visitpanama.com