



MAGAZINE

In love with France

Mélanie Paul-Hus

Director - Canada, Atout France

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SPECIAL FEATURE

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Letter from the publisher

One year ends... and another begins!

How would you rate your 2018? Super, great, average, or even bad?

At the end of December, I always put aside a few hours to take stock of the year that's ending to reevaluate the most important achievements, the most difficult moments I have overcome, and the challenges I faced – as well as setting targets for the near future. It is a ritual that's dear to me, and allows me to better balance my efforts to focus on the growth of the company.

In my case, 2018 will go down as a year of transition.

Transition towards new beginnings, towards my return to the helm of the company, and to bigger and better things for 2019.

As you know, the PAX team has been busier than ever in the past 12 months. The results of our work in 2018 speak for themselves: new websites, new newsletters, the launch of a new product (PAX Travel Jobs), and even the change of LogiMonde media's name to **PAX Global Media Inc.** (PGM). It has been an extraordinary team effort.

What does 2019 have in store? It goes without saying that the development of our products did not stop in 2018: come January, we will continue working on implementing projects that will significantly widen PAX's reach, including the diversification of our product range as well as the strengthening of our international activities.

To end the year on a positive note, our cover story features Atout France's Canadian director, Mélanie Paul-Hus; an apt choice, with France time and again proving itself one of the most popular destinations across the globe. The eloquent Francophile will surprise many of you with her top travel picks within the Hexagon.

Our special feature delves into the world of online travel agencies, which may be less powerful than they seem.

You can also follow Michael's adventures in Hong Kong, learn about Greece's splendid Royal Myconian Hotel through the words of Marie-Eve, and get some good advice from Ming to kickstart your cruise sales for 2019.

I conclude by sincerely thanking the members of my team, advertisers and customers who, year after year, work with us towards the common goal of continuing and improving this beautiful industry. And thanks to you too, dear readers; we are always very happy to read the comments and feedback you give us.

The entire PGM team wishes you a very happy holiday season and Happy New Year 2019! Your PAX magazine will return on Feb. 1, 2019.



Myrthe Chissov

President & CEO,
PAX Global Media

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BUSINESS MEETING





MÉLANIE PAUL-HUS

DIRECTOR – CANADA, ATOUT FRANCE

FRANCE, JE T'AIME

By **Marie-Eve Vallières** | Photos **Marie-Ève Rompré**

Mélanie Paul-Hus' enthusiasm for her work shines through as she tells the long lasting tale that spans two continents. Next stop, France...

The call of discovery

The saying goes that travel broadens the mind, and for Mélanie Paul-Hus it was no different.

Fittingly, as an executive whose career has seen her cross the Atlantic countless times, her appetite for a future career in travel was shaped from a young age by her experiences as an exchange student in Europe.

"By the age of 15, I knew that I wanted to go to Europe and learn a third language," she remembers. "I hesitated between the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria, before finally deciding on Germany the following year. It was during this trip that I visited Paris for the first time."

The experience provided Paul-Hus with her first real taste of the European way of life – one that would inhabit her forever. "I developed a real attachment to their traditions and their lifestyle," she reflects. "It inspired me a lot. It was refreshing to be surrounded by a culture that I did not know." →

A few years later, having gained research experience working in TV and with the *Les Affaires* newspaper, Paul-Hus turned to press relations at the Quebec Ministry of Tourism. It was a move that would help define her professional profile and lead the way to her subsequent role with *Maison de la France* (renamed *Atout France* in 2009), promoting France across Canada.

For the avowed francophile, it would prove the perfect match.

The French connection

Ten years later, Paul-Hus was named *Atout France's* Director for Canada. It's a position whose responsibilities are as prestigious as they are demanding, entrusting Paul-Hus with crucial issues for the development of Canadian tourism to France, and she clearly relishes her role – and working in the industry.

Indeed, Paul-Hus' ability to effortlessly navigate the vast tourist offering of France's 101 departments is impressive – from Finistère to Var and beyond.

The bright but humble director considers her role as that of a messenger for France's enticing tourist offering. "I have been lucky to discover many beautiful destinations in the last decade," she says. "I always come back with new experiences from which I try to inspire our tourism partners. It must be said that France is continental, yes, but also has overseas territories such as the French West Indies, Polynesia, St. Pierre and Miquelon – even Guyana! Each archipelago and region has a diversity that enchants me."

Forging relationships

Throughout the course of our interview, one recurring theme is particularly noticeable: Paul-Hus loves the human aspect of her duties, a source of great satisfaction to her.

way to evolve in the tourism industry is by making connections; I find it very stimulating. I have an infinite love for France and the people who have welcomed me to their region – I carry them with me, and in my work every day."

A proud Montrealer, the dynamic director argues that the city has significantly helped her in her role. "I have always had a special interest in France as a result of my friendships, in part because of the community that we meet here in Montreal. Many of my friends have returned to France, and I visit them as often as possible."

Travel differently

Far from being apprehensive about the profound changes currently shaking the tourism industry, Paul-Hus believes that a smooth transition is already well underway. "We have to find a balance between the present and the potential of the future," she says. "Don't put all your faith in trends if you want to create a product that will stand the test of time."

Simultaneously pragmatic and visionary, Paul-Hus recognizes the values and aspirations that all types of travellers have in common. "Basically, we all seek the same thing during a trip: making connections, creating lifelong memories, and immersing ourselves in the local culture. What might change, however, are the methods such as alternative hosting or advanced technologies. It's interesting because there is a generational shift happening right now that has the potential to transform the future of tourism – but the motives for travel, as such, do not change." →

“ I have never left France feeling like I saw everything. ”

"I have evolved in this business by getting closer to travel agencies and tour operators. I genuinely enjoy helping them to set up itineraries to offer travellers an unforgettable tour," she says. "Travel agents have a special relationship with their customers, who candidly share their experience on location. It warms my heart to hear these stories."

"Nowadays, tourism greatly values family entrepreneurship, small guest houses, non-standard tourism products, the creative industry, and start-ups," she smiles. "It's a pleasure for us to see the birth and growth of certain initiatives and to help accelerate their notoriety via tour operators."

"It's a type of matchmaking that I like a lot," she continues. "The only

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it takes our relationship
to new heights



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“ When you work in tourism, you’re never really on vacation. We have a more critical outlook. ”

As a member of neither Generation X nor the millennial group, what are Paul-Hus' preferred travel styles? Among her passions are sports and the outdoors; indeed, she says, she's rather talented at golf, but regrets the lack of time she has to pursue it.

“I like short stays a lot, for relaxation and gastronomic experiences,” she reveals, “but I'm just as comfortable being a backpacker. I prefer destinations that offer this versatility. A few days in a kayak, or hiking through the mountains – that's what reinvigorates me.”

Paul-Hus concludes by evoking the future. “I hope, one day, to have a small cottage on the edge of a lake,” she says, “where I can put into practice the French way of life and enjoy life as much as possible in good company.”

All that remains to be seen is which side of the ocean the cottage is located on. ●





FOUR FRENCH FAVOURITES

At the risk of provoking controversial debates within Paul-Hus' network, PAX asked her to name some of her favourite French locations. "I may never be invited again for a weekend by the friends whose destinations aren't on the list!" she jokes.



The mountains

"I really like all destinations in the vicinity of a mountain range; I feel that little bit more like I'm on vacation. Hiking is always a challenge, one that is both physically demanding yet incredibly rewarding. One of my first trips to France was in the Alps, in August – and it snowed!"



Hauts-de-France

"It's a place that's very close to my heart. I was deeply involved in the anniversaries of the Great Wars. There is a whole world to explore in the region, even at the artistic level thanks to Louvre-Lens. This is a revelation that would especially appeal to francophiles who have already been to France a few times."



Auvergne

"There is an extraordinary architectural ensemble in Auvergne, in its authentic, pretty and endearing villages. It's not for shopping, but for encounters and breathtaking landscapes. Its volcanoes are super-accessible and perfect for slow travel."



Castles of the Loire

"Some of the most famous castles in France are located here, but some others are a little under the radar because we tend to cross the region too quickly. Clos-Lucé, Langeais... there are many little hidden gems that deserve to be visited more."

Special thanks to Sofitel Montréal Golden Mile for allowing us to use their space for the photoshoot.



HOW TO close a sale

By Jean-François Venne

The time to propose to your customer that they buy the product you've presented has arrived; the moment of truth. How do you increase the chances of their saying "yes"?

"The conclusion of a sale will be smooth if the seller has done their job well in the previous stages," says Jean-François Paradis, president of P5 Médias Conseils.

"It is most often up to the seller to move to the 'closing' stage."

— Roger St-Hilaire, sales trainer

 A good analysis of the client's needs

According to Paradis, the process consists of collecting several "small yeses" from the client, which will naturally lead to their final agreement on the conclusion of the sale. First and foremost, a good analysis of the customer's needs is required. Where do they want to go? Would they prefer a three-, four-, or five-star hotel? Do they have children? Equipped with this knowledge, the agent can then propose options. Be careful not to give too many: limiting the client to three or four choices is about right.

Demonstrate how each option meets the customer's requirements by throwing in questions such as, "Did you tell me you wanted a little park nearby for the kids?" This method leads the client to agree and therefore to accept that several aspects of these proposals are suitable for them. Use the same terms that they do. If they talk about "all-inclusive," use the phrase yourself so they can see that you're talking about the same type of product.

If the customer still isn't sold on the product despite all this, then it's time to see what the problem may be.

Perhaps they changed their mind on one point – for example, if they had allocated \$3,000 in their budget, but would now like to bring that down to \$2,500. It'll be easy to overcome this last objection by proposing new options, since you've already agreed with the customer on everything else.

"The conclusion of the sale is no longer the time to negotiate, but rather to reaffirm what has already been accepted by the customer," Paradis explains.

Q Look out for clues

How can you tell if the customer is ready to go to the closing stage of the sale? "Very few customers will say it openly, so it is most often up to the seller to move to the 'closing' stage," notes Roger St-Hilaire, who has been conducting sales training for more than 45 years.

He advises to pay attention to the signs that indicate the customer's growing desire to buy. These can be small sentences – "That would really make a difference!", "Finally, someone

"The conclusion of the sale is no longer the time to negotiate, but to confirm what has already been accepted by the customer."

— *Jean-François Paradis, president of P5 Médias Conseils*

who understands what we want!" – or similar. Other clues can be very telling, such as a smile when discussing a destination or hotel, or a look exchanged between partners.

St-Hilaire stresses that we shouldn't hesitate to reinforce customers' comments by linking them to a concluding sentence. If a customer says, "I think I'd like that," then the seller can add, "I'm sure of it. Are you ready to go ahead?" If they remark, "It's cheaper than I thought," the seller might comment, "I'm glad to hear that – are you ready to book?"

"When people ask you about the price, it's a good opportunity to conclude," St-Hilaire comments. He suggests

using something along the lines of, "It's yours at \$1,750 – are you ready to go ahead with the booking?"

Regrettably, says St-Hilaire, too many sellers delay to effectively close the sale, fearing rejection. He emphasizes that an initial refusal does not necessarily mean that the sale is lost; rather, it presents an opportunity to adjust the offer by questioning the customer about their reservations. "In fact, it's better to know early on that you're not on the right track, rather than spending a lot of time proposing options that do not interest the customer for one reason or another," he concludes. ●

TERMS TO USE (AND LOSE)

A Gong study shows that certain terms reduce the chances of successfully closing a sale. The word "discount" reduces the success rate by 17 per cent, while "contract" makes closure seven per cent less likely. In the same way, repeating terms such as "I'm going to show you how..." or using the name of your agency several times harms the chances of success of the sale.

Terms you should use, according to Chorus, are those which emphasize collaboration ("we", "our", "together") and others that inspire trust ("certainly", "definitely", "absolutely").

Sources: <https://goo.gl/1zQTnD>
<https://goo.gl/5NhGPz>



Jean-François Venne
Independent journalist specializing in the field of business

A NUMBERS GAME

HITTING THE SLOPES



25

The percentage of the populations of Norway, Switzerland and Austria which are active skiers – which equals 1.3 million, 2.1 million and 2.18 million respectively!



17,785

The elevation (in feet) of Chacaltaya, Bolivia, which served as the country's only ski resort and was previously ranked as the highest in the world. In 2009, the resort closed after the glacier receded completely, following a lengthy melting period. The resort's restaurant was also ranked as the world's highest by Guinness World Records.



22,500



The year that the world's first chairlift was introduced at the grand opening of Sun Valley resort in Idaho. While the lift is no longer in use, it's been included on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for its role in revolutionizing the activity.

The area in square metres covered by snow at Ski Dubai, an indoor ski resort surrounded by the Arabian Desert. At that size, Ski Dubai produces more than 30 tonnes of snow each day!



428

The number of ski resorts in the U.S., the most in a single country in the world. Some way behind is Japan at 305, followed by Austria with 275.

Sources: Wikipedia, Sun Valley Resort, PlanetSKI, skidubai.com

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ONLINE TRAVEL BOOKING

What the future holds

By Blake Wolfe

While it's something of a dirty word amongst traditional travel agents, any discussion of travel in 2019 would be incomplete without an examination of online travel booking. It's a rapidly growing segment of the travel industry and as technology continues to evolve, online booking will only increase.



18-34 only/usually booked online in the past 12 months, compared to just 44 per cent of travellers 55 and older.

Mobile bookings – smartphones on the rise

In 2017 there were 24.4 million mobile phone internet users in Canada, a figure projected to grow to 29.1 million by the end of 2022. Increasingly, those phones are being used to book travel.

PhocusWright found that worldwide, online travel bookings are increasingly being made by mobile devices, with smartphones outpacing tablets. According to the report, in the fourth quarter of 2017, online travel agencies gained 39 per

According to Statista, in Canada, revenue in the online travel booking segment amounted to \$4.9 million U.S. in 2018. Of these bookings, the largest segment was hotels with a market volume of \$2.98 million U.S. in 2018.

But not to worry, dear travel agent – it's a big market and in many cases, you have the upper hand!

Millennial market

According to PhocusWright, Canadian online travel penetration of the total market will rise from 41 per cent in 2017 to 47 per cent by 2021 – and the majority of that is being driven by younger travellers.

The share of Canadians who only/usually book online rose from 50 per cent in 2014 to 55 per cent in 2017. However, online booking incidence correlates strongly to age: the PhocusWright report found that more than six in 10 Canadian travellers aged

cent of their bookings on smartphones – a 61 per cent year-over-year increase.

However, booking by phone hasn't caught on in every market.

While 50 per cent of all Middle East online travel bookings are made by phone, only 22 per cent of such bookings in North America take place by mobile.

The GAFAM

The so-called GAFAM – Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft – looms larger on the radar of the travel industry, as these brands' presence in travel grows.

While these five companies are indisputably among the world's most valuable, they're in constant flux. This past summer, Apple became the first publicly traded company in the U.S. to hit a stock value

of \$1 trillion; the milestone was repeated just weeks later when Amazon, however briefly, also crossed the \$1 trillion mark.

So where does their presence stand in the travel industry?

For Apple, Microsoft and Facebook, their impact on travel is, at the current moment, peripheral at best: Apple has yet to attempt an entry into travel and Microsoft took a step back following the failure of its Bing Travel search engine in 2011.

Of these three, Facebook has the most direct effect, both as an influencer of travel decisions (a Facebook-commissioned study in 2016 stated that when planning a trip, users spend five times longer on the social network versus travel-related sites and apps) and via its Recommendations tool, an application through which customers can endorse a business, that has been touted as a possible channel for direct hotel bookings.

Google & Amazon: trouble looming?

However, Google and Amazon may be a different story.

Since adding Google Flights, Google Hotels and Destinations in recent years, Alphabet (the parent company of the popular search engine),



has made the most inroads into travel of the five GAFAM companies. Valued at approximately \$739 billion in 2018, the company has the capital, reach and ambition to continue expanding its travel booking tools.

While not currently in the travel business, Amazon has flirted with the market before – and could very well again in the future. →



““ They’re not coming to just book airfare, they want added value from a travel professional ””

- Nathalie Boyer, general manager, Transat Distribution Canada



and while most millennials seem happier to book vacations over their phones, there's growing evidence that travel agents are becoming more popular with younger travellers.

A 2017 American Society of Travel Agents survey found that while online bookings are more popular amongst millennials, 30 per cent of millennials surveyed had used a travel agent over the previous 12 months. Better news still – 45 per cent of millennials who used an agent were likely to recommend that agent to family and friends, while 22 per cent of all survey respondents had booked through an agent at least once in the previous year – the highest share reported in three years.

In April 2015, the company launched Amazon Destinations, a tab on its Amazon Local site (which also offered deals on hotel bookings) allowing customers to search for travel deals on products such as weekend getaways available in the Amazon inventory. With few products available, the option was removed from Amazon Local just four months after its launch, when hotel bookings on Amazon Local were also discontinued.

However, given Amazon's past incursions into the online travel space, there's speculation that the company will make another run at the market; after all, they certainly have the finances to do just that.

Where traditional agents stand

While the above statistics represent a large percentage, the fact remains that more than half of boomers are still booking through traditional means,

And there's good reason.

According to the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies, while a Google search can easily yield millions of hits on a term such as "Mexico vacation," the search engine still can't provide travellers with advice and insider tips, along with access to exclusive pricing on airfare, car rentals, hotels and more.

"A travel agent has been there, knows someone who has, or has a network of contacts that can be accessed for on-the-ground up-to-date information that answers all your questions," the organization says.

The future of travel agents

Ultimately, it comes down to creating client peace of mind, which is the one thing that an online booking can't provide, regardless of whether said portal has the reach or financial backing of a Google or Amazon.

“ Although we need to use that technology to be efficient, they will never replace travel agents – robots don’t have the emotional intelligence or experience that an agent can bring to the equation. ”

*- Nathalie Boyer, general manager,
Transat Distribution Canada*

“You have an advocate that you can call on for help before or during your travels – in case of change of plans, emergencies, cancelled flights or the unexpected,” says ACTA.

Nathalie Boyer, general manager, Transat Distribution Canada, tells PAX that while technology is inevitably going to change the industry over the coming years, agents will still maintain an essential role in selling travel.

“I don’t think many people realize day to day how much they deal with technology,” Boyer says. “When you ask how many people have a smartphone, everyone raises their hands; when you bring up chatbots, there’s some confused looks but when you mention Siri, they understand.

“Although we need to use that technology to be efficient, they will never replace travel agents – robots don’t have the emotional intelligence or experience that an agent can bring to the equation.

“The goal is to make sure our agents are able to sell dreams through travel, not to be able to learn



the functionality of a system. Their value is in their passion and experience which can be provided to a client.”

In addition to the impact of technology on the industry, the way in which customers perceive the role of agents is also changing – a development which Boyer says TDC is preparing their consultants for.

“They’re not coming to just book airfare, they want added value from a travel professional,” she says.

“Clients are demanding and short on time and when they come to see you, they already have in mind what they want – they usually know the product better than us – and they just want the added value and reassurance that everything will be fine. It’s our job to equip the agents for this.” ●

TRVL



Is a TRVL agent the same as a travel agent? It depends who you ask.

“commission” on booking their own trips, in exchange for their advice to fellow TRVL users.

The online travel portal, which made its Canadian debut in late 2017, has blurred the lines between OTA and travel agent by paying travellers a

In the words of TRVL founder Jochem Wijnands, “basically, you’re your own travel agent.



Jochem Wijnands, founder of TRVL

“ Sharing your insights on visiting a place, on what to do and where to stay, we wanted to bring that process online, of travellers helping each other. That’s totally missing today. We built a place where you don’t pay as much and meet likeminded travellers willing to help you build a better trip. ”

Disruption vs tradition

So how does Wijnands feel about traditional agents? His answer may surprise you.

Industry Council of Ontario (TICO) raised concerns about how the platform was conducting business in the province, prompting TRVL to temporarily suspend its services in Ontario.

“We’re not against travel agents and we never wanted to pick a fight with anyone. We don’t think agents are obsolete at all. I use an agent if I have a more complex itinerary.”

Richard Smart, TICO’s president & CEO, told PAX that as of October 2018, TRVL was still not a registered travel business in Ontario; TICO is currently in the process of developing new regulations for travel businesses operating in the province which are based online or outside of Ontario.

Like many similar “digital disruptors” such as Uber and Airbnb, TRVL has not been without controversy: when the service debuted in Canada, the Travel

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ADVENTURES ON THE RIVERS





Original and unusual places for your events

By Aurore Bonvalot

Do you want to surprise your participants when you organize an event? Here are some unique, unusual places that are sure to intrigue attendees.

Onboard a houseboat or a yacht

Houseboats are very popular in Europe and can serve as intimate places for events in both summer and winter. Seminars can be organized all year long inside ships staying at the dock; you can also choose a river ride along the waterways to add a touch of exploration to your event.

Yachts come in all sizes, and whether you're staying at the dock or sailing, there's no doubt that they bring glitz and glamour to your event.

Inflight on a plane

It's possible to charter a plane and organize a press event or product launch on board – providing, of course, your budget allows it.

In an art gallery or museum

Are you organizing the launch of a brochure on Asia? Stage your event in a museum that presents an exhibition of works from this continent



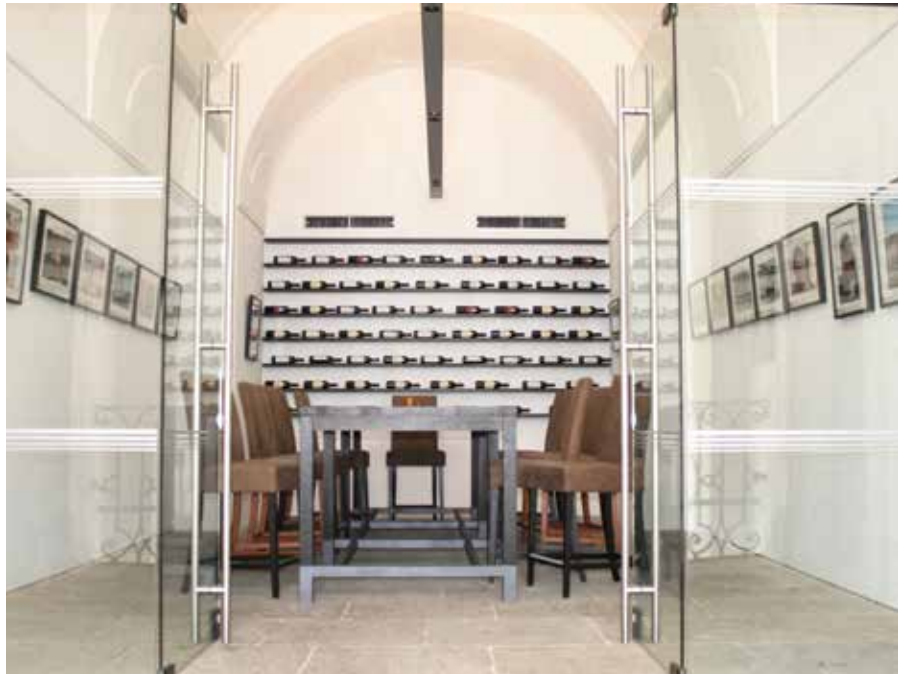
and give your participants a taste of their next trip. For Europe, there are plenty of choices when it comes to renting spaces dedicated to the continent's art.

In a penthouse or private villa

Some agencies specialize in renting villas or private apartments. You'll have the choice between several original, exclusive places your participants have never experienced – guaranteeing a surprising and memorable event.

In an historic church

These venues are becoming increasingly popular, and convenient, for organizing events. They're already visually →





interesting, allowing you to save on the cost of decorating; virtually all you need to provide is good lighting.

In a botanical garden

Embrace the outdoors and hold an event in a natural, scenic setting.

In a circus hall or planetarium

Change the décor and atmosphere of your events by allowing guests to travel through the magic of the circus or the fascinating world of space. You can work each venue's best features into the event's offerings for participants.

In an aquarium or zoo

These settings offer the benefit of rooms for organizing conferences or meals. Several activities can be planned around the animal theme: treasure hunts, initiation courses, interactions with animals, and more. They will also allow you to factor in some free time for your event participants to explore the site themselves.

On the beach

What's more exotic than an event on a beach with the sound of waves crashing in the background? The beach can serve as a lounge area, a

conference setting, a banquet area and a dancefloor. This type of event is especially popular on the west coast of the United States. It's important to factor in the associated costs such as the special operating licence, the rental of mobile toilets, the need for sufficient lighting, heat lamps (if required), and more. In addition, alcohol consumption is not always allowed – so make sure to check this before you start organizing.

In your own improvised event space

If you can't find the place of your dreams to realize the concept of your event, why not rent a large hangar or expansive local open space and create the surrounding that you wish? This is what many brides and grooms do in the United Arab Emirates, where no concept is too extravagant. Some have even been known to build Arabian Nights-inspired castles to celebrate their wedding in style. ●



IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN CHOOSING A VENUE

- The number of people and the target audience (male, female, spouses, children, average age)
- The desired theme and the agreement required with the chosen venue
- Whether it has the desired "wow" effect
- The level of difficulty of execution of the event with local providers
- The budget you have available

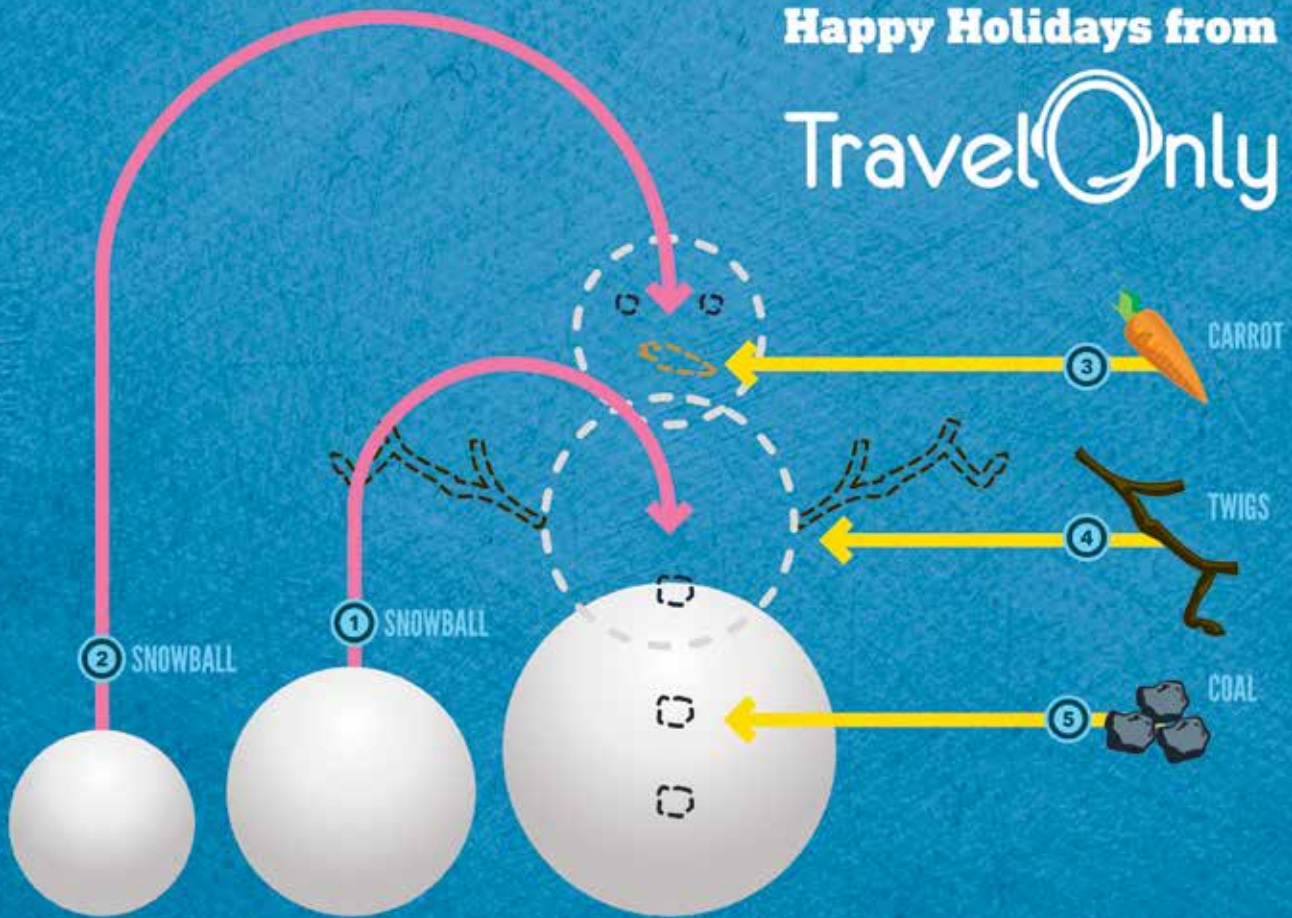


Aurore Bonvalot

President of the Collectionneurs de Voyages agency, specializing in event organization.

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FAMILY ADVENTURE

destinations around the globe

By Blake Wolfe

With adventure travel operators offering programs geared toward all ages and fitness levels, more and more families are taking part and exploring together. And for agents, family groups plus unique destinations can equal large commissions. Here's a look at some popular family adventure destinations and the offerings available there.

A family encounter with a sea lion on a G Adventures trip in the Galapagos

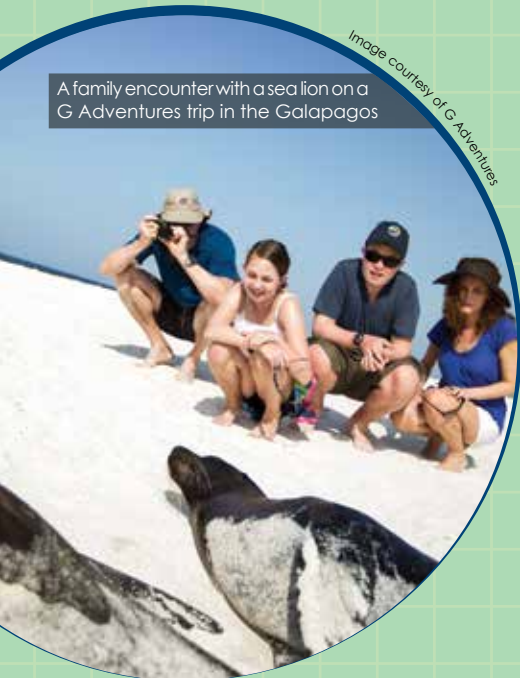


Image courtesy of G Adventures

Galapagos: a different world

A rugged landscape, unique wildlife and feeling like you're in a different world – it could only be the Galapagos! Drawing thousands of visitors every year, the island chain offers travellers the chance for some once-in-a-lifetime experiences; from seeing the giant Galapagos tortoises and marine iguanas in the wild to world-class diving opportunities, such a unique location makes Galapagos the perfect destination for families to explore together.

G Adventures' family itinerary in Galapagos offers opportunities to snorkel, hike, kayak, and swim the islands, as well as visit a giant tortoise breeding centre and the Charles Darwin Research Station.

South Pacific: an idyllic escape

Whether part of a cruise or a luxury getaway, the vastness and untouched beauty of the South Pacific yield plenty of chances for families to explore together. White sand beaches, blue waters and verdant islands are the primary colours of this region, painting an idyllic escape for the entire family.

On its South Pacific cruises during the summer and holiday season, Paul Gauguin has partnered with the Wildlife Conservation Society to offer families a range of ecology-themed activities for all ages, from discovering marine life while snorkeling to beach excursions in Tahiti and the Society Islands.

Family adventures in the South Pacific with Paul Gauguin



Image courtesy of Pacific Beachcomber/Paul Gauguin Cruises

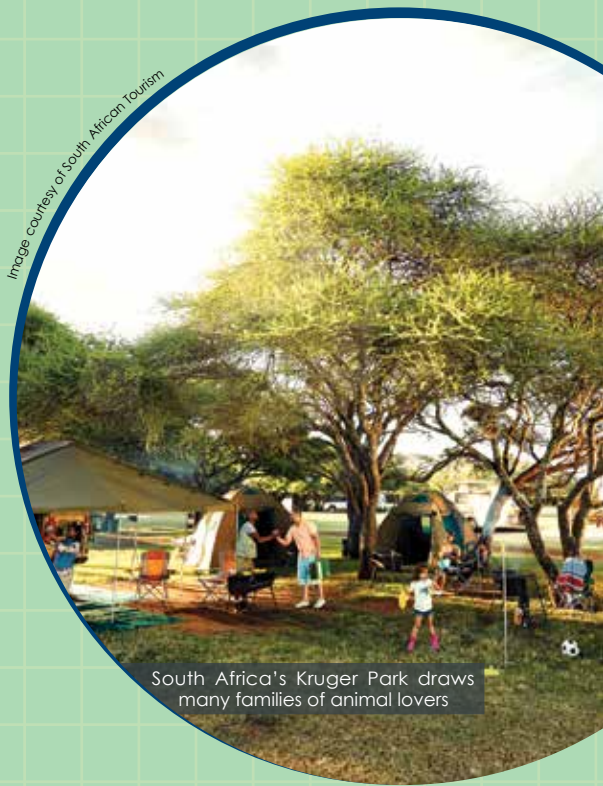
South Africa: go wild on safari

From the city lights of Johannesburg to its multiple distinct ecosystems just waiting to be explored, South Africa's popularity as a travel destination continues to grow – especially amongst Canadians, who continue to enjoy a favourable exchange rate!

In terms of active travel, Kruger Park is without a doubt the star of the show, drawing increasing numbers of families eager to catch a glimpse of the "Big 5" – specifically lions, elephants, leopards, cape buffalo and rhinos.

Visits to the park are incorporated in many of Goway's South Africa itineraries, including &Beyond Ngala Safari Lodge and Adventures in Nature, which allow families to explore the park and get in touch with their wild side.

Image courtesy of South African Tourism



South Africa's Kruger Park draws many families of animal lovers

Image courtesy of Visit Costa Rica



Underwater exploration in Costa Rica

Costa Rica: a prime spot for eco-tourism

With a tropical rainforest enveloping the slopes of towering volcanoes to its pristine Caribbean beaches, Costa Rica's reputation as a destination with something for everyone is well deserved! The country's lush surroundings have made it a prime spot for eco-tourism, a travel style appealing to all members of the family.

On Intrepid Travel's Costa Rica Family Holiday, families will head into the wilderness of Tortuguero National Park, where they will experience the coastal lagoons by boat and spend two nights in a riverbank lodge. The tour operator also offers a version of the itinerary exclusively for single parents, grouping together single-parent families on an exploration of the Costa Rican countryside. ●



On the horizon

The most anticipated cruise ships of 2019

By Ming Tappin

The cruise industry shows no signs of slowing down, with CLIA having anticipated 28 million cruise passengers in 2018 – representing a consistent 1.5 to two per cent growth year over year.

To accommodate this growth, close to 25 new cruise ships will be launched in 2019 by mass market, premium, luxury and expedition cruise lines. The following is our pick of the most anticipated newbuilds.



Photos by Viking Cruises

Viking Cruises – Viking Jupiter

Viking Ocean was born from the vision of its Chairman Torstein Hagen, who wanted to bring all the benefits of river cruising to the ocean. As a result, Viking's fares include wine, beer and soft drinks at lunch and dinner, a shore excursion at every port, Wi-Fi, specialty coffees and teas, plus all taxes and fees. The *Viking Jupiter* will feature all-veranda accommodations, complimentary alternative dining and free self-service laundrettes. Viking's target audience is well-travelled adults (it has recently changed its minimum guest age to 18+) looking for destination-focused itineraries without the nickel and diming experience onboard. As such, the ship has no casino, no photographers, and no art auctions or onboard pressure sales commonly found on ocean cruise lines.



- Size:** 47,800 GRT (gross register tonnage)
- Guests:** 930
- Crew:** 550
- Length:** 745 ft.
- Beam:** 94.5 ft.
- Launching:** February 2019



Photos by Royal Caribbean



Royal Caribbean – Spectrum of the Seas

The *Spectrum* will be the first of the "Ultra-Quantum" class, which includes familiar amenities such as the skydiving experience RipCord by iFLY, the North Star observation pod, Two70 video entertainment screens, and SeaPlex with bumper cars and a roller skating rink. New innovations include a virtual reality bungee trampoline experience called Sky Pad, and the Ultimate Family Suite – a two-storey, 2,809-sq. ft. enclave that sleeps up to 11, with an in-room slide and the first private 3D cinema. The *Spectrum* will also introduce new Golden and Silver suite categories perched on the top decks, with exclusive keycard access to a VIP restaurant, lounge, pool and deck areas. Purpose-built for the Chinese market, *Spectrum* will also feature a large selection of Asian-themed eateries including Sichuan Red – a specialty restaurant serving the cuisine of Sichuan province. →

- Size:** 168,666 GRT
- Guests:** 4,246
- Crew:** 1,551
- Length:** 1,139 ft.
- Beam:** 136 ft.
- Launching:** April 2019



Photo by Celebrity Cruises

Celebrity Cruises – *Celebrity Flora*

The all-suite, all veranda *Celebrity Flora* will elevate the Galapagos cruise experience with the largest and most luxurious accommodations (up to 1,288 square feet) in the region. Built for just 100 guests, onboard venues will include the Observatory with floor-to-ceiling windows, an al-fresco Ocean Grill, and a stargazing platform. Menus will be curated by a Michelin-starred chef, and each suite will be staffed with a Personal Suite Attendant to provide everything the guests need. The *Flora* will be sailing in the Galapagos year round, offering 10- and 11-night packages including overnight stays in Quito. The all-inclusive fares will cover all shipboard beverages, tours, lectures, Wi-Fi, snorkeling equipment, and gratuities.



Size: 5,739 GRT

Guests: 100

Crew: 81

Length: 333 ft.

Beam: 55.7 ft.

Launching: May 2019



Photos by Princess Cruises



Princess Cruises – *Sky Princess*

Princess Cruises is known for building ships with consistent layouts so its guests feel right at home on every vessel. The *Sky Princess* will be no exception, following in her sisters' wake as the fourth Royal class ship, but will feature two new innovations. First is the new Sky Suite accommodation, measuring 1,565 sq. ft. including a 700-sq.-ft. balcony furnished with day beds, loungers, outdoor TV and bar. The two-bedroom, two-bath suite accommodates up to five, with a separate dining and living room, and 270° views high atop the ship. A new themed bar will also be onboard, details of which are still under wraps. →

Size: 143,700 GRT

Guests: 3,660

Crew: 1,346

Length: 1,083 ft.

Beam: 155 ft.

Launching: October 2019



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Photos by Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line – *Norwegian Encore*

As the third Breakaway Plus class vessel after *Norwegian Joy* and *Bliss*, the *Encore* will again feature the 180° Observation Lounge with expansive views, as well as the Haven suite accommodations and its exclusive Horizon Lounge with equally unmatched views. Solo travellers will be accommodated in the Studio staterooms with access to a common living room area called the Studio Lounge. Details of other public areas and amenities are still forthcoming.



Size: 167,800 GRT

Guests: 3,998

Crew: 1,716

Length: 1,094 ft.

Beam: 136 ft.

Launching: November 2019



Photos by Carnival Cruise Lines



Carnival Cruise Lines – *Carnival Panorama*

True to its name, the *Carnival Panorama* will feature a variety of outdoor spaces, including open-air seating at several restaurants and bars, the pedal-powered SkyRide, WaterWorks Aqua Park, and an elaborate sports square. Panoramic views continue in the Havana class accommodations with private patios facing the promenade, and an exclusive outdoor bar and pool. The *Panorama* will be the first new Carnival ship to be homeported on the West Coast in 20 years. ●

Size: 133,500 GRT

Guests: 3,960

Crew: 1,450

Length: 1,055 ft.

Beam: 122 ft.

Launching: November 2019

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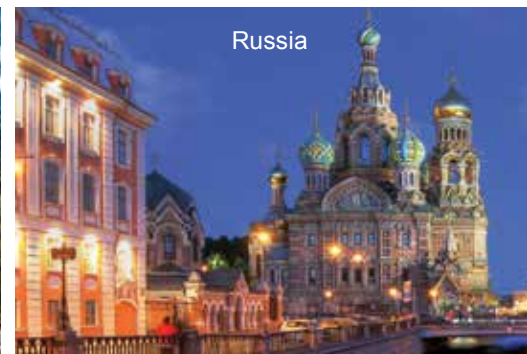
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+ MORE NOTABLE SHIPS LAUNCHING IN 2019

Cruise Line	Ship	GRT	Guest capacity	Expected launch date	Notable features
MSC Cruises	Bellissima	167,600	4,500	March 2019	262-ft. LED dome, Cirque du Soleil at sea
MSC Cruises	Grandiosa	177,100	4,888	November 2019	323-ft. LED dome, Cirque du Soleil at sea
PONANT	Le Bougainville	10,000	184	April 2019	Underwater observation lounge
PONANT	Le Dumont-d'Urville	10,000	184	August 2019	Underwater observation lounge
Scenic	Eclipse	17,085	228	January 2019	Two helicopters and a submarine onboard

*New ships featured in this article represent only a small selection that we have chosen to highlight, and not the complete list of newbuilds. As all ships are still under construction, all information and statistics are subject to change.

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Ming Tappin

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What does 2019 have in store for social media?

By Frédéric Gonzalo

With 2018 drawing to a close, it's already time to assess the balance sheets and start planning for next year. What has stood out in the past 12 months, and what trends are on the horizon for 2019?

Facebook's annus horribilis

On Jan. 18 of this year, Mark Zuckerberg heralded a significant change of course for Facebook, announcing a more sophisticated algorithm (or content filter) penalizing publications that attract little interaction. In other words, the site was to give priority to conversations between people and profiles, making life more difficult for managers of Pages.

A succession of controversies engulfed Facebook in 2018, ranging from questions over its involvement in the U.S. presidential campaign and Brexit (the Cambridge Analytica scandal) to Zuckerberg's appearance before a U.S. Senate Committee and the discovery, this autumn, that nearly 90 million accounts had been hacked.

Decreasing organic reach

"So what?" you may ask. Well, anyone using a Facebook page for business will probably have noticed underperformance this year, either through

the reach of their publications or the level of engagement. For a customer I worked with this fall, traffic generated from Facebook to their website dropped by 72 per cent in 2018 compared to the same period in 2017.

 **MY PREDICTION:** Facebook's slow decline will continue in 2019. Of course, this is not a reason not to maintain a dynamic presence and continue conversing with your community of customers. But organic reach is expected to fall, meaning that you should be aware of the prospect of having to spend more to achieve the results of previous years – or at least, satisfactory results according to your campaign goals.

Mobile devices: ever-popular

According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada (2017), 76 per cent of Canadians now own a smartphone. We can certainly extrapolate that this figure will reach 80 per cent in 2019 – if it hasn't already.

During the last year, while I was involved in website diagnostics for various clients, I noticed a big trend: mobile traffic now contributes more than 50 per cent of the traffic of sites analyzed, with the figure exceeding 60 per cent or even 70 per cent in some cases.

The implications of this? We now must think about our content according to this new reality for all electronic communications platforms.

- **Sending newsletters:** titles should be shorter, images in lower resolution, and links should be obvious and designed for the mobile user.
- Websites that are **slow to load have been penalized by Google since 2016** and the consumer will go elsewhere. Your site should be responsive, with more and more people likely to consider a mobile-first approach.
- **Social media:** knowing that nearly 92 per cent of content shared on social media today is consumed on a mobile device, you should make sure to write in a short, concise way, with photo slides and using icons to serve as calls to action. →



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MY PREDICTION: Travel counsellors, agencies and various providers in the travel industry have already begun to make the shift, but we should see this trend continue in 2019 with redesigned websites adapted to the new reality. It will be the same for the creation of content on social media, where we will see more short content, optimized for reading on mobile devices.

Instagram: one billion active users on a monthly basis

What Facebook is losing in popularity on one side, it seems to be making up for with its sister platform, Instagram. Over the past year, the popular mobile app has reached the milestone of 1 billion active monthly users, and several new features have emerged including the IGTV video channel. Stories has also proven extremely popular among users of the platform, with an estimated 400 million using the feature.

Snapchat: North America's 2nd platform of choice

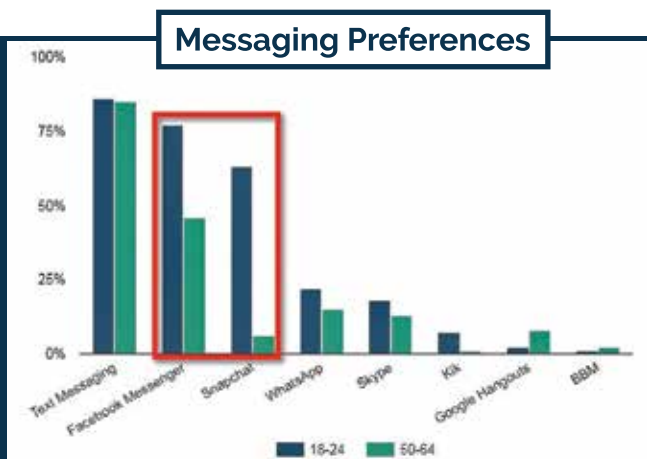
Some people, me included, may have predicted that popularity would kill Snapchat. But we were all wrong; in the last year, we learned that not only did Snapchat remain popular among young people (13-25 years), but it is now the second platform of

choice in North America, behind Facebook and far ahead of Instagram. As this chart from a recent Catalyst Canada report shows, text messaging also remains a popular tool – no matter what age category.

Messaging apps will continue to build on this momentum, and we can expect 2019 to reflect this new reality among travel agents and other industry players. One only must think about Messenger's chat feature, which is becoming more and more present on Facebook pages and encouraging conversation via text.

MY PREDICTION: I don't believe that Snapchat is the most promising platform for travel agencies, hoteliers and destinations, because of its youthful target audience. In contrast, I expect to see a strong presence on Instagram and ever-growing popularity of this platform in 2019. It will be the same with Messenger, whose integration on the Facebook page, or even on your website, will allow the conversation to be activated with certain customer segments who prefer this mode of communication.

What do you think will be the key trend that will impact your social media management in 2019? ●



Source: Catalyst Canada, 2017



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Conference speaker & consultant
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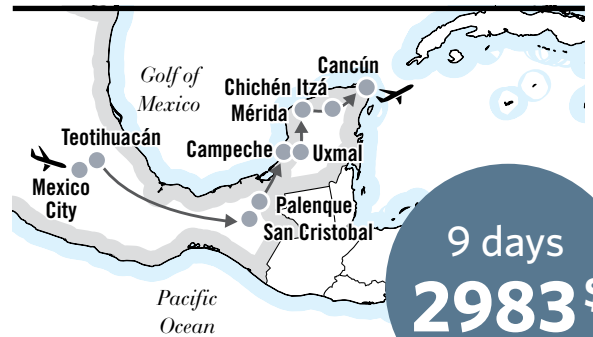
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San Cristóbal de las Casas

A COLONIAL GEM

One of the dozens of lakes at Lagunas de Montebello National Park

Residing at the heart of Mexico's Chiapas province is the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Have clients ready to visit? Here's a quick rundown of what the destination has to offer!

San Cristóbal de las Casas was designated one of Mexico's "Pueblos Mágicos" (Magic Towns) in 2003, and was further recognized as "the most magical of the Pueblos Mágicos" by former Mexican President Felipe Calderón in 2010 – high praise indeed! Established in 1528, the city retains much of its original layout, complete with a Spanish flair including red tile roofs and wrought-iron balconies overflowing with flowers.

Canyon and lakes

With its mountainous surroundings, San Cristóbal de las Casas has lots to offer outdoor enthusiasts. Located 45 minutes outside of the city, Sumidero Canyon can be traversed by boat along the Grijalva River. In addition to sights such as five seasonal waterfalls (visible during the rainy season, approximately from July to October), visitors can

also catch a glimpse of local wildlife including crocodiles and spider monkeys along the riverbank.

A communal tourism project operated by local indigenous peoples, the Arcotete Eco-Tourism Park can be found approximately six kilometres from San Cristóbal de las Casas. This park, which requires a small entrance fee, features a network of hiking trails and a series of caves to explore.

On the border of Mexico and Guatemala, Lagunas de Montebello National Park is comprised of 59 lakes, many of which are open for swimming or canoeing. Due to concentrations of various



Some of the work on display at Museo del Ambar

Photo by Jack Kennard/flickr



The Catedral de San Cristóbal de Las Casas, an example of the colonial architecture of San Cristóbal de Las Casas

Photo by Júbilo Haku/flickr

minerals, their waters range in colour from emerald and turquoise to dark green, purple and reddish black. The park also contains the Mayan ruins of Chinkultic, consisting of 200 buildings including several pyramids and a ball court.

History preserved

The past comes alive in San Cristóbal de las Casas, which features six museums dedicated to a number of subjects.

Casa Na Bolom ("Home of the Jaguar") is the former home of archaeologist Frans Blom, operating as a museum/hotel/research centre. Operated by the non-profit Asociación Cultural Na Bolom, the centre is dedicated to the protection of the Lacandon Maya people and the preservation of the Chiapas rain forest.

The region's natural resources also have a home in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Housed in a 16th-century convent, the Museo del Ambar is the only one of its kind in Mexico.

From fossils to works of art, the museum contains more than 300 amber pieces, most of them found in Chiapas province.

Commemorating an historically important stone in Central American cultures, the Museo Mesoamericano del Jade features numerous examples of artwork and carvings from the Mayan and Olmec civilizations. ●



HAVE YOU HEARD?

- In a nod to the past, horses and donkeys still play a major role in the delivery of goods such as milk and produce in San Cristóbal de las Casas.
- A recent influx of travellers has resulted in expanded restaurant offerings, including Italian, French, Thai, Indian, Chinese and more.

THE FESTIVE SIDE OF **Croatia**

From the Dalmatian coastline to the old city square of Zagreb, Croatia never stays quiet for long!

Take a tour of Croatia's festivities in its major cities and discover a little something for all tastes and ages. Take note though – these are just a few of the many celebrations taking place throughout the country each year!

Destination Dubrovnik

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, the city of Dubrovnik has hosted its annual Summer Festival since 1950 between July 10 and Aug. 25 of each year. The festival, one of the biggest in Croatia, welcomes international performers in the worlds of dance, theatre and music to its various stages each year. The festival often includes some big names in entertainment: over the years, the Dubrovnik Summer Festival has welcomed the likes of actor Daniel Day-Lewis and musicians Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie and Ravi Shankar.

The streets of Dubrovnik are best explored on foot – and what better way to do this than through the Dubrovnik Walking Festival? A recent addition to Croatia's festival calendar (the inaugural edition took place in 2015), the

October event brings together locals and visitors with the aim of showcasing lesser-explored paths in and around the city, the perfect way to discover something new in an already-popular destination.

Scenic Split

Travel further up the coastline to Split and you'll find yourself in the ancient home of Roman Emperor Diocletian (himself of Dalmatian descent), whose palace still stands as a tourist attraction and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As is the case in much of Croatia, Split commemorates the country's former membership as a province of the Roman Empire with its annual Days of Diocletian, a city-wide celebration honouring the connection to the past. From May to September each year, Split is transported back

Photo by M. Gačarić / Zagreb Tourist Board

Zagreb's King Tomislav Square hosts the annual Zagreb Classic festival each July



nearly 2,000 years with Roman centurions lining the streets and parading with Diocletian himself. History also comes to life with authentic music and cuisine from the Roman Empire available throughout Spilt during the summer months.

From A to Zagreb

Not to be outdone by its southern counterparts, the capital city of Zagreb has its share of celebrations throughout the year as well.

Each summer, the city's King Tomislav Square becomes the host of the Zagreb Classic, an annual celebration of classical music performed by top Croatian and international ensembles in a series of evening concerts throughout the month of July. Performances are free to attend but be sure to get there early, as prime spots fill up fast!

From November to January, Zagreb welcomes the return of its annual Christmas markets, a spectacle not to be missed!

While it's a tradition most often associated with Europe's Alpine countries, Zagreb's Christmas markets – which recently took top honours in an online poll conducted by European Best Destinations – draw visitors with the sights, sounds and flavours of the holidays, complete with an ice park in King Tomislav Square and a holiday light display within Gric Tunnel, an historic pedestrian tunnel built in the city's centre during World War II. ●



The Christmas display in Zagreb's Gric Tunnel

Photo by Julien Duval/Zagreb Tourist Board



The city of Dubrovnik



DID YOU KNOW?

- With a population of just 21 residents, the community of Hum, in northwestern Croatia, is ranked the World's Smallest Town by the Guinness World Records.
- Sunseekers, rejoice! Croatia enjoys 2,175 hours of sunlight each year.

EASTER ISLAND

A MONUMENTAL DESTINATION

This underwater moai is a leftover from the 1995 film *Waterworld*

Photo by Turismo Chile

Located 3,700 kilometres off the Pacific coast of Chile, Easter Island has long been a bucket-list destination for generations of travellers. While annexed by Chile in 1888, the island, located at the southeastern corner of the “Polynesian Triangle” (Hawaii and New Zealand being the other two points) offers a distinctive South Pacific flair.

More than 1,000 iconic moai

Synonymous with exploration and adventure, the iconic moai are Easter Island's most famous feature. More than 1,000 of these statues are found across the island, in various sizes and styles ranging from the massive stone heads placed along the coastal hillsides of Rano Raraku to the (relatively) smaller carvings found inland at Ahu Akivi. Nearly half of them can be found in a quarry at Rano Raraku, the main source of the volcanic rock used by the ancient artisans.

Created between 1250 and 1500, the moai are believed to represent the ancestors of the indigenous Rapa Nui people, all facing inland toward the former village sites.

One of the most striking displays is a group of moai atop a ceremonial platform known as an *ahu*, found in the town of Anakena.

Beach, surf and wine

Anakena is also Easter Island's main beach destination, where travellers can unwind on white sand and enjoy the turquoise waters, which are a consistent 20°C throughout the year. While other beaches can be found on Easter Island, Anakena is the only one officially open for swimming.



While Hawaii may be the top surf spot in the Pacific, Easter Island also offers opportunities to ride the waves. While the northern shores provide a challenge for even the most seasoned of surfers, those new to the sport can try out gentler waters in Hanga Roa along the island's west coast.

The destination is also a hot spot for wine and Chilean cuisine, including tuna empanadas and poe, a sweet pudding prepared with pumpkin and flour.

By plane and cruise ship

Currently, the only airline serving Easter Island is LATAM, which offers daily flights to/from Santiago and one weekly flight to/from Papeete, Tahiti.

Easter Island can also be accessed by ship, with the destination included on itineraries offered by several cruise lines including Holland America Line, Oceania Cruises and Princess Cruises. Smaller yachts also call at the island. ●



HAVE YOU HEARD?

- Thanks to its volcanic past, Easter Island has an extensive cave system consisting of more than 7,000 metres of tunnels.
- One of Easter Island's most famous moai – an underwater statue at Hanga Roa – is a recent creation: the statue and the reef it's anchored to was originally created for the 1995 film *Waterworld*.
- A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995, much of the island is protected within the confines of Rapa Nui National Park.
- Like the Galapagos, Easter Island also features a unique passport stamp – but you won't get it flying in from mainland Chile. Stop by the post office in Hanga Roa and for a small donation, you can receive one of the most unique passports stamps in the world!



The moai atop their ahu as seen from the sands of Anakena

Photo by Elias Rovielo/flickr

Photo by Lyle Rains/flickr

The coastline of Tongariki

LAPLAND

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Comprised of Finland's northernmost territory, Lapland is a study in contrasts. While the popular image of Lapland as a land of snow and reindeer may certainly hold up in the winter months, the destination is just as vibrant when the snows recede and green replaces white as the dominant colour of this unique landscape.

Fun in the Midnight Sun

Due to its geographic location, Finland experiences extended periods of light and darkness during the summer and winter months respectively – and nowhere is this more pronounced in the country than in Lapland!

While a full month of darkness in the winter may seem too much to bear for most, the Finnish summer balances out with four weeks of sunlight – the so-called "Midnight Sun" phenomenon. During this time, it's not uncommon to see the streets of the region's towns and cities teeming with residents and travellers enjoying the extra light, which takes on an orange hue at this time of year.



Travellers can take advantage of the extended daylight and explore Lapland's wilderness at any hour, by mountain bike, kayak or even horseback.

The real Santa's Workshop

The capital of Lapland which bills itself as "the official hometown of Santa Claus," the town of Rovaniemi is a popular holiday destination for Finns and international travellers alike. Situated atop the Arctic Circle, the boundary is marked by a permanent structure which runs through the town's Santa Claus Village, where Christmas

Photo by Visit Finland

The midnight sun shines on Lapland – the perfect time for a hike!



Santa Claus is a familiar face in Lapland, particularly the town of Rovaniemi

Photo by Visit Rovaniemi and Visit Finland



The Arctic Circle is marked in the town of Rovaniemi

Photo by Visit Finland & Visit Rovaniemi

skiers can take a break in a very unique way – by warming up in the world's only sauna gondola!

The two-hour experience is geared toward groups of nine to 12 guests, with groups of up to four guests boarding the gondola for a 20-minute ride (the rest of the group is invited to enjoy the sauna at the top Yllas while they wait for their turn). ●



HAVE YOU HEARD?

- Rovaniemi is the only place where the Arctic Circle can be crossed underground, through a tunnel in the town's SantaPark.
- Lapland is also a top spot for seeing autumn colours! The best time to catch them is mid-September, when the leaves enter *ruska*, a Finnish term referring to the vibrant colours of fall.

is celebrated year-round just eight kilometres north of the city's centre. A rite of passage for visitors to Rovaniemi, the crossing of the Arctic Circle can also be commemorated with an official certificate from the city!

It's a far cry from 1944, when the city was nearly destroyed completely during World War II.

The world's only sauna gondola

Saunas and winter sports are a major part of Finnish culture – so why not combine the two? In Yllas (one of Lapland's many *fells* or highlands),

A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS

St. Martin/ St. Maarten

Explore the natural side of St. Martin at Loterie Farm

Photo by Mike Roberts/flickr

With a French flair to the north and a Dutch demeanour down south – both basking in the Caribbean sunshine – St. Martin/St. Maarten has something of a split personality.

While it was hit hard by Hurricane Irma in 2017, the destination has recovered and is looking to welcome more travellers than ever before.

From the colourful homes of Philipsburg to the top of Fort St. Louis overlooking Marigot, the island boasts plenty of character no matter which side you're on!

Panoramic views and nature sanctuary

At a height of 424 metres, Pic Paradis is the highest point on St. Martin – overlooking the French side of the island, the lookout point provides one of its most picture-perfect views, drawing plenty of photographers looking to get the ideal shot.

Not far from Pic Paradis is Loterie Farm, a 135-acre nature sanctuary where visitors can explore St. Martin's natural side. Nestled in the green hillsides are numerous hiking trails and for the adventurous traveller, a tree-top obstacle course and zipline collectively known as the FlyZone, allowing visitors to soar above 200-year-old mango trees. A kids' obstacle course known as Ti-Tarzan was destroyed

by Hurricane Irma and will be replaced by a different experience.

37 beaches

Boasting 37 beaches, the island has plenty of places to catch some sun. But with St. Martin becoming increasingly popular, where can you go to enjoy the beach and escape the crowds? Located along the northwestern shore, Friar's Bay typically draws



mainly locals as opposed to tourists, offering a more laid-back vibe for travellers looking to get off the beaten path.

Looking to go for a dive? South of St. Maarten lies Saba Island, a prime scuba spot where divers can get up close with marine life, including sea turtles, pufferfish and more at Tent Reef. Saba can be reached by a 90-minute ferry ride from St. Maarten, with a number of dive operators based on the island.

More than 300 restaurants

In a place where Europe meets the Caribbean, there's bound to be some amazing food and beverage options!

Billing itself as the culinary capital of the Caribbean, St. Martin/St. Maarten boasts more than 300 restaurants – nearly one for every day of the year – featuring everything from the best of French and Dutch cuisine to restaurants offering seafood, barbecue, sushi and vegan eats. Be sure to bring an appetite!

While it's only been in operation since 2012, Topper's Rhum has received international accolades for its products. Located in Simpson Bay in St. Maarten, a variety of rum can be enjoyed from the source through tours of the company's 6,000-sq.-ft. distillery.

Getting there

Canadians have lots of options for getting to St. Martin/St. Maarten. Flights are offered by Air Canada, Air Transat, Sunwing and WestJet, with plenty of resort options available through the airlines' respective tour operator divisions. ●



DID YOU KNOW?

- You can make your own perfume in St. Martin! Just head over to Tijen Parfumerie in Grand Case for lessons from experts in the field.
- While St. Martin was named and claimed a Spanish territory by Christopher Columbus on his second New World voyage in 1493, he never actually set foot on the island.



Colourful homes dot the streets of Phillipsburg in St. Maarten



Divers can swim with sea turtles at Saba Island

Varadero

BEYOND THE BEACH



Enjoy the beaches of Varadero... but there's a lot more to see!

Known for its many resorts – and the beautiful 20-km stretch of sandy beach on which many of them reside! – Varadero has long been established as a vacation hotspot for thousands of winter-weary Canadians each year.

However, there's more than just sand and surf to see here; check out some of the unique attractions which Varadero has to offer travellers who want to explore beyond the beach.

Varahicacos Ecological Reserve

Not far from several resorts at the eastern end of the Hicacos Peninsula is the Varahicacos Ecological Reserve – where guests can travel back in time more than 2,500 years! A protected nature preserve since 1974, the area contains a number of surprises within its three square kilometres. Several hiking trails wind through the region's scrub forest, which guests can take to see the 500-year-old giant El Patriarca cactus.

Cueva de Musulmanes

It's not just ancient plants that define the preserve: numerous burial sites of Cuba's indigenous people can still be found throughout, while in the Cueva de Musulmanes, the cavern

walls feature ancient petroglyphs carved there by the island's Taino people more than 2,500 years ago.

Ambrosia Cave

Amateur spelunkers can also explore the preserve's Ambrosia Cave for more Taino petroglyphs (with 72 such works, it's one of the largest collections in the



Photo by Kerion J. Wick

Relive the British Invasion at Varadero's Mi Casa Beatles

Caribbean) with an added surprise: this cave is also home to thousands of bats, which cling to the walls and ceilings of the cavern.

An affordable admission rate is charged to enter these various sections of the preserve.

Underground swim

While the beaches of Varadero are great for swimming, travellers looking to take a dip of a different sort can head to Saturno Cave. Located 30 minutes outside of Varadero just south of the Via Blanca highway, this cave contains a crystal-clear freshwater pool, which hovers around 20-22°C – perfect for a swim!

Saturno Cave can also be explored further by scuba diving; experienced

divers can explore to a depth of 22 metres and thanks to the exceptionally clear waters, a variety of marine life – including lobsters, angelfish, barracuda and moray eels – can be easily seen.

Mi Casa... es Beatles' casa?

While Latin rhythms are the usual Cuban soundtrack, the sounds of 1960s-era Liverpool are immortalized at Mi Casa Beatles, a Varadero bar dedicated to the Fab Four. A statue of Paul, John, George and Ringo greets patrons as they enter the establishment, which is adorned with album jackets and photos of the band inside. Cover bands perform every night and while songs from The Beatles catalogue are in heavy rotation, patrons can expect to hear sounds from every generation and genre of rock 'n' roll.

Be sure to arrive early, as Mi Casa Beatles is a very popular venue with locals and travellers alike. ●



DID YOU KNOW?

- Long before the first resort, Varadero (Spanish for "dry dock") and its salt mine served as a supply base for Spain's Latin America fleet, as far back as 1587.
- Following the Cuban revolution in 1959, many of the mansions built in Varadero by U.S. millionaires were expropriated and converted to museums.



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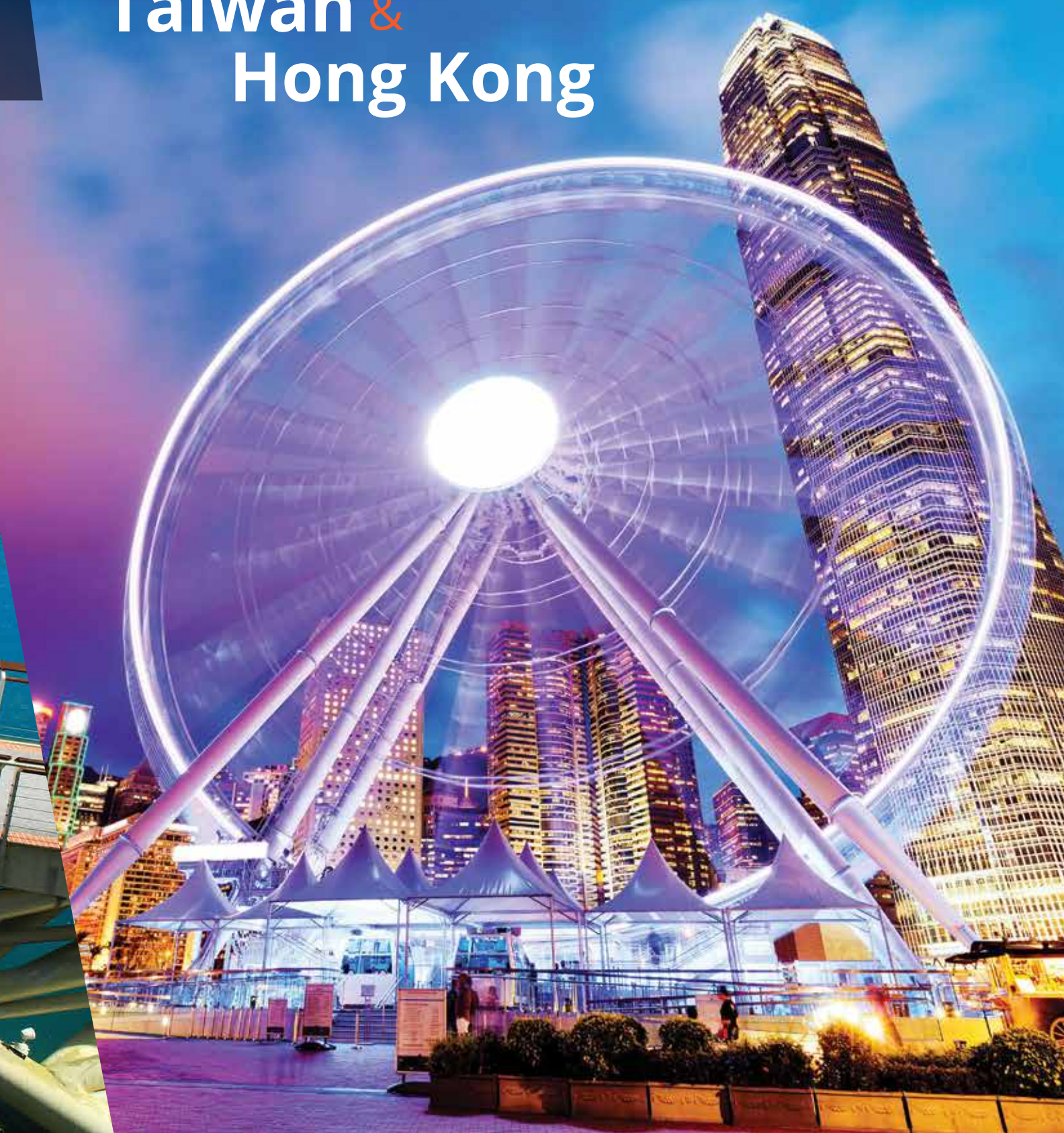


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HONG KONG & TAIWAN

A magic combo

Want to make the most out of your long-haul trip to Asia? Expand your East Asia bucket list by combining the sights and sounds of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

By Michael Pihach



"We're gonna need a bigger plate."

I pondered this, paraphrasing the famous "bigger boat" line from the movie *Jaws*, as another round of steaming-hot, Cantonese-style dumplings found a landing spot at our crowded table.

Must-have dumplings

The afternoon had been a feast for the eyes at Tim Ho Wan, a no-frills dim sum restaurant in downtown Hong Kong.

We were lucky to get a seat at this self-proclaimed "humble hole-in-the-wall." On the street out front, crowds of hungry guests were swarming like bees, vying for a table.

The eatery specializes in classic dumplings, puffy pork buns and even more adventurous fare, such as chicken feet. As a disciplined maitre d' hollered names and table numbers in Cantonese and Mandarin, the scene in the kitchen was a hurricane of flour-dusted hands, patting and preparing dumpling skins.

The bite-sized delicacies are cooked in a meticulous way. "Timing is everything," our guide, Miranda, insisted, claiming that fewer than five restaurants in Hong Kong make dumplings like Tim Ho Wan does.

The result is a smooth, tender dumpling, slightly overcooked on the surface, oozing with flavour.

The most affordable Michelin-starred restaurant in the world

It's a happy-ending experience that doesn't require a payday loan –



Hong Kong as viewed from Victoria Peak

dishes cost between \$10-24 HKD (about \$1.50-4.00 CAD). It's no wonder Tim Ho Wan has been called the most affordable Michelin-starred restaurant in the world.

More than 10,000 restaurants

Had we found the most divine dumplings in Hong Kong? The skyscraper-studded city with more than 10,000 places to eat presents endless options. Given the hoopla on the street outside of Tim Ho Wan (and the bloat in my belly), I'd say we'd come close.

It was one of several must-eat places PAX visited while touring the cosmopolitan city of more than seven million people. Accompanied by the Hong Kong Tourism Board and →

WHERE TO GO IN HONG KONG FOR...

A Perfect View

Hong Kong's Ocean Terminal Deck at Harbour City offers one of the best panoramic views of Hong Kong Island's futuristic skyline (hot tip: go at night). Higher up is the Victoria Peak's Sky Terrace 428, which stands 428 metres above sea level and serves the best 360-degree views of Hong Kong.

A Zen-Like Experience

Ngong Ping Village on Lantau Island is home to a peaceful, 34-metre-high Big Buddha statue and Po Lin Monastery. How to get there? The Ngong Ping 360 gondola, which sends you soaring over mountains and lakes, steeply and safely (glass floor included).

A Swim in the Clouds

Take your backstroke to new heights at the newly-opened Hotel VIC on The Harbour (which hosted PAX). The 671-room hotel has one of the highest rooftop infinity pools on all of Hong Kong Island. hotelvic.com

Authentic Street Food

We loved the Temple Street Night Foodie Tour, a guided neighbourhood food stall crawl covering everything from fish balls to egg puffs (and the stories behind their fame). hongkongfoodietours.com

A Rowdy Dinner

Tung Po, a cafeteria-style eatery in Hong Kong's North Point. While the Cantonese-fusion dishes are noteworthy, it's the restaurant's spikey-haired owner, Mr. Robby Cheung, who steals the show as he moonwalks, does the splits and takes selfies with customers.



Some of Hong Kong's distinctive, colourful buildings



Lungshan Temple of Manka in Taipei's Wanhua District



The Ngong Ping 360 gondolas

Hong Kong Airlines, we were introduced to Hong Kong's sights, smells and sounds, but also learned how to make the most out of a long-haul trip to Asia.

Taiwan: only two hours by plane from Hong Kong

One option: make your trip to Hong Kong a combo and include Taiwan.

Located 180 km east of mainland China from Hong Kong, Taiwan is a mountainous island known for its modern cities and natural beauty. What sold us was how easy it was to get there from Hong Kong (the flight is just under two hours).

Flying Hong Kong Airlines in Business Class made the journey extra comfortable with its amenity kits, full-flat seats and full-service Skybar (which, with the right combination of passengers, can become your own nightclub in the sky).

Endless cultural experiences

Both destinations offer endless cultural experiences. Hong Kong's Causeway Bay is a hub for glitzy mega-malls and

luxury retailers while bargain hunters flock to the Temple Street Night Market, a bustling street bazaar where trinkets, electronics, clothing and art is haggled over, in between rounds of street food, such as egg waffles and fish balls.

"Every neighbourhood is a different world," Michael Lim, director, Canada, Central & South Americas at the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), told PAX.

Shilin Night Market

Similarly, Taiwan's Ximending Shopping District and Shilin Night Market offer an eccentric mix of culture and eats. As guests of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, our visit to Shilin was a feast for the senses as our group linked arms and navigated our way through throngs of people, passing midway games, shopkeepers and vendors selling pepper buns (a hot pocket loaded with pork and green onions), oyster omelets and stinky tofu.

Similar but also very different

Urbanite travellers will love the cityscapes of both destinations. Hong Kong's dense



Taiwan's Taipei 101 building from the pool deck at Humble House Taipei

skyline comes ablaze at night as colourful lights and lasers blast from skyscrapers on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, a nightly presentation at 8 p.m. called the Symphony of Lights. Taiwan's Taipei 101 building, a 101-storey landmark shaped like a stalk of bamboo, towers over the capital city of Taipei with stunning magnificence.

Connecting with nature

Visiting Taiwan, before or after a city like Hong Kong, ultimately allows you to tell another story. Taiwan's connection to nature – and all the activities that go with it – truly sets the destination apart in one-of-a-kind ways.

With more than 200 mountain peaks and nine national parks, the region's countryside is a paradise for outdoor lovers. As we hiked along the Liwu River in the gorge of Taroko National Park, peering up at misty mountains and pickle-green hills, we questioned if we were indeed hiking or hunting for dinosaurs in Jurassic Park.

If we were in fact attacked by dinosaurs, I'm sure we would have tasted good!

But not as good as Tim Ho Wan's dumplings. ●

Our journalist was hosted by Hong Kong Airlines as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan tourist offices.

WHERE TO GO IN TAIWAN FOR...

A Survivor-like Experience

The Cidal Hunter School, an indigenous retreat near rural Hualien County. The school was opened to preserve traditions central to the local Amis tribe, offering group activities such as fire-making, straw-plaiting, river trekking, hut making and trap setting (with the promise that no wild animals are harmed).

A Rural Retreat in the Country

With mountains on one side and the Pacific Ocean to the other, the Victorian-style Farglory Hotel, perched 220 metres high in rural Hualien County, makes you feel like you're staying in a classic English villa. farglory-hotel.com.tw

A True Taiwanese Lunch

Din Tai Fung, a restaurant located at the base of the Taipei 101 building, where chefs, in assembly line fashion, knead, roll, fold, and steam xiaolongbao, or "soup dumplings," served in steaming hot bamboo baskets. dintaifungusa.com

Rooftop Dragons and Worship

Lungshan Temple of Manka, a Chinese folk temple with rooftop dragons statues in Taipei's Wanhua District, where visitors can be seen wandering the halls, quietly worshipping at altars to Chinese deities.

A 5-STAR STAY AT ROYAL MYCONIAN RESORT & VILLAS

SLEEPING UNDER A HEAVENLY SKY

By Marie-Eve Vallières

Overlooking the Aegean Sea (the playground of legends such as Poseidon, Zeus, the Nesoï and other ancient deities), this fabulous hotel has the capacity to astonish, with both its modernity and the quality of its services sure to seduce cosmopolitan travellers staying in Greece's Mykonos.

It all paves the way for an exceptional stay in the heart of the Cyclades islands.

WHERE HEAVEN AND EARTH MEET

Nestled on a rocky promontory with a steep, logic-defying incline, the hotel inspires awe among its guests on approach as they make their way higher and higher upwards, toward skies that feature so prominently in local mythology.

The main terrace overlooking the sandy beach of Elia boasts unrivalled views of the sea and the Cycladic island duo of Naxos and Paros, whose hilly silhouettes are outlined on the horizon.

The beach is one of the most popular on the island, with sun loungers and



The hotel offers an exceptional stay in the heart of the Cyclades.



rustic straw umbrellas exclusive to Royal Myconian guests – meaning you won't have to wake up at dawn to guarantee a prime place under the sun.

A ROYAL SERVICE

Although it goes without saying, it's still worth emphasizing that the Royal Myconian's status in the prestigious Leading Hotels of the World group reflects an attentive, impeccable, downright royal service to guests.

A thalassotherapy spa and gym help guests to work off any excess pounds gained from a meal at the Ambrosia restaurant where, at dusk, holidaymakers adorned in their fineries cross the imposing wooden doors. Here, they discover a panoramic terrace and experience a simple but impeccably-executed à la carte menu from chef George Oikonomou. Guests can enjoy these dishes, bearing the distinctive flavour of local tradition, in the atmospheric dim lighting of thousands of candles lining the stone walls and vaulted ceilings.

For vacationers who feel like getting further acquainted with the local culture and cuisine,

meanwhile, a minibus transfer to the main village of Mykonos, with its iconic white windmills, is offered every day until the early hours.

FIVE ROOM CATEGORIES

The Royal Myconian skilfully punctuates its common areas with New Age décor, with the unmistakable hallmarks of Aegean tradition evident across the architecture and bold art of its rooms (except, perhaps, for the free Wi-Fi across the entire property – a luxury that wasn't quite yet available in ancient Greece). The rooms all feature generous private terraces covered with aromatic bougainvillea fuchsia and aqua shutters, creating a picture-postcard effect. Although most rooms face the sea, some even offer private infinity pools or Jacuzzis.

It's a true privilege to stay at the Royal Myconian – a heavenly place where the gods and goddesses of lore are never far from the imagination. ●

Our journalist was a guest of Transat as part of its Andromeda package.



JUST IN CASE

Already well-known for its backpacks, the popular Canadian brand Herschel also offers travellers convenient and trendy suitcases. We love the design and functionality of this cabin bag, which has an internal battery that can be easily removed for standalone use; an external USB-A port, meanwhile, will keep your phone charged throughout the trip.

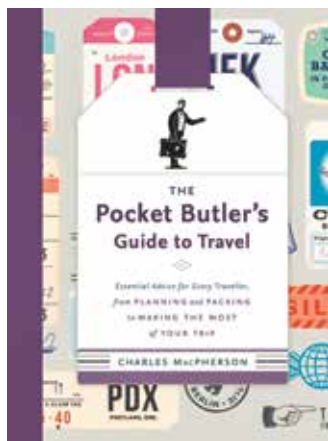
\$279.99 ‹‹



POCKET FOR YOUR PASSPORT

In addition to being wearable in five different ways (including around the neck, as a hood, bolero, or shoulder bag) this multifunction scarf contains a secret pocket to put your passport in. Stylish – and very practical! Designed in Canada by Fol-Artists Creations.

LESCREATIONSFOL-ARTISTS.COM - \$65 ‹‹



New FINDS

THE BUTLER KNOWS BEST

As the owner of North America's only registered school for butlers and household managers, Charles MacPherson (as seen on CTV's *The Marilyn Denis Show*) knows a thing or two about travel. He has planned itineraries for royalty, celebrities and business leaders alike, and has trained staff at the world's leading hotels. His tips on how to make the most out of travel - from mastering wrinkle-free packing techniques to navigating etiquette around the globe - can be found in his latest compact book, *The Pocket Butler's Guide to Travel*. You can travel the world, but not without this book.

\$16.95 ‹‹



LOCKED AND LOADED

The Tapplock padlock makes carrying keys and having to remember codes a thing of the past. All it needs is your fingerprint, with the unlocking process lasting just 0.8 seconds! You can also connect the padlock to your cell phone if you want to unlock it via Bluetooth. The Tapplock can save up to 500 different fingerprints and limit access; while it's a number that few of us are likely to reach, it's handy when multiple users share the same padlock. To access the features, simply download the Tapplock app to your phone. Unusually (but brilliantly) you can also unlock the padlock using Morse code.

\$129.95 ‹‹



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★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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