

# **The Independent – 30.12.2006**

## **The top destinations for 2007**

**From exotic escapes to action-packed adventures, Frank Partridge explores the new horizons that will delight even the most world-weary traveller during the year ahead**

**Published: 30 December 2006**

### **WHERE ARE THE HOT NEW DESTINATIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR?**

There is, of course, nowhere "new" under the sun, but the travel industry's constant quest to tempt us means that there is a steady flow of places, near and far, that open up to organised tourism. In Europe this year, the target is another fragment of the former Yugoslavia: Montenegro. This southern Adriatic republic is the continent's youngest sovereign state - it seceded from Serbia last May. This year, an estimated 75,000 British travellers visited Montenegro, but the aim is to boost that to 700,000 within five years.

Montenegro crams a lot of attractions into a small area. It has an appealing slice of Adriatic coastline; southern Europe's only fjord; deep river canyons; four national parks; and a spectacular mountain range where skiing resorts are being developed. Culture-seekers will find Byzantine-style monasteries and churches, and Venetian palaces in this self-styled "wild beauty" of the Mediterranean that could become a serious challenger to its neighbour, Croatia.

Ten large new hotels are due to open in the next 12 months to accommodate the early influx. The expansion of the airports at Podgorica and Tivat is likely to attract the low-cost airlines: rumours have already begun about spies from Ryanair "sniffing around". Visit [www.visit-montenegro.org](http://www.visit-montenegro.org) for more information.

### **SOMEWHERE MORE EXOTIC?**

Mozambique is now at peace, but it is taking some time for most travellers to consider the formerly war-wracked African republic as a serious destination. A step in the right direction is the Ibo Island Lodge ([www.iboislandlodge.com](http://www.iboislandlodge.com)), which has just opened in northern Mozambique, 45 miles from Pemba, an unspoilt area of exquisite, surreal beauty.

Ibo Island, part of a coral archipelago of 32 islands, was once an important Portuguese trading post, and contains the scattered ruins of abandoned villages and 18th-century forts. The 12-room lodge consists of three waterfront mansions, restored in colonial style - all antique furniture and heavy wooden shutters. You can explore the other islands by boat, in waters ideal for swimming, snorkelling and kayaking. Return flights from Pemba cost £150; half-board at the lodge costs \$295 (£160) per person per night.

Week-long packages can be arranged through the UK operator Rainbow Tours (020-7226 1004; [www.rainbowtours.co.uk](http://www.rainbowtours.co.uk)). International flights, light-aircraft transfer, full board at the lodge, a historical tour and some complimentary watersports will cost £1,795 per person.

### **AND ROMANTIC?**

Judging by the number of UK tour operators who are including Madagascar in their brochures for the first time, this vast Indian Ocean island is emerging as an alternative to Zanzibar, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Classic Representation (0131 556 4368; [www.classic-representation.com](http://www.classic-representation.com)) is modelling the tropical island as a honeymoon destination, combining luxury (in a handful of choice resorts) with exotic wildlife. Seven nights in June at the five-star Anjajavy Hotel on a remote peninsula on the north-west coast, including flights from London via Paris, internal air transfers, full board, activities, and various "honeymoon extras" including exclusive use of a private stretch of beach, costs £3,350 per couple.

Honeymooners who don't want to travel beyond Europe might consider a peaceful mountain retreat overlooking Turkey's luminous Lycian coast. Exclusive Escapes (020-8605 3500; [www.exclusiveescapes.co.uk](http://www.exclusiveescapes.co.uk)) is offering a striking new "concept" villa near Kalkan, with an alfresco kitchen and dining room, spa bathroom, infinity pool, and floor-to-ceiling windows looking out to sea. Seven nights in June, including flights, transfers, the hire of an open-top vehicle, and a complimentary Turkish bath at the Kalkan Regency, costs £1,400 for two.

### **ANY OLD "NEW" PLACES?**

Ten years after the Luxor massacre devastated Egypt's tourism business, Nile cruises are regaining their popularity (subsequent attacks by Egyptian terrorists have targeted the Red Sea resorts, far from the Nile). Recent finds in the Valley of the Kings include preserved flower garlands from the time of the Pharaohs, and 2007 should see the first organised excursions to the "tomb of garlands". Discover Egypt (020-7407 2111; [www.discoveregypt.co.uk](http://www.discoveregypt.co.uk)) is offering seven-night full-board Nile cruises, including flights from Gatwick, transfers and excursions, from £448 per person.

### **ARE OUR HOLIDAY TASTES CHANGING?**

Surveys on both sides of the Atlantic suggest that affluent consumers are spending more on life-changing experiences, while their need for luxury is waning. Numerous operators are tailoring their packages to satisfy this new "experience economy", such as Holiday Options (0870 420 8372; [www.holidayoptions.co.uk](http://www.holidayoptions.co.uk)), whose 2007 brochures include such diverse activities as preparing a meal in the garden of a Sicilian olive mill, or having a painting lesson from a local artist; spending a day picking grapes in France to understand the wines better; taking part in a tree-planting programme in the Azores to help the environment; or visiting a sheep's-cheese manufacturer in Corsica to put together a picnic.

### **BRING ME SUNSHINE... APART FROM THE ASHES, WHAT IS AUSTRALIA BRAGGING ABOUT IN THE COMING YEAR?**

The walking paradise of... Sydney. Yes, Australia's largest city. Much of the shoreline surrounding the harbour has been designated as National Park. A new 16-mile Harbour Circle Walk shows off areas of unspoilt bush, bays and sandy beaches, as well as the spectacular city skyline in the distance to remind you where you are.

Melbourne, never to be outdone by its rival, is opening a 55-mile footpath along a stretch of the wonderfully scenic Great Ocean Road, taking in the 12 Apostles (huge limestone rock formations), two national parks, beaches, forest and heathland.

Bridge & Wickers (020 7483 6555; [www.bridgeandwickers.co.uk](http://www.bridgeandwickers.co.uk)) is offering five nights in a room with a harbour view in Sydney's Sebel Pier One hotel, from £384 per person, and can arrange a three-day escorted hike along the Great Ocean Walk, including two nights' accommodation, transfers and most meals, from £553 per person. Another novel way to explore Sydney's highlights is on two wheels. Escorted tours organised by Bonza Bikes ([www.bonzabiketours.com](http://www.bonzabiketours.com)) take in the Opera House, Harbour Bridge and the downtown area, for A\$70 (£28).

Bridge & Wickers has also announced an inexpensive way of touring New Zealand that's considerably more comfortable than camping. A new model of VW camper van is now available for hire. It can accommodate a family of four and features a cooker, DVD player with flat-screen TV, a heater, hot and cold water, and a hand-held outside shower. Charges start from as low as £100 for seven nights.

### **ANY NEW AIRLINES?**

Improving relations between Britain and Spain over the Gibraltar issue have hastened the arrival of a new low-cost operator, Fly Gibraltar (0870 774 7411; [www.flygib.com](http://www.flygib.com)), which starts direct services to the Rock from Stansted, Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham in April. Tickets are already on sale. A "concierge booking service" is available, enabling passengers to pre-order hot meals, snacks, newspaper, magazines and gifts from the in-flight shop before they leave.

### **AND NEW AIRCRAFT?**

The new Airbus A380 is due to start commercial flights in 2007, just as it was in 2006. The launch customer is Singapore Airlines, and the jet will initially be used on the Heathrow-Singapore-Sydney link. But little of the development of the A380 "super jumbo" has gone to plan so far. The first nine of the 555-seat, double-decker leviathans are due to be delivered to Singapore Airlines in October, but the timetable keeps slipping: they're already a year late following a raft of difficulties, notably with the installation of the plane's in-flight entertainment system.

Qantas has already been told that its quota will be two years late. Several airlines are reconsidering their options to buy, especially as the smaller, faster and more efficient Boeing 787 Dreamliner nears completion. But the A380 is not necessarily a lost cause, having successfully completed its trials, including proving flights in November over both Poles. Singapore Airlines is likely to get at least one into commercial service before the end of the year.

### **ANY IN-FLIGHT INNOVATIONS?**

While the Airbus engineers grapple with the A380's entertainments system, Apple and Panasonic have developed a device that enables passengers to plug their iPods into a socket and watch their own videos on the seat-back screen. They'll also be able to charge their

batteries in-flight, play games and interact with on-board content. Air France, Continental, Delta, Emirates, KLM and United will introduce the system in the summer.

It was only a matter of time before the mobile-phone revolution took to the skies, although it's debatable whether the prospect of your in-flight neighbour shouting, "I'm on the plane!", to their friends and family will add lustre to the travelling experience. Roaming charges will certainly add to airline profits, however, and some time in 2007, Ryanair is expected to be the first airline to offer the service. Passengers are always being warned that mobile phones interfere with the aircraft's communication systems, but personal mobiles will be connected to their networks via an on-board transmitter and satellite that will bypass the cockpit electronics.

### **CAN AIR TRAVEL GET MORE COMFORTABLE?**

For business passengers, most definitely. British Airways will roll out its new £100m Club World format in 2007, featuring a flat bed that's 6in longer and 25 per cent wider than the existing model. Other innovations include remote-control opaque partitions, mood lighting, films on demand and gastronomic creations by celebrity chefs. Throughout 2007, Virgin Atlantic will be upgrading its Premium Economy seats. The new models will be wider (21in), with a greater pitch, lumbar support and an adjustable footrest. In a £12m revamp, the quality of the meals for the airline's middle class will be improved, and the cabin furnishings, cutlery and crockery redesigned. Neither UK long-haul airline is planning any immediate improvement of economy class. But Cathay Pacific promises the cheap seats "will be revolutionised by our new cabin design". The Hong Kong-based airline has borrowed from business class to create a new fixed-back seat design that "allows a passenger to recline without intruding on those seated behind". Cathay also promises more space for legs and knees.

### **GETTING SAFER?**

Ever arrived in a foreign country exhausted from a long flight and uncertain what to do when you walk out of the terminal? The first hours in a distant destination can be bewildering, even frightening.

An unnerving encounter with some corrupt guards on the Cambodia-Laos border inspired a London University student, Sally Broom, to start up an internet company that aims to take some of the travail out of travel. Your Safe Planet involves a network of local people around the world who can provide prospective travellers with a grapevine of information and advice about places they intend to visit.

Subscribers register their profiles, interests and any specific requirements, and the YS Person at the other end e-mails the necessary information through the website.

If the traveller needs further help on arrival, or gets into difficulties, the YS Person is available on the telephone or can even meet up with them.

The cost of the service is £60 for the first country visited, and £45 for subsequent destinations; and [www.yoursafeplanet.co.uk](http://www.yoursafeplanet.co.uk) launches in January.

### **HAPPY ANNIVERSARIES**

The biggest celebrations of 2007 are likely to be in Virginia in May, when America marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. This was the first permanent English settlement in the New World, and a place where it's said that every American should stand at least once in their lives.

Jamestown came into being by accident, when a party of English adventurers headed 40 miles upriver from Chesapeake Bay to seek shelter from a fierce storm that was endangering their ship.

Along with nearby Williamsburg and Yorktown, Jamestown ([www.jamestown1607.org](http://www.jamestown1607.org)) makes up America's so-called Historic Triangle of restored English settlements. The sites are presented in a distinctively American way, mixing serious archaeology and history with, in places, a splash of kitsch.

The highlight of 18 months of celebrations will be a visit by the Queen in May, marked by three days and nights of music, theatre and firework displays on Jamestown Island. More details at [www.americas400thanniversary.org](http://www.americas400thanniversary.org).

Every Wednesday from 2 May, Cosmos (0870 787 9588; [www.cosmos.co.uk](http://www.cosmos.co.uk)) is offering fly-drive packages from Kent International Airport (better known as Manston) to Norfolk, Virginia, based on charter flights operated by Monarch. Packages start at £399 per person, with seat-only tickets for a little less. Tickets allowing admission to all the Historic Triangle's attractions on five consecutive days cost £39 (£15 for under-17s). Should you prefer to economise, the Museum in Docklands (0870 444 3856; [www.museumindocklands.org.uk](http://www.museumindocklands.org.uk)), in Canary Wharf, east London, has a special exhibition on the capital's connection with Jamestown; Journey to the New World is open until 13 May, and is covered by the museum's general admission charge of £5. It opens 10am-5.50pm daily except Sunday (when it opens noon-5pm), though will close on New Year's Day.

Also at home, VisitScotland (0845 225 5121; [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)) has declared 2007 the Year of Highland Culture, coinciding with the 300th anniversary of the union of Scotland and England.

The Highlands are one of the few British destinations that come into their own during the snowy months of February and March, attracting large numbers of walkers, climbers and skiers at an otherwise quiet time for the tourist industry. The Fort William Mountain Festival, from 16 February to 3 March, aims to take advantage of this with 16 days of films, lectures, art exhibitions, theatre and music events celebrating mountain culture.

## **NEW ROUTES FOR 2007**

In March, British Airways (0870 850 9 850; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) is introducing three new services from Gatwick, flying three times a week to Trinidad and Sarajevo, and daily to Dresden. At the same time, the airline is dropping four of its Gatwick destinations - Athens, Kiev, Newcastle and Riga - though rival airlines will continue to serve these cities from the airport.

In April, Virgin Atlantic (08705 747 747; [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com)) restores its daily link from Heathrow to Chicago.

The main focus for Britain's low-cost carriers in 2007 will be expanding their regional services to Europe. From April, easyJet (0905 821 0905; [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) will be flying daily from Edinburgh to Munich, and inaugurating two new services to Krakow - from Newcastle and Belfast. In the summer, easyJet will fly from Bristol to Bordeaux and from Newcastle to Menorca. Two destinations familiar to Ryanair customers are joining the easyJet network from Gatwick: Pisa and Palermo.

Ryanair (0871 246 0000; [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) is stepping up its operations at Nottingham airport. From February, the Irish airline is offering new connections from the East Midlands to Milan, Pisa and Inverness. Pilgrims may be interested in the new destinations of Knock in the west of Ireland and Santiago de Compostela - the Roman Catholic shrine in northern Spain.

Later in the year, Ryanair will connect Nottingham with Rimini on Italy's Adriatic coast, as well as Granada, Valencia, Alghero in Sardinia, Bratislava and Krakow. Two regional airports, Tyne Tees and Bristol, will be linked by Ryanair with Girona in northern Spain. From Stansted, the airline is establishing services to Bremen in north-west Germany and Deauville in northern France.

Bmibaby (0871 224 0224; [www.bmibaby.com](http://www.bmibaby.com)) is heading south with four new services from Birmingham. In March, it begins daily departures to Barcelona, and from May it's offering frequent flights to Rome, Lisbon and Marseille.

Despite the rise in Air Passenger Duty, Europe will continue to shrink in 2007.