



Hot destination: Chinese models have fun on the beach on Hainan Island.



Blissful: Lembah Spa at the Viceroy in Ubud, Bali, has a helipad for high-fliers.



Reconstructed: sunset shows Dresden at its renaissance and baroque best.



What's hot in 2006



Conscience vote: local kids benefit from guest dollars at Nihiwatu.



Last frontier: zero-gravity space travel is offered at Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Hotel charity

“GIVING back” is the buzz travel phrase of the moment.

Hotels are setting up their own charity foundations funded by guest dollars with the aim of helping those in need.

Nihiwatu sits atop a surf-break cliff on Indonesia's Sumba Island.

The recent winner of the Best Hotel award for Responsible Tourism, the hotel's Sumba Foundation helps with health care, education and hygiene for the local poverty-stricken villages.

Christine Ong's Como Foundation has helped the development, education and health of women and girls since 2003. The foundation contributes to non-profit grassroots organisations in Bhutan, Nepal, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia.

www.selecthotels.com/nihiwatu
www.comohotels.co.uk

Hainan Hi-O

GRAB the reef oil and head to the South China Sea for boasting rights next year.

Dubbed the Hawaii of the Orient because they share the same latitude, Hainan Island is a 32,000sq km Chinese province full of unspoiled beaches, mountains and hot springs.

The island made global news in 2001 when a US plane collided with a Chinese jet in nearby air space, sparking an international incident.

The only international incident on Hainan now is the annual Miss World Competition in the beach-side town of Sanya every December.

The Sheraton and Holiday Inn were the first to mark their territory in the China paradise.

Hotel group Rendezvous opened its Baohong Hotel this year and the Hilton will follow next year, Shangri-La in 2008.

Hidden kingdoms

BHUTAN understands the fragile nature of its beauty, which is why this land-locked Himalayan kingdom has a controlled-tourism policy: no more than 9000 are allowed in each year.

Bordered by Tibet and India, Bhutan is a country of mountain monasteries, river valleys and smiling villagers.

Most visitors come to trek the mountains, to raft the valleys' rivers, to find and lose themselves in a country where the gross national profit is measured in happiness, not dollars.

For the cashed-up, Aman Resorts has a range of Amankora lodges in the three regions open to visitors to Bhutan. Intrepid Travel offers all-inclusive 15-day Bhutan treks for small groups from \$4070 twin-share.

Chinese islands, space flights and day spas in rice fields

— *Rachael Oakes-Ash looks at the latest travel trends*

And non-smokers can breathe easy. Cigarettes are strictly forbidden in Bhutan.

www.amankora.com; www.intrepidtravel.com

Dresden revisited

SOCCER fans already know Germany is the place to be seen come next June.

But those wanting a slice of the German action without soccer tragedies can visit Dresden.

The capital of Saxony is known more for its love of music and art than its sporting prowess, and is most famous for the terrible damage it sustained in World War II bombing raids.

Once cut off by the Berlin Wall, Dresden's neglected renaissance and baroque homes and museums have been restored to pre-war glory.

But it's the mix of contemporary building and old-world sculpture that gives this Elbe River town its buzz.

Modernists head to the “transparent factory” of Volkswagen, where visitors can watch luxury cars being made.

Traditionalists go to the Semper Opera House, which was destroyed by fire in 1869, rebuilt immediately, then bombed in 1945.

The 1985 reconstruction still stands.

Spa Bali

THAILAND and Bali have traditionally fought it out for the role of Spa Mecca in Asia.

With the December launch of the Como Shambala Estate spa retreat, Bali's Ubud wins this year by a well-exfoliated nose.

Como Shambala Estate (known as CSE) is a residential health retreat set high in the rainforest hills.

Pool villas provide respite for stressed-out souls and cuisine is from the Shambala Spa menu, with personal eating plans designed for each guest.

Visiting masters, weekend retreats, spa relaxation and more ensure a truly holistic stay. Bliss.

But wait, there's more in Ubud.

Lembah Spa at the Viceroy in Ubud has a helicopter pad so you can fly in for a scrub.

Nearby, Waka Di Ume has opened a rice-paddy spa, a three-level retreat in the middle of



Local ambition: plans are afoot to attract more Australians to Kangaroo Island in SA.

a rice terrace and which uses spa treatments made from Indonesian herbs.

www.comohotels.co.uk; www.theviceroybali.com;
www.wakaexperience.com

The east edge

INTREPID travellers are fast running out of locations in which to tread.

Enter Kamchatka, Russia's most remote province in the far east of the country.

Stretching from Alaska in the east down to Japan in the south, the province is home to 29 active volcanic craters, the largest population of brown bears in Eurasia, a geyser valley of more than 150 springs, and the rare grey whale.

Kronotsky National Park, with its Uzon Valley and Maly Semyachik blue crater lake, is a United Nations World Heritage Site where skiers can heli-ski the virgin volcano snow.

With a population density of one person a square kilometre, travellers won't be crowded.

Cruise Europe

EUROPE is the new Caribbean, and Celebrity Cruises has rescheduled one of its Caribbean cruise liners, the *Century*, to meet the demand for cruising in Europe.

Luxury Silver Sea cruises offer Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea, and Conde Nast favourite Celebrity Cruises visits most of Europe, including the Balearic Islands and the fjords of Norway.

But by far the hottest cruise spot in Europe is the Danube.

Board a riverboat and cruise waltz king Johann Strauss's favourite river from central Europe to the Black Sea.

An Aussie isle

KANGAROO Island is a long-favoured locale for overseas visitors to Australia.

But if James Baillie has his way, this quiet-achieving South Australian island will soon make its mark in the domestic market.

The owner of Lord Howe's lush Capella Lodge plans to open his own eco lodge in Kangaroo Island's national parkland if he can get locals to approve the plans.

Until his doors open, guests with \$600 a night to spare can stay at Hannaford's beachfront Life Time retreat and dine inside a giant fig tree.

Kangaroo Island also has a gourmet tour for foodies, seal bay for nature lovers, Little Sahara dunes, Remarkable Rocks in Flinders National Park and rugged coastline guaranteed to keep David Attenborough wannabes well entertained.

www.life-time.com.au;
www.tourkangaroosland.com.au

The space race

WHAT to get the traveller who's done it all? Send them into space.

Space Adventures is the pioneer in commercial space travel, offering a five-day training program at Moscow's Star City with acrobatic jet flights in MiG-25s and L-39 Albatrosses to the edge of space. From 24km up passengers can view Earth's curvature. All this for \$32,000.

A little less (\$5000) will get you a zero-gravity experience at Fort Lauderdale, Florida. A half-day program led by veteran astronauts takes space groupies for a weightless experience in the “vomit comet”. Far out.

www.spaceadventures.com

The Dreamliner

THE A380 is *sooo* five minutes ago. Flying fashionistas are already eyeing the Boeing Dreamliner. By 2008, three Dreamliner models (787-8, 787-9, 787-3) will carry 210 to 330 passengers from 6500km to 16,300km non-stop.

This means more scheduled flights to suit passengers' time needs, and non-stop travel from Asia to New York City in 16 hours.

More passenger comfort is something most airlines are pursuing, with the introduction of premium economy. The Dreamliner cabin features higher humidity to reduce on-board jet lag, mood lighting, bigger windows, wider aisles and fatter seats.

Air New Zealand, Air Nippon, Air Canada and Japan Airlines have all placed orders.

Just before Christmas Qantas announced it too would order up to 115 of them, the first of which will go to Jetstar International.



Existential: monasteries such as Tigers Nest in Bhutan offer quiet for the more intrepid.

Sea change: Celebrity Cruises has rescheduled the *Century* for Europe.



Flying fashionista: Boeing's Dreamliner can fly 6500km non-stop.

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