

OAG Executive Flight Guide

October 2003 Vol 22 Issue 7

Contents

2 Bahasa Melayu

2 日本語

3 한국어

3 華語

4 简体华语

4 ไทย

Valid 01 October - 31 October

Garden path, Japan

The Shuyu (stroll) style of garden has a path to allow strollers to proceed from one vantage point to another enjoying a different view from each



iii



vi



x



xii



xiv



xvi

Executive Travel

News

- iii News briefing: budget airline boom
- v Wingtip: another prizewinning suggestion
- vi Hotel briefing: Singapore fling
- xx What's on where: events around the world during October and November

Plus Your letters to the Editor: iv

Features

- x Airline briefing: seamless service
- xii Airport briefing: Taipei International – flightpath to recovery
- xiv Destination briefing: Macau – visually prosperous and forward looking under the new order
- xvi Travellers' briefing: checking the obvious

1 Planning your flight

4 How to plan your flight

20 Flight schedules

581 Information to help you choose your flight

582 Airline codes

585 Airline code share carriers

591 Aircraft codes

594 State codes

595 Connecting city/airport codes

597 Building your own connections

604 Minimum connecting times

609 Airport terminals

615 Reference

616 City index and airline reservation numbers

653 Bank closures and public holidays

660 International time calculator

664 Time zone map

665 Calendar

666 OAG offices and general sales agents

669 Customer services/How to advertise

Publisher's letter

Last year, the world's airlines carried something in the order of 1.5 billion passengers – a truly remarkable logistical achievement, bearing in mind they all have to pass through an airport at each end of the journey. For many travellers, it must seem like one bottleneck after another, from the moment they arrive at the terminal to the time they leave it at their destination: queues at check-in, immigration, security, the gate, boarding the aircraft, disembarking and then again on arrival.

Airlines once did little to dispel this view: passengers were decanted at their destination and left to get on with it. As far as the carriers were concerned, they had completed their side of the bargain. Although this still prevails in respect of the budget operators, conventional airlines have done much to address the problem in recent years in their quest to provide business customers with a seamless service.

As we report in this issue, premium passengers can be collected by chauffeur driven car at their office or home, given fast track treatment on arrival at the airport, cosseted in comfortable lounges, where they can relax or work, given priority boarding and deplaning, and whisked through the formalities on arrival, where long-haul travellers occasionally have access to somewhere to freshen up before being driven away to their ultimate destination. All of which removes much of the hassle normally associated with the business of getting from A to B.

Airlines are frequently criticised for their shortcomings, and rarely acknowledged for their achievements. In this case, and against all the odds, they have succeeded in delivering the promise – at least most of the time – even if, on the ground, airports still have some way to go.

When passengers are molly-coddled to such an extent, it is all too easy to become complacent, sometimes overlooking the basics. In our Travellers' Briefing this month, we offer a checklist to help avoid some of the more obvious pitfalls. Elsewhere, we look at Taipei's Chiang Kai-Shek airport, which is on the flightpath to recovery following a dramatic downturn in traffic as a result of the SARS outbreak; and Macau, a destination which has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years and is now visibly prosperous and forward-looking under the new order.

And there are two more prizewinning opportunities this month for our letter-writing readers and those submitting ideas for our new *Wingtips* slot. Keep them coming.



Nicola Burrows
Managing Editor

**Published monthly by
OAG publishing**

Managing Editor
Nicola Burrows
Tel: +44 (0)1582 695179
E-mail: nburrows@oag.com

Editorial
Editor: **Mike Toynbee**
E-mail: eteditor@oag.com

Contributors: **Leon Barber, Colin Elison, Jonathan Hart**

Design
www.thunder.co.uk

Advertising Sales
Eng Huat, Yeo
Tel: +65 6395 5888
E-mail: a.spac@oag.com

ISSN 1478-453X

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to OAG Executive Flight Guide, 3025 Highland Parkway, Suite 200, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515-5561.

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OAG Worldwide, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 4HB, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1582 600111
Fax: +44 (0)1582 695230
E-mail: customers@oag.com
www.oag.com

OAG Worldwide, 3025 Highland Parkway, Suite 200, Downers Grove, IL 60515-5561

Typeset by OAG Worldwide, UK. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers Pte Ltd, Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore.

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News

Budget airline revolution set to sweep Asia?



executive travel

The no-frills revolution that started with deregulation in the US and has since spread throughout Europe and to Australia, looks set to sweep Asia.

Australian Airlines is already operating low-cost flights to various points in Asia, Virgin Blue is planning its first international routes, a budget start-up is actively under review in Singapore, and Air Deccan has become India's first no-frills carrier, operating cut-price services from Bangalore to Hubli and Mangalore. Flights are being operated by a fleet of ATR turboprops, with fares around half the price of those of competitors. And by the end of the year, Orient Thai Airways is due to launch no-frills services from Bangkok to eight domestic destinations. While fares on this service are unlikely to be rock bottom, they are expected to be around one-third less than existing tariffs.

Australian Airlines, Qantas' low-cost offshoot, launched services a year ago and currently serves eight destinations in Asia, including Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong. Virgin Blue this month spreads its wings with the introduction of low-cost flights from Australia to New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu, and Air New Zealand recently launched a no-frills service to Australia. Meanwhile, Qantas has announced it plans to set up a low-cost domestic rival to compete with Virgin Blue.

There are now more than 50 budget airlines – 34 in Europe, 13 in the US and five in Asia.

JAL boosts London flights

Japan Airlines is from November 1 increasing the frequency of its non-stop Tokyo-London service to double daily, making it the only carrier on the route to offer two flights a day. The second departure will be operated on a regular basis by a two-class Boeing 777-200ER, configured with 212 seats in economy and 56 of the recently introduced Shell flat seats in executive. The aircraft also features 30 channels of audio/video-on-demand in-flight entertainment.



Shangri-La heads for Haikou

Shangri-La is to manage a 364-room hotel which is scheduled to open in Haikou, in southern China, in 2005. It increases the group's Chinese portfolio to 17 out of a total of 41 properties in Asia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, it has a number of hotels in the pipeline in China, Malaysia, the Maldives, Dubai, Oman and Qatar.

NEWS BRIEFING



TravelPostings



Your letters to the Editor

A test of stamina

Is it my imagination or the fact I am getting older and notice these things more, but are the distances we are required to walk at airports getting longer? I must have covered the best part of one kilometre from the immigration and security checkpoints to the departure gate at London Heathrow's Terminal 3 recently, and have walked even further at Amsterdam Schiphol. And I was in need of serious liquid refreshment by the time I reached The Pier, Cathay Pacific's excellent lounge located at the far end of the terminal at Hong Kong.

Travelators, of course, do take some of the strain (although it is surprising just how often they are out of service), but as I travel most of the time with hand baggage-only, it does mean I am lugging a suit carrier or bag on these route marches. At least it saves having to go to the gym on a regular basis!

Andrew Baker, Chorley Wood,
Hertfordshire, UK

This letter wins the writer a desktop clock.
Congratulations.

Get real, Gordon

What a prude Gordon Munro appears to be (*TravelPostings*, September). The in-flight movies shown today are no worse than what appear on television screens as part of our regular diet of entertainment. Is he equally surprised and shocked whenever he turns on the TV? This is, after all, the real world we are living in.

I think the airlines have at last got it right with an excellent selection of movies, from classics to the

very latest releases, plus all the other channels available. The cutting that previously went on to ensure they were 'suitable' for public screening in the main cabin often resulted in their complete emasculation. I returned on a Singapore Airlines flight from London recently and caught up with some of the best movies I have seen for a long time.

Peter Boyes
Singapore

Flyway robbery

How can airlines continue to justify charging outrageous business class fares on short-haul routes when you can travel for a fraction of the price with a no-frills carrier? I accept there is a premium to be paid for the benefits of a flexible ticket, plus perhaps a snack and a drink, but having to pay up to eight times more for the privilege seems excessive by any standards. Surely the days of short-haul business class must be numbered?

Karen Brodie,
Stuttgart, Germany

Farewell Concorde

This month sees the end of Concorde flights and I, for one, will lament its passing. After 27 years' of service, it is still an eye-catcher when it flies overhead. I had the good fortune to use it on three occasions and thought the experience wonderful – once flying from London Heathrow at 10.30am, attending a lunchtime meeting in Manhattan and returning the same day, touching down at 10.30pm. That takes some beating.

Colin Fairfax
Chiswick, London W4, UK

This stylish desk clock to be won by the writer of the best letter of the month



Send your letters to The Editor, OAG Executive Travel, OAG Worldwide, OAG Worldwide, 300 Beach Road, #35-01, The Concourse, Singapore 199555
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Win this elegant, multi functional World Time Clock for the best published monthly tip from a reader

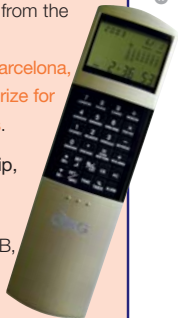
wingtip

I always carry a basic 'survival' kit whenever and wherever I travel: a small pouch with a spare pair of socks, underpants, all-in-one toothbrush and paste, a miniature phial of shaving oil, a plastic razor (before they were prohibited in cabin baggage), pills for diarrhoea and headaches, a small pack of biscuits, chocolate bar, a 0.25 litre bottle of water and a spare pair of glasses. You would be amazed at the number of times it has come to my rescue – for delayed flights, especially when you sit on the ground for a couple of hours without food or drink, when your bags are mislaid, or simply finding everywhere

closed when you are in need of some basic sustenance or medication. Furthermore, it takes up little space and, apart from the water, weighs next to nothing.

Submitted by John Crayford, Barcelona, Spain, who wins this month's prize for his suggestion. Congratulations.

Send your suggestions to Wingtip, OAG Executive Travel, OAG Worldwide, Church Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4HB, United Kingdom, or e-mail eteditor@oag.com



Airline of the Year

The prestigious OAG Airline of the Year Awards — the Oscars of the sky — recognise the very best in service, both in the air and on the ground. Singapore Airlines again confirmed its position as the world's top carrier by sweeping

the board at the 2003 Awards. Soon we will be asking readers to cast their votes in the 2004 poll. Will SIA repeat its success or is the competition hotting up for the 19 regional and global categories? A case of watch this space.

WINNER

Airline of the Year 2003
Singapore Airlines

Best Airline based in Western Europe
British Airways

Best Airline based in Central/Eastern Europe
LOT Polish Airlines

Best Airline based in Asia
Singapore Airlines

Best Airline based in Central/South America/Caribbean
LanChile

Best Airline based in North America
Midwest Airlines

Best Airline based in Australasia/Pacific
Qantas Airways

Best Airline based in the Middle East/Indian Sub-Continent
Emirates

Best Airline based in Africa
South African Airways

Best Europe to Far East/Australasia Airline
Singapore Airlines

Best Trans-Pacific Airline
Singapore Airlines

Best Trans-Atlantic Airline
British Airways

Best International First Class
Singapore Airlines

Best Executive/Business Class
Continental Airlines

Best Economy Class
Singapore Airlines

Best Frequent Flyer Programme
Air Canada

Best Low-Cost Airline
Southwest Airlines

Best Airline Website
Air Canada

Best Airport
Singapore Changi



Singapore fling

Recovery from the SARS doldrums is now in full swing as travellers are wooed with some tempting offers. Mike Toynbee reports

With SARS now hopefully just a distant memory, Singapore's hotels are busy making up lost ground. Occupancies plummeted during the height of the scare earlier this year, with some owners taking advantage of the downturn in business to bring forward refurbishment programmes or undertaking unscheduled work to upgrade facilities.

Standards are already among the highest in Asia, and although Singapore ranks as one of the more expensive destinations – not quite as costly as Tokyo but certainly on a par with Hong Kong – there are currently plenty of deals around.

During the summer and autumn, a huge campaign has been under way to woo business and leisure travellers back to the Lion City with a range of tempting travel, accommodation and entertainment packages, many of which the canny road warrior can take advantage of.

Among the hotels that have just completed an extensive renovation is the upmarket Shangri-La, where the ultra luxurious Valley Wing has reopened after a multi million dollar refurbishment. Features include a new Champagne bar, for the exclusive use of

Valley Wing guests, with complimentary drinks and canapés served throughout the day.

The Shangri-La remains one of Singapore's top addresses, along with Raffles, the Fullerton, the Ritz-Carlton and the Conrad Centennial, which last year earned the distinction of being voted Singapore's Hotel of the Year in the Tourist Board's annual Tourism Awards. The Conrad, which faces directly on to the Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre, is designed to appeal to the "discerning business traveller", according to general manager Heinrich Grafe.

Facilities include broadband technology in all 509 guest rooms and meeting areas. ▶



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ROOM TARIFF
Plus Free Upgrade
to the Next Room
Category*



▲ Meritus Mandarin Singapore



▲ Marina Mandarin Singapore



◆ Meritus Negara Singapore



▲ Hotel Istana Kuala Lumpur



◆ Pelangi Beach Resort Langkawi



◆ Riviera Bay Resort Malacca



■ Shanghai JC Mandarin



▲ Capital Hotel Beijing



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▲ Meritus Shantou China

Offer includes:

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- Welcome Drink
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- Use of Fitness Centre
- Late check-out till 2pm (subject to availability)

* Conditions

- All rates are already discounted, subject to service charge & prevailing taxes, and are not applicable to meetings & conference groups.
- Upgrade is subject to availability at time of reservation.
- Upgrade to Club Floor Room is not applicable.
- Frequent Flyer mileage claims only applicable to MPC Members for room rates of USD75 and above.
- Discounts indicated are off room tariff

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► Other notable features include more than S\$3.5 million-worth of artworks displayed throughout the hotel.

The newly rebranded Meritus Mandarin, recently voted among Asia's top 25 hotels by the influential *Travel + Leisure* magazine, is another major business and convention choice. During the SARS scare, it became the first to install sophisticated infra-red thermal imaging scanners for the added safety of guests. The group, whose other Singapore properties are the Marina Mandarin and Meritus Negara and which is a member of the Asia Hotel Alliance, is offering discounts of up to 60% and free upgrades to the next room category until the end of November.

One of Singapore's more unusual properties opened during the height of the SARS crisis: Hotel 1929, conveniently located close to the Chinatown MRT station and about a 5-minute taxi ride from the business district, combines the old and the new in an unusual package. The 32-room townhouse-style establishment occupies five conservation shop-houses built at the end of the 1920s – hence the name – and features a mix of classic designer and retro vintage furniture, with some bizarre details, including two individually designed suites with outside baths set in tropical roof gardens. Rates are surprisingly competitive at S\$80 (US\$46) for a single and S\$180 (US\$103) for a suite.

Another contemporary style property – claimed to be Singapore's first hip hotel when it opened three years ago – The Gallery is architecturally unconventional, with a 'minimalist' interior. Located at Robertson Quay at one end of Mohammad Sultan Road in the heart of the city's entertainment district, its 220 rooms feature vivid-coloured furnishings and fast Internet access. Lighting and air-conditioning are controlled by computer sensors in the 'smartly wired' rooms. An outside cantilevered pool at the top of the building has its base partially exposed and has glass walls on three sides.

Among the groups that have been offering

deals is Summit, whose Asian Exclusives programme provides discounts of up to 50% on standard rates, which has meant that a room at the Royal Plaza on Scotts, for example, has been available from US\$95 a night. Free upgrades and double Air Miles have also been offered as incentives. French group Accor's 'Smile Across Asia' recovery campaign also offered discounts of up to 50% at more than 80 hotels around the region, including Singapore's Novotel Apollo (S\$108/US\$63), and the Century Roxy Park (S\$128/US\$73).

Even The Fullerton, the latest addition to a distinguished list of luxury properties, opened two years ago, has been offering special rates. The former General Post Office building and a stunning example of Palladian architecture with its Doric columns and monumental porte cocheres, has had half price rooms available until recently. Conveniently located for the financial and business district, it is close to The Esplanade, Singapore's impressive new performing arts centre, opened 12 months ago.



1978

Bangkok
Beijing
Da Nang
Da Lar
Dien Bien Phu
Ha Noi
Ho Chi Minh City
No San
Phnompenh
Vientiane

1985

Ban Me Thuot
Bangkok
Da Nang
Da Lar
Dien Bien Phu
Ha Noi
Ho Chi Minh City
Hai Phong
Hue
Manila
No San
Nha Trang
Phnom Penh
Phu Quoc
Pleiku
Quy Nhon
Vientiane
Vinh

1995

Ban Me Thuot
Bangkok
Da Lar
Da Nang
Guangzhou
Ha Noi
Ho Chi Minh City
Hong Kong
Hue
Kaohsiung
Kuala Lumpur
Moscow
Manila
Melbourne
Nha Trang
Osaka
Paris
Phu Quoc
Phnom Penh
Pleiku
Quy Nhon
Seoul
Singapore
Sydney
Taipei
Vientiane
Vinh

2003

Ban Me Thuot
Bangkok
Beijing
Da Lar
Da Nang
Dien Bien Phu
Fukuoka
Guangzhou
Ha Noi
Hai Phong
Ho Chi Minh City
Hong Kong
Hue
Kaohsiung
Kuala Lumpur
Kunming
Los Angeles
Manila
Melbourne
Moscow
No San
Nha Trang
Osaka
Paris
Phu Quoc
Phnom Penh
Pleiku
Quy Nhon
Rach Gia
San Francisco
Seoul
Siem Reap
Singapore
Sydney
Taipei
Tokyo
Tuy Hoa
Vientiane
Vinh

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Our dream has been to rise and grow - bringing passengers from throughout the world to new experiences in Vietnam and Indochina. The Lotus of our new corporate identity encapsulates this aspiration in its symbolism. Now it has never been easier to realize our dreams - or yours. New Routes. New Flight Frequencies. New D777s. New Improved Services



Travel's Holy Grail

If the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, why are travellers subjected to so many twists and diversions? Colin Ellson looks at the question and suggests some answers

Seamless travel is the Holy Grail for which road warriors traditionally search in vain. Getting from A to B in as straight a line as possible, in the shortest time, with the minimum of hassle, should, in theory, be universally achievable a century after the Wright Brothers gave us wings.

Tell that to the birds. Airlines, airports, and surface transport operators generally do their best to integrate their operations, but the ever-changing realities of travel tend to put the seamless goal tantalisingly out of reach.

Apparently, it was ever thus. In the largely experimental early years, as fledgling commercial aviation tested its flight feathers, Sir William Hildred, the first boss of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), claimed the stress of flying was in the air. The airports, he noted, were "wonderfully comfortable" places.

Today, the roles have been reversed: airlines make the flight reassuringly safe and comfortable, offer the perks of frequent flyer programmes, and conclude code-share agreements in the name of passenger convenience. But back on terra firma, terminals are far from being "wonderfully comfortable". Rather, they have become

congested bottlenecks, their efficiency in innovations such as fast track and e-ticketing frustrated by air traffic control delays and extra security checks, problems compounded by the relentless growth in air travel.

Getting to the airport in the first place often disproves the theory that it is better to travel than to arrive, although a growing number of gateways are making the going easier by constructing fast rail links. Nevertheless, taking London's main airports as a yardstick, 66% of travellers prefer to drive themselves to the terminal rather than use public transport.



Driven by competition

Or let the airline take the wheel. A number of carriers — including Air New Zealand, ANA, Cathay Pacific, Continental, Emirates and Royal Brunei — offer the promise of seamlessness for at least the first or last leg of a trip at selected destinations. Collecting premium passengers from within a given radius of their departure point, they whizz them by chauffeur-driven limousine to within a few metres of check in.

Virgin Atlantic, for example, provides the facility at 20 points on its global network; Emirates' limos pick up and deliver passengers throughout the United Arab Emirates; Continental has chauffeured vehicles warmed up and waiting at all 140 points it serves in the US; and ANA gives its premium passengers a choice between valet parking at Heathrow or a luxury car with driver in Tokyo. Malaysia Airlines goes one step further by offering first class passengers complimentary helicopter transfers in Paris and London.

More seamless still is Virgin's Drive Thru check-in at London's Heathrow and Gatwick, where Upper Class travellers are security profiled, relieved of their luggage and issued with boarding cards without leaving the leathered luxury of the airline's Volvo S80 super limos. American Airlines has a similar service at Heathrow, and its passengers enjoy kerbside check-in the other side of the Atlantic.

Privileged class

Such privileges come as of right with a business or first class ticket, far fewer of which are being issued as corporate travel budgets are tightened. Which means the increasing number of executives forced to travel economy are looking for other ways to retain the perks that make life on the road a little more seamless.

Where the carrier does not offer a limo, for example, many are turning to private operators like Carey Worldwide, which claims to offer highly competitive rates in 480 cities in 75 countries. Other corporate travellers, especially in the small- to medium-enterprise (SME)

sector, are opting to pay an annual premium to key into the full services of an "extras" club, such as Wexas, Diners Club, and the International Airline Passengers Association.

With 400,000 members in 200 countries, who benefit from its buying power in terms of preferential airline, hotel, insurance, and car rental rates normally reserved for large corporations, IAPA works closely with sister company Priority Pass, which claims to offer the largest choice of that other essential piece in the seamless jigsaw — the airport lounge. It has 400 worldwide, compared to Wexas' 104 and Diners' 80, with members of all three clubs paying at the door to enter.

Meanwhile, the airlines are continuing to expand their own network of lounges to give executives the opportunity to both work and relax. In Australia, for example even budget carrier Virgin Blue has embarked on an ambitious programme to provide its business travellers with lounge access.



And arrivals lounges are now an established feature for many premium class travellers, enabling them to step off the aircraft, freshen up with a shower, have clothes pressed, enjoy a spot of breakfast and catch up with e-mails before continuing their journey or heading off for the first meeting of the day in a chauffeur-driven limo.

Which is about as seamless as it gets — unless you can hitch a ride in Harry Potter's flying car.





Taipei

Flightpath to recovery

Destination
(TPE)

SARS may have taken its toll, but it's now business as usual at Taiwan's main international gateway. Leon Barber reports

Along with many of its Asian neighbours, Taipei's Chiang Kai-Shek airport was badly hit by the downturn in traffic caused by the SARS outbreak earlier this year. But since the removal of Taiwan from the World Health Organisation's list of affected areas in July, business has steadily picked up and the country's main gateway is operating a near-normal schedule.

Admittedly, passenger numbers are likely to be well down on last year's 19.2 million, not helped by the country's sluggish economy, but recovery seems to be well under way as airlines restore services.

Opened in 1979, the airport has become an important hub for both northeast and southeast Asia, with 26 passenger airlines serving around 50 destinations worldwide. It is the base for Taiwan's two major international carriers, China Airlines and EVA Airways, although the majority of domestic services are operated from the smaller and more

conveniently located Sung Shan airport, a mere 3 miles (5km) from downtown Taipei.

The two-terminal Chiang Kai-Shek complex is 29 miles (40km) from the city centre, with an average journey time of around 50 minutes. Plans are on the drawing board for a third terminal, as well as a high-speed MRT link between the airport and Taipei city.

For business travellers, there is wireless Internet access and an Internet room, a business centre in Terminal 2, and various meeting facilities for hire, including a press centre, plus a choice of executive lounges. Unusual features include a National Palace Museum and National History Museum display and shops, and an Aviation Museum a short bus ride from the airport, and well worth a visit for those with time to spare. Further meeting space is available at the CKS Airport hotel, one mile from the terminal II, with free shuttle transfer. Day rooms are available within the airport for transiting passengers.

At-a-glance guide

Location: 29 miles (40km) from central Taipei

Transport links: Six companies provide frequent bus services to and from the airport, with departures every 15-30 minutes, depending on the time of day, and a journey time of 45-50 minutes. Fares: NT\$120-NT\$140 (US\$3.50-US\$4). Metered taxis charge around NT\$1,100 (US\$32) for the 45-minute journey to central Taipei and NT\$3,200 (US\$93) to Taichung, reached in around two hours. A high-speed MRT link is planned

Annual passenger throughput: 19.2 million (2002)

Minimum connecting times: one hour; 90 minutes between terminals 1 and 2

Facilities: Transit hotel; business centre; post office; tourist information centre; nursery, children's playroom; national history museum; medical centre; massage centre; mobile phone rental; beauty salon; smoking rooms; prayer room; choice of Taiwanese and Western-style food outlets; bars; range of duty- and tax-free shops, plus florists and bookstall; Skytrain people mover operates between terminals

Bank/Cashpoint: two banks, foreign currency exchange and cash dispensers

Airlines. Terminal 1: Air Macau, Australian Asia Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways, China Airlines, Continental Airlines, Far Eastern Air Transport, Japan Asia Airways, Malaysia Airlines, Mandarin Airlines, Northwest Airlines, Pacific Airlines, Palau National Airlines, Philippine Airlines, President Airlines, Royal Brunei Airlines, Thai Airways, TransAsia Airways, Viet Air; Terminal 2: Air New Zealand, Air Nippon, Dragon Airlines, EVA Airways, KLM Asia, Singapore Airlines, UNI Airways, United Airlines

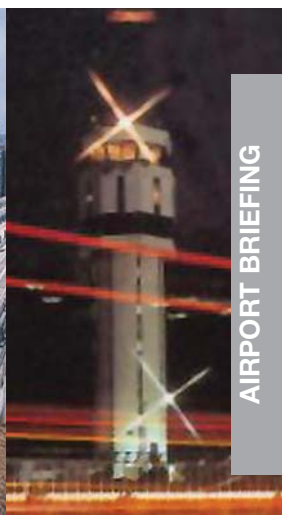
Executive lounges: China Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Eva Airways, Japan Asia Airways, Malaysia Airlines, Philippine Airlines, Thai Airways, TransAsia Airways, Singapore Airlines, Far Eastern Transport.

Airport hotels: CKS Airport Hotel (1 mile from terminal)

Car rental desks: Hotai Leasing (T1), Sheng Hong Type Car Rental (T2)

Departure tax: NT\$300 (US\$8.75), collected at time of ticketing

Website: www.cksairport.gov.tw



Macau

Nice but not naughty

Once known for its profligate lifestyle, the former Portuguese colony has been cleaned up and expanded under Chinese rule. Jonathan Hart sees it as a mini Las Vegas

Destination
(MAC)

Currency: Macau pataca (=US\$ 0.13)

Tipping: Most hotels and restaurants include a 10% service charge but it is customary to leave a small additional tip

Time: GMT+8

Electricity: 220 volts

Public holidays 2003/2004: October 1; November 1; December 8, 20, 25; January 1, 22, 23, 24; February 2, 22; April 4, 9, 12; May 1, 26; June 22; September 29; October 1; November 1; December 8, 20, 25

Climate: Subtropical with very hot summers, high humidity and a rainy period during the summer months, when much of the rainfall tends to be in the afternoons. Risk of typhoons from June to September

Airport: 3 miles (5km) from city. Airport bus (AP1) stops at the major hotels, with a journey time of 15-25 minutes and a fare of MOP6/US\$0.80; air-conditioned taxis take 10-15 minutes and charge MOP40/US\$5;

and Airport Express Link and Kee Kwan Motor Road Company provide transfers to China. Macau Ferry Terminal, with more than 150 departures a day to Hong Kong, is a 10-minute drive from the airport; there is also a regular HK helicopter link from the ferry terminal

Business hours: 08.30-12.00, 14.00-17.30 Monday to Saturday; many branches of the Bank of China open Sunday morning, but close on Wednesday afternoon

International dialling code: 00 853

In emergency: 999 (all services)

Business do's and don'ts

Do take a good supply of business cards

Do make appointments in advance

Do be punctual and dress smartly

Don't expect to be invited to someone's home — most entertaining is in hotels

Don't be surprised to find the place full of gamblers from Hong Kong at weekends

Old Asia hands won't recognise their once familiar stamping ground. Time was when you could escape the prim British rule of Hong Kong for a night or two on the alternative tiles of rakish Macau – a melange of gambling dens, drinking clubs and whorehouses, interspersed with dingy restaurants serving excellent food and copious quantities of affordable wine.

All were dedicated to relieving you of both money and stress in double quick time. But nobody cared because nobody stayed beyond getting a carefree quick fix of whatever proclivity they fancied amid the sweatshops, firework factories and garish neon that lined the cobbled streets and densely packed alleyways.

Macau, after all, had a breakaway, low-life purpose and served it admirably, despite the fact that it was run by monopoly and cared not a jot for pluralism. Dishevelled, unkempt, brazen and wildly atmospheric, it was fondly known as a wart on the rear end of China.

You could go to the dogs as well as the horses here, and it shared its otherwise forbidden or hard-to-find fruits with enthusiastic abandon, not just with bored expats seeking refuge from Hong Kong but also the bigwigs of Beijing on privilege passes. Visiting Macau today is a different prospect. Those same bigwigs are busily transforming their old playground into a mini Las Vegas. Saving their ideological blushes by harnessing the former Portuguese territory's autonomous status under new mainland rule,

they have put the gaming rights out to franchise to turn swathes of newly reclaimed land into instant profit centres. Much needed to complement the other primary revenue earner of meetings, usually in conjunction with an international music festival in October and November's Formula 3 Grand Prix.

Formerly a compact trio of islands connected by causeway – the outer Taipa and Coloane atolls comprising duck farms, fishing villages and shabby but charming hotels – Macau has virtually doubled in size under the new regime. It has sprouted an international airport to import regional gamblers faster; seas of new high-rise housing estates; and a fresh sense of purpose as a trading outlet for, and gateway to, neighbouring Guangdong Province and Zuhai Special Economic Zone.

If you share that sense of purpose, access to the mainland has been made simpler. Business hotels that were mostly substandard at best have been given a new lease of life. Colonial and cultural sights – churches, mansions and temples – have been dusted down, and fresh attractions, including a 750ft-high Skywalk atop the new Macau Tower, bungee jumping and wall climbing, have been added.

Arriving from Hong Kong (fastest jetfoil 55 minutes) as most visitors still do, you will be greeted by a Macau that is visually prosperous and forward looking under the new order. Old Asia hands, however, will be disappointed with a playground that is certainly nice but no longer naughty.



Checking the obvious

Most frequent flyers tend to be on automatic pilot when they travel: trip preparation, packing, getting to and from the airport, checking in and out of the hotel and getting around the destination city. However, even the most experienced of travellers occasionally overlook the basics. Here's our checklist to ensure you don't come unstuck

Familiarity, wrote Mark Twain, breeds contempt. Perhaps, more accurately, that should have read complacency. That is certainly true in the case of many frequent travellers for whom travel is merely a means to an end: to get on with the job in hand, to transact business or to complete whatever has to be done with the minimum of fuss and hassle. That is the nature of the game – the travel element is something that has to be undertaken to achieve it.

As such, it is possible to become blasé. Not many people actually forget their passports or pack them in their luggage these days, but it is easy to overlook the fact that many countries require a minimum validity of three or even six months on a passport before allowing you in. Even the most experienced of travellers have been known to be denied entry due to this elementary oversight.

And, still on the subject of passports, this month sees the introduction of stiffer security measures by the United States, which means those travelling on its visa waiver programme

must have a machine-readable passport. If you don't, you are unlikely to get further than your departure airport or, if you do, there is a good chance you will be turned back on arrival.

Then there are jabs. Most regular travellers keep them up to date as a matter of course, but it is worth checking from time to time to ensure nothing has lapsed – particularly those vaccinations that have a shelf life of years. And the more health conscious always carry a small medical kit with them, including sterilised needles in places where AIDS is endemic.

The secret, however, is to travel light – pack only what you are likely to wear and nothing else – you can always buy clothing if you need it. And many frequent travellers simplify matters by wearing a colour co-ordinated wardrobe, which means you don't have to pack shoes of different colours and other accessories which merely add to the weight of a bag. Admittedly this is harder for women travellers, but the rules still apply.

With more and more suitcases looking the ►



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▶ same, it is worth travelling with one of an unusual colour or with distinctive markings. Personalised luggage straps are one easy way of identifying your suitcase from the rest on the carousel – and reduce the risk of someone else walking away with your luggage by mistake.

Not everyone – even those travelling in business class or members of frequent flyer programmes – has automatic access to lounges. It is worth remembering that you can join a lounge access scheme, such as Priority Pass with more than 400 lounges worldwide. A useful alternative is to carry a Diners Card, which also gives holders entry to 80 airline lounges around the world.

If your ticket doesn't entitle you to fast track services through airport immigration and security, it is worth investigating whether or not the facility is purchasable as it can save valuable time for those in a hurry.

Another time-saving benefit is to opt for Executive floor accommodation, which invariably entitles users to priority check-in – occasionally at a dedicated desk on the floor itself – as well as rapid and often a late check-out facility. A further advantage of using an executive floor is access to a private lounge, where breakfast is served in the morning (much quicker than in the main restaurant), refreshments during the day, and often complimentary cocktails or drinks in the evening. It also provides a quiet refuge from the rest of the hotel, particularly when things are busy.

Most frequent travellers regard themselves as streetwise and do not take unnecessary risks, avoiding no-go areas where they exist and taking sensible precautions while on the move and in the hotel room. At the airport security scanner, for example, the wary will always keep a watchful eye on laptops and other valuables going through the machine – at the other end of the conveyor belt they are easy pickings for thieves if you are still

stuck in the queue or someone is blocking your view. By the time you've been screened, a pilferer can have evaporated into the crowd. Using in-room safes for valuables, such as passport and tickets as well as other more obvious possessions, is also common sense. Never leave the 'Make Up Room' sign on the door, which merely advertises the fact you are out – it is even worth leaving the TV on as an added precaution.

It is also worthwhile carrying a wallet with out-of-date cards (hotel key cards are a good substitute as are expired loyalty programme membership cards) and any currency you might still have that is no longer legal tender. A mugger is hardly likely to hang around long enough to check the validity of any plastic or banknotes you might have had on you.

Hotel fires are rare but not unknown and it always pays to check the whereabouts of fire exits, physically walking down the corridor to familiarise yourself with your escape route, should it be needed. Too many people have died needlessly simply because they turned the wrong way in a smoke-filled corridor.

The biggest risk? Complacency.



Samsonite

Luggage so cool, it comes with insurance!

Travelling with a Samsonite bag now comes with an added advantage. Three of its most recent product lines offer luggage insurance to the buyers. This novel and practical initiative takes the stress out of travelling.

In a special partnership with insurance provider ELVIA based in Europe, the luggage – and its contents – will be covered by insurance for air travel, including loss and delay of luggage and cabin baggage. The scheme began in Europe and is now being offered globally.

Each bag within the specified product lines is covered for a period of three years from purchase, and must be registered as airline luggage to ensure coverage from the time its owner boards the plane until he/she disembarks.

Owners will receive compensation of up to 1.250 Euros (approx S\$2,500) for registered airline luggage that is not returned within one week of arrival at destination; up to 250 Euros (approx S\$500) for registered airline luggage that is delayed by more than eight hours after arrival; and up to 1.250 Euros (approx S\$2,500) for registered airline luggage that is lost on board a scheduled or chartered flight.

All a new bags owner needs to do is register at www.samsonite-insurance.com. He/She will be issued with a unique ID number, which he/she will use to register for the free insurance.

The three product lines that come with the insurance coverage are the Hommage, Xylem and Prof line deluxe series. They come in a wide assortments of sizes and models priced between S\$ 100 and S\$ 620, and are designed to meet the most demanding individual's travel needs.

Samsonite's promise of offering the ideal travel solution for all travellers and destinations is captured in the "Worldproof" positioning. Providing insurance coverage for its luggage is fresh testimony of this commitment.

Here is a close up on two of the product lines, the Hommage and Xylem series.



900 series

The 900 Series Hommage range:

- Sleek style and timeless luxury
- Premium quality materials and craftsmanship
- Made from high-grade polyamide/polyester -
- Classic bronze and black with full-grain cowhide leather trimmings.



The 800 Series Xylem:

- Designed for trendsetters and the fashion-conscious
- Aluminum-like corners
- Silver quartz and darker charcoal body
- Features include the wide, bridge wheel handle, fitted with the clever snaphook and turn release 'quick-hook', specially combined to achieve maximum ease of mobility.



800 series

What's on

A selection of major conferences, exhibitions, sporting, cultural and other events around the globe during October and November

October

- 1 National Day, Hong Kong
- 1-3 PATA Travel Mart (exhibition), Singapore
- 3-5 JATA World Travel Fair, Japan
- 4 Chung Yeung Festival, Hong Kong
- 5 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (horse-racing), Paris
- 7-8 ASEAN Summit, Nusa Dua, Bali
- 7-15 Paris Fashion Week, France
- 12-14 Association of Corporate Travel Executives Global Conference, Dublin
- 15-17 International Premium Incentive Show, Tokyo
- 19 Superbike World Championship (final round), Magny-Cours, France
- 27/28 Start of Ramadan



November

- 4 Melbourne Cup (horse-racing), Australia
- 4-6 Incentive Travel & Conventions, Meetings Asia (exhibition), Bangkok
- 15-16 Elephant round-up, Surin, Thailand
- 15-18 Taipei International Travel Fair, Taiwan
- 16 Macau Grand Prix (F3 motor-racing)
- 23 Japan Cup (horse-racing), Tokyo
- 26 End of Ramadan

