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TRAVEL WEEKLY

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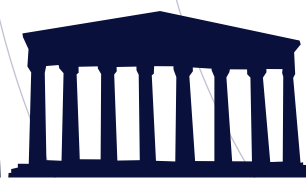
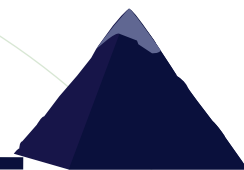
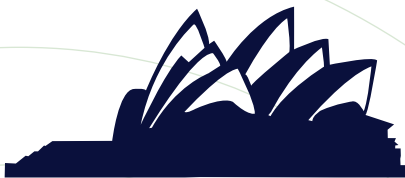
APRIL 16, 2012

**WORLD
TRAVEL
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COUNCIL ANNUAL SUMMIT

GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

Delegates gathering this week in Japan for WTTC's 12th annual summit will address how economic turbulence and political unrest are likely to affect the industry's growth in the decade ahead.

BY JOHANNA JAINCHILL
PAGE 16



Cruise lines, tour operators eat costs of higher fuel; airlines levy surcharges

By Michelle Baran and Donna Tunney

As gas prices flirt with the \$4-per-gallon mark for the first time since 2008, the travel industry is anxiously bracing for signs of what impact higher fuel costs will have on summer travel.

While airlines have been steadily increasing fuel surcharges for transatlantic flights and raising domestic airfares to cover costs, tour operators and cruise lines interviewed for this report said they are still absorbing the additional costs. None were yet willing to say they planned to implement fuel surcharges this year.

As for how the higher gas prices will affect

drivers this summer, a recent AAA survey of 1,024 adults, conducted March 1 through 4, found that 52% of respondents were already driving fewer miles because of current gas prices and that 64% would reduce their mileage in the future if gas prices remained at their current levels.

In addition, 14% of respondents said they were already using public transportation more regularly, and 23% said they would increase their use of public transit if gas prices remain at their current levels.

For the moment, at least, all bets are that pump prices will remain stuck at, or close to, their current levels.

See **FUEL** on Page 83

The travel industry is being squeezed by both rising fuel costs and soaring airfares.

[SIN CITY FEARS BECOMING A POLITICAL FOOTBALL ONCE AGAIN]

Las Vegas to Washington: Don't blame us for GSA's misbehavior

By Danny King and Damon Hodge

"Leave Vegas alone!"

That's the message from Nevada lawmakers as Congress investigates an October 2010 conference at the M Resort Spa Casino Las Vegas where the General Services Administration (GSA) spent almost \$823,000 hosting 300 attendees.

As a result of the findings, GSA chief Martha Johnson fired top adviser Stephen Leeds and Public Buildings Service chief Robert Peck before resigning herself.

Given that this is an election year, it was probably inevitable that the event also prompted simultaneous probes by a House Transportation Committee panel and the House Oversight and Government Reform

Committee. Both will have lots of red meat to gnaw on.

A government inspector's 23-page report is an eye-opener, even by Las Vegas standards. Highlighted expenses include \$136,504 for two pre-event scouting trips; \$75,000 for a team-building activity (assembling bicycles); \$7,000 for sushi; \$6,325 for commemorative coins celebrating the event; \$5,600 for in-room parties; and more than \$30,000 on a closing-reception dinner.

The GSA even spent \$3,200 on a mind-reader to entertain attendees, the Washington Post reported.

The government inspector's report spurred strong reactions from members of Congress as well as something of a backlash

See **VEGAS** on Page 82

The city offers easy access to some of the world's most famous mountain hikes and climbs.

A pinnacle of sophistication in Interlaken, Switzerland

By Jerry Soverinsky

I suspect that even for locals, the approach to Interlaken, Switzerland, is dramatic and remarkable. Driving along the north side of the Thunersee lake, the road rises gently just a few miles out, winding its way carefully along the steep mountain face, passing effortlessly through strategically carved tunnels. Less than a mile away, you're offered a spectacular vista of the faultless blue lake, with Interlaken lying anxiously in the distance.

You descend quickly down to the lake at Unterseen, a roller coaster-like acceleration that, once at the bottom, propels you along a connector road to downtown Interlaken. And you've arrived.

Interlaken is fully deserving of the superlatives it arouses: the best base for outdoor enthusiasts; the widest selection of facilities; the most helpful tourist office.

I've been coming to Interlaken for more than 20 years, and each time there's something new to discover. Perched between two lakes (*inter-laken*), the Thunersee and Brienzsee, and served by an intricate network of trains, buses and even funiculars, the city offers easy access to some of the world's most famous mountain hikes and climbs.

Indeed, you can reach the base of the North Face of the Eiger, at Kleine Scheidegg, in less than 45 minutes by public transportation (although you're on your own for tackling the climb).

While my earliest visits to Interlaken were of the budget variety, for which the city offers dozens of suitable lodging and food options, my visits today are far more comfortable. And for pleasing the luxury traveler, Interlaken is truly up to the task.

The accommodations scene

Top of the list for over-the-top indulgence is the Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, which has been pampering guests since 1865. It seamlessly combines elegant design with modern and contemporary function. Rooms are spacious and bathed in light, incorporating peerless furnishings along with every conceivable amenity. Three restaurants cater to every occasion, with Restaurant La Terrasse serving refined French cuisine, Jungfrau Brasserie dish-

Left, a view of the Alps from the Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa; below, the L'Ambiance Restaurant at the Lindner Grand Hotel Beau Rivage.



A guestroom at the Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa.

EUROPE

ing out traditional Swiss cuisine and La Pastateca preparing Italian-inspired fare. An on-site, massive spa provides a bevy of services and treatments, all delivered from a well-heeled staff of professionals. And a comprehensive fitness facility enables the most conditioned athlete to maintain a workout routine. Room rates vary by season and according to demand, starting from about \$500. For more, see www.victoria-jungfrau.ch.

The Lindner Grand Hotel Beau Rivage is another five-star choice. Its 101 rooms are decorated with contemporary furnishings and offer views of either the snow-capped Jungfrauoch or the fast-flowing Aare River. Two on-site restaurants, L'Ambiance and La Bonne Fourchette, rotate seasonally, with the former the more casual and operating in the summer, while the latter is more elegant, offering fireside dishes in winter.

The spa and fitness center includes an indoor pool complex, Finnish sauna and workout area. Rates begin at about \$400, double. See www.lindnerhotels.ch.

Finally, the ornate lobby of the four-star Hotel Royal-St. Georges might be somewhat

tired, but richly appointed, contemporary rooms await within. Its Veranda Restaurant offers a range of international specialties, everything from French to Arabic, and a small wellness center features a sauna, steam room and whirlpool in a chic, minimalist setting. Double rooms are priced from about \$210. Go to www.hotelroyal.ch.

Longer-term solutions

As I was making an extended stay in Interlaken this year, I opted for a private apartment, and the local tourist office helped me sort through the long list of options. I settled at Villa Margaretha, a 100-year-old home just two blocks from the city center. It offers modest but sparkling-clean one-room rentals on the home's first floor, while the entire second floor has been converted into a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment featuring a fully equipped kitchen, spacious living room and dining room and terrace that offers views of the distant mountains. At roughly \$250 per day, the price was a relative high-season bargain, too.

For more on Interlaken and Switzerland, see www.myswitzerland.com.



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