

AIRLINE NEWS

Opening at the end of March, British Airways' new **Terminal 5** at Heathrow Airport will be the U.K.'s largest freestanding building—and one of London's hottest shopping areas. Among the 140-plus retailers unveiling T5 shops are Prada, Gucci, Tiffany & Co., menswear trend-setter Paul Smith, and luxe stationers Smythson. Top dining options include star chef Gordon Ramsay's first airport venture.

Designed by Richard Rogers, 2007 winner of architecture's Pritzker Prize, the building features an undulating wave-form roof and light-filled expanses of glass—a welcome change from the windowless confines of other Heathrow terminals. Look for first- and business-class lounges offering hotel-like rooms for quick naps between connecting flights, and a V-VIP lounge suitable for the Queen herself (baa.com).

—S.D.

first-class UPDATE

Forget mere seats, no matter how spacious. In first-class air travel, life is "suite."

On **Cathay Pacific Airways**, first-class accommodations on long-haul flights now feature enclosures with closets, extendable tables, high-definition televisions, and ottomans for entertaining drop-by guests. Three work surfaces and in-seat power make the suite office-friendly. The seat converts from an armchair to a chaise longue with lumbar massage or an extra-long bed with separate mattress. Turn-down service includes not only a duvet but pajamas from Shanghai Tang. The new cabins debuted on the New York–Hong Kong run in November, and will be introduced on Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, and Vancouver runs in 2008 (cathaypacific.com).

Another top player in the first-class "suite" stakes is **Singapore Airlines**, which recently rolled out its two-deck Airbus A380 on the Singapore–Sydney route. While the A380 has a maximum capacity of over 800 passengers, Singapore Airlines' planes will carry fewer than 500, and only 12 in their premier suites. Located at the front of the main deck, the completely private suites—created by French luxury yacht designer Jean-Jacques Coste—feature ergonomic seats upholstered in leather by Poltrona Frau, chaise longue companion seating, 23-inch flat-screen televisions, height-adjustable tables, closets and luggage stowage, and duvets, china, and crystal designed by Givenchy (singaporeair.com). —S.D.



Los Angeles



Amsterdam



Berlin

LIFESTYLE TOURS

A handful of innovative companies are at the forefront of a new trend: urban lifestyle tours. More about a city's present than its past, these tours connect travellers to what's happening now, with visits to artists' studios, new restaurants, and trendy neighbourhoods.

TOKYO The recently launched **Bespoke Tokyo** is the brainchild of fashionable British expats Nicole Fall and former TV producer Charlie Spreckley, who offer what they call "urban safaris," or custom-tailored tours. For someone looking for a lively nightlife scene, that might mean a trip through the city's hottest new bars and clubs; for a group of gourmands, it could be a hunt for the best sushi bars (bespoketokyo.jp; about \$100 an hour plus a \$100 booking charge; maximum three people, minimum four hours).

LOS ANGELES **Take My Mother Please** features owner Anne Block, a vivacious redhead whose excursions are peppered with Hollywood gossip. They include the city's best chocolate makers, a celebrity tour of the Hollywood Forever Cemetery, emerging fashion designers' boutiques, and only-in-L.A. finds like The Paper Bag Princess, the shop where Julia Roberts found the vintage Valentino she wore when she won her Oscar (323/737-2200; from \$550 for a full-day tour with up to three people).

LONDON One of the early pioneers in lifestyle tours is Tobias Moss of **Karma Kabs**. His colourfully decorated fleet of Indian Ambassador cars has been a favourite of such celebrities as Kate Moss and Scarlett Johansson. For £70 an hour, up to four visitors can cruise around the city with Moss or one of his crew. That entitles the group to a customized tour with an itinerary determined by both the client's interests and the spontaneous stops of the driver. These might range from an insider art gallery and café in the trendy club Sketch to a drive down Brick Lane—London's Little Bangladesh—or a visit to an artist's studio (208/964-0700).

BERLIN Berlinagenten's **Urban Living Tour** (€519 for a maximum of seven people) brings you into the homes of several Berliners, such as a young photographer or an art-collecting architect. The **Gastro-Rallye** (€129 per person), a food-focused tour of the trendy East Berlin Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhoods, features a four- or five-course meal, with each course taken at a different restaurant. The Gastro-Rallye has proved so popular that Berlinagenten's founder Henrik Tidefjård plans to take the concept to Budapest and Zagreb this winter. "There are not many better ways to get local and discover a city's present than through its trendy neighbourhood restaurants," claims Tidefjård (30/4372-0701).

AMSTERDAM **Like-a-Local** is a quirky travel company that offers a variety of experiences hosted by Amsterdam residents. These might include a shopping spree with a local fashionista (€29 per person for two people for two hours, €35 for three hours) or a dinner cooked on a private houseboat (€25–€29 per person, including wine). Like-a-Local offers similar packages in Lisbon, Madrid, and other cities (20/530-1460).

—Gisela Williams

master plan

With travel arrangements increasingly booked online, the details of a single trip—flights, car rentals, and so forth—can be scattered among several websites. Tripit, a free online service, consolidates bookings into a master itinerary that includes daily weather updates, maps, driving directions, and a calendar of local events. Users can add notes and share the trip plan with friends (tripit.com).