

[World Report]

# Dispatches

## The Inside Scoop From Our Contributors

**C**hicago holiday: Do lunch in the Walnut Room at Marshall Field's on State Street, at the foot of the towering Christmas tree dripping with ornaments—a great hometown tradition, whatever your age. **Texas sleep:** The Hotel San José in Austin shatters any preconceived notions East Coasters might have of Texas. You could find a note on your pillow inviting you to an outdoor movie screening in the hotel's parking lot. Surprising, in a good way.

**Beyond currywurst:** A gastro-tour of Berlin takes you to places only locals seem to know about. Our pick: A progressive dinner with stops at three chic East Berlin neighborhood eateries in the historic Jewish Quarter—Lafil, Vino e Libri, and Zoe Berlin. Cost starts at \$67 per person for personalized tours. ([www.berlinagenten.com](http://www.berlinagenten.com)) **Vietnam secret:** Don't miss the quaint and mystical charm of Hoi An: It's a preserved Vietnamese village on the central coast, little changed and unscarred from years of war. In the morning, after you've had your morning buns and Vietnamese coffee, go to any tailor shop on the main street to be fitted for an authentic *ao dai* (for women) or suit (for men). You can pick it up—finished and tailored just for you—at the end of the day. **Tokyo high:** For *Lost In Translation* views, head to the Metropolitan Government Building, with the tallest towers in the Shinjuku skyscraper district. Each of its towers has a free observatory on the 45th floor. Same view as Bill Murray's hotel room (without the \$550 rate). On clear days you can

see all the way to Mount Fuji. **What's new, Buenos Aires?** It flies against a standard rule of travel safety, but here's something for the adventurous. With frequent street protests in Argentina, there's now a tour where participants picket with demonstrators. ([info@tourexperience.com.ar](mailto:info@tourexperience.com.ar)) **Bali tunes:** In Ubud, the small shop Moari sells handmade musical instruments, including the traditional Balinese xylophones used in the indigenous gamelan music. There are also all kinds of bamboo flutes. But more interesting are the kid-friendly wooden croaking frogs, thunder tubes, and rattle bracelets. Buy a bagful for less than \$15. —Susan O'Keefe, Jerry Sealy, David McLain, Dean Foster, Stefan Caiafa, Mei-Ling Hopgood, Dan Westergren



Café society: The crowd at the Hotel San José.



Hoi An, Vietnam

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achieved gold, silver, or platinum status and qualify for seat upgrades and other valuable perks such as priority lines and access to club lounges.

There is more than one way to become a preferred customer. Widzer says many airlines offer special short-cuts that let you achieve elite levels by flying out of certain cities where they're trying to drum up more business. The best way to find out about them is to call your frequent-flier or guest program, or check the airlines' websites. Widzer achieved elite status on Delta within a few weeks last year by flying the right routes.

"Elite status," he says, "should be everyone's goal." ■

### BULLETIN

## CHINESE UPSTARTS

**C**hina granted licenses last year to several new discount airlines. Getting off the ground hasn't been easy for the upstart airlines, which are struggling with funding, hiring, and marketing to a flying public unaccustomed to flirting with new entrants. In spite of the rocky start, at least ten other private airlines are petitioning to start more low-fare carriers in China. Three that have recently taken to the skies include **Okay Airways**, which busted the state airline monopoly when it flew its inaugural flights from Tianjin and Kunming in March; **Spring Airlines**, aka Air Spring, headquartered in Shanghai and owned by one of China's largest travel agencies; and **United Eagle Airlines**, based in Chengdu, with plans to serve cities such as Jiuzhaigou, Changsha, and Shenzhen. —Hope Hamashige

### New lowfare airlines in China.



»Where our staff is headed for the holidays: Morocco (to get lost in a souk); Estes Park, Colo. (to hit the trail); Copenhagen (to visit Mom); Caye Caulker, Belize (to eat conch); Rome (to ride horses); Patagonia (to lick glacier ice); Punta Cana (to do *nada*).