

New York sets a record for tourist visits in 2010



The Big Apple is biting back from a recessionary slump, drawing 48.7 million visitors last year after slipping in 2009 for the first time since 2001. New York City tourism officials announced today that 39 million visitors were from the U.S. and 9.7 million were from abroad. Both numbers are records, and help put the city back on track for reaching Mayor Michael Bloomberg's goal of 50 million visitors by 2012.

Tourists came to New York despite a well-publicized spread of bed bugs, weather-related snafus following a Christmas weekend blizzard, and rising tabs for theater tickets, restaurants and hotel rooms. The average rate paid for a hotel room in Manhattan in 2010 was more than \$250, the New York Times reported, but the occupancy rate still increased to more than 85 percent, according to figures compiled by Colliers PKF Consulting USA. "The strength of our tourism industry is one of the reasons New York City was less impacted by the national recession than other cities," Bloomberg said in a statement, "and it continues to be one of the reasons we're growing faster than other cities today."

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Incheon International Airport opens direct rail link to Seoul for tourists

Incheon International Airport in South Korea has opened a direct rail link to downtown Seoul last month. While South Korea's largest airport has often been cited or voted as one of the best in the world by trade magazines and associations, travelers have complained that buses and taxis heading to downtown Seoul,

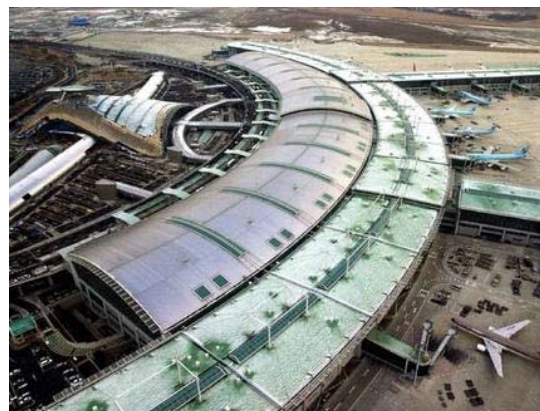
Continued Incheon International Airport opens direct rail link to Seoul for tourists

about 36 miles away, often run into heavy city traffic.

The direct underground line, which costs about \$12 per person, will transport passengers between the airport to Seoul Station, the city's main ground transportation hub in downtown, in about 40 minutes, according to CNN.

The airport has had a metro rail link to Seoul for several years, but the line, while cheaper, stops at 10 stations on the way and is slower than the direct service that opened last month, according to Arirang TV, a South Korean station.

The Airports Council International named Incheon International the world's best airport in 2010.



Airline Baggage Policies

Overview

Airlines have greatly enhanced the size of their overhead bin storage compartments and interior baggage hulls since the start of the 1990s. However, increasingly strict airline baggage policies have limited passengers' ability to fully use cargo space. Many companies have updated their luggage regulations and fees to maximize profits, making it more difficult and more expensive for travelers to bring extra bags with them. As such, passengers should pay special attention to individual airline policies when booking tickets and packing for their trips.



Carry-Ons

Passengers flying within the United States can bring one piece of carry-on luggage and one personal item such as a coat, purse or laptop case, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. Similar policies

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Grand Opening Package: Enjoy daily breakfast for two at 1826, a 25% discount on all spa treatments and valet parking starting at \$295 for a Colonial Room. Offer valid Feb. 1-Apr. 20, 2011.



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Continued Airline Baggage Policies

typically apply to international flights as well. Carry-on items must be stored in the overhead bins or beneath the seats as stipulated by standard safety regulations. Carry-on bags are usually free, but some airlines have actually started charging for every item you bring on board to off-set costs and boost revenue. Spirit Airlines was the first company to introduce fees for all carry-on bags, and other operators have begun to follow suit.

Checked Bags Included

Some airlines still allow passengers to check one or two bags for free. In other words, the baggage fees are included in the ticket price. For instance, as of August 2010, JetBlue allows passengers to check their first bag free and their second bag for a small fee. Similarly, Southwest Airlines lets riders check their first two bags for free. Travelers going on international flights are allowed to check one piece of luggage for no additional cost.



Checked Bags for a Fee

Most airlines now have mandates that require you to pay for any checked luggage. Fees vary from company to company, so don't be surprised if you encounter drastically different baggage rates for two different airlines. One thing that the majority of airlines do have in common is a sliding scale for baggage charges. Essentially, the rate per bag for each passenger goes up for every additional piece of luggage. For example, the first bag may cost \$20 while the second costs \$35 and the third costs \$70. Packing light is more important than ever for saving money now that these policies are in place.

Weight and Dimension Restrictions

Airlines impose a fairly standard set of weight and dimension restrictions for bags and suitcases. Carry-on items usually have to fit dimensions of 22 inches by 14 inches by 9 inches or less with a weight limit of 40 lbs., according to the Luggage Pros website. Likewise, checked bags must normally weigh under 50 lbs. and measure approximately 27 inches by 21 inches by 14 inches to be acceptable. Airlines sometimes allow overweight or oversize baggage, but they tend to charge hefty fees as penalties. Rules may differ between airlines, so consult the appropriate air carrier personnel to see what conditions apply to you.

Prohibited Items

The Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, and other global authorities enforce strict rules regarding prohibited items on flights. Problematic items include weapons, lighters, flammable chemicals, explosives, illicit drugs and certain plant and animal products. Additionally, liquids and gels in containers larger than 3 oz. are no longer permitted in carry-on luggage, so you'll have to pack any big bottles of shampoo or toothpaste in your checked bags or leave them at home. TSA provides a detailed list of prohibited and potentially suspicious items that passengers can review prior to traveling.

Rebrand Cliqbook as “Concur” or “Travel”

Concur recently made changes to our product offerings to make it easier for customers to engage with Concur. To-date, we have had three names to describe elements of what is essentially the same core service: Concur Travel & Expense, Concur Cliqbook Travel, and Concur Expense.



Going forward, we are simplifying the naming convention under a new umbrella name called Concur Premier.

The primary reference will be Concur. We will now refer to our solutions as Travel, Expense, or Travel & Expense. While you will see these changes throughout marketing materials and on our website, Concur.com – rest assured that the name change does not have an impact on your product, your contract, or terms of service.

Tourists in Rome face new tax

A new tax on tourists to the Eternal City is causing controversy, with hotels expressing fears it could hurt their business and scare tourists away.

As of January 1, nonresidents of Rome must pay the extra charge when staying at a hotel or visiting any tourist site, such as a museum, that charges admission.

Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno introduced the tax law last year after the Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi cut funding to Italian cities, including Rome, as part of austerity measures.



The new tax will cost 3 euros (\$4) per person per night for four- and five-star hotels and 2 euros (\$2.70) for lower categories. Small children are exempt. The tax will also see an extra 1 euro (\$1.35) charged at the city’s museums and other tourist attractions. The new law applies not only to foreign tourists, but also to Italian tourists and business travelers who are not Rome residents. Rome had a similar tourist tax law in the past but it abolished it 20 years ago.



The city of Rome says the tax will generate around 200,000 euros (nearly \$268,000) a day, for a rough total of 80 million euros (\$107.2 million) a year. It has said it hopes to invest the money in improving its cultural heritage and other city infrastructure without taxing its citizens. Rome gets about 30 million tourists per year.

The 'five ugliest airports in the U.S.'

That's the headline from TheStreet.com, which says it polled its readers to find the "ugliest airports in America."

Which airport fared the worst? TheStreet.com writes "the 5,718 folks who responded selected LaGuardia Airport as the ugliest airport with 24% of the votes, while Kennedy International was second with 17.5%." Next on the list were St. Louis (16.5%), Philadelphia (16.4%) and Los Angeles (14%). However, TheStreet.com's poll wasn't scientific (you can see the details here). In fact, TheStreet.com readers' votes were limited to just one of six airports: Los Angeles, Miami, New York JFK (old terminals), New York LaGuardia and Philadelphia. Additionally, TheStreet.com notes it can be complex to judge an entire airport. Even at JFK, the publication notes that two of the airport's terminals (JetBlue's and American's) are considered to be among the nation's nicest.



With that background, I'd like to hear what our Today in the Sky readers have to say. Nominate your choice via the comments link. The most mentions in the comments and conduct our own vote. If readers seem to like it, we'll follow with a "most-beautiful" airports query.


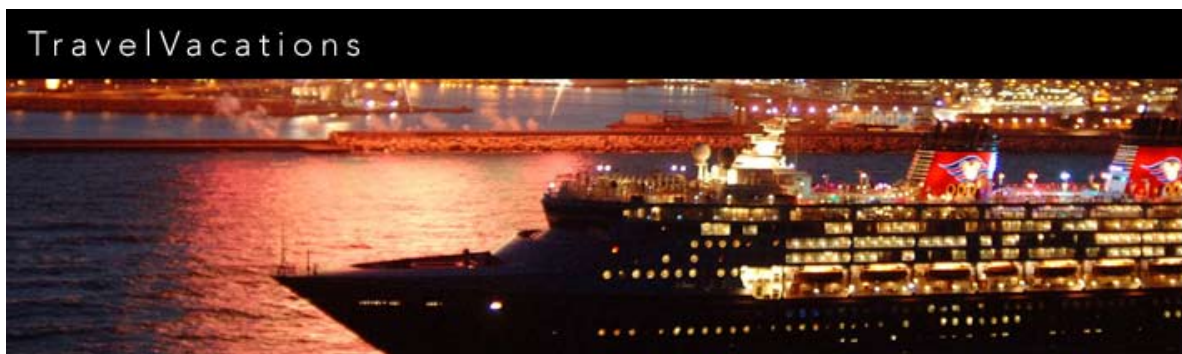
Southwest Airlines Unveils New Frequent Flyer Program

Southwest Airlines unveiled its long-awaited All-New Rapid Rewards frequent flyer program, which will eliminate blackout dates and allow redemption for international flights for the first time. The program, which will officially launch March 1, will allow members to redeem points for any seat on any flight, with no blackout dates or seat restrictions. Points won't expire so long as the member has any earning activity within a 24-month time period. Members will earn points for every dollar spent on Southwest. The amount of points earned is based on the fare and fare product purchased, and the same is true for redeeming points.



Wanna Get Away fares, the carrier's lowest level, will earn 6 points per dollar; Anytime fares will earn 10 points per dollar, and Business Select

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Continued Southwest Airlines Unveils New Frequent Flyer Program

fares will earn 12 points per dollar. Southwest spokesman Brad Hawkins states that holders of the Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards credit card will be able to redeem points for flights to 800 destinations worldwide through the Chase Bank travel program. Chase plans to reveal additional details next week.

The tie-in with Chase addresses one of the weaknesses of the current program, which allows members to redeem only flights operated by Southwest, which does not yet fly to international destinations.

Another new feature is the ability to earn miles by shopping and dining, long a staple of network airlines' programs.

Customers will retain existing credits and awards in the current program. They will maintain their value until they are used or expire.

Members' accounts will automatically be transferred to the new program on March 1, 2011 and do not need to re-enroll.

For Southwest's most frequent flyers, there are enhanced A-List and Companion Pass programs and a new level of status, A-List Preferred, that will provide a 100% earning bonus on flights.

Members also will have the ability to purchase points in blocks of 1,000, with a minimum purchase of 2,000 points.



'Miracle On Hudson' Plane To Go Into Museum

The crippled US Airways plane that made a miraculous safe emergency landing in New York's icy Hudson River in 2009 is headed for its final destination -- the Carolinas Aviation Museum.

The museum in Charlotte, North Carolina is close to completing a deal to obtain the Airbus A320 as a permanent exhibit, museum president Shawn Dorsch said on Wednesday.

"This is without a doubt a major international aviation icon," Dorsch said. "People around the world are captivated by this story."

All 155 people survived the emergency landing on January 15, 2009 after the plane was struck by birds, blowing out its engines, moments after take-off from New York's LaGuardia airport.

Pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger became an American hero for his skillful guiding of the Charlotte-bound plane and his grace under the public spotlight. The incident won the nickname "Miracle on the Hudson." The plane will be shipped in May to North Carolina from New Jersey, where it has been stored. Dorsch said she expects it will take several months to reassemble the aircraft for public display in Charlotte, which is the hub for US Airways.

The final exhibit will include the uniform worn on the flight by Sullenberger, who has since retired.

Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group Implements No-Smoking Policy for Rental Cars

Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group, Inc. is pleased to announce that Dollar and Thrifty rental cars are now 100 percent smoke-free as a result of Dollar Thrifty's new policy prohibiting smoking by renters at all U.S. corporate stores and participating franchise locations.

"We're extremely pleased to now offer a 100 percent smoke-free fleet," said Scott Thompson, Dollar Thrifty President and CEO. "We are passionate about providing our value-oriented customers with a rental experience that is consistent with our high standards, and we think that fresh, clean and smoke-free car interiors are essential to achieving our objectives."

Renters who do not comply with the new policy and return vehicles after smoking may face a charge of up to \$250. This is necessary to cover the special cleaning required to remove all traces of tobacco residue and smoky odor from a vehicle's interior. Rental cars that have been smoked in will be immediately grounded upon inspection and removed for a thorough detailing before being returned for customer use. All rental cars in Dollar and Thrifty fleets display a "No Smoking" sticker notifying renters of the potential charge for noncompliance.

"We think it is important to follow suit with the rest of the U.S. travel industry's non-smoking approach so that travelers always have a smoke-free means of transportation. We're confident this new policy will not only be widely-accepted by customers, but greatly appreciated as well," continued Thompson.



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Air fares on the upswing as jet fuel costs increase

U.S. and foreign airlines are adding fuel surcharges — or increasing base fares — to deal with the rising fuel cost of jet fuel, which is going up with the price of crude oil.

United Continental (UAL) added \$6 in surcharges for round-trip tickets Monday, says Rick Seaney, CEO of FareCompare.com, which closely monitors fares.

American Airlines (AMR) also raised base fares by \$4 to \$10 round trip on most routes about the same time United added its fuel surcharge, Seaney says. US Airways (LCC), Delta Air Lines (DAL) and AirTran (AAI) have also since matched the increases on some routes.

United subsequently dropped its surcharge, but rolled it into an increase in the base fare as American did. This round of fare increases, the industry's fifth since December, will likely stick, Seaney says. "They didn't know whether to match either (the surcharge) or (the base fare increase)," he says. "Either way, we're going to have a hike."

Domestic travelers haven't paid fuel surcharges since November of 2008, when airlines eliminated them by rolling them into fares.

But oil prices are higher — at about \$91 a barrel on Wednesday — and more fuel charges are likely coming. Those to feel them first: travelers to small cities or on routes where large network airlines face little competition, Seaney says.

Airline executives have been sounding the alarm about rising fuel prices for weeks. The International Air Transportation Association said Wednesday that the industry's profit worldwide would fall by 40% this year to \$9.1 billion from last year based on oil at \$84 per barrel.



Enterprise Rent-A-Car offers Volt in California

Enterprise Rent-A-Car now offers Chevrolet Volt extended-range electric vehicles for daily and weekly rentals at its Mark Christopher Auto Centre branch in Ontario, California.

Enterprise added the Volt to its fleet in early January and is working with all auto manufacturers to make electric vehicles (EV) available to consumers for rental at its neighborhood and airport locations, and through its WeCar car-sharing program. On January 13th, Enterprise was the first in the car rental industry to offer the Volt, which was rented to the Automotive Club of Southern California.



"We appreciate that Enterprise is on the cutting edge of

Continued Enterprise Rent-A-Car offers Volt in California

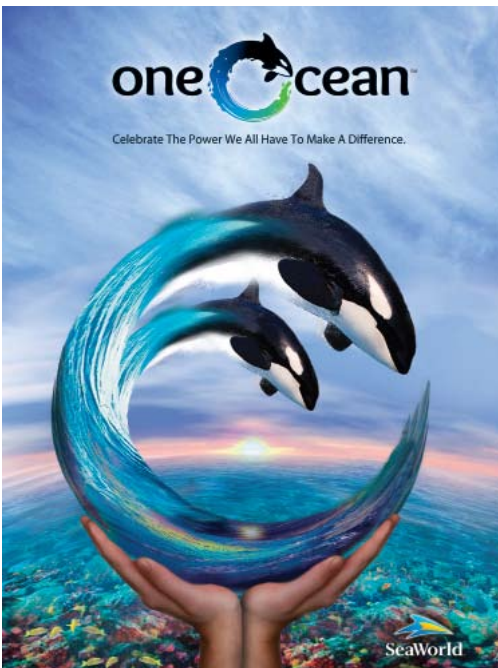
renting state-of-the-art, green vehicles,” said Steve Mazo, manager of the Automotive Research Centre for the Automobile Club of Southern California.

In preparation for the vehicles, Enterprise installed charging stations at select locations throughout California. Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE) manufacturer EV-Charge America installed the new multi-vehicle charging station at Enterprise’s Mark Christopher Auto Centre rental location. The charging station provides easy access to vehicle charging, and multi-vehicle recharging, for Enterprise at the Ontario location. Enterprise is working with a variety of EVSE manufacturers to install Level II chargers at its neighborhood locations in each city where EVs are offered to its customers.

In addition to the locations where chargers are already available at Enterprise in California, several will soon be installed at rental locations in Washington, Oregon, Tennessee and Arizona. While most EVs can travel about 100 miles on a single charge, extended-range EVs like the Volt can travel up to 379 miles on a full charge and full tank of gas due to an on-board gas-powered generator.

Both technologies accommodate the travel habits of the daily commuter, who drives an average of approximately 40 miles a day. “We will continue to integrate new, clean fuel and engine technologies into our fleet to promote new alternatives like the Volt and help them become commercially viable,” said Lee Broughton, director of corporate sustainability for Enterprise Holdings, the parent company of Enterprise Rent-A-Car. “Making EVs available through our network of Enterprise locations provides an opportunity for customers to try them out for consideration through an extended test drive.” Enterprise works with all automotive manufacturers as well as electric vehicle suppliers and advocates, such as the Electrification Coalition, to enhance awareness of EVs.

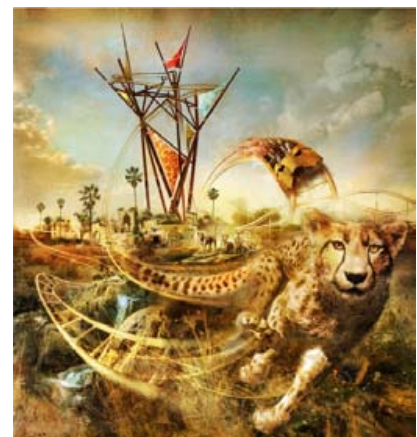
SeaWorld, Busch Gardens to open new attractions



SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment on Thursday announced the opening of 10 new attractions at its parks this year, including a new killer whale show at SeaWorld’s in three cities, a cheetah-themed coaster at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay and a swim-through artificial reef at Discovery Cove in Orlando.

The new whale show, “One Ocean,” has an educational, environmental theme, with a focus on teaching the public about orcas. It will be offered at SeaWorld Orlando at the end of April, SeaWorld San Diego in May and SeaWorld San Antonio in June.

“These types of attractions can connect people to animals, nature and the environment, and can provide the inspiration to want to care about the world,” Julie Scardina, SeaWorld’s top animal trainer, said in a phone interview.



Continued SeaWorld, Busch Gardens to open new attractions

Discovery Cove, a separate theme park in Orlando which offers interactions with dolphins and other aquatic animals, will open The Grand Reef in June, with hammocks and sandy beaches. Visitors will be able to swim and snorkel amid marine life similar to what you might find in a real coral reef. SeaWorld San Diego will open Turtle Reef this summer, with a ride and massive aquarium featuring sea turtles, tropical fish and an underwater viewing gallery. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay will debut Cheetah Hunt, a coaster with 4,429 feet of track and three zero-to-60 mph launches in one ride. A new viewing area, Cheetah Run, will offer a close-up look at real cheetahs, including a chance to see them run in a daily workout session.



Other new attractions at parks owned by the SeaWorld company include Sesame Street Bay of Play at SeaWorld Antonio; Mach Tower, a rotate-and-drop ride at Busch Gardens Williamsburg in Virginia; Vanish Point, a water tower ride at the Water Country USA water park in Williamsburg; and a Neighborhood Street Party parade and Elmo's Cloud Chaser ride at Sesame Place in Pennsylvania. Scardina said the 10 new attractions represent the largest capital investment in a single year in the company's history.

SeaWorld is also about to restart its popular "Dine with Shamu" killer whale show. It will begin Feb. 26 at SeaWorld San Antonio and later this spring at parks in Orlando and San Diego. The performance includes a buffet meal for guests while trainers work nearby with one of the park's orcas. The show was suspended last year after trainer Dawn Brancheau was dragged into the water and killed by a six-ton orca named Tilikum shortly after a "Dine with Shamu" session.

Dennis Spiegel, president of International Theme Park Services, a global consulting agency, said the new attractions "will take the edge" off the trainer death incident, but he added that he didn't think the death had much of an impact on SeaWorld attendance overall. SeaWorld does not release visitation figures, but Spiegel said the extraordinary popularity of Universal's new Harry Potter attraction in Orlando siphoned potential guests away from SeaWorld, while the weak economy has also dampened theme park attendance in general.

Hilton opening first new brand in 20 years

With the first Home2 Suites in Fayetteville, N.C. opening February 3rd, Hilton Worldwide is venturing into a mid-tier extended stay market that remains relatively competitive amid a slowly recovering economy. Hilton already has a presence in the extended-stay segment with the upscale Homewood Suites, but Home2 Suites is providing something new: Increased amenities and a larger, more modern lobby design. Hilton hopes its lobby concept — called "Oasis" — will bring extended-stay customers out of their rooms and into the lobby, so they'll feel less isolated or lonely during multi-day stays.



Six other Home2 Suites are under construction, with the next few opening in Baltimore, San Antonio and Layton, Utah. Until now, mid-priced extended stay hotels have paid little attention to lobby designs, on the theory that business travelers would rather hole up in their rooms than hang out in a lobby after working all day. But wireless access and longer stays have led to a new approach.

Continued Hilton opening first new brand in 20 years

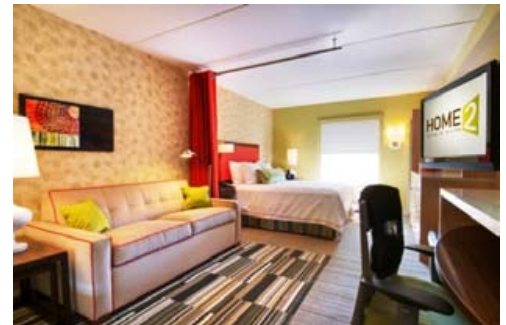


“As people have become more mobile with laptops and iPhones and what have you, the things that tether you to your room aren’t there anymore,” said Robert LaFleur, managing director and lodging and leisure analyst with Hudson Securities. “People are social creatures by nature.”

Home2 Suites lobbies will be large, with plenty of tables and modern, colorful couches and chairs. A breakfast area is included. Outside, there could be a swimming pool, a patio with grills and seating areas, and an exercise track.

The lobby design is a rarity for the typically bare-bones, budget-conscious extended-stay segment, providing an area for social gathering as well as communal and individual work and meeting zones. The first Home2 Suites in Fayetteville, like most of the other properties in the pipeline, is a new construction project. It will have 118 rooms, priced from the low \$100s, with rates dependent on season and availability.

Many of the properties will be located near universities, hospitals, military bases and commercial centers — places where visitors tend to stay several days or even weeks at a time. Fort Bragg, a major U.S. Army facility, is in the Fayetteville area. Many Home2 Suites franchise owners already own a Hilton property, and about 90 Home2 Suites owners have either received approval or have deals in the works, said Bill Duncan, global head for brand management for Homewood and Home2 Suites. Home2 Suites falls under the umbrella of Hilton Worldwide, based in Memphis.



All Home2 Suites properties will have carpets and tables made from recycled materials, Energy Star appliances and other eco-friendly features. Studios and one-bedroom suites will have kitchens and a “working wall” with a 42-inch flat screen TV, ambient and task lighting, alarm clock with iPod port and MP3 jack. Furniture can be moved around to customize living spaces and adjust storage options. Studios will average 323 square feet and one-bedroom suites will be around 509 square feet, smaller than rooms at high-end extended hotels. But Eric Brey, director of the Center for Resorts and Hospitality Business at the University of Memphis, believes the “Oasis” concept will be key to the new brand’s success. “That’s going to be that sweet spot,” Brey said. “They’re going to try to bring people out of the room and bring them downstairs and have a social dialogue that other competitors don’t really provide.” The Fayetteville property’s opening was delayed from December to February, due to construction delays including weather problems. In addition, some Home2 Stay franchise owners had trouble securing financing because of the economy. “We have seen a sign of purse strings loosening up a little bit, but they have to be gold-plated deals,” LaFleur said. “Projects are done with a lot of equity, with more developer ‘skin in the game.’”

The extended-stay market appears to be picking up. The occupancy rate for extended stay hotels was 70.1 percent last year, up from 64.2 percent in 2009 but below the 74.7 percent seen in 2005, according to research by Hendersonville, Tenn.-based STR Inc. Revenues eclipsed \$6.3 billion in 2010, up from \$5.6 billion in 2009 and \$4.7 billion in 2005. Job cuts could actually be a reason why extended-stay hotel revenue has increased, as people take jobs farther from home.



Ditch TSA workers? Airports no longer allowed to 'opt out' Agency announces that it won't grant additional private security contracts

The Transportation Security Administration has said it won't allow any more airports to "opt out" and bring in private security contractors in place of the agency's federal workers. Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., who in the fall wrote a letter to 100 airports urging them to ditch TSA agents, said it is "unimaginable" that TSA would end "the most successfully performing passenger screening program we've had over the last decade."



Despite staunch opt-out support from Mica — the new chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee — TSA Administrator John Pistole said Friday that he had reviewed the private contractor screening program as part of a more general review of TSA policies and decided not to expand the program beyond the current 16 airports because he did not see "any clear or substantial advantage to do so at this time."

Since the TSA was created after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, federal law has allowed airports the option of using private screeners. But few of the nation's roughly 460 commercial airports have done so.

Currently, San Francisco International, Kansas City International and 14 other airports use private contractors to screen airline passengers. Under the program, the private company conducts an airport's passenger screening according to TSA's rules and policies and under TSA supervision.

"TSA will continue to sustain the program at the current level to compare the effectiveness of federal vs. private screeners," said TSA spokesperson Greg Soule. "The information we have to date shows the performance of TSA officers and private screeners is comparable."

'Facebook Factor' Inspires 52% to Book a Holiday

Sharing holiday snaps through Facebook, the social network with over 500 million users worldwide, is not only helping people stay connected in the virtual world, but also influencing people's travels in the real world, Skyscanner can reveal. In the recent poll by the flights comparison website, Skyscanner, found that the 'power of pictures' has a very strong influence on Facebookers' travel plans, with more than half (52%) stating that seeing friends' holiday pictures had inspired them to book a holiday to the same place.

Despite the well-worn joke surrounding the boredom of being subjected to other people's holiday snaps, a whopping 88% of respondents loved to nose through their friends' shots with half of those admitting to doing so because "they could see what they had got up to and with whom!". 45% of respondents also said that Facebook encourages them to visit their friends abroad more and despite some recent reports that have claimed FB reduces real life contact, only 5% of people said that being on Facebook actually meant they were less likely to see their friends in person.



The Skyscanner survey also revealed that Facebook is playing an increasing part in the organisation of group travel with 46% of people having either organised or been invited on a trip via the site.