

Travel

TRAVEL ROUND-UP

BANYAN TREE OPENS ITS FIRST HOTEL IN MACAU

BANYAN Tree Hotels & Resorts has opened its first Macau hotel, The Banyan Tree Macau.

Located at the US\$2.4-billion (S\$2.4-billion) Galaxy Macau integrated resort complex, the five-star "urban resort" has 246 private pool suites; four restaurants, including an underwater oyster bar and grill; a large Banyan Tree Spa and a series of other offerings, The Independent reported.

The hotel is located on the Cotai strip and only a 15-minute drive from Macau International Airport.

In addition, the Banyan Tree Spa at Galaxy Macau is one of the largest in the world. It is located on the Grand Resort Deck, next to the world's largest sky-top wave pool and white-sand beach, said Travel Daily Asia.

WYNDHAM HOTEL GROUP EXPANDS INTO THAILAND

THE Wyndham Hotel Group will make its debut in Thailand with a Days Hotel in Phuket.

To be opened in April 2013, the two-storey Days Hotel Phuket Town will be close to local leisure and entertainment facilities, AsiaTravelTips.com said.

The hotel will have 120 guest rooms situated near lush gardens and offering ocean view. Hotel amenities will include an outdoor swimming pool, gym, spa, meeting rooms, lobby bar, pool bar and all-day dining restaurant.

EMIRATES TO START DAILY DUBAI-DUBLIN FLIGHTS

EMIRATES will launch daily flights between Dubai and Dublin from January, its first route to the Republic of Ireland.

An Airbus A330-200 will be deployed between Dubai and Dublin, offering First, Business and Economy class.

Ireland is a popular tourist destination and last year received 6.7 million visitors, drawn by its rich ancient history, spectacular countryside, traditional Irish music, thousands of miles of scenic coastline and renowned fresh air, Travel Daily Asia reported.

JETSTAR LAUNCHES DIRECT S'PORE-NINGBO FLIGHTS

LOW-COST carrier Jetstar now flies direct from Singapore to Ningbo in Zhejiang province, China.

It will operate a three-times weekly service that will grow to four-times weekly by November.

In addition to Ningbo, Jetstar is preparing to launch long-haul flights from Singapore – and Melbourne – to Beijing on Nov 24, subject to regulatory approval, the carrier said.

Jetstar's all-day, everyday lead-in fares between Singapore and Ningbo start from S\$198 one way, inclusive of surcharges, fees and taxes.

Sights, sounds and glorious

The T'ang Quartet performed at the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland last month. The four – Lionel Tan, Leslie Tan, Ng Yu Ying and Ang Chek Meng – managed to squeeze in sight-seeing during their four days there. Here's what they did.

BY LIONEL TAN
IN EDINBURGH

DAY ONE (AUG 14)

WE HIT the ground not exactly running after Leslie's luggage didn't follow us on the connecting flight from Paris. We blamed it on Chek as he jinxed it when he voiced his fear that his luggage wouldn't arrive from Singapore.

That's not the first time this had happened to us, so we just got on with things as there was little time to lose. We have today and half of tomorrow to explore what we didn't the last time we came to this festival.

Little has changed from 2007 – the city is still crowded during the festival season, the old buildings from the 1500s are still standing, thank god prices haven't increased too much, and the festival is still a huge draw, if not one of the top picks of the international circuit.

During the summer, Edinburgh is full of riotous vibrancy as several independent festivals are cramped into the city. We are here for the Edinburgh International Festival which, unfortunately, has been overshadowed by the eclectic Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which attracts over 20,000 acts.

The Fringe Fest boasts of being the launching pad for many a star from Stephen Fry and Emma Thompson to The Mighty Boosh and Eddie Izzard.

Off we wandered from the four-star hotel, Ten Hills Place (small rooms with too much fancy furniture), to find sustenance – an order of English breakfast with some add-ons. The incident ones ordered a pint of something to go with it although the really decadent one already had some in Paris.

After that, we headed to the Grassmarket and the Royal Mile. This is the spine of the Old Town, where we checked out some local speciality stores (read whisky and tweed) and, after a wee bit of walking, we came head-on upon the irresistible scent of slow roasted pork.

Les and I ordered two portions of the "Oink" sandwich to share. I definitely "won" by



IRRESISTIBLE: Members of the T'ang Quartet, (from left) Ang Chek Meng, Leslie Tan, Ng Yu Ying and Lionel Tan, with Oink sandwiches, which contain slow roasted pork. (PHOTOS: T'ANG QUARTET)

also having the optional **pork crackling**. I decided right away that that would be my lunch tomorrow too.

You might like to know that I changed my mind after I couldn't finish my Oink sandwich, tasty as it was.

"We really have to work this off," I said, so we headed for the cobbled streets of the Royal Mile. The atmosphere was one heady mix of bustling eclecticism and laughter-bone therapy.

After checking out more local speciality stores peddling crafts, like the iconic **kilt** and tweed makers, the local cheese makers and, of course, even more whisky, we began to feel the effects of the flight and decided to rest at a local pub.

Of course, we had to pick the Tolbooth, a 16th-century toll booth-turned-pub and one of the many popular haunted pubs that the city offers. We decided to be safe and sat in the section where the "presence" was not felt. After all, we were weakened by jetlag and, in some part of our psyche, the Chinese "sev-

enth ghost month" does exist.

Messy as it might seem to jet-lagged tourists, the creativity and zaniness of the pub were still a wow factor. And, surprisingly, the scene was bustling but never noisy and annoying.

DAY TWO (AUG 15)

You have to see the elegant New Town where there's a strong stamp of all things English – including a Prince Albert Memorial much like the one in London.

The New Town was a 20-minute walk from our hotel. As I strolled along the street, I began to suspect that the area is a Little India/Arab town surrounded by numerous Indian curry places like the Mosque Kitchen (good and cheap curry) and Islamic eats. The Central Mosque and Islamic Centre confirmed our guesses.

Lo and behold, the sound of bagpipes and manly legs wrapped in kilts greeted us as we arrived at the New Town. It is said that one wears nothing underneath a kilt. I couldn't confirm that as the wind didn't help me and I didn't think the blokes

were going to be amused if I asked them for proof.

Topshop, H&M, Harvey Nichols and Louis Vuitton are familiar brands that line the main street. There was a *pasar malam*-like tent selling candles, incense sticks as well as Thai and Balinese wares.

The cafe and food scene was very different, though. Here, Starbucks and McDonald's do not sprout like wild mushrooms after a rain. Instead, you get artisan/boutique hole-in-a-wall coffee joints tucked in base-ments and building corners.

The one we went to offered scones and brownies that looked so delectable that I couldn't resist ordering both.

The festival van then transported us to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's building which is, in fact, an elegant Georgian townhouse. It houses the orchestra's offices and some rooms where outreach activities are held. We were privileged to have our rehearsal in what used to be the drawing room.

CONTINUED ON TRAVEL A15

food of Edinburgh



CHEERS: T'ang Quartet violinist Ang Chek Meng trying out whisky straight from the cask.



DRESS REHEARSAL: The T'ang Quartet practising at Queen's Hall.



BLOWING HIS HORN: A street busker showing off his prowess with the alpenhorn, or alpine horn.

FROM PAGE A14

Then came dinner time. Fish and chips are a must, right? Or should it be the Scottish icon of haggis? The greedy me wanted both. Poking my head into a pub called The Greenmantle, I heard people jamming in this especially warm and cosy pub. What a nice vibe!

And what a menu! There were Puddledub Buffalo burger with haggis, fish and chips, shetland bannocks (local bread) with a signature red-onion marmalade and, of course, beer.

We enjoyed our dinner slowly while the soft sounds of traditional tunes floated over quiet chatter and hearty laughter. Now, that's what I call a genuine Scottish experience.

DAY THREE (AUG 16)

After breakfast at the hotel, we were off to The (Festival) Hub for Conversation – a Q&A session where the public came with questions ranging from our programming process to whether we fight with one another.

Right after Conversation, we

headed to the performance venue, the Queen's Hall – converted from a wooden church – for our dress rehearsal and to check out the acoustics and “feel” the space.

DAY FOUR (AUG 17)

11am: Concert time. The first half went well and I was quietly happy. There was a good feeling after the dress rehearsal yesterday and I was quietly confident but this was beyond expectations. Second half went well too and we had a good response.

It's an awesome feeling to be playing to such an enthusiastic audience. Some searched for our website right after the concert and e-mailed to say they enjoyed the intense morning.

Work done, we headed for a lunch hosted by Mr Jonathan Mills, the director of the festival. Then, we had just enough time for a quick drink with our friends before we were packed into a bus headed for the airport for the flight home.

How things have swung from high to low. Well, that's the life of a travelling musician.

myp@sph.com.sg

◆ The writer, a violinist, is one quarter of the T'ang Quartet. Fellow members are violinists Ng Yu Ying and Ang Chek Meng, and cellist Leslie Tan.

◆ Catch the T'ang Quartet at their upcoming concert – *Death of the Harlequin* – on Saturday at the Esplanade Recital Studio, at 7.30pm and 9.30pm.

Tickets are at \$35 (\$24 concessions for students, NSmen and senior citizens), excluding Sistic booking charges. For tickets, call Sistic on 6348-5555 or visit www.sistic.com

HELPPESK 我的字典

Pork crackling: 脆皮猪肉
cui pi zhu rou

Kilt: 苏格兰短裙 sū gé lán duǎn qún

Haggis: 羊杂碎布丁
yáng zá suì bù dīng

Dress rehearsal: 彩排 cǎi pái

Bottoms up at Oktoberfests – in America

NEW YORK

FOR dedicated beer lovers, autumn conjures up images of Oktoberfest, and that means steins the size of toddlers, boisterous drinking songs and waitresses in dirndl skirts.

The Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, is the biggest beer festival in the world, and this year it will take place from Saturday to Oct 3.

However, there is plenty to do – and drink – in the United States during the beer festival, too. Think of it as Oktoberfest in America.

The festivals can be rambunctious parties, where one has to shout to be heard. Or they can be quieter affairs, with the hum of mingling and a focus on the task at hand: drinking beer.

So many beer festivals are bubbling up throughout the US that domestic fans now have a dizzying year-round array of choices, said Mr Eric Shepard, executive editor of trade publication Beer Market-er's Insights.

“It's gotten so popular, I don't know of any place that doesn't have one,” he said, citing the success of craft beers as the reason.

Here's a look at the trend and some of the festivals in the US this autumn.

FESTIVAL BASICS

Breweries, brewers' guilds and local groups of enthusiasts hold the festivals. Tickets can range from US\$20 (\$25) to US\$100 or more, depending on what is offered.

Tickets may cover drinks or they may be good only for entry, and visitors have to pay separately for their drinks, said Ms Julia Herz, craft-beer programme director for the Brewers Association, which represents most of the nation's craft brewers.

OKTOBERFESTS IN AMERICA

◆ **Oktoberfest Zinzinnati (Cincinnati, Saturday and Sunday)**

The southern Ohio city gives a nod to its German roots with this festival, which bills itself as America's largest Oktoberfest, with half a million attendees.

There is a full weekend of festivities, starting with the fifth annual Running of The Weiners at noon on Friday, where dachshunds run in complete hot-dog regalia.

For human beings, there's a beer-stein race and beer-barrel roll. The actual beer festival, which is sponsored by brewer Samuel Adams, begins on Saturday when a parade of German-Americans wearing traditional garb taps the kegs at each festival tent.

Admission is free and beers are purchased at each tent, for either US\$4-US\$5 for a small, or as much as US\$11 for a large souvenir mug.

◆ **Oktoberfest by the Bay (San Francisco, Sept 30-Oct 2)**

The festival at the scenic waterfront features “sizzling oompah music”, native dancing and, of course, beer.

Entry is split into sessions, either day or night. Tickets are US\$25 for any session, but that covers only admission. VIP tickets for US\$65 include a buffet and a beer. Most beers are US\$6 and food ranges from US\$3-US\$11.

The final day of the event marks the 122nd anniversary of German Day in San Francisco.

◆ **Soulard Oktoberfest (St Louis, Oct 7-9)**

This festival is held in the backyard of one of America's most successful brewing companies, Anheuser-Busch, founded by German immigrants.

The city's strong German heritage is on display at the festival, which promises 2,000 kegs and 14 bands. The event includes contests for brat-eating, stein-holding and strongest barnaid.

Entry is US\$5 but those who turn up wearing German attire would get in for free.

Food and drinks are separate. For US\$40-US\$75, depending on the day, one gets VIP treatment with all-you-can-eat bratwurst and other food, beer, special parking and, perhaps most important at a beer festival, special access to bathrooms.

OTHER BEER FESTIVALS

Not all autumn beer festivals are Oktoberfests. Here is one example:

◆ **Great American Brew Festival (Denver, Sept 29-Oct 1)**

This festival, run by the Brewers Association, features 2,400 beers served in the festival hall from 465 brewers.

With some 49,000 attendees each year, it is considered the largest ticketed beer festival in the US.

However, tickets for the 30th annual festival this year sold out in a record one week. Tickets for next year's event should go on sale in late July at www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com/

Attendees come wanting to taste as much as possible, so the organisers have breweries pour drinks one ounce at a time, rather than the typical four-ounce pours at most other beer festivals.

AP