

GO NOW

It's a small

These days, there isn't much of the free world you can't get to from New York on a one-seat ride — ALEXANDER BASEK takes a look at five fantastic destinations that have just moved closer to you

T IRED of being stuck in traffic on the LAX runway on the way to Asia? Gone into every shop, twice, at Heathrow on your way to Africa? The airlines feel your pain. A growing number are launching non-stop flights from New York, easing access to points both exotic and just plain desirable.

As of this month, Thai Airways now flies non-stop to Bangkok from JFK. Equally remote Singapore now feels closer, thanks to a Singapore Airlines flight that launched last year from New York. The list grows. It isn't just our town that's reaping the benefits — Air France recently embarked on an aggressive expansion campaign into the heartland to offer non-stop service to Paris from Cincinnati and Detroit, while Washington now has a one-seat ride to Johannesburg on South African Airways.

The airlines' newfound generosity in part has to do with wanting to streamline the flying experience.

Nigel Page, a senior vice president at Emirates, says that while the biggest draw of his airline's new JFK-Dubai flight is time saved, the service also means "fewer air traffic problems and getting to your destination with your baggage."

It has to do as well with the airlines' desire for new business (something they definitely need).

"The domestic market has become more competitive, and carriers saw an opportunity to serve international demand," says analyst Michael Allen, of BACK Aviation, an airline consultancy group.

While new aircraft that are able to fly longer distances are responsible for some of the changes, don't always expect to end up on a jumbo. Allen says that many of the airlines are using smaller aircraft, which can be easily swapped on to shorter routes if demand for these new flights hits a low patch.

For now, however, long-distance travel is becoming simpler — a notable shift in an age where many airlines are doing everything they can to raise our blood pressure.

Here, five destinations that are easier than ever to get to from New York, and why now's the time to go.



TAHITI
How to go: Air Tahiti Nui from JFK to Papeete, beginning July 4

Why go now: Because you need a break from the Caribbean (plus, temps in Papeete are lower than

what we've been getting in N.Y.C.).

The French Polynesian islands, including Tahiti, Bora Bora and Moorea, have been a popular vacation spot for nearly 200 years. They combine the remoteness and natural beauty of the South Pacific with a well-developed tourist infrastructure.

Tahiti is all about the classics: beautiful beaches and relaxed locals. There's plenty of outdoor activities, but many come just for peace and quiet. Don't forget the bank card — the best hotels run upwards of \$800 per night.

Stay here: Head for the private island of Tautau, a 45-minute boat ride from Raiatea — which itself is a half-hour flight from noisy, congested Papeete (where you'll land). There, check into one of the 48 over-water bungalows at the exclusive **Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa**. Each of the units offers a palatial 1,000 square feet of personal space (from \$912; letaha.com).

On a budget? Twenty minutes outside of Papeete you'll find the **Taaroa Lodge**. Taaroa has its own beach, perfect for launching kayaks and sail-boards (they'll loan them to you) and rustic accommodations (\$106/night for a bungalow, from \$26 for dorm rooms; 011 698 58 3921; taaroalodge.com).

Don't miss: Dive or snorkel, as the water here is among the clearest in the world. You'll see coral reefs, sharks, exotic fish, manta rays and genuine shipwrecks (from \$50 for diving and snorkeling with **Aquatica** outfitters; aquatica-dive.com). Also, surfing was invented here — catch a wave.

Need to know: Round-trip fares from \$1,000; airtahitiniui-usa.com

Old time: 15 hours, 40 min. there, 16 hours back, through LAX

New time: 12 hours, 40 min. there, 12 hours back

Time saved: Approximately 3 hours each way

Info: tahiti-tourisme.com



BERLIN
How to go: Continental from Newark, beginning June 30; or Delta from JFK

Why go now: To stay current.

Travelers quibbling over which Eastern European city is currently the hippest are forgetting one thing: To the west lies Berlin, a bastion of cool that's cooler than ever.

Bars, clubs and boutiques multiply by the minute here, and the energetic, innovative art scene beats New York's exclusive one by far. You'll also want to see the much-talked about, just opened Holocaust Memorial near the

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Non-stop and direct are not the same, when it comes to flights. The former means no stops, the latter means you can reach the destination without changing planes, but there will be one stop along the way.

Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate, 2,711 dark gray slabs designed to make visitors feel, among other things, profoundly disoriented.

Stay here: The **Riehmers Hofgarten** is a hotel in hip Kreuzberg, a dynamic section in the city's southeast. A former turn-of-the-century (19th century) apartment complex, the hotel was renovated in 1999. The rooms are minimalist with light wood accents and colorful furniture. The lobby downstairs, where breakfast is served, has a great view of foot traffic on Yorkstrasse, and the restaurant, e.t.a hoffman, is also top notch (from \$131/night; 030 780 98 800; www.riehmers-hofgarten.de).

Don't miss: For a great view of the city, go to the **TV Tower** at Alexanderplatz (\$9 entrance fee; Panoramstrasse 1A, berlinerfernsehturm.de). Also check out "it" bar du jour, **CSA**, located in the former office of Czechoslovak Airlines, with its retro-futuristic 70s vibe (Karl-Marx-Allee 96).

Need to know: from \$896; continental.com

Old time: 9 hours there, 10.5 hours back, via Frankfurt

New time: 8 hours there, 9 hours back

Time saved: Approximately 1 1/4 hours

Info: berlin.de



NAPLES
How to go: Eurofly from JFK, launched June 13

Why go now: To do a serious taste test.

Naples is Italy's third-largest city, the birthplace of pizza (in the western hemisphere, at least) as well as the home of Mount Vesuvius, in the hills above the city. It's noisy, dirty, chaotic — and a blast. Next month is the annual Neapolis Music Festival, which this year features Tori Amos, LCD Soundsystem and Kraftwerk (July 7-8).

Stay here: The **Grand Hotel Parker's** is the best hotel in town. You get views of the bay, turn-of-the-century style rooms and elegant service — but it doesn't come

cheap (\$433/night; 39 081 761 24 74, grandhotelparkers.it). For a more cost-effective accommodation with bay views, head for the **Parteno**. It's not as stylish, but you'll have more money to spend on the excellent Neapolitan seafood (\$129/night; 39 081 245 20 95, parteno.it).

Don't miss: Pizza experts should sample the best of what Naples has to offer. Among the better addresses: **Pizzeria di Matteo** (Via dei Tribunali, 94) and **L'Antica Pizzeria da Michele** (Via Cesare Sersale 1). Pizza Margherita — that's the classic with tomatoes and mozzarella — was invented at L'Antica. At di Matteo, things are on the rough side (don't expect fine china), but Bill Clinton enjoyed himself on a recent visit.

Need to know: from \$649; euroflyusa.com

Old time: 11 hours, 15 min. there, 11 hours, 55 min. back, via Milan

New time: 8 hours, 25 min. there, 9 hours, 40 min. back

Time saved: 2 hours, 35 min. (average)

Info: italiantourism.com



DUBAI
How to go: Emirates from JFK

Why go now: See the new Vegas. Home to a month-long shopping festival (each January) and the Palm, a man-made residential island in the shape of, you guessed it, a palm tree, Dubai is as flashy as it is euro-trashy.

Thanks to the desert heat, going outside is not always an option — hence, don't look for "downtown life." Head for one of the city's many malls, where just about every luxury brand in the universe is represented, or the old souks north of Dubai Creek, which now sell electronics and perfume.

Ready yourself for lots of construction. For each completed project, there are five new ones.

With the launch of the JFK-Dubai flight, far-flung destinations in the Indian Ocean, South Asia and Africa are considerably less stressful propositions. Today, most popular are the routes continuing to India, Pakistan and East Africa.

Stay here: One of the newest properties, the **Madinat Jumeirah**, is one of the hottest. The architecture is more in the Arabian style of the whole region instead of the glass and steel that threatens to dominate the city around it. Within the complex there are two hotels (the Mina A' Salam and the Al Qasr) plus a spa, a souk, 23 restaurants and bars. Visitors get around the complex in small boats;

waterways link the different parts together (from \$300; 971 4 366 8888, madinatjumeirah.com).

Don't miss: Camel racing at the **Nad Al Sheba Racetrack** Thurs. and Fri. (nadalshebaclub.com).

How to go: from \$1,423; emirates.com

Old time: 15 hours, 20 min. there, 17 hours, 40 min. back (through Heathrow)

New time: 12 hours, 50 min. there, 14 hours, 10 min. back

Time saved: 3 hours (average)
Info: www.dubaitourism.co.ae



BEIJING
How to go: Continental from Newark (first daily service)

Why go now: They're paving it over as we speak

Yes, the Chinese capital will shine during the Olympics in 2008, but don't wait until then to visit. Besides the fact that it will be impossible to get a hotel room, the city is veering dangerously close to becoming a soulless corporate park thanks to \$40 billion in sweeping redevelopments. Four new subway lines are in the works, as well as new highways encircling the city. In the name of progress, a lot of colorful old neighborhoods will disappear in the next two years.

Stay here: No city hotel has the sex appeal of the kooky **Commune by the Great Wall** out in Badaling, the most-visited section of the Great Wall of China, about 90 minutes from the city. This unique property is a collection of 12 guest houses, each conceived by a major architect, and with furniture by international designers such as Serge Mouille and Marc Newson (from \$888; commune.com.cn). In town, the 12-story **Renaissance Beijing Hotel** near the new American embassy is a marble-and-brass buffer from the outside world (from \$300; marriott.com).

Don't miss: Beijing may be doing double duty to transform itself, but luckily, the historic beauty contained in the region's six UNESCO World Heritage Sites will go unmolested. Among them, don't miss the **Forbidden City** and, of course, the famous **Great Wall**, outside the city. Pay your respects at **Tiananmen Square**, site of the 1989 protests. The square abuts the Forbidden City.

How to go: from \$1,031; continental.com

Flight time: 13 hours, 45 minutes there, 13 hours, 30 min back

Time saved: n/a
Info: cnto.org

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