

## HOTEL VIEW IS SHARD TO BEAT

LONDON'S highest and almost certainly most exclusive hotel will open on May 6. The Shangri-La will occupy floors 34-52 of Europe's tallest building, the Shard.

We had a sneak preview this week and checked out a 50th-floor bedroom with astounding views.

The room was kitted out as stylishly as you would expect for a 5★ hotel but with floor-to-ceiling windows framing the capital, it barely mattered.

The heated toilet seat and marble bathroom could not distract from the views of St Paul's, the London Eye, the Houses of Parliament, Wembley and the green belt beyond.

The Shangri-La has its own entrance at ground level and private lifts to whisk you to the reception on level 35 – the 202 guest rooms and three suites are on floors 36-50.

The bar, called GONG, will be London's highest on level 52. The hotel will also house a gym and an infinity pool.

The restaurant and lounge – TING – is on level 35 while LANG is a deli on the ground floor.

The Shangri-La only started

NEWS

taking bookings last week and has already seen huge demand from all over the world.

Darren Gearing, general manager of The Shangri-La, said: "Since opening our reservation lines for rooms, events and our signature restaurant and lounge, TING, it has been wonderful to not only confirm those that had already enquired and also to be able to process new requests."

"Our first week has been incredibly exciting and is a great insight into the busy year ahead once we open in May."

Rooms start at £450 per night. Find out more at shangri-la.com/london.

● SPACIOUS pitches, beautiful landscaping and immaculate facilities have helped Polmanter Touring Park in St Ives, Cornwall, be crowned the AA's Best Campsite of the Year 2014.

The family-owned site scored top marks in the awards.

Haven's Hafan Y Mor holiday park in Pwllheli, Gwynedd, north Wales, won Holiday Centre of the Year, and Greenacres Camping in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, won Small Campsite of the Year.

## CITY IS SIMPLY THE 'PEST.. AGAIN

BUDAPEST has retained its crown as the best value city break for Brits.

The Hungarian capital came out on top using the Post Office Travel Money city costs barometer.

It compares the price of 12 items, from accommodation to meals, in the top 25 city-break destinations.

Budapest reigns supreme as prices for Brits have fallen 11 per cent

year-on-year. A Budapest break will set you back just £117 compared to the most expensive – Boston at a whopping £412.

Lithuanian capital Vilnius (£118) is second-best value followed by Warsaw (£132) and Prague (£136) – proving Eastern Europe is still the best value for Brit city break fans.

Andrew Brown, of Post Office Travel

Money, said: "Cheap flights and accommodation will not necessarily give you the best deal overall."

"Make a shortlist of cities you are interested in and check sterling's value and local living costs, adding these to the flight and accommodation costs to see which comes out cheapest."

To see the full results go to postoffice.co.uk/cityreport2014.



## MED VOYAGE FOR CHOOSY GUESTS

FRED Olsen has come up with a novel new cruise itinerary – where the PASSENGERS decide where to sail.

The 15-night Tell The Captain Where To Go trip, on board the Braemar, departs Southampton on October 10, 2015. Guests vote for the next port of call from two choices every 48 hours.

Nathan Philpot, from Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, said: "With a host of

warm and sunny Mediterranean destinations to choose from, guests will not be disappointed."

The first decision guests will make on this "curiosity cruise" is whether to point Braemar towards Vigo in Spain, or Leixoes in Portugal.

Next is a choice between Malaga in Spain or Gibraltar and then plumping for various calling points along Spain's

Mediterranean coastline. Passengers can then pick between Andalusian Cadiz or opt to set sail for Portimao on the Portugese Algarve.

The final choice for guests is the Galician city of Ferrol in Spain or La Coruna, also in Spain.

Prices start from £1,199 per person. For details, visit fredolencruises.com or call 0800 0355 242.

HOT SPOT

MAURITIUS is a sunny 29°C – 14 nights' all-inclusive stay at the 4★ Blumarine

Attitude hotel, which is parallel to a sandy beach and located near the Anse La Raie Lagoon, is from £1,469. Flight leaves from Gatwick airport on April 27. For further details log on to thomson.co.uk.

STAY with the STARS

## SCARLETT LOVED HIGHLAND FLING

ARGYLL is renowned for its rugged beauty rather than Hollywood glamour. But even the locals were impressed when Scarlett Johansson recently came to town.

The Hollywood A-lister was in the West Highlands of Scotland to film sci-fi hit Under The Skin. Scarlett and the film crew stayed at the Drimsynie Estate holiday park with local operator Argyll Holidays.

Apparently they loved the remote location and even joined fellow guests in the bar one evening.

You can stay in the very same lodge, which has stunning views of Loch Goll and Argyllshire hills.

A weekend in the Plati-num Alba-tross lodge is from £762

this spring. See argyll-holidays.com or call 0845 459 6412.

● IT wasn't that long ago JJ Hamblett was in short trousers.

But the Union J star said a visit to Disneyland Paris "made him feel like a big kid again".

The X-Factor finalist enjoyed a getaway to the Disneyland Hotel last week with girlfriend Caterina Lopez.

They rode around on the Mad Hatter's Tea Cups and more grown-up fare, including Space Mountain: Mission 2 and Big Thunder Mountain.

A celeb style break, staying at the same hotel as JJ is from £2,097 for three days, with park entry and Euro-star travel. See disneyland-paris.co.uk.

HOT SPOT

IT is 28°C in THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC – save up to 46 per cent on seven

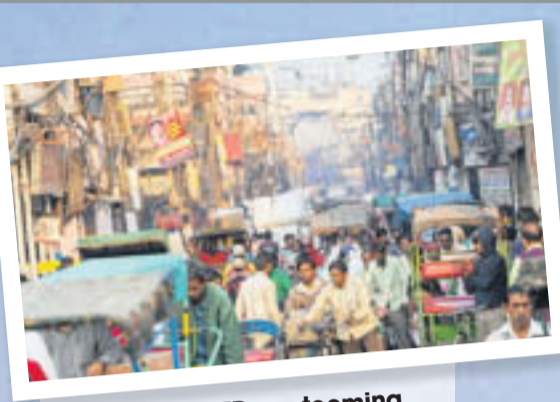
nights in Punta Cana. An all-inclusive stay at the 3★ Riu Naiboa is from £792, with flights from Gatwick on April 20. See loveholidays.com.

HOT SPOT

IT'S 20°C in TENERIFE – seven nights' B&B at the 4★ Sol Tenerife in Las

Americas is from £469 with travelbag. Book by April 8 for travel between April 8-30. Flights are from Manchester. Call 0845 543 6615 (travelbag.co.uk).

# Having it Taj



STALL ORDER . . . teeming street market in Old Delhi



SHAW THING . . . bike rickshaw is only way to get around



ROYAL VISIT . . . Ellie poses just like Princess Di, inset, at Taj Mahal



### GO: INDIA

GETTING THERE/STAYING THERE: Journeys of Distinction's nine-day India's Golden Triangle tour is available as a private or group trip. The next departure is November 9. Book by April 30 and get £100 off the £1,445 price tag. Includes flights from Heathrow, 4-5★ B&B, guiding and some meals. See jod.uk.com or call 0161 826 4853.



TREE TRUNK . . . elephant branches out into the city and, below, a traffic jam in Chadni Chowk

"IT'S so much better than the pictures," my guide told me. And with the scene before me, I was inclined to agree.

An elephant was heading down the road. On its neck sat its keeper, chatting on his phone. Monkeys play-fought on a tree, a pig trotted away from the jaws of a dog. There was even a camel pulling a cart.

In Delhi, a city of 21million, animals jostle for space with cars, mopeds, bicycles and tuk-tuks. Just watch out for the elephants – they have right of way.

"This is why I call India a true democracy," said my guide Shailendra, waving his arm at the urban jungle. "People and animals are on the road at the same time, all doing as they please."

I was on a nine-day trip with operator Journeys of Distinction around India's Golden Triangle – the tour from Delhi to Jaipur via Agra, complete with the Taj Mahal, being the classic introduction to the subcontinent.

Delhi – called Dilli until the British accent changed it – is split in two. Old Delhi dates to the 17th Century Mughals, while New Delhi was built by the British

## INDIAN WONDER HAS TO

between 1911 and 1931. But the whole city was as I imagined India to be – exotic and hectic. Hours after landing, I found myself being jolted around the old town in the back of a bicycle rickshaw.

We squeezed down narrow streets where traders squatted on mats and displayed their goods – bright saris, bangles and pomegranates with incense burning on top. One man balanced a sack of ginseng on his head, another got a wet shave right next to my elbow.

### 'Horn please'

Before leaving for Jaipur, we walked around Jama Masjid, the country's largest mosque, and visited India Gate – a monument carved with the names of India's fallen soldiers.

We also stopped by Raj Ghat, the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi. There we found dozens of schoolchildren who wanted pictures taken. . . with us.

Shailendra explained: "They are just as interested in you as you are in them."

"But if you shake one of their hands, they will all want to shake your hand, that could take some time."

I had been daunted by the amount of driving on the itinerary but it is from the road that you glimpse the real India – the villages, women toiling in fields, roadside tea stands.

Lorries are brightly painted with the slogan "Horn please" – it is courteous, not rude, to beep when overtaking. My driver, Sarwan, dodged cows – the sacred Hindu animal – which lay in the central reservation as though they knew it is



## BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED

taboo to harm them. Sarwan's family still follow the tradition of feeding the first chapati of the day to the cow, the second to the human and the last to the dog.

We arrived that afternoon in Jaipur, just as the sun was setting over the city's pink-washed walls.

Capital of the state of Rajasthan, it is known for its Amber Fort, the very regal residence of the 17th and 18th-Century maharajas. And we approached it as they might have done – on the back of an elephant. I did feel for my beast Champa – or "Flower" – as she lugged me up the hill. But the welfare of the 116 working elephants here is strictly monitored –

they are only allowed four journeys each per day in winter, two in summer.

Ramps connect the fort's decorated gateways, chambers and temples. The maharaja's 12 wives and 100 concubines wore so much heavy jewellery they had to be pushed about in wheelchairs

### Marbled remains

Back on lower ground we queued with locals for a morning snack. Friends had warned me about Delhi belly. But I devoured a potato samosa, cooked before my eyes in a pot of oil, with no fear. Spiced with chilli and pepper, at just

ten rupees – less than a penny – it was the cheapest and one of the tastiest meals of my trip.

My final stop was Agra, where the unmistakable dome of the Taj Mahal loomed on the horizon.

Rising from the winter mist, it was so much more impressive than the version on the wall of my local Indian restaurant back home. I queued for the obligatory snap on the bench where Princess Diana was photographed in 1992 – known as Lady Di's Chair.

If you cross the river to the Moonlight Garden, you find blackened marble remains believed to be the foundations of a second Taj. It is said Shah Jahan, who built the original in memory of favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal, planned to build a replica, where he could be buried.

But before it was completed he was deposed and imprisoned in nearby Agra Fort by his own son Aurangzeb – forced to look upon the Taj Mahal containing the body of his beloved wife until his dying days. His body now lies next to hers inside the mausoleum.

Shah Jahan never got his second Taj but the one he did create remains the world's most beautiful building.

Gazing at it, I realised my guide had been right about the whole trip. It really is so much better than the pictures.

ELLIE ROSS

## Sun SNAPS!



£150 Win

Hotels.com

FUN comes before anything in our quest for the perfect holiday snap. And Sun reader Steve Hackey is jumping for joy here.

No wonder – it looks like the ideal end to the day. Taken last year on Collins Beach in Sydney, he's even higher than the sun.

That wins him the £150 hotels.com voucher this week. But you don't have to go to the other side of the world to win one of your own.

Just send us your best holiday snap to be in the running next week. Tell us where you were and use a high resolution image please. Email entries to sunsnaps@thesun.co.uk by midnight, April 2.



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