

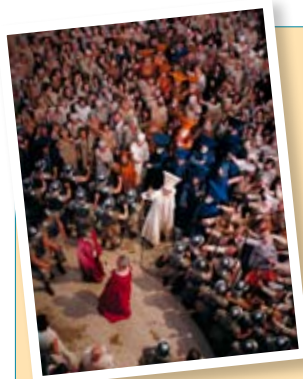


AGE OF Aquarius

Since the '60s when Lloyd Bridges fluttered his flippers in *Sea Hunt*, our generation has been fascinated with all that lies beneath the surface. This year, two new underwater hotels will offer journeys into the Piscean world — no scuba gear required.

Istanbul's planned seven-storey, seven-star hotel (yes, there really is such a thing) is being constructed in the Bosphorus under the city centre (*istanbul-view.com*). On the other side of the globe, Fiji is the setting Poseidon Undersea Resorts has chosen for an elevator-accessed

retreat 12 metres below at the bottom of a 2,000-hectare lagoon. The 1.6-kilometre-long facility, made mostly of acrylic glass, includes a restaurant with panoramic views of the marine world, scuba excursions and outings in a mini sub. In case the fish aren't visiting, the push of a button in the rooms releases food near the windows. The first 1,000 guests will have their names permanently inscribed on the floor of the lagoon (*poseidonresorts.com*). As for Dubai's \$500-million, 260-hectare Hydropolis, we're still waiting (*designbuild-network.com*).



TIME OF PASSION

WHEN MARY MAGDALENE isn't acting, she's a flight attendant; Herod is a dentist; Jesus, a shrink. Once every decade, more than 2,000 villagers in Oberammergau, Germany, take part in the production of the world's most famous Passion play. In preparation, the actors stop cutting their hair and shaving their beards more than a year in advance. Between May and October, half a million people will witness the performance five days per week, rain or shine, on an outdoor stage (the audience and 60-piece orchestra are covered) an hour south of Munich. This year marks the 41st staging of a spectacle that began in 1634 after the bubonic plague

killed most of the residents. Those who were spared promised to put on a play to show their gratitude. Only people born in the village (or those who've lived there for at least 20 years) can participate in the five-hour-long production whose backdrop is the Bavarian Alps (*oberammergau-passion.com*).

APP TO IT

GONE ARE THE DAYS when apps were something you consumed before beef bourguignon. Versions of "application software" now number in the hundreds and help with everything from comparison shopping to the latest spotting of Elin Nordegren. And when it comes to travel, applications are turning smart phones into savvy concierges.

World Customs, for example, lets you in on local etiquette no-nos, while **TripIt** transforms complicated itineraries into easily shared single digital versions. Hotel companies such as **Starwood** and **Omni** have apps that, in addition to finding rooms



and making reservations, also recommend activities and restaurants.

Meanwhile, business travellers no longer need to keep receipts and file expense reports because apps submit the info automatically. There's even one that lets your phone automatically check you into your hotel after landing. Not to mention all the GPS-based apps that do everything from finding the best fusilli in Siena to highlighting local attractions along with the Wikipedia entry played aloud (**HearPlanet**). An app is also available for the iPhone that sorts through your iTunes library and, based on your musical taste, recommends local concerts.