

Packing the House in Orlando

While it's reassuring to see that even consumer magazines are hailing travel agents as true travel professionals, it's even more reassuring to see that professionalism being exhibited. At the recent THETRADESHOW held in the Orlando Convention Center last month, **Recommend** sponsored a seminar, "Costa Rica: The World's Preeminent Sustainable Travel Destination" at 10 a.m. Amazingly, more than 160 travel agents squeezed into a room meant for 133 people and listened intently to a presentation held by Christopher Baker, a noted expert on Costa Rica and an author/photographer who created the "Moon Costa Rica" and "National Geographic Costa Rica" guidebooks. We're talking Orlando, here, folks—America's playground—and more than 160 agents showed up for an early morning presentation and there were many others who had to be turned away because of lack of space in the room—a classic example of people genuinely interested in expanding their knowledge of their trade. To say that the **Costa Rica Tourist Board** was more than happy with the turnout would be an understatement. As co-sponsors, they were there to also witness the introduction of **Recommend's Costa Rica Specialist Program**, which was launched in our September issue. Many of the other presentations were equally full, showing that today's travel agent is truly interested in being true travel professionals. So, ladies and gentlemen, **Recommend** salutes you for that professionalism and we thank you for your participation in our presentation. And, should you be one of the unlucky few who missed that presentation last month, go back to your September issue of **Recommend** or online at our *Recommend Member Education Center* and you'll find all that valuable information in our new *Costa Rica Specialist Program*.



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This might not be the right time to say this, but if you're feeling rich, welcome to our biannual luxury edition. In these pages you're going to find high-end inventory from all over the world—destination and accommodation selections that will fit your most discerning clients to the proverbial "T" and have them coming back for more. For just a few examples, there's a kind of "Ladies Night" at the **Fairmont Turnberry Isle Resort & Spa** in Miami in an ultra-lux environment with plenty of pampering, complimentary cocktails and "Sex and the City" re-runs (page 47). Just up the road in Bal Harbour—the toniest shopping village outside of Rodeo Drive—the recently opened **Regent Bal Harbour** takes luxury to an incredible level and you're going to read all about it on page 40. Want more luxury on a global level? **Greaves Tours** will give you all the luxury and exotic travel your clients could ever want in India, complete with private plane transfers, the best hotels and beautiful places to go and see (page 26). Of course, no luxury issue would be complete without a menu of the best of the best in one of the world's wealthiest and most luxurious cities, exotic Hong Kong (page 30). So join the jet-set while reading through this issue.

Panama—It Will Never Leave You

And you know why? Because of all the concise and valuable destination knowledge you're going to acquire when you complete our new *Panama Specialist Program* contained in this issue (page 51) and online at our *Recommend Member Education Center*. This is truly a valuable course that's loaded with all the newest information about the varied product available throughout the country. You name it, it's in there—family travel, adventure travel, nightlife, cruise and cultural travel. You will be surprised at the amount of inventory that's waiting for you in this small, but diverse country, almost as surprised as your clients when you dazzle them with an exciting vacation package you learned how to put together for them because of this course. So don't dally, complete it today and earn valuable CEUs, the opportunity for exciting FAMs and a variety of other benefits.

World Travel Awards

Last month, the travel industry celebrated the *World Travel Awards North and Central America* in Orlando at the **Walt Disney Swan and Dolphin**. In the U.S., the big winners were **American Airlines**, taking the gold for "North America's Leading Airline," **Hyatt Hotels & Resorts** for "North America's Leading Hotel Brand" and the legendary **St Regis Hotel, New York**, walking off with "North America's Leading Hotel." In the Canada category, **The Hyatt Regency, Calgary** won "Alberta's Leading Hotel," whilst the opulent **Fairmont Banff Springs** took double honors, voted both "Leading Resort" and "Leading Spa Resort." In the east, **Le Westin Resort & Spa Tremblant** was named "Quebec's Leading Ski Resort." Central America's rise to tourism stardom was also acknowledged with 37 travel brands and destinations from the region picking up top honors. **TACA** was named "Central America's Leading Airline." Cancun won both "Central America's Leading Destination" and "Central America's Leading Beach," while **Four Seasons at Peninsula Papagayo, Costa Rica** took "Central America's Leading Family Resort." For a complete list of winners, visit worldtravelawards.com.

Next Month

We know you're waiting for this one, it's our *Editors' Picks* issue—our view of what we think are the hottest global destinations, not only now but into 2009. It's a grueling time for us as we do our best to make the best choices and after you go over them next month, we'd appreciate getting some feedback from you, our readers, on how close you think we came to the mark. You can e-mail us at agentspeak@worthit.com and tell us what you think. In the meantime, have a great read. —Rick Shively