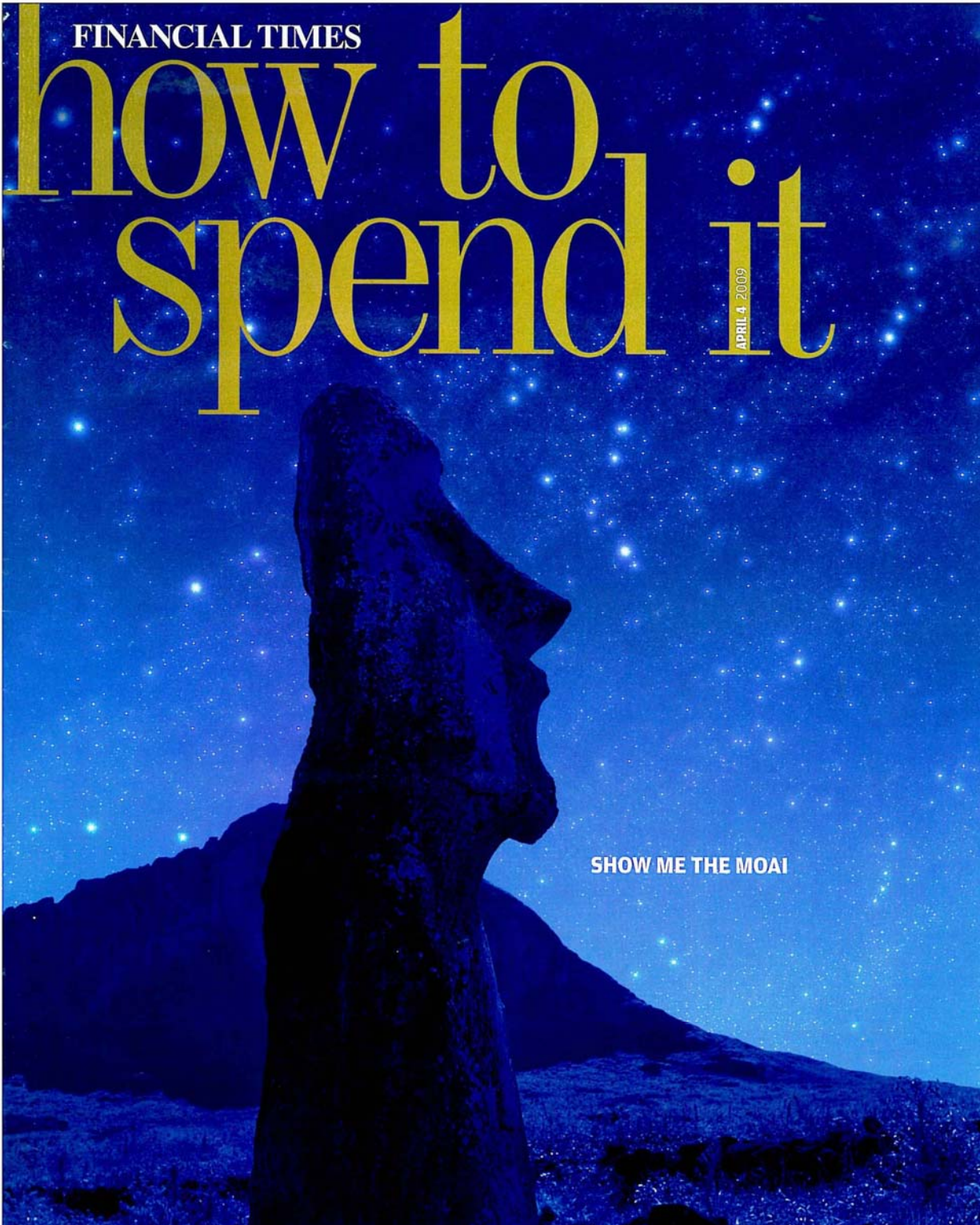


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travelista

Frequent flyer Claire Wrathall fast-tracks international intelligence on where to be and what to see.

As demand for extraordinary villa rentals intensifies, Sarah Hutchins and Judith Menier are two names whose numbers you might care to add to your BlackBerry. Their company, SJ Villas (www.sjvillas.co.uk), represents some of the most desirable privately owned holiday homes in Europe, the Caribbean and beyond.

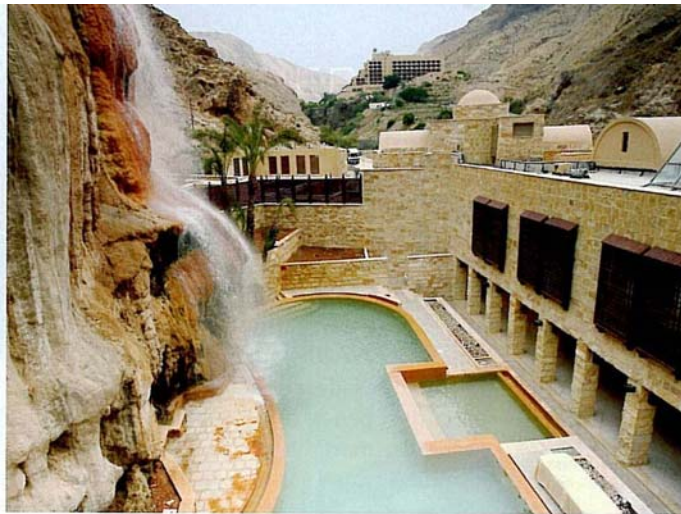


Above: individual beachside villas with private gardens at the Jimbaran Puri Resort Hotel in Bali, Indonesia.

New for this year is Can Claudia (from €11,700 per week) in **IBIZA**. Ten minutes' walk from the village of St Agnes, the finca, which overlooks the sea and sleeps 10, belongs to Claudia Solti, actress daughter of the late, renowned conductor. It's a 40-minute walk to a secluded cove otherwise accessible only by boat, but the chances are you won't want to leave the extensive gardens with their waterfall and idyllic 16m curved infinity pool. For those who really crave seclusion, the company is also offering a four-bedroom beach house, Villa Sortland, on the remote Norwegian island of **BOMLO** for the first time (from NKr100,100, about £9,934, per week including meals). Located 55 miles from Bergen on the edge of the Adnanes fjord, the island is accessible by road via a tunnel.

Orient-Express also has a new villa offering this month. In **BALI**, the Jimbaran Puri Resort Hotel opens 22 thatched villas (www.jimbaranpuribali.com; doubles from \$738) on one of the loveliest beaches on the island. Each has a private Balinese garden, courtyard and 9m pool. Other developments at Orient-Express include the new bar overlooking the swimming pool at the Copacabana Palace (www.copacabanapalace.com.br; doubles from \$523) in **RIO DE JANEIRO**. Expect something splendid: a fibre-optic-lit ceiling designed to evoke the constellations of the southern hemisphere (2009 is the Year of Astronomy, after all), a bar tiled in golden Murano glass and a winding pathway of bronze brick leading to a dance floor that looks, as Shakespeare might have put it, like "the floor of heaven ... thick inlaid with patines of bright gold".

Meanwhile, the same company's Grand Hotel Europe (www.grandhoteleurope.com; doubles from Rbs15,694, about £306) in **ST PETERSBURG** has invested in a €180,000 Venice-built speedboat, *Katarina*, which can whisk guests out of town to the imperial palace at Peterhof, on excursions into the Gulf of Finland or on tours of the city's rivers and canals – the bridges over which are raised at night.



Above: Evason Ma'In Hot Springs and Six Senses Spa in Jordan. Below: the Grand Cascade at Peterhof Palace, St Petersburg. Bottom: travel to Peterhof on the Grand Hotel Europe's new speedboat, *Katarina*.



« It's an extraordinary spectacle, especially during the light-all-night White Nights – which also give their name to a spectacular festival of opera, music and ballet taking place from May 10 to July 27 (www.mariinsky.ru).

Right: floating sunning islands at Gansevoort Turks & Caicos. Below: an opulent suite at Taj Hotel's Nadesar Palace, the first boutique hotel in Varanasi, India.



In **VARANASI**, India, a new hotel, the Nadesar Palace, has recently opened amid mango orchards, marigold fields and jasmine-scented gardens on the banks of the Ganges. Built by the East India Company as accommodation for its officers and subsequently a maharajah's palace, the building has been given a boutique makeover by Taj Hotels (www.tajhotels.com; doubles from Rs21,000, about £285), creating 10 richly furnished suites – think spacious marble bathrooms, four-poster beds swathed in Schiaparelli-pink netting and opulent textiles in rich colours.



These are just the sort of hues one associates with Kandinsky, in fact, a major retrospective of whose work opens at the Centre Pompidou in **PARIS** on April 8 (till August 10; www.cnac-gp.fr). Organised in conjunction with the Guggenheim in New York (where the show will transfer on September 18) and Munich's Lenbachhaus, it brings together more than 100 works by the Russian Expressionist held by many to have invented modern abstract art.

Also opening this month, amid another colour-saturated landscape on the island of **PROVIDENCIALES**, is Gansevoort Turks & Caicos (www.gansevoorttc.com; doubles from \$480), a 91-room resort that will find itself in competition with Amanyaara and the Regent Palms. This sister hotel to the Gansevoorts in New York and

Miami will bring elements of its Manhattan sibling to the fabulous (if somewhat built-up) beach that is Grace Bay, not least a branch of the NYC bistro Bagatelle. Its real selling point, however, is likely to be the “sunning islands” – wooden platforms for lounging on that appear to float on the surface of its palm-fringed 25m infinity pool.



Above: SJ Villas' collection of holiday homes includes the Beach House in Mozambique. Left: Kandinsky's 1937 painting, *Groupement* – on show at the Centre Pompidou from April 8.



More extraordinary yet is another April opening – the new Six Senses Evason (www.sixsenses.com; doubles from £206) at the Ma'In Hot Springs in **JORDAN**. Located 264m below sea level in a dramatically barren rocky landscape 30km from the town of Madaba (famous for its Byzantine and Umayyad mosaics) and half an hour from the Dead Sea coast, the spa is fed by a natural mineral-rich hot spring waterfall that cascades directly into its main swimming pool. †