

New Starwoods in the East ...

The 429-room Westin Jersey City Newport debuted in February. Located in the heart of Jersey City's waterfront financial district, just 15 minutes from Manhattan, the hotel is convenient to Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) and one block from the Pavonia–Newport PATH station, Newark Light Rail and NJTransit buses. Visit www.starwood.com. Also in the Starwood group, The St. Regis Atlanta Hotel & Residences opens this spring in Atlanta's Buckhead community. The 151 luxurious guestrooms and suites and 51 branded St. Regis Residences will share a 7,800-square-foot Remède Spa. Visit www.stregis.com/atlanta.

And Hyatts in the West

The January opening of Seattle's first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified hotel, the 346-room Hyatt at Olive 8, signals a serious commitment to earth-friendly practices. Lights switch on and off as guests enter and exit rooms, bathrooms have dual-flush toilets and water-reducing showerheads, and green housekeeping includes the use of chemical-free cleaning products. Urbane restaurant and bar uses ingredients from regional farmers and serves only beers and wines produced in Washington and Oregon. Visit www.olive8.hyatt.com. Also in January, the first North American Andaz opened in West Hollywood, replacing

the former Hyatt on Sunset. Art and luxury are Andaz hallmarks, along with incorporating each locale into the guest experience. Visit www.andaz.com.

Shares Well with Others

The shifting sands of codesharing are difficult to follow. The most newsworthy of the new alliances is Air France and KLM's preliminary accord with Iraq to help Iraqi Airways offer service to European cities and to renovate Baghdad's airport (SDA), which on Jan. 1 was returned to Iraqi control. The codeshare enables Iraqi Airways to fly international flights, including to/from Europe. Visit www.airfrance.com.

Virgin Atlantic and BMI have expanded their existing codeshare agreement so that customers traveling on BMI's U.K. domestic and Middle East networks can make seamless connections to Virgin Atlantic's North American flights. Passengers can now book with Virgin Atlantic and connect at London Heathrow (LHR) with BMI flights to travel between New York (JFK), Newark (EWR), Boston (BOS) and Los Angeles (LAX) and points in the Middle East. Visit www.virgin-atlantic.com.

JAL expanded its Europe Network under a new codeshare agreement with British Airways, adding Lisbon, Portugal (LIS), to JAL's Europe network, along with Aberdeen (ABZ), Edinburgh (EDI), Glasgow (GLA) and Newcastle (NCL) in the U.K. Visit www.jal.com.



South African Airways Premium Class

New York (JFK) to Johannesburg (JNB) via Dakar (DKR)

On the Ground: Checking in at JFK was a breeze. I was greeted with the friendly smile of a well-prepared staff member. The surprising part was that my check-in agent then escorted me to the lounge. This was one of the "little" touches that make an experience memorable. The lounge itself was small but efficient. The food and beverage service was also good, with a few small meals available to order prior to flight. **(27/30)**

Pre-flight: The flight attendants were attentive and arrived promptly with my beverage. **(28/30)**

In-flight: The flight started out very nicely. During the entire trip the flight attendants had a wonderful attitude — not always easy on a long-haul trip — which came in handy when the entertainment system broke down. Normally I don't care about in-flight entertainment, but on a long flight it is essential. They were able to fix it, but on the return flight the problem repeated and the system completely failed. The flight attendants were apologetic and seemed to take the mechanical problem personally, which certainly lightened the mood of the passengers. The food was flavorful: I began with marinated shrimp on a bed of guacamole, followed by grilled red snapper with lemon pepper risotto, asparagus, tomato concasse and a lemon butter sauce. Unfortunately, they only had one serving on board of my first choice, the vegetarian pasta dish. I finished with a delicious selection of cheeses and South African port wine. The seats were comfortable and reclined to a 180-degree lie-flat position. The contours of the seat caused the bed to be a bit bumpy, but that cannot be avoided. With the ability to lie flat on such a long flight, one really can't complain. **(34/40)**

The Experience: South African Airways flies from the U.S. East Coast, but the flight times make it convenient to get connections from the West Coast with plenty of time to spare. All airlines experience a glitch or two with amenities, and it's how the staff handle the situation that counts. I was overall pleased with the experience and would definitely choose SAA again.

Total Score: 89/100 **Morissa Pawl**