

DESTINATION WATCH

PLACES IN PLAY

The Dead Sea Fights Death Throes

Water depletion inspires various plans for this threatened lake.

Can the **Dead Sea** be saved? Its rapidly receding shoreline is pocked with hundreds of sinkholes, and tourist visitation is dropping along with the water level. A World Bank study for a canal that would feed water from the Red Sea into this, the world's lowest body of water, is under way. Environmentalists claim the better solution is to restore flow of the Jordan River, 90 percent of which has been diverted by Israeli and Jordanian farmers. The Dead Sea would flourish again, and revenue lost from agricultural products, some of which are exported, would be made up by a reborn tourism industry. They also warn that Red Sea diversions into the much saltier Dead Sea could result in an algae bloom or water that stinks, inhibiting tourism. Canal proponents say that properly channeled saltwater can generate electricity and feed a desalination plant this drought-stricken region urgently needs. Some Israeli developers envision a Dubai-like tourist zone along the canal, with artificial lakes, casinos, and parks. "That threatens to completely alter the World Heritage values of the Dead Sea and Arava Valley," says Munqeth Mehyar, Jordanian director of Friends of the Earth. Still, there is this: Saving the Dead Sea has Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority in a cooperative dialogue that has long been absent. —CHARLES KULANDER

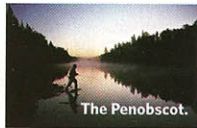


DULY NOTED

And the Dams Come Tumbling Down

The waters of **Maine's Penobscot River** will again flow freely thanks to an unprecedented deal worked out by a power utility, environmental groups, an Indian nation, sporting organizations, and government officials. The second-longest river in New England, the Penobscot was once famed for its salmon runs. But damming, overfishing, and pollution have seriously reduced the populations of all its fish, including herring and sturgeon. Though the

river has been cleaned up in recent years, the dams still blocked salmon and forced Penobscot Indians to suspend sacred fishing rituals. The new deal targets two dams to be torn down and a third to be retrofitted for better passage for fish, restoring a thousand miles



The Penobscot.

of the river and its tributaries to fishing and recreation. The Penobscot River Restoration Trust, a coalition of conservation groups, raised \$25 million to buy the dams in 2007 from PPL utility, which agrees to increase its hydroelectric production at six other dams. This may be a trend: In the past decade dams have come down on a number of American rivers, including North Carolina's Neuse, Maine's Kennebec, and Wisconsin's Menominee.

—JAY WALLJASPER



Cacao Pearl Island.

GREENING OF LUXE

A Guilt-Free Resort Island? One Developer Hopes So.

An ambitious plan to marry ecological preservation with first-class accommodation is progressing near the Philippines' Palawan Biosphere Reserve, where a 124-acre island rimmed with white-sand beaches and endowed with tropical rain forest is being developed as a nonprofit eco-resort, **Cacao Pearl**. All operating profits will be donated to local social programs and environment-protection efforts. Sixty private villas are to be designed by Spanish architect Antonio Calvo, who contributed to the popular films *Pride and Prejudice* and *Love Actually*. The plan promises sustainable building methods, using timber harvested from local, sustainably managed forests; 100 percent renewable energy; the latest water-conservation practices; extensive composting and recycling; organic gardens; and bulk purchase of supplies to reduce packaging waste. The only vehicle on the island will be an electric jeepney. Activities will include crafts workshops and cooking lessons with local organic produce. Another attraction: Cacao Pearl is within a day's sail of two World Heritage sites—Tubbataha Reef Marine Park and Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park—and four other marine reserves. However, a question lingers: Will the fuel needed to reach the distant island offset the resort's laudable conservation measures? —J.W.

Nature on the Rebound Europe's rare bison survive in small herds in only a handful of nations, but they've been making a comeback in the Bialowieza forest that straddles the Poland-Belarus border. Reduced by hunters and wars to only captive animals in Poland's zoos by the 1920s, over 500 of the beasts now roam this remote landscape—though their limited gene pool poses risks for their future health.