

Lux push for Japan

The weak yen has prompted operators and the tourist office to declare 2015 a good year for British visitors to Japan, with trips considerably cheaper and new luxury product available. *April Hutchinson reports*

The Japan National Tourism Organisation is hoping the weak yen will make luxury holidays seem even more affordable for UK travellers this year, with the yen having depreciated almost 40% against the pound since 2012.

Operator Ampersand Travel, which launched a range of itineraries across the country last year, added that Japan was growing massively in appeal.

But the company's Japan specialist David Wall also warned that travellers should consider visiting sooner rather than later: "Trips are 10% cheaper than they were last year and we

believe 2015 really is a great year to go. But it could actually start to get costlier - after years of zero inflation and few rate increases, hotel prices are going up, VAT will rise to 10% in October, and foreign demand is up."

The country will be a new offering for Cazenove+Lloyd in 2015, while Black Tomato is offering a Learn the Way of the Ninja trip and Steppes Travel has a new visit to the Ogasawara Islands, or "Japanese Galapagos". InsideJapan Tours has also launched a new website and has new small group tours, including a diving holiday.

Kylie Clark, the JNTO's marketing and communications manager, said:

"Japan has always been an amazing holiday destination, perfect for the luxury holiday market, so we are delighted to see more luxury tour operators now featuring Japan and offering interesting itineraries."

Luxury product in Japan is also ramping up considerably, Clark added. "In the lead-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japan is expecting a boom in hotel construction and various transport infrastructure developments are already on track to be completed before then," she said.

Two luxury ski hotels opened for this season in Hokkaido - Kasara Niseko and Ki Niseko - Aman Tokyo has recently opened and a Four Seasons will arrive in Kyoto in 2016.

The Hokuriku Shinkansen "bullet train" extension to Kanazawa opens this March, cutting journey time in half to 2.5 hours from Tokyo with quicker access to Yudanaka, skiing the Japanese Alps and the famous Snow Monkeys, who bathe in Yudanaka's natural hot springs.

Two luxury sleeper trains will also launch in 2017, including one designed by Ferrari designer Ken Okuyama.



Kasara Niseko ski hotel has recently opened in Hokkaido

checking in

Design Hotels Madrid move

Design Hotels has added the Principal Madrid to its collection. The 76-room hotel is set on Gran Vía and has Ramon Freixa as head chef. Guests are checked in via the sixth floor Atico, or penthouse, and there is a rooftop terrace and bar (pictured below).



Four Seasons' Bogota venture

Four Seasons is to manage its first hotels in Colombia, the Hotel Casa Medina Bogota - which will reopen as Four Seasons Hotel Casa Medina Bogota - and the Hotel Charleston Bogota, which will become the Four Seasons Hotel Bogota. They will reopen "later in 2015", the group said.

Fresh look at Tanjong Jara

Tanjong Jara Resort in Malaysia has reopened after its annual four-month closure with locally inspired activities, a new petanque court, evening film screenings, refurbished Anjung category rooms and a new dive centre, volleyball and badminton courts.

Venice opening for St Regis

Starwood's St Regis Venice San Clemente Palace is set to open in April following an extensive restoration. Designed by Hirsch Bedner Associates and GA Design, the 191-room hotel sits on a private island in the lagoon. It will be the third St Regis in Italy.

Sovereign 'looks to evolve' with TV and digital push

SOVEREIGN HAS launched its first ever TV advertising campaign, with British actress Hermione Norris (pictured) providing the voiceover.

The TV campaign launched last Friday (February 6) in London and the Home Counties and will feature on Channel 4, ITV and selected Sky channels until February 28 and will run through video-on-demand services until the end of March.

Sovereign launched a new brand identity in December and the push is

said to enhance this proposition and "differentiate [it] from a cluttered luxury market".

General manager Scott Langridge said: "We have had a good start to the year anyway but we are always looking at how we evolve. We want to keep up momentum throughout the year."

He highlighted the eastern Mediterranean as being one of the best-performing areas this



year and said Egypt was also making a comeback.

The TV ad spots are complemented by a digital focus, PR campaign, national press and the trade team on the road. "We're working on all fronts really," Langridge said.

Sovereign is running an agent incentive to coincide with the advert. Any booking made before the end of February receives a £10 Love to Shop voucher.