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SATURDAY NIGHT MILLENNIUM FEVER

Here it comes. Can you feel it? Millennium Fever is taking hold, as millions of Americans contemplate the possibility that they will face the fake millennium date of December 31st, 1999, seated in front of the television set with no place to go.

This is clearly going to be one of those dates in history when we ask one another "where were you when"? Will we, some of us wonder, be judged by our peers in the new millennium by the style in which we welcomed in the new age? Will we shrink when the subject comes up in the Cyber Starbucks and softly mumble that no, we simply welcomed the year 2,000 by remaining in our town, in our home, in quiet contemplation.

The fact is that those planning to get away for the big day might already be a tad late. Hotels in the South Pacific, where the millennium will strike first, are theoretically sold out.

Abercrombie and Kent has already sold out it's millennium 1999 tours to Egypt, India, Nepal, and Europe. It's Egypt-Nile package is capped by a gala New Years Eve party at the Pyramids featuring a concert by Little Richard. Actually, I made up the part about Little Richard because, as a child of the fifties, I try to get his name in my column whenever I can. The firms India-Nepal odyssey will feature a party at the Taj Mahal as the clock strikes midnight.

What is particularly interesting is that these tours are selling out without a price tag. A&K is advising those booked to think about prices that are 5-10% higher than their current brochure - but that's a per year increase until 1999.

Some Tour Operators are waiting. Holland America, for example, has not yet decided exactly how it is going to market its millennium cruises. Past passengers of the line will likely be offered a first shot to sign up. Meanwhile a London-based Millennium club has had a \$10,000 deposit down on the Queen Elizabeth 2 since 1982. The ship will be sailing the Caribbean out of Barbados.

Austravel, a tour operator specializing in Australia and the South Pacific will be coming out with a series of millennium tours early next year. They are one of a growing number of tour organizers looking at special celebrations on more remote South Pacific islands at Ayers Rock.

British Airways has had numerous requests to charter one of its seven supersonic Concorde jets. BA says that it has proposals that date back ten years. Supersonic aircraft are capable of celebrating the stroke of midnight in three separate destinations, hence the immense interest.

The ultimate New Years Eve Party is putting quite a strain on hotels hoping to "reward" their loyal frequent guests. The Savoy in London and the

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Waldorf Astoria have been sold out for some time. Hotels in Istanbul like the Swissotel and the Four Seasons are inundated with reservations by people who want to see the new age dawn over Europe and Asia at exactly the same time.

A man who does not seek publicity, has rented out Volcano House which sits precariously close to the Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii's Volcanoes National Park.

Mountain Travel has completely sold out New Years treks to exotic destinations such as Mount Kilimanjaro and the Galapagos Islands.

The Space Needle in Seattle was booked in 1991 by a lady from Portland while in Stockholm, an ad agency executive has booked the Kaknas television tower.

There are some cities that simply don't know how many guests they can expect for the big shindig. Sydney Australia has high expectations. They will; be hosting the rugby World Cup in November, with expectations that the party will just continue in to the New Year. The city is psyched to show the world that it is going to be hosting the year 2000 Olympics. By way of preparation, the folks in Sydney have been launching the most massive fireworks ever seen on earth each New Years. The bombardment of Sydney Harbor will increase in intensity every New Years until the ultimate event.

Not to be outdone, folks in Edinburgh, Scotland have decided that they are the natural inheritors of the mantle New Year City since Auld Lang Syne is a Scottish song. This is, of course, a bit of a stretch, but reality has little to do with millennium planning. The Scots have been staging huge Hogmanay party's each New Year in preparation for the big event. This year, a half million people are expected to attend. 1999- the sky's the limit.

Air New Zealand has received hundreds of requests for seats on its flights to the South Pacific island of Tonga. where the first real landfall will occur. It is expected that there will be a total of about 700 hotel rooms on the island by the year 2000, Air New Zealand stops there on its flights between Los Angeles and Auckland.

Sara Waldheim, a very far-sighted travel agent from Sarandipity Travel in Hayward, California, chartered Windstar's Wind Spirit for a Caribbean cruise departing January 27th. She acted on her idea several years ago and now wishes that she had chartered all three Windstar vessels.

The Scandinavians will be heading to Nordkapp, just North of the Arctic Circle. This is not the most scenic place in Europe given its rather barren landscape punctuated only by outcrops of rock. But Nordkapp does have one thing going for it; it is the sliver of Europe that is farthest north. Reservations are poring in and guests will be treated to a special concert on a stage set in a large cave.

Hucksters and historians are spewing out so many claims about the Millennium that it is hard to separate truth from fiction. The Chairman of the Millennium Adventure Company has, for instance, bought the rights to the

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highest hill on Pitt Island, New Zealand which is being billed as “the first terrestrial, accessible, and populated place to usher in the next 1000 years”.

The word “populated” is operative here. It’s the old “did a tree fall in the forest if no one saw or heard it fall” argument. There has to be intelligent life present in order for the passing of the millennium to have meaning.

The Millennium Society, based in Washington D.C., is one of the grandest of the Millennium organizations. They are planning celebrations in each of the world’s twenty-four time zones including the Pyramids and the Golden Gate Bridge. It sounds as though the Pyramids are going to be crowded, there is hardly going to be space to park your camel. As a former resident of San Francisco, it really doesn’t surprise me that the locals are totally involved with the dawning of the new age. They are, it has been my observation, in a perpetual state of celebration. The Society’s telephone number is 202-332-1999.

One of the greatest parties on earth will be held on the tiny island of Jost Van Dyke, off Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands. Several years ago, I wrote a story about Foxy, the owner of Foxy’s Tamarind Bar. Each year, this small enclave and open bar festooned with hanging articles of clothing from revelers past, hosts a New Years party that draws thousands of celebrating yachtsman and their guests. Foxy’s is “the” place to be in 1999.

Like the giant turtles that instinctively head out to sea after hatching their eggs, like the birds that arrive each year in Capistrano, humans will be scampering to achieve their rightful place, their special vantage point from which to view the dawn of a new age. It is, of course, completely symbolic, this inaccurate calendar celebration of a fictitious and arbitrary date. But it does provide a wonderful series of goals and a supreme opportunity for redemption and hope. The wealthiest of our corporations and the loneliest of our citizens can each set goals for that one second in time. If nothing else, midnight on December 1999 will allow us to celebrate the fact that we made it and that we made it together. It would seem to me that this might be reason enough to celebrate.

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