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Travel Picks: Top 15 destinations "on the rise"

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NEW YORK Jan 27 (Reuters) - Now that we are nearly at the end of the first month of 2012, it's time to consider new places to explore this year, which is why online travel consultant TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com) has offered a list of its top 15 destinations on the rise. Reuters has not endorsed this list: 1. Tallinn, Estonia

Tallinn's atmospheric Old Town is an enthralling hodgepodge of medieval streets and spires. It's a small city, and the tourist areas are safe and easily explored on foot. Buy a Tallinn Card if intending to use buses, trolleys or trams. For a look into Tallinn's past, visit Rocca-al-Mare Open Air Museum's typical rural Estonian taverns, windmills and watermills, see the onion-domed 1900 cathedral or join the bustle in historic Town Hall Square. St. Olav's spire was once the tallest in the world. 2. Riga, Latvia

The Latvian capital, the largest city in the Baltics, is a fascinating mixture of proud Latvian tradition and influences of the various countries that have occupied it. Independent once again since 1991, Riga's Art Nouveau center has won it UNESCO World Heritage Site designation. Opened up to mass tourism with the advent of budget air travel, Riga's Old City and its abundance of bars and restaurants can be

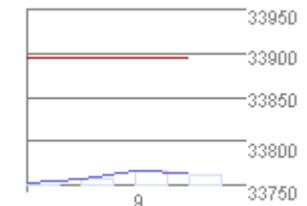
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.JALSH	33,752.16	-142.86
.JTOPI	30,183.60	-140.68
.EGX30	4,535.18	+102.19
TRX SA	474.04	-1.89

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explored on foot. The New Town is easily reached by an efficient and modern bus and tram network. 3. Moscow, Russia

The political, scientific, historical, architectural and business centre of Russia, Moscow displays the country's contrasts at their most extreme. The ancient and modern are juxtaposed side by side in this city of 10 million. Catch a metro from one of the ornate stations to see Red Square, the Kremlin, the nine domes of St. Basil's Cathedral, Lenin's Mausoleum, the KGB Museum and other symbols of Moscow's great and terrible past, then lighten up and shop Boulevard Ring or people watch in Pushkin Square. 4. Zurich, Switzerland

The largest city in Switzerland is a major contemporary art and shopping destination. Important artworks are displayed in the Kunsthaus and the Rietberg Museum. Those who consider shopping an art can hone their skills along Bahnhofstrasse and Niederdorf. Chagall's stained glass windows in the Fraumünster amaze. Zurich's 500 clubs and bars, including several in swimming pools, pulse with life 'til the early hours. This city on Lake Zurich has excellent public transit and a free bike rental system. 5. Fethiye, Turkey

Prepare to be enchanted by this lively Mediterranean seaside town and working harbour. Travellers report it's less touristy than other nearby towns, though with shops, restaurants, and fascinating ruins all around, there's plenty to see and do. Hike to nearby Kayaköy, an abandoned "ghost village," or visit the magnificent beach at Ölüdeniz, where you can bask in the sun or paraglide over the turquoise waters. 6. Seminyak, Indonesia

Located in the south, Seminyak has some of the nicest beaches in Bali. Be sure to catch the legendary sunsets and enjoy the tranquil beauty. Watch authentic Balinese ceremonies on the beach, complete with gamelan players and offerings to the gods. 7. Vilnius, Lithuania

Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, contains one of the largest surviving medieval quarters in Europe. Included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Old Town contains almost two thousand medieval, gothic, renaissance, and baroque buildings, all centred on the neo-classical cathedral and town hall. Other popular attractions include the KGB Museum, located in a former Soviet prison, and the 13th century Higher Castle, which affords a glorious view of the city center. 8. Austin, Texas

It seems like everyone knows someone who's moving to Austin. In the past decade the capital of Texas has grown steadily, attracting everyone from young urban professionals to artists and students. This rapid

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UK £	USD =1.5684
Euro	USD =1.3143
Rand	USD =0.1276

evolution is noticeable everywhere from the busy downtown area to trendy and pricey neighborhoods. Despite the growth, Austin has managed to maintain its mellow, small-town appeal. A perennial "Best Place to Live" winner, it's also a great place to visit, offering a range of attractions and activities. Austin offers recreational activities from golf to walking trails in beautiful parks. The shopping, restaurants and nightlife offer world-class appeal with a down-home Texas feel. 9. Chania, Greece

You've found Little Venice - or something very close indeed. Chania, on Crete's west end, was under Venetian rule in the 13th century, and much of the town's architecture still reflects that influence. The Venetian Harbour is the place to enjoy an afternoon sipping coffee and watching the world go by. Explore the old town's shops and narrow alleys, and be sure to rent a car for day trips to nearby beaches. 10. Chaweng, Thailand

Dance the night away at the bars and pubs of Chaweng. On Samui Island's east coast, Chaweng attracts a youthful crowd to its beach and dive shops by day, and to every kind of music and nightclub you could want by night. All this in a brilliant island setting some call paradise on earth. 11. Bordeaux, France

Controlled by the British for 300 years, Bordeaux is one of the most un-French cities in France. What was once a sleepy city (literally nicknamed "Sleeping Beauty" in French) is now a thriving tourist destination and mecca for wine enthusiasts. The city's boundless energy is supplemented by the spirited university population. That is, unless you've been wine-tasting all day... in which case you'll probably sleep quite well. 12. San Sebastian - Donostia, Spain

San Sebastian is a seaside city in the north of the Basque Country. It is no wonder why surfing is so popular in San Sebastian. The picturesque city looks out to La Concha bay and two beautiful beaches, Ondarreta and Zurriola. Bike to the many seafood restaurants and traditional "pintxos" (Basque tapas) bars, plus take in the views from Mount Igueldo. Walk up Monte Urgell to visit the Statue of Christ and see even more spectacular views. 13. Lyon, France

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Lyon has 2,000 years of history imprinted on its streets. Originating as Lugdunum under the Roman Empire, it evolved into a centre of silk production and later a Haussman-style industrial city. Travel through the ages with stops at the Roman theaters and Temple of Cybele on Fourvière Hill, the 19th-century Basilica of Fourvière and the cathedral Primatiale St-Jean.

With notable sausage, poultry and other specialties, Lyon makes a delicious base for exploring the Rhone region. 14. Essaouira, Morocco

Portuguese, French and Berber architecture frame the maze-like streets of Essaouira, a western Moroccan city hugging the Atlantic Ocean. With its long beach, abundant seawater spa treatments and dramatic sunsets over the Purple Islands just offshore, relaxation is as easy to find as the northeast trade winds that create ideal kitesurfing conditions. For total cultural immersion, stay in a riad, a traditional home-turned-guesthouse, and attend the annual Gnawas and World Music Festival. 15. Mendoza, Argentina

Mount Aconcagua, the Western Hemisphere's highest summit, lords over this tranquil capital city, which shares its name with the Cuyo region province in which it resides. Although it draws its share of adventure travellers, drawn by the climbing, skiing, hiking and rafting opportunities within an easy drive of downtown, Mendoza is also embraced by oenophiles for its wines, especially Malbec. Tours and tastings at the area's more than 1,000 vineyards are a local highlight.

(Editing by Paul Casciato)

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