New year, new routes
Routes: Roswell, N.M., is flying high

CONTINUED FROM 2G

Panama City, Panama
Panama City gets a listing in “1,000 Places To See Before You Die” for the Panama Canal, still one of the greatest engineering achievements of the 20th century. The canal reaches from Panama City on the Pacific to Colon on the Atlantic. The Panamanian government has been pushing tourism in recent years — actor Ruben Blades is the country’s tourism minister — and the country is slowly becoming known for eco-lodges instead of former dictator and CIA employee Manuel Noriega. Guidebooks and Web sites caution against going to Colon, saying street crime makes it dangerous.

Cool lodging: Travel + Leisure places The Bristol in its top 500 hotels of the world, serving “regional dishes from chef Cuquita (considered the Martha Stewart of Panama)” at Restaurant Las Barandas. Rooms start at about $224 at www.thebristol.com. On the eco side, T+L says you can do the castaway thing in wood-and-thatch bungalows at Al Natural Resort on an island in Bocas del Toro, a Panamanian archipelago off the coast. Doubles from $170, www.bocas.com/alnatural.htm

Information: www.visitpanama.com (Note: This is the official Web site, but its information is a little limited; you’ll want to supplement your research with others like

Grand Junction, Colo., starting in April
Grand Junction is a great jumping-off point for southern Colorado vacations in spots like Colorado National Monument (huge canyons, wildlife-watching); Glenwood Springs (89 miles east, it has a 2-block-long hot springs pool); and Delta (home of the Council Tree Pow Wow American Indian Cultural Festival each September). This part of the state bills itself as Colorado’s wine country.

Cool lodging: Wine Country Inn in Palisade, 10 minutes east of Grand Junction, is scheduled to open in August. The 80-room inn is owned and run by former Texans Jean and Richard Tally. It’s next to two wineries and is a short drive from many more. Rates were not available yet, but Jean Tally said regular guest rooms should run $150-$175, suites around $250. www.coloradowinecountryinn.com. Two hours away in beautiful desert Moab, Utah, look into the Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa, where rooms are about $400 a night; or the Red Cliffs Lodge, which is having a half-off Internet special through Feb. 13, with rack rates starting at $99. www.sorrelriver.com and www.redcliffsloge.com.

Information: www.visitgrandjunction.com

Flights: Two a day on American Eagle
Fares: As low as $368 round-trip, according to American spokeswoman Andrea Hugely

Roswell, N.M.
There are three main reasons to go to Roswell: 1. You like small towns and the wide-open, flat desert with lots of horizon; 2. You’re taking your child to New Mexico Military Institute; 3. You’re into aliens. The last reason, of course, is the one that attracts most people. The International Alien Museum and Research Center on Main Street is a big draw, and the “Roswellian Experience 2008,” an alien festival, is planned for this summer. All of this is because of “the Roswell incident,” in which a rancher supposedly found an alien spacecraft and alien bodies in 1947. We’re not saying a word.

Cool lodging: Well, cool isn’t exactly Roswell’s thing. The usual economically priced chain hotels are scattered around town. But after you’re all aliened out, you could drive two hours to the