

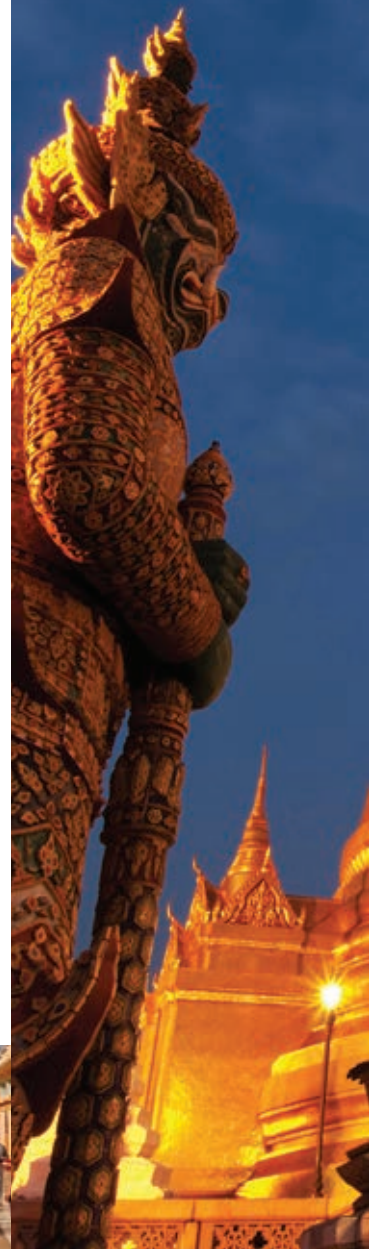
# ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

2013/2014

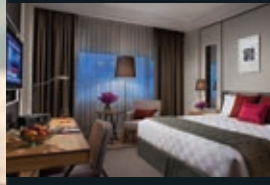
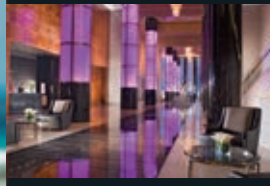


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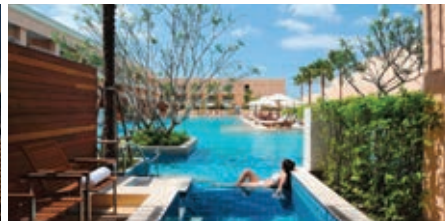
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# It can only get better



Following the immense success of the guide last year, welcome to the 2013/2014 edition, which has been renamed Asian Tourism Expert Guide (ATEG).

This is the sixth year we're producing this guide, with many thanks to you, our readers, and our advertisers, who have lent

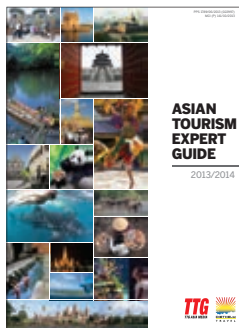
continual support towards its publication.

Apart from the usual key tourism statistics of 17 Asian destinations, we are delighted to present this issue with a new structure offering a focus on various product categories for each destination.

We thank our partner, Diethelm Travel Group, which has expanded on last year's Hot Pick section by contributing insider tips for more product categories in 12 selected destinations.

Last but not least, in response to our readers' feedback, we are also pleased to present a handier, more compact size of the guide this year. We welcome more voices from you, so tell us how we can do even better by sending us your opinions and ideas – your 'ATEG Feedback' – to [ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com](mailto:ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com).

We hope you like this revamped edition. Enjoy.



**Darren Ng**  
Managing director  
TTG Asia Media

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Asian Tourism Guide 2013/2014 is published by TTG Travel Trade Publishing, a business group of TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd. It is mailed free on written request to readers who meet predetermined criteria. Paid subscriptions are available to those who do not meet the criteria.

MCI (P) 141/10/2013 • PPS 1789/06/2013 (022997)

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List of new hotels in each destination is by no means exhaustive.

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## Six and counting



Dear travel trade partners,

We are proud once again to collaborate with TTG Asia, the tourism industry's leading media brand, in bringing you key facts and figures from around the region.

Welcome to the Asian Tourism Expert Guide.

New style, new size, new name – same high quality content, the sixth edition of the guide is a reflection of its continuing success and based

on feedback from you, our valued partner, it has – like a newly refurbished hotel or re-styled restaurant – also had a makeover.

The new Asian Tourism Expert Guide offers the very best of previous editions, plus new product and experience themes – all captured under a section called Insider Highlights – for each of the 17 destinations in focus. In countries where Diethelm Travel operates, we reveal insider tips on up to four themes – Family Fun, Special Interest, Wellbeing, and CSR & Sustainability – and offer a hot pick determined by the managing director of the local office.

With increasing demand for experience-led activities, discerning travellers are looking to immerse themselves deeper in Asian culture; Insider Highlights takes you on a journey of ideas and suggestions, helping to offer your customer sights, sounds and pursuits far removed from the usual city touring and beach holiday.

Over 55 years of experience, coupled with local contacts and knowledge, give us a unique perspective of travel and touring across the region which we are delighted to share with you again through this edition of the Asian Tourism Expert Guide.

With 2013 drawing to an end soon, may I wish you, your teams and your loved ones a very joyful festive season.

Warmest regards,

**Richard R. Brouwer**  
CEO  
Diethelm Travel Group



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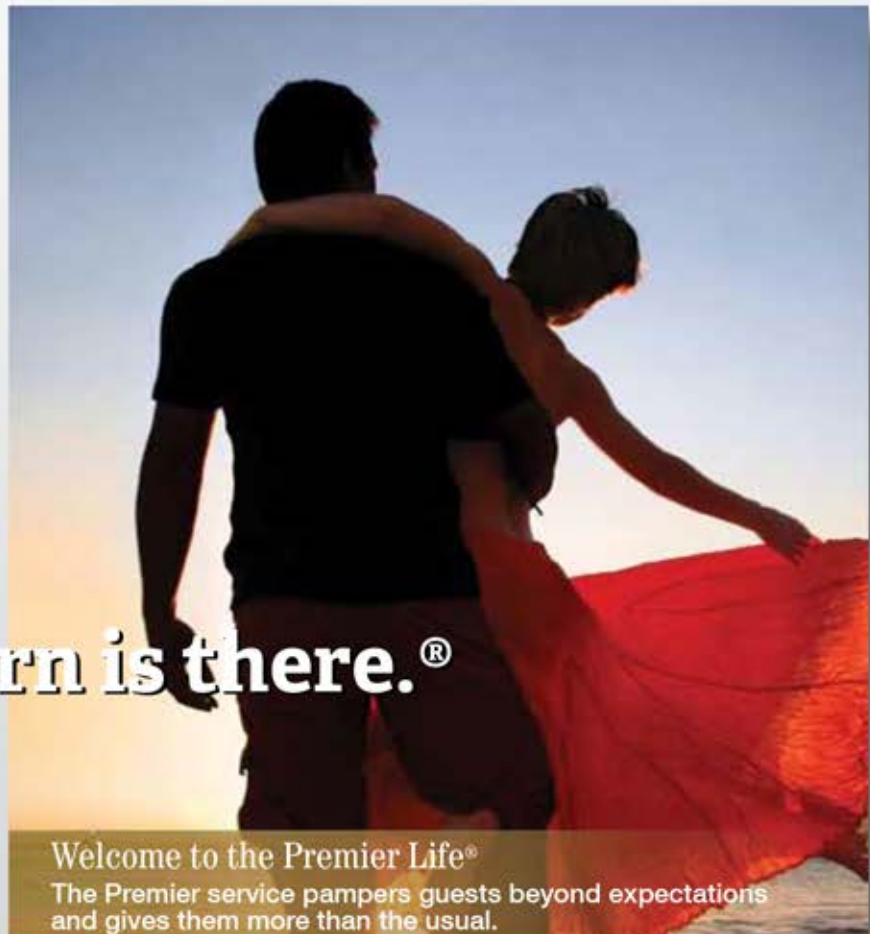


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# Bhutan

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

• 8



Czardases/123RF.com

Sunlight falling upon Paro Dzong



Masked man making music at tsechus festival in Bumthang

Wouter Tolenaars/123RF.com

Bhutan is where even the ordinary is, to the foreign visitors, extraordinary. It has a deep-rooted and well-protected culture, spectacular mountains and deep valleys, unique architecture as well as a host of activities such as Buddhist pilgrimages, bird-watching, trekking and cycling. Many visitors time their visits to coincide with good weather or the colourful Bhutanese festivals.

In 2012 when international visitor arrivals hit a historic high, the tourism industry generated a total revenue of US\$62.8 million, at 31.7 per cent growth compared to 2011 and providing employment for 28,982 Bhutanese.

Still, the volume of visitors that enters the Land of the Thunder Dragons is limited, not by decree or legislation, but by the twin effects of limited air access and what is perceived to be high tour package prices of US\$200 per day during off-peak season and US\$250 per day during peak season.

Additionally, unlike many of its Asian neighbours where gastronomic delights are a top draw for visitors,

Bhutanese cuisine appears to be missing the wow factor. A survey published in *Bhutan Tourism Monitor* indicated that 31.9 per cent of visitors considered Bhutanese food to be “average” or “poor” in quality and diversity. However, the fact that this response is noted by the authorities and the wish expressed for improvements to be made offers room for optimism.

### ARRIVALS

In 2012, Bhutan welcomed a total of 105,407 visitors (representing dramatic growth of 64.6 per cent year-on-year and breaching the 100,000 mark for the first time), of which 43,939 were classified as international visitors, 50,722 as regional tourists from Bangladesh, India and the Maldives, and 10,746 as expatriates and business travellers. April, October and November were the peak months for visitor arrivals.

From January to August 2013, there were a total of 62,326 visitors, of which 23,124 were international visitors and 38,202 regional tourists.

China is the strongest emerging market with high double-digit growth

of 93.8 and 30 per cent in 2011 and 2012 respectively, occupying the third position in the top 10 source markets league. For the period from January to August 2013, it moved to second place among the top 10 source markets.

According to the 2012 *Bhutan Tourism Monitor*, Chinese tourists visited Bhutan for short holidays. Their time of visitation was spread throughout the year, with a slight majority skewed towards September to November. They were highly educated, with the majority holding university degrees, according to Tourism Council of Bhutan Secretariat (TCBS). About 64 per cent of them were in Bhutan for the first time, while about 27 per cent came for the third time. About 34 per cent came to visit only Bhutan, while the rest combined their trips with neighbouring countries

such as Nepal and Thailand. About 20 per cent of Chinese visitors arrived as part of an organised tour group in 2012 and a further 49 per cent arrived as 'groups of friends'.

The Japanese market, which performed strongly in 2011 and 2012, appeared to have waned in the first eight months, while arrivals from Malaysia recorded strong growth, climbing to sixth position among the top 10 source markets compared to the 10th position in 2012. Statistics for the top 10 for the eight-month period suggest that at least half of these markets – most likely from Europe and the US – may not produce as many visitors to Bhutan this year as they did in 2012.

TCBS' records also indicated that US visitors stayed an average of eight days in 2012 while those

from China and Japan stayed fewer than five days.

The NTO has set a target of 200,000 visitors per annum by end-2018, nearly doubling the number received in 2012.

### Top 10 source markets in January-August 2013

Country	Arrivals
US	3,144
China	2,744
Japan	2,618
Thailand	2,168
Germany	1,197
Malaysia	1,177
Australia	1,052
Singapore	1,047
UK	985
France	684

### Top 10 source markets in 2011

Country	Arrivals	Year-on-year Change (%)
US	6,226	+20
Japan	3,943	+33
China	2,896	+93.9
UK	2,795	+57.7
Germany	2,287	+1.6
Thailand	2,235	+155.4
Australia	1,773	+34.5
France	1,585	+9
Singapore	1,349	+71.9
Canada	1,061	+35

### Top 10 source markets in 2012

Country	Arrivals	Year-on-year Change (%)
Japan	6,967	+76.1
US	6,007	-3.5
China	3,766	+30
Thailand	3,573	+60
Germany	2,880	+26
UK	2,466	-12
Australia	1,926	+8.6
France	1,847	+17
Singapore	1,605	+19
Malaysia	1,307	+66

Source: TCBS

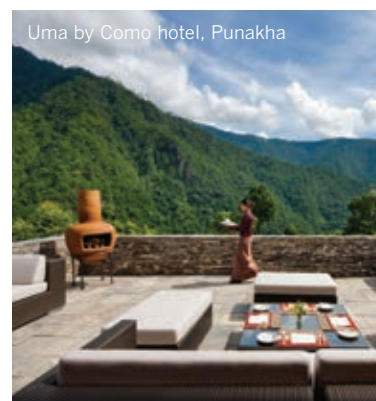
## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Matching visitor arrivals seasonality trend, hotel occupancy in Bhutan fluctuates significantly with October being the peak when many hotels run at full or near full occupancy. Chairman of the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators, Karma Lotey, said: "It isn't really difficult to get accommodation, with the increasing hotels catering to tourists every year. It's more to do with the issue of seasonality and it's difficult to get rooms in popular hotels during the peak season."

According to Bhutan Tourism Corporation's deputy manager Khandu Yitsho, the most acute room squeeze is experienced in Punakha, while it is not much of an issue in Thimphu and Paro.

In 2012, there were 123 TCBS-accredited hotels and resorts with a total of 2,749 rooms and 5,464 beds every night.

Month	Bed nights in 2012	Year-on-year change (%)
January	8,450	+78.9
February	9,301	+3.6
March	25,402	-8.8
April	44,299	+45.2
May	22,253	+16
June	13,107	+56.4
July	8,525	-4
August	14,343	+6.9
September	29,614	+44.6
October	66,604	-8
November	45,234	+4
December	16,187	+8.3



### Average occupancy rate in 2012 based on accommodation category

5-star	30.5%
4-star	30%
3-star	34.6%
2-star	20.3%
1-star	8.2%

Source: *Bhutan Tourism Monitor* 2012 (Note: The occupancy rate in reality is likely to be higher since the calculation only pertains to international tourists, and does not include figures of regional and domestic tourists, government guests and corporate guests etc.)

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

By 4Q2013

- Wangmo Hotel, Thimphu, 32 keys
- Hotel Shambav, Thimphu, 15 keys
- Lama, Thimphu, 20 keys
- Taksang View Hotel, Paro, 9 keys
- Gantey Gonpa Lodge, Gantey, 12 keys
- Hotel Peling, Phuntsholing, 20 keys
- Druk Deothjung Hotel, Trashigang, 40 keys
- Yet-to-be-named hotel developed by Kinley Tenzin, Bumthang, 12 keys

### 2014

- Gakhil Hotel, Thimphu, 37 keys
- Dorji Elements, Thimphu, 30 keys
- Dori Wangmo, Thimphu, 18 keys
- Thimphu Towers, 21 keys
- HTMTI, Thimphu, 21 keys
- Natshang Hotel, Thimphu, 21 keys
- Hotel Manedheepa, Paro, 59 keys
- Ravens Nest Resort, Paro, 23 keys
- Sangay Phuntsho, Paro, 12 keys
- RKPO Resort, Paro, 43 keys
- Drupchu Resort, Paro, 32 keys
- Densa Resort, Punakha, 24 keys
- Leksol Hotel, Phuntsholing, 39 keys
- Tashi Namgay Resort, Phuntsholing, 47 keys
- Yet-to-be-named hotel developed by Bhutan Hotels, Thimphu, 78 keys

## AIR ACCESS

For all of the last two decades, the only airline operating into land-locked Bhutan was Drukair, which currently operates three Airbus A319s and a turbo-prop ATR42. Besides a couple of Indian cities, the airline depended on two international gateways to convey international visitors into the kingdom.

In October this year, Tashi Air, which operates as Bhutan Airlines, launched daily flights to Bangkok with a refueling stop in Kolkata, using an A320 wet-leased from Small Planet Airlines of Lithuania (technically, the A320 is based in Bangkok). Looking



Bhutanese children

into the future, Tashi Air is considering new routes to Dhaka and Singapore with further expansion to Kathmandu, Dubai and Hong Kong in the longer term. Its CEO David Young expects Hong Kong to serve as a gateway for visitors from the US while Dubai would be a useful hub for European visitors.

Until September 2012, the bulk of international visitors depended mainly on Drukair's flight from Bangkok. Since then, twice-weekly flights from Singapore have brought visitors from Australia and Japan. Following the launch of its Singapore flights, Drukair joined the Changi Airport Group on roadshows to Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia and in recent months, its general sales agent (Druk Asia) in Singapore has been receiving stronger interest from these markets and the Philippines.

Although Tashi Air's A320 is slightly larger than Drukair's A319, operational constraints dictated by Paro Airport's location in a deep valley surrounded by mountains will limit the A320 to the same passenger numbers as Drukair's A319. Airfares are also not expected to drop as Young confirmed that Tashi Air is not keen to start a fare war with the incumbent carrier and prefers instead to deliver better service.

Paro Airport currently has an apron that can accommodate only five aircraft, and plans to add three more parking stands have stalled as the land needed is controlled by the Indian Air Force. It is estimated that even if the land is released for this development, it will take 10 to 12 months to complete. Besides the five-strong combined fleet of Drukair and Tashi Air, Paro Airport is visited by an average of 23 private jets each year and these often remained parked for a week or more.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

While there have been no new attractions in the kingdom, infrastructure wise, a refurbished

Yongphula Airport is expected to welcome visitors in 2015 following major renovation works from November 2013 to end-2014, which include the re-surfacing of the 1,266m long runway and the construction of access roads to the airport. Two hills on either sides of the runway will also be excavated and leveled. The cost of this renovation amounting to US\$1.6 million is being funded by Asian Development Bank.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

The autumn months from September to November are the most popular with visitors as clear skies and cool weather prevail. Trekkers are attracted to the ideal conditions in the mountains and this continues into February for low altitude trekkers and bird-watchers. However, Bhutan is no less attractive during the other months – with low-level clouds and some precipitation, the mountains and deep valleys take on a completely different and perhaps more mystical ambience. Throughout the year, temple festivals with spectacular performances are staged.

### Tipping culture

Although tour prices are all inclusive, the going rate for tipping tour guides and drivers is US\$5 per person per day. Tipping is seldom expected in other establishments, some of which already have a service charge which serves as a tipping pool for all employees.

### Public transportation

Mandatory tour packages already come with transportation and one hardly ever needs to resort to public transportation. Taxis exist in small numbers.

### One sound advice

Inevitably, visitors will meet more Bhutanese children than they can count. The lovely children are mostly uncorrupted by tourism and do not ask for money in exchange for photo opportunities, so do not start giving them money. Instead, bring good children's story books in English for them as English is the primary language in school and they could certainly do with a wider choice of reading materials.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

### NTO

Tourism Council of Bhutan Secretariat  
Website: [www.tourism.gov.bt](http://www.tourism.gov.bt)

### Travel trade association

Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators  
Website: [www.abto.org.bt](http://www.abto.org.bt)

Compiled by Sim Kok Chwee

All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights



## FAMILY FUN

### Trekking, camping, river rafting, cycling, farmhouse visit and hiking to Taktsang Monastery

This activity-packed tour is suitable for outdoor-loving and adventure-seeking families. Trekking will be on a route only frequented by yak-herding nomads, up the Paro valley and against the backdrop of snow-capped Mount Cho molhari. The trail winds through an apple orchard before entering the forest and finding a spot for a thrilling overnight camp in the great outdoors.

Families can also go river rafting, a relatively new sport in Bhutan and a unique and exhilarating way of exploring stunningly beautiful and vastly untouched nature. Bhutan's rivers are fed by snow run-off of the Himalayas and surrounded by forests inhabited by abundant wildlife. The Parochhu River offers both easy rafting for beginners and hair-raising runs for the veterans (aged seven years old and above; rafting season is from March to July). After half a day on the river, a tasty picnic lunch

by the river follows, before cycling around the Paro town and valley.

While cycling through the villages, there will be a stopover at a traditional farmhouse to see how the rural Bhutanese live. The houses are normally three levels high: the ground floor is used for keeping cattle, top floor (attic) for drying hay, and middle floor as the family's living quarters.

The highlight of the tour, for adults and older children, is the two-to three-hour hike up to Taktsang Monastery. Commanding superb views, this is where the great Buddhist saint, Guru Padmasambava, is believed to have landed on the back of a flying tigress in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and meditated for three months.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### Trekking and cultural tour

For the active traveller who wants to combine walking, sightseeing and visit to traditional places, a nine-day trekking and cultural journey through the valleys of Thimphu, Paro and Gangtey is recommended.

Comprising four solid days of six to seven hours of walking, participants get to trek through dense forests filled with sprawling junipers, bamboos, magnolias and rhododendrons, breathing in the fresh air and taking in the beautiful scenery.

After the physically demanding trekking, participants will stop at traditional *dzongs* (fortresses) and monasteries to rest and learn more about Bhutan's history and religion.

The experience is also about getting up close and personal with Bhutan's people and traditions, with walks through rural villages and visits to traditional arts schools. The journey completes with a friendly archery match with the locals.

There are two highlights of this tour. One is a hike up to the famous Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tiger's Nest. This Himalayan Buddhist sacred site and temple atop the cliff of the upper Paro valley is Bhutan's most well known. The other is the opportunity to get wet – possibly very



Tiger's Nest



Punakha Dzong



Asian Trails

Archery match with the locals

wet – aboard a raft along the Pho Chu River, known for stretches of Class II and IV rapids.

### **WELLBEING**

#### **Consultation with an astrologer and private Buddhist ceremony**

The Bhutanese will consult the astrologers for important events, such as the birth of a child, setting out on a journey, a marriage in the family, construction of a house and a funeral. The horoscope is also relied on at the beginning of each year for a forecast of the year's ill fortunes and to determine appropriate remedies.

Hence, there can be no better way to get deeper into the culture than for visitors to consult an astrologer themselves. By meeting one of the monks from Pangri Zampa, a school of astrology in Thimpu and the oldest monastery in Bhutan, visitors may begin to understand how important astrology is for the Bhutanese who believe that supernatural power – both good and evil – as well as the stars and planets, exert a profound influence on human life. They turn to astrology not only to understand these influences, but also to ward off potentially unfavourable times and heighten the effects of favourable periods.

Visitors will be taken to Zangtopelri Lakhang, a chapel



## MD'S HOT PICK



**Special interest:**

**Black-Necked Crane Festival**

In Bhutan, the endangered black-necked crane, known as Thrung Thrung Karmo, is deeply revered in Buddhist traditions and appears in Bhutanese folklore, songs and dances. The birds arrive at their wintering grounds between mid-October and early-December and remain until March or mid-April. In November every year, a festival to highlight the importance of conserving this rare species takes place in Phobjikha. It is a day when monks, students, women and children donning masks and costumes perform different dance items, of which the black-necked crane dance is a highlight, signifying the spiritual connection between the community and the bird. Tourists pay a small fee which goes towards the funding for the festival and conservation work.

Every year, more than 700 tourists come to witness the festival, along with thousands of locals.

built in the 1990's in Thimpu. Here, the monks will perform a small Buddhist ceremony for the individual visitor, with prayers to ward off bad luck, evil spirits and misfortune and to enhance longevity and prosperity. Visitors can also make butter lamp offerings and get a blessing for their prayer flags,

which are inscribed with auspicious symbols, invocations, prayers and mantras – a wonderful keepsake to bring home. Buddhists for centuries have planted these flags outside their homes and places of spiritual importance for the wind to carry the prayers across the countryside for all sentient beings.

Camping close to a snow mountain



# Brunei

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Sophiejames / 123RF.com

Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque in Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan



Bridegroom In traditional attire

Hamidun HMN/Brunei Tourism

**B**runei Tourism is not aiming for volume but well-travelled tourists looking for fresh experiences in a new destination in South-east Asia.

So far, most travellers to Brunei are from Asia-Pacific destinations, which are within six hours' flight distance from the capital city Bandar Seri Begawan.

The NTO is constantly working towards creating awareness for the destination's ecotourism, sports, heritage and cultural offerings through fam trips for tour wholesalers and retailers from its key markets.

Bandar Seri Begawan, best depicts the culture and heritage of Brunei, while Temburong, Muara and Tutong are places visitors will enjoy for nature. Popular beaches are located in Muara, Jerudong and Tutong, whereas Brunei Bay is best known for diving, a new product which Brunei Tourism wants to promote.

Brunei Tourism is also promoting its culture and Muslim way of life, targeting especially Muslim travellers

from China, Malaysia and Indonesia. This year, the NTO is targeting 260,000 tourists, an increase of 50,892 tourists from last year's total arrivals by air. At press time, Brunei Tourism has not determined targets for 2014.

### ARRIVALS

Brunei received a total of 209,108 visitors by air in 2012, compared with 192,755 in 2011. The top 10 source markets were Malaysia, China, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, the UK, India, Japan and South Korea.

The longhaul market remained small compared to the Asia-Pacific market, which made up the bulk of air arrivals to the Sultanate. Hence, the main focus of Brunei Tourism's marketing efforts will continue to be on Asia-Pacific.

In the first quarter of this year, Malaysia and China maintained their respective top two positions of the previous year in the top 10 generating markets, while Thailand and the US elbowed out Japan and South Korea to take the ninth and



10<sup>th</sup> position respectively. The top 10 were Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, the UK, India, Thailand and the US. These 10 countries accounted for 83.4 per cent of total tourist arrivals (61,816) to Brunei.

Comparing the first quarter of 2013 with the corresponding period in 2012, the biggest year-on-year growth was recorded by Australia, which saw a dramatic 44.1 per cent increase. This was due to Royal Brunei Airlines' increased frequencies to Melbourne from four times weekly to daily in March 2012.

Other markets that showed strong year-on-year growth were the US (37.2 per cent), Indonesia (35.1 per cent), the UK (30.33 per cent) and Thailand (30.13 per cent). Growth in these markets was due to Brunei Tourism's increased marketing efforts through fam trips for their tour operators and the media.

The NTO also co-organised travel shows with Royal Brunei Airlines (RBA) in Jakarta and Surabaya in 2012. Some tourists from Indonesia use the airline for its direct flights to Jakarta and Surabaya stopping over in Brunei before proceeding to Mecca for Umrah. Brunei is proud of its Malay and Islamic traditions, which the NTO is also promoting to the Muslim segment from Indonesia.

**Top 10 source markets in 2012**

Malaysia	56,214
China	27,490
Philippines	19,189
Indonesia	18,245
Singapore	15,933
Australia	11,877
UK	11,401
India	5,104
Japan	4,310
South Korea	4,277

**Top 10 source markets in 1Q2013**

Malaysia	15,086
China	8,773
Indonesia	6,391
Australia	4,756
Philippines	4,416
Singapore	4,150
UK	4,039
India	1,354
Thailand	1,287
US	1,281

Source: Brunei Tourism



Fireworks Over Bandar Seri Begawan



Dulang making

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

According to Brunei Tourism's statistics, the hotel inventory in Brunei was 3,194 rooms as of December 2012. The newest hotel to open this year is Badi'ah Hotel on Tutong Road, managed by Times Hotel Sdn Bhd.

The national average occupancy rate in 2012 was 46.1 per cent, according to Brunei Tourism's statistics and for the first six months of 2013, it hit 53 per cent. The higher occupancy this year could be attributed to Brunei's chairing of the ASEAN Summit.

There is only one five-star property in Brunei, which is The Empire Hotel & Country Club. The average occupancy rate of this property in 2012 was 42.4 per cent, average room rate was around B\$200 (US\$161) and RevPAR, was B\$85.

For the first eight months of 2013, its average occupancy rate was 40.7 per cent, average room rate, B\$229, and RevPAR, B\$85.

## AIR ACCESS

Air accessibility to Brunei is largely dependent on national carrier RBA's network of 13 international destinations. These destinations include three longhaul destinations, London, Jeddah and Dubai as well as 10 cities within the Asia Pacific region: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, Bangkok, Manila, Melbourne, Jakarta, Surabaya and Singapore.

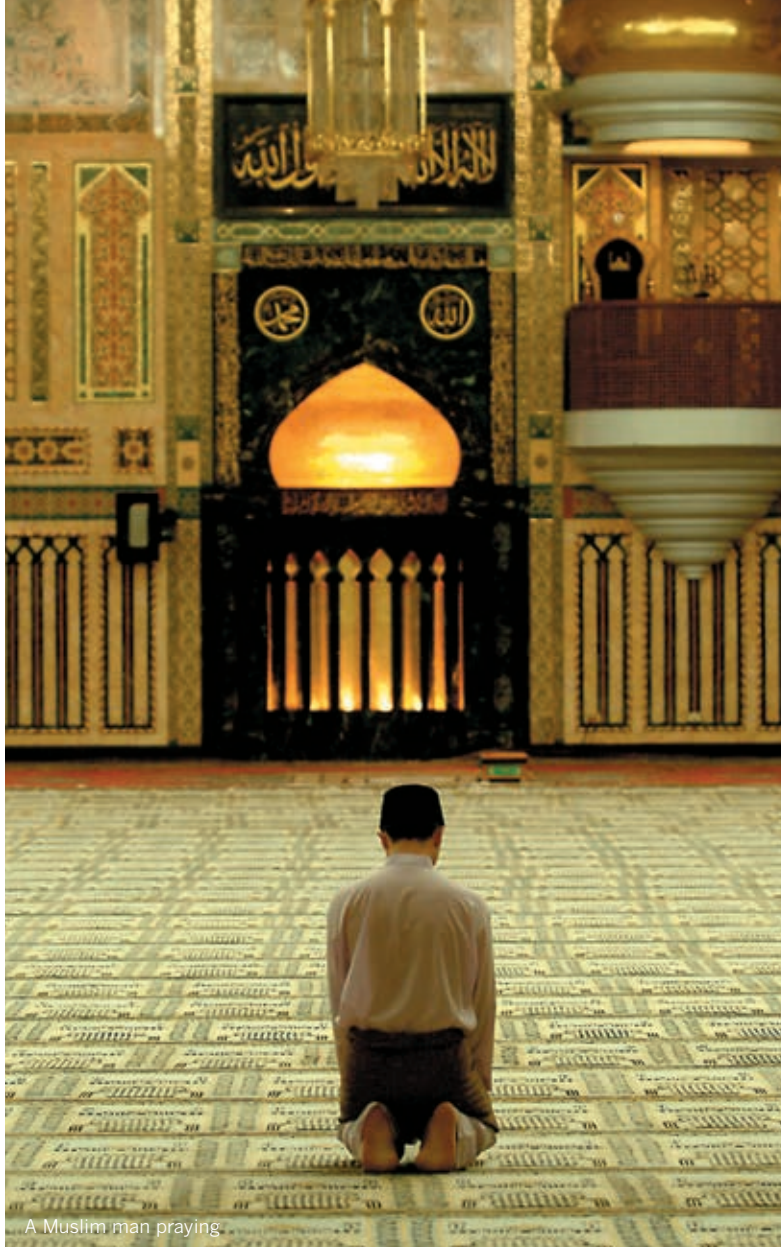
Foreign airlines that fly to Brunei are limited to Malaysia Airlines, MASwings, AirAsia, Cebu Pacific and SilkAir.

MASwings suspended flights between Kota Kinabalu and Bandar Seri Begawan in July, slightly more than a year since it started servicing this route in February 2012. This route is now serviced only by RBA.

MASwings continues to operate four-weekly services between Kuching and Bandar Seri Begawan.

RBA increased its frequencies between Bandar Seri Begawan and Kuala Lumpur from 11 weekly flights to 14 in May this year. It has ordered five B787 Dreamliner aircraft, with the first aircraft scheduled for delivery in September, followed by another in October, and the remaining three in 2014. The Dreamliner aircraft will replace the four B777 leased aircraft to serve existing longhaul routes such as London via Dubai and Melbourne.

Meanwhile, the B\$130-million upgrading of Brunei International Airport is scheduled for completion in November 2014. When completed, it will double the airport's handling capacity from the current 1.5 million annual passengers to three million.



A Muslim man praying

## NEW HOTEL IN 2013

Badi'ah Hotel, Bandar Seri Begawan, 55 keys, 2Q

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

Brunei's Empire Hotel and Country Club reopened its seafood Pantai Restaurant in April. The restaurant had been closed for renovation for 15 months. It can seat 180 guests and features live-action cooking stations.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

All year round; rooms are easy to secure at any time of the year, except during Chinese New Year.

### Tipping culture

Tipping is not expected.

### Public transportation

There are no metered taxis in Brunei

and the limited number means flagging one down is not easy. There are six bus routes servicing the Bandar Seri Begawan area and they operate from 6.30 to 18.00. Water taxis are the most common means of transportation at Kampung Ayer.

### One sound advice

Ask for permission before taking photographs inside a mosque.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Brunei Tourism  
Email: [info@bruneitourism.travel](mailto:info@bruneitourism.travel)  
Website: [www.bruneitourism.travel](http://www.bruneitourism.travel)

### Travel trade associations

Association of Travel Agents Brunei  
Email: [info@bruneitravelagents.org.bn](mailto:info@bruneitravelagents.org.bn)  
Website: [www.bruneitravelagents.org.bn](http://www.bruneitravelagents.org.bn)

Brunei Association of Hotels  
Email: [bahsecretariat@gmail.com](mailto:bahsecretariat@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.hotelsofbrunei.com](http://www.hotelsofbrunei.com)

# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

Many inbound tour operators offer programmes that take visitors to the homes of local communities so they can experience the local way of life. Tourists are usually taken on a tour of the house by the owner and are served lunch or tea. Interactive activities such as learning to make local handicrafts or a traditional dish can also be arranged with prior notice. Some itineraries also include a one- or two-night homestay experience.

Homestays benefit the villagers, who are paid a fee by the local tour operator for their services. Freme Travel Services (email: [holidays@freme.com](mailto:holidays@freme.com); website: [www.freme.com](http://www.freme.com)) and Sunshine Borneo Tours (website: [www.exploreborneo.com](http://www.exploreborneo.com)) offer homestay programmes at Kampong Sungai Matan and Kampong Ayer respectively.

## FAMILY FUN

Families can travel by boat from Bangar to get to Ulu Temburong National Park. Within the park, visitors are kept off the delicate vegetation on the forest floor, thanks

to a series of canopy walkways rising above the treetops. There are many experiences to savour here, from watching gibbons foraging along the river at daybreak to taking on the Grade 1 and 2 rapids on the Temburong River.

Kampung Ayer is a must-see destination for all, regardless of age. It is a historic settlement of more than 4,000 houses built on stilts over Brunei River, and is home to more than 20,000 people. Many of these houses have been in continuous occupation for at least 400 years.

The Royal Regalia Building on Jalan Sultan is a tribute to the Sultan and another must-visit destination. The main gallery presents a recreation of the coronation of the Sultan, while another is devoted to information on the Sultan's life up to the time of his coronation. It is open from Saturday to Thursday, 9.00 to 16.30; Friday, 9.30 to 11.30, 14.30 to 16.30. Admission is free [tel: (673) 223-8358].

For royal watchers, Brunei History Centre has a wealth of information regarding the Sultans of Brunei, from family trees to replicas

of royal tombs to reference books on regal matters. It opens from Monday to Thursday and Saturday, 7.45 to 12.00, 13.45 to 16.30. Admission is free [tel: (673) 224-0166].

Finally, Rimba Horticultural Centre at Kampung Rimba, Gadong sells tropical plants and gardening accessories, drawing crowds of garden enthusiasts.

## SHOPPING

There are three big malls for tourists to browse around. The Mall in Gadong (website: [www.arhbrunei.com/themall/abtthemall.htm](http://www.arhbrunei.com/themall/abtthemall.htm)), which is Brunei's biggest mall and a premier shopping area housing more than 150 stores and a Cineplex.

Kompleks Bangunan Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah on Jalan Pretty (website: [www.yshhb.org.bn](http://www.yshhb.org.bn)) is home to high-end local boutiques selling fabrics and jewellery, while Brunei Times Square Shopping Centre (website: [www.tsqbrunei.com/home](http://www.tsqbrunei.com/home)) on Jalan Berakas is a mere five minutes' drive from Brunei International Airport.

These three outlets usually have sales at the end of the year and



This is Hestefeld/Brunei Tourism

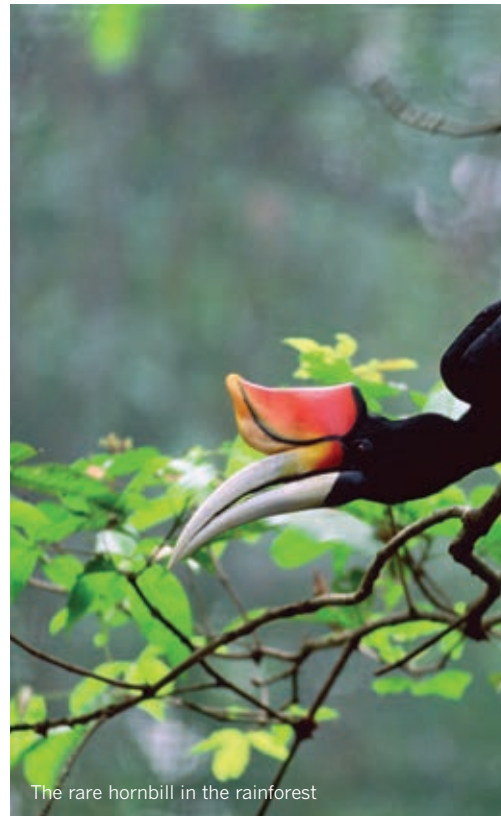
Ulu Temburong National Park

ASIAN  
TOURISM  
EXPERT  
GUIDE

David Kirkland/Brunei Tourism

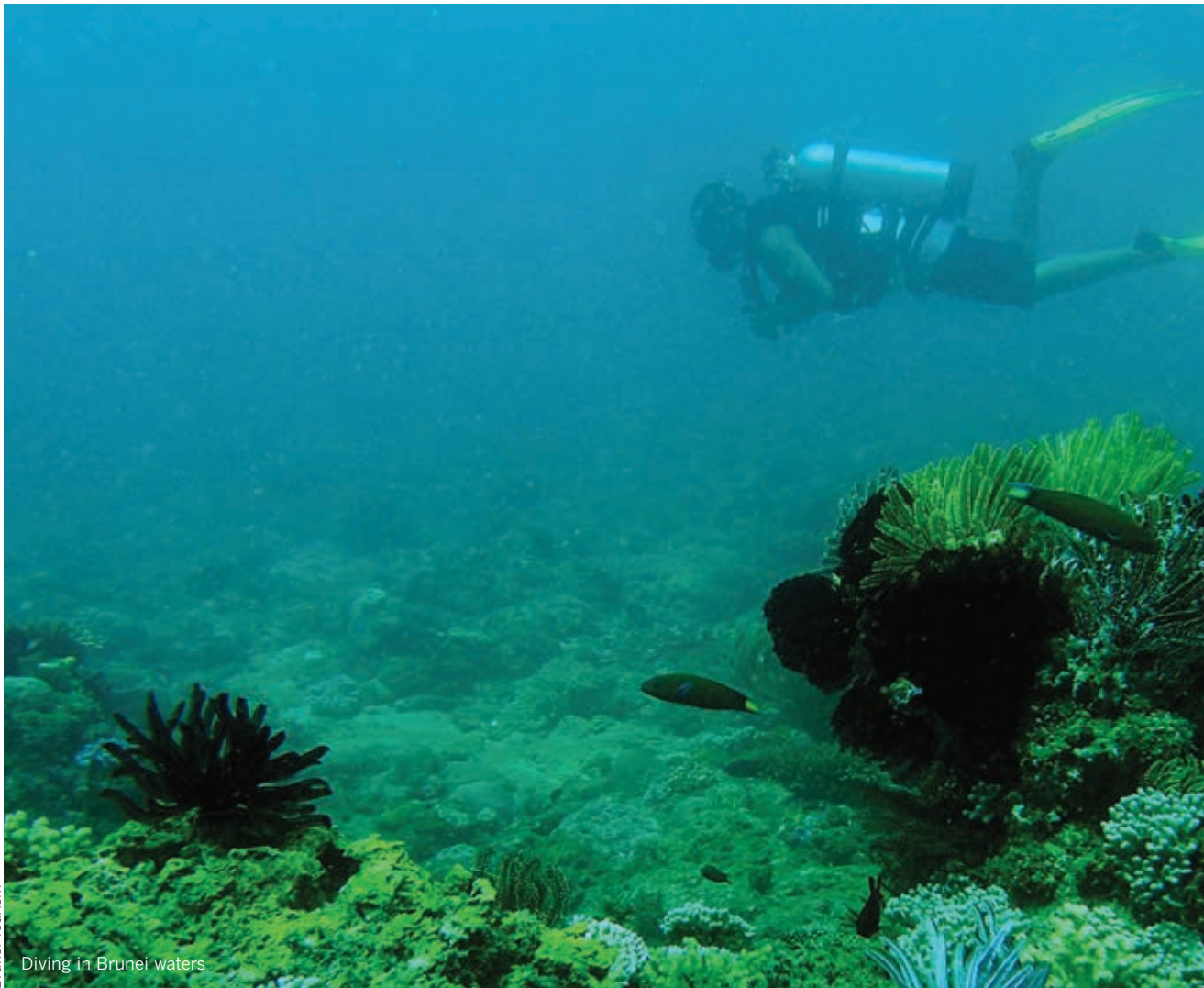


Shopping for local textiles



The rare hornbill in the rainforest

Brunei Tourism



Diving in Brunei waters



Brunei Tourism



The Empire Hotel & Country Club, Brunei

The Spa at The Empire Hotel & Country Club

about a month before Hari Raya.

Those looking for hand-woven materials and baskets or ornate silverware and brass artifacts should head to Brunei Arts and Handicraft Training Centre on Jalan Residency. It also sells brocade, which Brunei is known for.

Pelanggi De Mutiara Tourist Square ([www.facebook.com/pages/Pelanggi-De-Mutiara-Tourist-Square-Sdn-Bhd](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Pelanggi-De-Mutiara-Tourist-Square-Sdn-Bhd)) at Latifuddin Complex is a one-stop gift shop for tourists. Visitors can view murals and displays of traditional fabric in the Cultural Showcase room, shop for popular souvenirs of Brunei such as locally made basketry and brocade, and sample local delicacies at the café.

Budget shopping can be fun too at Tamu Kianggeh, located along Kianggeh River opposite Brunei Hotel, and which sells handicrafts, local fruits and vegetables as well as snacks and traditional ready-to-eat desserts. It is open daily from 5.00 to 18.00.

### SPECIAL INTEREST

Brunei Bay is a diver's paradise blessed with vast coral reefs and spectacular marine life. There are good shallow coral dives perfect for inexperienced divers as well as more challenging reef and wreck dives. The best time to go diving in Brunei is from March to October during the dry season when the lighter south-west monsoon is blowing.

Brunei Sub Aqua Dive Club (email: [chairman@BSADC.com](mailto:chairman@BSADC.com); website: [www.bsadc.com](http://www.bsadc.com)) is open to all certified divers, both locals and

foreigners visitors. Besides offering diving programmes, it also rents out dive equipment. Another good option is Poni Divers, a full-service dive and watersports centre ([www.facebook.com/PoniDivers](http://www.facebook.com/PoniDivers)).

Brunei is also home to more than 622 species of birds, of which 49 species are endemic only to Borneo, according to Brunei Birds (email: [roger@bruneibirds.com](mailto:roger@bruneibirds.com); website: [www.bruneibirds.com](http://www.bruneibirds.com)), from which birdwatching tours can be arranged on request.

### WELLBEING

Spa outlets in Brunei have separate treatment rooms for men and women. Male masseuse will treat men and female therapists, women. Treatments typically start from B\$40, with popular ones including Malay, Chinese Balinese and Thai massages. It is best to make a booking in advance.

Voted as one of the best spas in the world by Conde Nast Traveler, Thann Sanctuary at Bangunan Seri Kiulap [tel: (673) 223-5599; website: [www.thannspa.com](http://www.thannspa.com)] offers a wide range of treatments and products to soothe and calm the mind, and relieve strains, tension and blockages in the body and skin. Treatments include massages for body firming, detoxification and sport recovery.

The Spa at The Empire Hotel & Country Club (website: [www.theempirehotel.com](http://www.theempirehotel.com)) are said to offer top-notch treatments. Try the Royal Touch treatment, which comes with a scrub, massage and facial.

*Compiled by S Puvaneswary  
All information is correct at press time*

# Cambodia

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Donyanedomam/123RF.com

Elephant walking down Sisowath Quay, city centre of Phnom Penh



Stone carving of classical Khmer construction at The Bayon

Tourism is one of the major pillars of Cambodia's economy. In 2012, the country generated a total of US\$2.2 billion in tourism revenue, which comprised 12 per cent of the gross domestic product.

Siem Reap, where the famed Angkor Wat temple is located, continues to take the lion's share of Cambodia's inbound tourist arrivals – particularly the leisure segment – while Phnom Penh attracts more business travellers. More than 1.1 million tourists visited the Angkor Archaeological Park in the first six months of 2013, up six per cent year-on-year, according to figures released by Siem Reap Provincial Department of Tourism.

However, Cambodia's lack of international-standard infrastructure outside of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh still poses a challenge for visitors to explore other provinces (such as Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri and Stung Treng in the north-east) or extend their length of stay, which, at 6.3 days in 2012, was still very short as compared with its neighbours.

With 443km of coastline,

the country's coastal tourism potential has not been fully tapped. Sihanoukville, a province by the Gulf of Thailand, has started to gain awareness among international tourists as a beach destination; Song Saa Private Island's opening in 2012 has put Cambodia on the luxury travel map, while Cambodian Angkor Air's Siem Reap-Sihanoukville service launched in late 2011 has facilitated travel from the famed Angkor town to the beaches.

In addition, the entry of established hotel brands such as Park Hyatt and Anantara in Siem Reap as well as Phnom Penh's hosting of the ASEAN Summit 2012 signify rising confidence in Cambodia's economic and tourism potential.

### ARRIVALS

International tourist arrivals to Cambodia have been steadily growing. In 2012, Cambodia welcomed close to 3.6 million international arrivals, growth of 24.4 per cent year-on-year, and generated total tourism revenue of US\$2.2 billion.

This year, Cambodia aims to welcome four million international tourists, which will represent a 12 per cent year-on-year increase in visitor arrivals if the targets are met.

Based on 1H2013's statistics, the country is on track to reach its goal this year, having posted strong growth of 19.1 per cent from some 1.76 million arrivals recorded during the same period last year.

Among the source countries, Vietnam shored up the biggest share in the first half while South Korea took up the second spot. Following closely behind in the third position is China, whose arrivals surged dramatically. In the fourth and fifth spots are Laos and Thailand respectively, both of which also recorded healthy growth. The US, Japan, Russia, France and Australia respectively made up the rest of Cambodia's top 10 source markets in the first half.

As a region, Asia-Pacific continues to contribute the bulk of visitor arrivals to Cambodia with 76 percentage share, followed by Europe and the Americas, with 16.8 and 6.8 percentage share respectively. All three regions posted healthy growth in the first half.

Recognising the potential of the fast-growing Chinese inbound market, the Cambodian Tourism Ministry has unveiled a five-year plan in June to target at least 1.3 million Chinese visitors by 2018. Under this plan, Cambodia will roll out entry-exit application forms, airport

announcements and road signages in Chinese, while it will also push for more flights, train more Chinese-speaking tour guides and conduct studies on establishing Chinatowns in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville, according to *The Cambodian Daily*.

#### Total international arrivals; year-on-year change

1H2013	2.1 million; +19.1%
2012	3.6 million; +24.4%

#### Top five source markets in 1H2013

Country	Arrivals	% year-on-year change
Vietnam	423,815	+12.1
South Korea	239,585	+5.5
China	230,997	+52.1
Laos	183,581	+77.8
Thailand	111,082	+20.9

#### Top three regions in 1H2013

Region	Arrivals	% year-on-year change
Asia-Pacific	1.6 million	+21.3
Europe	350,997	+13.8
The Americas	142,726	+9.9

Source: Statistics and Tourist Information Department

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Cambodia's steadily rising tourism performance over the last couple of years – with double-digit growth since 2010 – has buoyed the country's hotel development. Average occupancy across all hotel types in the country has been continuously inching upwards, crossing the 60 per cent mark in 2008 and reaching 68.5 per cent last year, based on 2012 figures from Cambodia's Statistics and Tourist Information Department.

The gateway to the Angkor temples, Siem Reap, recorded strong growth last year as well as the 2012-2013 peak season, with international hotels and operators experiencing as much as a 20 per cent spike in occupancy rates from the corresponding period in 2011-2012, according to CBRE Cambodia. Despite the gain in visitor numbers, rack rates in Siem Reap have remained firm over the past year due to the lack of additional supply.

Meanwhile, Phnom Penh's successful hosting of the ASEAN Summits – which saw over 1,000 delegates and international press members descending in the capital city in April and November 2012 – has bolstered its image as a luxury hotel destination as well as a business city. The average occupancy rate for luxury hotels stood at 60 per cent at end-2012, while room rates have generally increased, CBRE Cambodia revealed. The Phnom Penh-based real estate services firm also expects supply to grow by 70 per cent in the next few years with the completion of Sokha Hotel and Naga 2, which will add some 450 rooms and over 1,000 rooms respectively.

Furthermore, Phnom Penh is also seeing a thriving serviced apartment market driven by a rising number of foreign nationals residing in the city. According to 1Q2013 figures from CBRE Cambodia, the capital currently had in excess of 15 fully serviced apartment buildings, with one- and two-bedroom apartments taking the bulk of the total supply at 76 per cent.

### Performance in Phnom Penh

<b>Average occupancy rate</b>	
- Luxury properties	60% (as at end-2012)
- Serviced apartments	95% (in 1H2013)
<b>RevPAR</b>	
- 4- and 5-star properties	US\$25-\$100 (as at end-2012)
<b>Projected increase in room supply</b>	1,450 (over next few years)

Source: CBRE Cambodia

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- Frangipani Living Arts Hotel & Spa, Phnom Penh, 123 keys, 1Q
- Rambutan Resort, Phnom Penh, 14 keys, 1Q
- TeaHouse Asian Urban Hotel & Spa, Phnom Penh, 52 keys, 1Q
- Saem Siemreap Hotel, 78 keys, 1Q
- Preah Vihear Boutique Hotel, 32 keys, 1Q
- Park Hyatt Siem Reap, 108 keys, 3Q
- Patio Hotel & Urban Resort, Phnom Penh, 45 keys, 3Q
- Villa Nane, Phnom Penh, 14 keys, 3Q
- Shinta Mani Resort, 63 keys, 3Q
- Anantara Angkor Resort & Spa, 39 keys, 4Q
- Regent Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap, 167 keys, 4Q

### 2014

- Sokha Hotel & Convention Center, Phnom Penh, 458 keys, 4Q
- Mittapheap Hotel, Sihanoukville, 500 keys

## AIR ACCESS

Cambodia Angkor Air (CAA) has embarked on a rapid expansion of its regional network since late last year. The national flag carrier launched its inaugural international route in November 2012 with a daily Siem Reap-Bangkok service on ATR72 aircraft, breaking up the monopoly of Bangkok Airways on this route.

In January, CAA started daily Phnom Penh-Hanoi flights via A321 aircraft, followed by a daily Phnom Penh-Bangkok service via A321 in February. It has also introduced a daily Siem Reap-Guangzhou service via A321 from September. New services to Shanghai, Guangzhou, Seoul and Busan are also in the pipeline.

In October, Philippines Airlines entered into a joint venture with Royal Group to acquire a 49 per cent stake in Cambodia Airlines. The deal is set to intensify competition in Cambodian skies, as the new carrier is reportedly planning to launch domestic routes before expanding into the international market.

Vietnam Airlines has started a daily Danang-Siem Reap flight on ATR72 aircraft from July, while Lao Central Airlines has planned to commence flights from its Vientiane base to Phnom Penh via B737-400 aircraft, although the launch date has not been announced at press time.

In October, Dragonair launched a thrice-weekly seasonal service from Hong Kong to Siem Reap via A320 and A321 aircraft, while Air China has planned new daily Beijing-Siem Reap flights from December and Phnom Penh-Beijing flights from February 2014.

Meanwhile, Cambodia's LCC links have been pumped up considerably, with Thai AirAsia rolling out daily flights between Bangkok and Siem Reap from October 1 via A320 aircraft, as well as Jetstar Asia breaking up its Singapore-Siem Reap-Phnom Penh route from October 27 for a daily direct service to Phnom Penh and thrice-weekly flights to Siem Reap via A320 aircraft.

Longhaul links are also on the rise. Germany's Condor Air launched a weekly service from Frankfurt to Siem Reap in November 2012 via B767-300 plane. Qatar Airways has started a daily Doha-Ho Chi Minh City-Phnom Penh route since February 20 via A330 aircraft, becoming the first Middle Eastern carrier to provide services to Cambodia.

Additionally, Cambodia Airports announced in late 2012 an investment upgrade of close to US\$400 million until 2020 for the airports in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

### Flight of the Gibbon

In June, Flight of the Gibbon expanded its operations beyond Thailand to launch its Cambodian debut in Siem Reap. Read more in Insider Highlights.

### Phare, The Cambodian Circus

This has received much acclaim since its debut in Siem Reap in early 2013. In May, a 400-pax Big Top tent was added to ensure shows can take place rain or shine, and most recently a café was added to offer three-course set meals for spectators' enjoyment before/after the show. Read more in Insider Highlights.

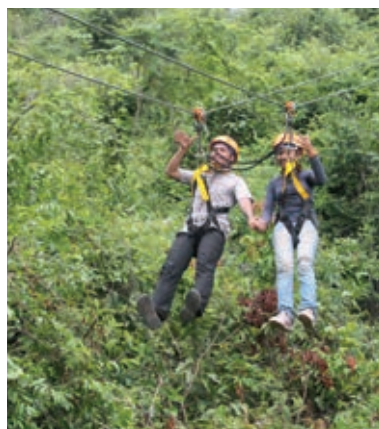
### Google Street View

Google has announced its plan to launch Google Street View in Cambodia, which will become the 51<sup>st</sup> country to be added to the Internet giant's portfolio. According to Google, it will work closely with Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, the APSARA Authority and the Phnom Penh Municipality on the project. Street View camera cars have already started capturing images around the capital, while the 400km<sup>2</sup> Angkor complex will also be mapped. While no date has been given on the launch of the Cambodia project, the programme is expected to be a tool in attracting potential tourists.

### Cruising the Mekong River

Phnom Penh-based Mekong Secret Cruises will begin operating new Cambodia and Vietnam cruises on the *Le Tamarin* from February 2014. Sailing along the Mekong River between the delta and the Tonle Sap Lake, the 39m vessel – due to complete end-November – can host a maximum of 28 passengers in 14 cabins, with three different programmes for travellers to choose from.

Launching in early 2014 by Aqua Expeditions, the *Aqua Mekong* is a



Flight of the Gibbon

60m luxury vessel offering 20 suites, each measuring 30m<sup>2</sup> with private bathrooms, outdoor balconies and floor-to-ceiling windows. Facilities include a spa and fitness centre, a dining room, a bar, a screening room, an observation deck with a swimming pool and sun beds. Sailing from Siem Reap to My Tho (near Ho Chi Minh City) via Phnom Penh, the vessel will offer three-, four- and seven-day itineraries.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

The cool, dry season (November through to February) spells the most popular time to visit Cambodia – which also translates to more crowds at popular attractions like the Angkor temples – although the rainy season (May to October) should also be considered for ample views of lush green landscapes across the country.

### Tipping culture

Tipping is not traditionally practised in Cambodia and although some upmarket hotels apply a 10 per cent service charge, tips are still encouraged to reward good service, especially in a developing country where salaries remain low.

### Public transportation

Motos, or small motorcycle taxis, are readily available and offer a quick way to get around attractions and sights in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, but it is advisable to negotiate prices before starting the journey.

### One sound advice

Instead of making brief visits or volunteering stints at local orphanages – which has led to a boom in orphanage tourism in Cambodia – give your support to organisations that work with marginalised youth and their families through vocational training and community-based initiatives.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

**NTO**  
Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia  
Website: [www.tourismcambodia.org](http://www.tourismcambodia.org)

### Travel trade associations

Cambodia Association of Travel Agents  
Website: [www.catacambodia.com](http://www.catacambodia.com)

Cambodia Hotel Association  
Website: [www.cambodiahotelassociation.com.kh](http://www.cambodiahotelassociation.com.kh)

PATA Cambodia Chapter  
Website: [www.patacambodia.org](http://www.patacambodia.org)

Compiled by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena  
All information is correct at press time



# Insider highlights



Phare Ponleu Selpak's circus performance

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Visit to Phare Ponleu Selpak

Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS), meaning "the brightness of art", is a non-governmental organisation originated from a refugee camp on the Thai border in 1986. Initially aimed to help young refugees overcome the trauma of war, PPS was formally founded in 1994 by a group of former refugee camp children with a focus on rehabilitating street kids, orphans, and children in high-risk situations, through multidisciplinary forms of art and expression. The centre currently supports around 30 orphans and victims of human trafficking and is schooling more than 1,200 pupils, more than 400 of whom study visual arts, music, circus, drama and dance for leisure or vocational training.

The centre in Battambang is open for visits on weekdays from 08.00 to 10.00 and from 14.00 to 16.00. It is closed on public holidays. Visitors will be able to watch a video on the history of PPS, a visual arts exhibition, a musical concert, and students practising their everyday academic courses. Alternatively, they can watch a circus show (maximum 200 pax) that is performed every Monday and Thursday, as well as on special dates. Each visitor will also receive a small souvenir. All donations will go directly into supporting the running of the centre and its projects.

PPS's circus shows in Siem Reap welcome around 400 spectators. The daily one-hour performance starts at 19.30, showcasing productions by

professional artistes who completed the vocational training programme. The circus concept is modern, and is not only an entertaining performance but a sharp representation of Cambodia today, as seen through the eyes of the new generation of artistes growing up in Battambang. The audience will be awed by an amazing blend of traditional and modern theatre, music, dance, acrobatics, juggling, contortions, comedy and more. Each performance is beautifully choreographed and integrated with stories about Cambodian life and society.

Appreciators of art can also visit the Romeet Gallery, a new contemporary art gallery in Phnom Penh opened by PPS. Set up as a platform for emerging and established artists who are alumni of PPS's Visual Art School, Romeet is a dynamic space for exhibitions, talks, workshops and local and international exchange.

### Flight of the Gibbon zipline tours

Active visitors who are also nature lovers will be happy to know that the well-established zipline eco-adventure canopy tours in Thailand, Flight of the Gibbon, has also opened in Siem Reap, offering the same high standard in terms of experience and safety.

The tours are designed to enable adventure seekers access to the rainforest through an exciting combination of tree houses, platforms, cables, sky bridges and abseils, while protecting the ecosystem.

Much of the tours' profit and

volunteer resources are directed towards benefiting the local communities, rainforest restoration and primate habitat rehabilitation.

## FAMILY FUN

### Tour of Siem Reap

Cambodia provides a wonderful opportunity for educating children from the more developed countries. Furthermore, being predominantly Theravedic Buddhist, it has a culture that places an immense value on the family, and the local people are very tolerant and hospitable. Hence, for visiting families, the Siem Reap tour should entice, combining culture, adventure and relaxation activities and offering the right balance of entertainment and education for all ages.

Allow imagination to run wild exploring crumbling and vine-strangled temple ruins and getting lost in the stone corridors of Angkor. The route is reminiscent of Hollywood movie Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. In addition, for most visitors, there is a first-time experience of Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book adventure riding an elephant, rising high above Angkor Wat and its surroundings in a tethered hot air balloon, or taking a tuk-tuk to the south gate of Angkor Thom. Younger children can travel by the ox-cart through the countryside, stopping to visit a school, while teenagers ride a thrilling quad bike for a glimpse of Cambodia's traditional village life and a chance to interact with the locals.

Each day of the tour brings a new adventure, with varied activities such as taking a boat trip along Tonle Sap Lake, stopping at floating villages, paddling a boat in a flooded forest, cycling around on the flat roads of the ruins and learning how to prepare a traditional Khmer dish after buying ingredients from the local market. There are also the unique shadow-puppet show and Khmer dance performed by children for the evening entertainment.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### Different ways to see Siem Reap

Visitors should leave the traditional mini-van behind and make visiting the temples of Angkor the trip of a lifetime by heading out in less conventional ways.

**Angkor jeep:** explore Angkor



Angkor Wat



Elephant riding at Angkor Thom

Thom or the countryside of Cambodia in an open Vietnam War-era military jeep. A fleet of restored M151 A2 vintage military jeeps produced from 1959 to 1982 by Ford Motors and used in the Vietnam War are available for adventure programmes, photo rallies, teambuilding and outdoor activities around Siem Reap and throughout Cambodia. One jeep accommodates up to three passengers.

This exciting sightseeing option is especially popular with small groups wanting to revive the spirit of adventure of the French explorers who rediscovered the temples of Angkor around 150 years ago. There is nothing like travelling in an open vehicle through forests, which also allows interaction with the warm-hearted locals.

**Horseback riding:** from another vantage point, visitors can experience the temples and authentic Khmer lifestyle on horseback. Suitable for all and also ideal for families looking for a fun activity, the trail rides last one to four hours, taking riders on an enchanting journey to places that are otherwise unreachable.

Riders journey through beckoning countryside villages and tourist-free temple ruins, taking in incredible vistas around Siem Reap, with its signature palm trees, vine-clad ruins and iridescent rice fields.

**Microflight:** passengers will enjoy a breath-taking bird's eye-view of Siem Reap and its countryside aboard the ultramodern Quik GTV-450 micro-light aircraft, which can be boarded just five kilometres outside of Siem Reap, at the Jayavarman

Airfield. The pilot flies over the region's different landmarks with flights ranging from 15 minutes to one hour. Passengers get to choose different routes, either following the Siem Reap River down to the Tonle Sap Lake, flying over floating villages and rice paddy fields, or over ancient temples.

Flying times are from early morning until sunset but clouds may form in the afternoon during the rainy season, while thermal activity during the hot season might prevent the aircraft from flying. Hence, early-morning flights are highly recommended.

**Quad biking:** quad biking is a fun activity. Basically a motorbike with four large wheels, a quad bike can be driven by any teenager or adult. No driving license or prior quad biking experience is necessary and, for those who are a bit nervous about hitting the trails on a quad bike, training is provided by experienced staff prior to the tour.

There are five different tours to choose from, varying in duration and according to participants' level of driving. All routes are well-planned and offer glimpses of local village life with great views of paddy fields and temples. There are ample opportunities to stop and take in the views, take pictures and chat to the locals.

## WELLBEING

### Health-enhancing activities in Siem Reap and Kep

In Siem Reap, visitors can try out a calming spiritual cleansing ceremony performed by the monks at a pagoda, before heading out to discover the temples of Angkor. They then explore the countryside by bike, before moving on to a trendy, new art gallery to see a wide variety of paintings, sculptures and photographs. In the evening, they get to dine at the best restaurants in town and unwind with a full body massage at the spa of the deluxe hotel they have checked into.

Over in Kep, the exquisite lifestyle resort of Knai Bang Chatt offers a wonderful blend of privacy, serenity



Buddhist monks in Angkor Wat

and exclusivity, its villas designed with large terraces overlooking the sea and islands. Guests enjoy yoga sessions, meditation or the best of Khmer and Asian massages at the seaside, where the sound of the waves offers further calming effect.

### Sunrise yoga at Angkor

Doing yoga at sunrise at Angkor is a unique opportunity to experience the temple complex and discover why it was originally constructed for meditation, yoga and prayer. The one- to two-hour yoga sessions are nothing like an intense and sweaty workout, but are slow and relaxing and conducive to the connection of body, mind and soul. Natural fibre-woven yoga mats which work well on stones and grass, as well as meditation cushions, are provided whenever necessary. The hatha yoga sessions and guided meditations are conducted at shady, scenic spots which are tucked away from the crowds.

Yoga practice at the ancient Library of Angkor Wat



Yann Jouanique/123RF.com

## MD'S HOT PICK



### CSR and sustainability:

#### homestay at Banteay Chhmar

The best way to get close to locals is through a homestay at Banteay Chhmar. Over 70 villagers are directly involved in the Community-Based Tourism committee (CBT) – aimed to preserve the cultural heritage of the area and create a sustainable local tourism industry – as tour guides, cooks, homestay owners, musicians and activity providers. Many more receive secondary benefits as food sellers, taxi drivers, and other service providers. The accommodation may be very simple, with all meals cooked by the local women, but the friendliness and warmth of the homestay family will compensate for any shortcomings. Visitors will also get to see the massive temple of Banteay Chhmar, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest temple dating back to the Angkor period. Since 2009, preservation of this temple has been led by the Global Heritage Fund, which has formed a partnership with CBT and is currently funding CBT's operations.

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

# China



Chuyi/123RF.com

Yuyuan Garden in Shanghai



Shutterstock/123RF.com

In 2012, China's tourism industry maintained steady and rapid development in spite of the global economic downturn. While its domestic tourism market continued to grow, inbound tourism market was essentially flat.

According to China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), the number of China's domestic tourists last year reached nearly three billion, up 12 per cent year-on-year. Foreign tourist arrivals hit 27.2 million, up merely 0.3 per cent.

In the first quarter of 2013, the number of domestic tourists reached 998 million, up 14.1 per cent year-on-year, according to Zhu Shanzhong, deputy director of CNTA.

"The sustained and healthy development of China's tourism market fundamentals have not changed," announced Zhu.

CNTA projected that by 2015, China's domestic tourists will reach four billion.

## ARRIVALS

Asia was China's major source market in 2012, with total tourist arrivals of 16.7 million, equivalent to the previous

year's and accounting for 61.2 per cent of total foreign visitors. South Korea sent the most number of tourists.

Apart from the American market, all other markets maintained a year-on-year increase. European tourists totalled 5.9 million, up 0.2 per cent, while African tourists totalled 524,900, up 7.4 per cent.

Foreign tourists also spent an average of 7.5 days in China, up 2.7 per cent year-on-year.

In the first seven months this year, China attracted 14.9 million foreign tourist arrivals, a year-on-year drop of 5.3 per cent. Arrivals from Vietnam recorded the largest year-on-year increase of 17.8 per cent, while Japan saw the largest drop of 25.5 per cent.

## Foreign arrivals in January-July 2013

Overall total	14.9 million
South Korea	2.3 million
Japan	1.6 million
Russia	1.2 million
US	1.2 million
Vietnam	756,300
Malaysia	627,500
Philippines	581,800

Source: CNTA

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

According to CNTA, by end-2012, there were 11,367 registered star-rated hotels across the country, with approximately 1.5 million rooms or 2.68 million beds. Aggregated revenue were RMB243 billion (US\$39.8 billion), of which 44.8 per cent were revenue from F&B and 41.6 per cent from rooms.

However, official statistics show that the development of China's hotel sector is now slowing down. Industry experts said that is due to the slowing down of China's economic growth, stiff competition in the hospitality industry, China's efforts to restrain public consumption as well as the declining number of inbound tourists.

In Q2 2013, the aggregated revenue of the total 12,101 hotels were RMB55.8 billion, among which, 43.3 per cent were revenue from F&B and 44.7 per cent from rooms. Average occupancy rate fell 7.4 per cent year-on-year.

### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

#### 2013

- Shangri-La Hotel, Qufu, 325 keys, Q3
- Grand Metropark Resort Hotel, Sanya, 505 keys, Q3
- Intercontinental Hotel Kunming, 541 keys, Q3
- Kempinski Hotel Taiyuan, 363 keys, Q3
- Shangri-La Hotel, Shenyang, 424 keys, Q3
- Wanda Realm Hotel Fushun, 283 keys, Q3
- Sheraton Shenyang South City Hotel, 340 keys, Q3
- Wanda Hilton Hotel, Wanzhou, 253 keys, Q3
- Yinruilin International Hotel, Shilin, 836 keys, Q3
- Beidaihe CTS Sheraton Hotel, Qinhuangdao, 243 keys, Q3
- Wyndham Grand Plaza Royale Hainan Longmu Bay, 362 keys, Q3
- Wanda Vista Hotel Shenyang, 298 keys, Q3



Shangri-La Hotel, Qufu

## No. of properties in 2012

Overall	11,367
5-star	640
4-star	2,186
3-star	5,379
2-star	3,020

## Performance in 2012

	Overall	5-star	4-star	3-star
Average occupancy rate	59.5%	60%	60.6%	59%
Average room rate	RMB329	RMB710	RMB365	RMB216
RevPAR	RMB162	RMB306	RMB190	RMB115

## Top 10 cities in 2012 by average occupancy rate, average room rate and RevPAR

Average occupancy rate	Average room rate	RevPAR
Changsha	Sanya	Changsha
Qingdao	Shanghai	Shanghai
Kunming	Beijing	Dongwan
Nanjing	Guangzhou	Beijing
Guiyang	Qingdao	Sanya
Zhangjiajie	Chengdu	Wuxi
Fuzhou	Shenzhen	Guangzhou
Chengdu	Xiamen	Nanjing
Lanzhou	Hohhot	Fuzhou
Urumqi	Dongwan	Changchun

## Performance in 2Q2013

	Overall	5-star	4-star	3-star
Average occupancy rate	56%	56.4%	56.6%	55.7%
Average room rate	RMB326	RMB699	RMB356	RMB211
RevPAR	RMB183	RMB394	RMB201	RMB117

Source: CNTA



Forbidden City in Beijing



Li River, which stretches from Guilin to Yangshuo

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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### AIR ACCESS

According to Civil Aviation Administration of China, as of end-2012, there were 183 domestic airports, three more than the year before. Heilongjiang Jiagedaqi Airport, Jiangsu Yangtai Airport and Guizhou Zunyi Xinzhou Airport were the newly opened ones. Meanwhile, Sichuan Panzhihua Airport and Xinjiang Qiemo Airport were suspended.

The top ten airports in terms of traffic in 2012 were Beijing Capital International Airport, Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport, Shenzhen Baoan International Airport, Kunming Changshui International Airport, Xi'an Xianyang International Airport, Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport and Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport.

Last year also saw the launch of a number of international flights. For instance, China Eastern Airlines started new flights from Shanghai Pudong to Keynes and from Kunming to Phnom Penh and Hanoi. It also increased flights from Shanghai to Sydney, Hawaii, New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur and Ho Chi Minh City.

Low-cost carrier Juneyao Airlines launched its first international flight from Shanghai to Phuket in January, while Hainan Airlines opened new flights from Beijing to Bangkok and Male.

This year, Yunnan Airport Group partnered with a couple of airlines to launch new services, such as the Cheju-Kunming charter service by Easy Star Airlines, Busan-Kunming service by Busan Airlines, Kunming-

Bangkok service by Asiana Airlines and Kunming-Myanmar service by Myanmar Airways International.

In January, Juneyao Airlines launched flights from Shanghai to Bangkok, while Air China increased flights from Beijing to Bangkok in March and planned the launch of thrice-weekly Beijing-Chiang Mai flights in November and twice-weekly Beijing-Siem Reap flights in December.

Other airlines that started new services this year include the Dalian branch of China Southern Airlines, with new flights from Dalian to Juju, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka and Hiroshima; as well as China Eastern Airlines, with new flights from Nanchang to Singapore and Phuket.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

With an investment of RMB5 billion, Xiamen Huaqiang Culture and Technology Industrial Base opened in the summer of 2012 and is dubbed the Chinese version of Disney. It consists of three bases, two theme parks as well as a supporting tourist hotel. The three industrial bases are the animation film culture base, the cultural and creative industry base and the special film base. Its annual tourist reception capacity is expected to reach 500 million visitors.

In Tianjin, Triumph Kingdom Theme Park opened in June 2012, covering an area of more than 80 hectares. Arc de Triumphant is the landmark within, from which tourists can enjoy a view of the entire park. The roller coaster was specially developed by Swiss and US suppliers. It is over 60m high and can reach a speed of 120km per hour.

Also in Tianjin is Caidaidao Park Cruise Terminals, a park in the CBD of Tianjin Binhai New District. There are three docks in the park, the yacht marina, the cruise ship terminal and the freight terminal. The Yacht marina is the cutting-edge floating marina, while the cruise ship terminal welcomes ships for sightseeing.

Guilin in Southern China has the nation's most spectacular scenery, and it was here in August this year that Club Med Guilin opened. The architecture and the sculptures in the gardens will make for a unique experience not provided by other Club Med properties. Mountain bike riding is a great way to get around and explore the resort and its surrounding area. The excursions as well as motor bike and car tours through the mountains and villages should not be missed.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

May, September and October, as the weather is cool at a comfortable 18-28°C. In May, there are also a lot of performances, such as the annual Heineken International Jazz Festival.

#### Tipping culture

Tipping is not practised here, as a service charge applies on most bills.

#### Public transportation

Taxis are the most convenient option although traffic congestion is common, especially in Beijing.

#### One sound advice

Visitors to Beijing in winter must remember to drink a lot of water as the weather can be very dry. They also need to wear masks as Beijing has a lot of sand dust storms during this season.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

China National Tourism Administration  
Tel: (86-10) 6520-1732  
Website: [www.cnta.gov.cn](http://www.cnta.gov.cn)

#### Travel trade associations

China Association of Travel Services  
Tel: (86-10) 6520-1448  
Website: [www.cats.org.cn](http://www.cats.org.cn)

Shanghai Tourism Trade Association  
Tel: (86-21) 6339-1557  
Website: [www.shtour.org](http://www.shtour.org)

China Tourist Hotels Association  
Tel: (86-10) 6520-1416  
Website: [www.chinatouristhotel.com](http://www.chinatouristhotel.com)

Compiled by Hong Xu

All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights



## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Visit a panda sanctuary

Animal lovers will get a good opportunity to contribute to the preservation of the seriously endangered panda with a visit to one of the sanctuaries for this well-loved, gentle Chinese icon.

It has been reported that a panda pelt can be sold for as much as US\$67,000, hence it is no wonder that illegal hunting of the creature by destitute locals prevails in some regions of the country, especially the provinces of Sichuan and Chongqing. Additionally, more than 300,000 people today are reported to be living within very close range of the panda's natural habitats, and as China's population grows, the country's need to house and provide workspaces for the growing headcount means that the wild panda numbers will inevitably continue to dwindle.

What can be achieved is the improvement of the panda's population growth in the dedicated sanctuaries to ensure the future of the giant creature. The World Wildlife Fund runs various projects in the Yangtze region of China, mainly educating the public on wildlife and the financial benefits that would be brought about by the panda's preservation.

The proceeds from entrance fees and donations will no doubt go towards supporting the conservation works of the sanctuaries.

## FAMILY FUN

### Tour of Beijing, Luoyang and Yangshuo

China has infinite possibilities to entertain and educate children. Diethelm Travel introduces a family tour involving three extremely different regions.

The first stop is Beijing. While exploring the Hutong area by rickshaw, stops are made to fly a kite with local children, learn Chinese calligraphy and make dumplings with a local family. Enjoy some Chinese tea while learning to write simple Chinese characters and your name with swift strokes of the brush. For families with more energetic children, the following day can include a hike up the Great Wall.

Leaving Beijing for Luoyang, families then head for Shaolin Temple, probably the most famous temple in China for its long history in Buddhism and for being the birthplace of Chinese martial arts. All aspiring

Kites featuring Beijing opera-style faces



fishing for food in the river, preparing an

authentic Chinese dinner with a local family in the traditional farming village of Chao Long, and exploring the beautiful town filled with western restaurants and coffee shops.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### Meet the locals in Tibet

Upon arrival in Lhasa for Diethelm's five-day tour to meet the locals, visitors are warmly welcomed with a traditional *hada* (white scarf) to bring them good luck. After a full day of sightseeing visiting the Potala Palace and exploring Barkhor Street, the bustling Lhasa marketplace with traditionally dressed Tibetans and stalls full of local handicrafts, the spiritual climax is to join in the late-afternoon chanting at one of Tibet's holiest shrines, the 1,300-year-old Jokhang Temple.

Participants then head out some 50km south-west of Lhasa to the tiny village of Junba, which lies beside the incredibly emerald green Lhasa River and is surrounded by stark mountains. Junba is well known for manufacturing traditional artworks from yak and sheep hide as well as for fishing from self-made cattle skin boats. Participants get to spend a whole day with a Tibetan family learning how yak dung is turned into fuel for making fire, how the harvest is gathered and how the Tibetan joss

Jackie Chans will enjoy the two days here, which include marvelous Chinese kung fu and music shows, visit to the Kung Fu School, and the opportunity to take a basic kung fu lesson conducted by an experienced master.

Next, in beautiful Yangshuo featuring countless scenic trails and paths, mountain biking is an excellent way to go deep into the countryside or ascend Moon Hill, which offers panoramic views of the natural surroundings. Families also get to go on a private cruise of the Li River with its fairytale rock formations to the historical town of Xingping. Activities include watching night cormorants



The Great Wall of China



The Potala Palace in Tibet

sticks, or *thangkas*, are made.

The last day of the tour takes participants by car 70km outside of Lhasa to Tsurpu Monastery, the traditional seat of the Karmapa sect of Buddhism. In this remote monastery, they get to join in the magical butter lamp lighting ceremony. Typically intended to focus the mind and aid in meditation at funerals and on pilgrimages, the lighting of the lamps is extremely symbolic and calming.

## WELLBEING

### Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine

Home to the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practices, China is experiencing a revival of this ancient tradition which are used widely throughout the whole of South-east Asia and gaining popularity in the Western world.

TCM adopts a holistic approach with a focus on finding the root of the illness rather than treating its symptoms. All TCM treatments focus on *qi*, the vital energy, which flows through our bodies. Here are some treatments to consider.

Acupuncture and cupping: acupuncture is one of the most well-

A woman practising tai chi



known TCM treatments that is also widely practised in the western world. It involves the insertion of needles into the patient's skin at specific points called acupuncture points to relieve problems such as back pain, migraine, anxiety and insomnia.

Cupping is another often-practised treatment method. The therapist places a heated glass cup on the skin so that a vacuum forms and the cup sticks to the skin. This suction helps in blood circulation and healing.

Both treatments can be experienced across China, for example, at the He Sheng Tang Therapeutic Centre in Sanya.

Meditation at Wenfeng: about

eight kilometres to the southwest of Lijiang city, in Yunnan, the Wenfeng (or Wenbi Si) monastery offers great views and enjoyable walks in the surrounding area. Like all monasteries in Lijiang, Wenfeng is of Tibetan origin and belongs to the Karmapa (Red Hat) sect.

Visitors have the opportunity to take part in a one- to two-hour meditation session taught by the monastery's monks. Simple techniques accompanied by the monks' chanting and meditation music will set one in the most relaxed state of mind. Participants should wear comfortable clothing as the class is taught with them seated on a flat cushion on the floor.

After the class, participants can enjoy a vegetarian lunch and will be given time to chat with the monks. As no accommodation is available at Wenfeng, they are transported back to Lijiang in the evening. This is a unique opportunity to experience the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism first-hand.

Tai chi: every morning, tai chi is practised by thousands of people in China. This ancient morning ritual takes place in parks, gardens and any open ground and is said to bring





Plus99/Dreamstime.com

## MD'S HOT PICK



**Special interest:  
photography trip to  
Dongchuan Red Soil, Yunnan**

A recommended short trip for photography buffs is to Dongchuan Red Soil, an untouched area boasting the deepest red soil in the Yunnan highlands. Some local photographers discovered this region and published their works in the newspapers. It is about 180km north of Kunming and a two-day tour staying overnight at a local guesthouse is sufficient. In the soft afternoon light, visit Luoxiagou Valley and enjoy the sunset view of local villages and farmland. The following day, rise early to take pictures of the sunrise at Damakan, followed by the scenic spots of Jinxiu Garden, Qicai Slope, Yuepu Hollow and Yueliang Field. Additionally, observe the local farmers at work, or even participate in their activities to get closer to the red land. The best time to visit Dongchuan Red Soil is mid-May to early-June or mid-October to November.

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

balance and harmony to one's body and mind. Slow, flowing movements combined with controlled breathing increase muscle strength and enhance the body's flexibility. The soft movements also have a calming and meditative effect, helping tai chi students cope better with stress and other problems of daily life.

Diethelm organises private tai chi classes in the historical parks of Beijing, such as the Summer Palace, the Forbidden City or the Temple of Heaven. A professional tai chi master will teach participants the basic movements in a two-hour session.

Qigong: the Shaolin Temple of Shong Shan and its famous Pagoda Forest in Henan Province are not only UNESCO World Heritage Sites, but the temple is allegedly the birthplace of the Chinese martial art, kung fu. That said, Shaolin Temple is the ideal place to learn the art of qigong.

While tai chi was developed as a martial arts form some hundred years ago, qigong is a health practice that has evolved for over 7,000 years and is also taught outside of martial arts. As a result, qigong has many more styles than tai chi.

Participants may sign up for a day at the temple, which will start

at 07.00 with physical training, followed by breakfast and the rest of the morning spent learning the movements of qigong. After lunch, they will learn more about qigong, and the day is rounded up with a Shaolin Zen Music Ceremony. Each participant will receive a certificate from Shaolin Temple's Kung Fu School.



Main gateway into Shaolin Temple in Henan Province

Nastya Tenkina/123RF.com

# Hong Kong



Phillip Lange/123RF.com

Crowded Hong Kong street scene

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Tian Tan Buddha in Hong Kong Lantau Island

Leung Cho Pan/123RF.com

Hong Kong's tourism continued to achieve steady growth and Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) projects total arrivals to hit 52 million this year, about 6.8 per cent growth over 2012. China continues to be the powerhouse, contributing more than 60 per cent of total traffic.

HKTB aims to achieve a diverse and healthy visitor portfolio by maintaining a well-balanced investment in a number of markets. With a total marketing budget for 2013-14 set at HK\$337.9 million (US\$43.6 million), about 52 per cent (HK\$176.6 million) will be used for promotion in visitor source markets. Of these, more than 70 per cent will be utilised for the international markets and the rest for China.

In recent years, HKTB has also accelerated the development of new markets. So far, these emerging markets (India, states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Russia, the Netherlands and Vietnam) have performed well and generated 7.3 per cent growth to 409,543 for the first eight months of

this year. Most markets demonstrated positive growth, while Russia recorded the highest growth of 22.2 per cent.

### ARRIVALS

This year will be another record year for Hong Kong as overall arrivals for the first eight months surged 12.5 per cent to 35.6 million. Driving more overnight arrivals has been one of the key objectives of the NTO and for the first half of this year, efforts started paying off with about 12 million overnight arrivals, representing an 8.7 per cent year-on-year increase and 47.1 per cent of overall arrivals. Overnight arrivals from China even reached 7.8 million, 16.2 per cent more than in the same period in 2012.

The global economic uncertainty resulted in a single-digit year-on-year drop for both overall longhaul and shorthaul traffic in the first half. According to HKTB, the drop in shorthaul arrivals was due to Japan drawing away many regional travellers with its weaker yen. However, arrivals from Taiwan rose, attributed partly to the free pre-arrival online visa-registration service offered to Taiwan residents by the Hong Kong SAR

### Arrivals for top five source markets in January-August 2013

China	26.8 million
Taiwan	1.4 million
US	720,514
South Korea	703,697
Japan	685,274

### % year-on-year change in overnight arrivals in 1H2013

Overall shorthaul	-4.2
Overall longhaul	-4.1
China	+16.2
Thailand	+15
Taiwan	+4.1
Japan	-29.1

Source: HKTB

Government. Direct flights between Taiwan and China also diverted business travellers who used to have to transit in Hong Kong, making more seats available for vacationers from Taiwan.

HKTB continues to work closely with various trade partners to promote Hong Kong as a hub for multi-destination travel in the region, developing new itineraries to attract more visitors and intensifying promotions to consumers. To stimulate visitors' continuous interest in Hong Kong, in the coming years, less known attractions and activities such as art and culture will be promoted. HKTB also launched the first travel guide on Hong Kong for the Russian market and organised a consumer promotion in Dubai for the Middle East market.

### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Burgeoning arrivals spurs high demand for hotel rooms and this explains why the city's hotel average occupancy rate (AOR) stood at a high 80 per cent as of August 2013. As of June 2013, the city is home to 217 hotels and a total of 68, 677 rooms, with the numbers projected to increase to 258 and 74,125 respectively in 2014.

Hong Kong Hotel Association (HKHA) also indicated hotel business performed well during the first eight months, maintaining 2012's same period's AOR and average room rate (ARR) at 87 per cent and HK\$1,400 respectively. New hotel supply in the next few years is also projected to correspond with the increase in demand. Looking ahead, HKHA expects 2014 will be another good year comparable to 2013, if not better, not considering any unforeseen circumstances that may disrupt business and leisure travel around the world.

As at August, STR Global found trading performance for Hong Kong's midscale and economy market registered single-digit decline year-on-year, with AOR remaining stable at 89 per cent due mostly to increased room rates. The luxury segment comprises 14 hotels, including the InterContinental, Peninsula, Ritz-Carlton, Mandarin Oriental and the Four Seasons, amongst others. Following a strong increase in RevPAR performance in 2011 of almost 20 per cent, the performance of the luxury segment was fairly stagnant at 2.4 per cent growth in 2012, with no change in performance for the first eight months.

### Top five average daily rates for Greater China cities in 1H2013



Source: Knight Frank's Greater China Hotels Report published in September

### Year-on-year change in RevPAR in January-August 2013

Midscale/economy hotels	-4.3%
Luxury hotels	0%

Source: STR Global

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

#### 2013

- Auberge Discovery Bay Hong Kong, 325 keys, 1Q
- Courtyard By Marriott Hong Kong, 539 keys 1Q
- Hotel Indigo Hong Kong Island, 138 keys, 1Q
- Lodgewood by L'hotel, 87 keys, 2Q
- OZO Wesley Hong Kong, 251 keys, 2Q
- Hotel Rainbow Hong Kong, 126 keys, 2Q
- Pentahotel Hong Kong, 695 keys, 3Q
- Mira Moon, 91 keys, 3Q
- Ovolo Hotel, 100 Shek Pai Wan Road, 85 keys, 3Q
- Dorsett Tsuen Wan, 548 keys, 4Q
- King's Hotel, 99 keys, 4Q
- Regal iClub Hotel, North Point, 199 keys, 4Q

#### 2014

- Hotel Pennington by Rhombus, 80 keys
- Somerset Victoria Park Hongkong, 92 keys
- Hotel sàv, 388 keys, 2Q
- Regal iClub Hotel, Sheung Wan, 351 keys, 3Q
- Mira Studio, 50 keys, 4Q



Mira Moon



Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

## AIR ACCESS

According to Civil Aviation Department (CAD), additional points served by scheduled services during the period covering IATA Winter Season 2012/13 and Summer Season 2013 included Danang, Hohhot, Hulunbeier, Ilo-Ilo, Mahe Island, Novosibirsk, Seattle, Siem Reap, Yangon and Yinchuan. At press time, CAD is processing three applications to operate scheduled services from Singapore, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Apart from the new full-service carrier Air Seychelles that debuted in April, the city is about to welcome a new low-cost carrier this year after Oasis went bust in 2008. While Jetstar Hong Kong announced its venture in 2012 and is still awaiting government approval, Hong Kong Express Airways decided to switch to budget service from Oct 27, starting with eight destinations, namely Tokyo, Osaka, Penang, Chiang Mai, Sabah, Taichung, Kunming and Phuket.

Infrastructure wise, the Midfield development is still ongoing with phase one scheduled for completion by end-2015. The Midfield area is the last piece of land for large-scale development on the airport island. It is located to the west of Terminal 1 and between the two existing runways. Facilities will include the construction of a five-level Midfield Concourse with a total floor area of 78,000m<sup>2</sup> and 20 aircraft parking stands; an Automated People Mover extending from Terminal 1; a cross-field taxiway and other supporting facilities.

Meanwhile, National carrier Cathay Pacific Airways launched a four-times-weekly service to the Maldives in October, and will in 2014 start a daily service to Newark Liberty International Airport in March, a fourth daily direct flight to Los Angeles in June and three additional direct flights to Chicago in August. The airline also added the fifth daily service to London in June and has resumed some frequencies to Toronto,

Los Angeles and New York. Sister company Dragonair is also active and has kicked off services to Zhengzhou (daily), Yangon (four-times-weekly), Wenzhou (daily) and Danang (four-times-weekly) this year. It also launched a Siem Reap four-times-weekly service and increased flights to Phuket and Kolkata in October. Frequencies to Chiang Mai, Kota Kinabalu, Wuhan, Qingdao, Kaohsiung and Jeju were also increased.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal began operation in June while the second berth will be ready in mid-2014. This dedicated facility provides efficient services for embarking and disembarking cruise passengers, as well as a rooftop garden and dining experiences for locals and visitors. HKTB expects more incentive groups to include cruise travel in their trips to Hong Kong and plans to develop the MICE cruise business.

Hong Kong two theme parks have also demonstrated efforts to entice visitors with new facilities. In Hong Kong Disneyland, the Mystic Point has become the newest themed area since it debuted in May. It also marks the final chapter of the current expansion project, which will be completed one year ahead of schedule and effectively increases the size of Hong Kong Disneyland by 25 per cent. Facilities include the iconic Mystic Manor, a themed photo area, new restaurant and a merchandise location. By late 2016, the park will launch a new themed area based on Marvel character Iron Man.

Meanwhile, Ocean Park also launched the Grand Aquarium Scuba Diving programme in April, inviting visitors to immerse in its world-class 5.2million-litre aquarium alongside close to 5,000 fish of over 450 species. Visitors will also experience the thrill of swimming

next to schools of darting fish.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

The period from October to February is favourable for outdoor activities as the weather is perfectly cool and not humid.

### Tipping culture

As service charge applies to most bills, there is no need to tip unless customers want to reward for excellent service.

### Public transportation

The city is well connected by a highly efficient and comprehensive transportation network of buses, taxis and subway trains at very affordable rates.

### One sound advice

Visitors should buy an Octopus card (a smart card paying system) on arrival because it is widely accepted by most forms of public transport (except taxis) and local convenience stores.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

**NTO**  
Hong Kong Tourism Board  
Tel: (85-2) 2807-6543  
Website: [www.discoverhongkong.com](http://www.discoverhongkong.com)

### Travel trade associations

Quality Tourism Services Scheme  
Website: [www.discoverhongkong.com/hk/qts](http://www.discoverhongkong.com/hk/qts)

Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents  
Website: [www.hata.org.hk](http://www.hata.org.hk)

Travel Industry Council  
Website: [www.tichk.org](http://www.tichk.org)

PATA Hong Kong Chapter  
Website: [www.pata.org/Chapters/392](http://www.pata.org/Chapters/392)

*Compiled by Prudence Lui  
All information is correct at press time*

# Insider highlights



## **FAMILY FUN**

### **Hong Kong Museum of History**

This museum serves to preserve Hong Kong's culture and heritage and is our top choice for a museum visit. Its wonderful displays and models really do bring the city's past to life, captivating and deeply engaging adults and children alike.

### **Cheung Chau Island**

If there is only time to visit one island, we would choose Cheung Chau, just a 30- to 55-minute ferry ride from Hong Kong Island. This small, picturesque island remains essentially a fishing village and the waterfront is the ideal location to watch the many junks and fishing boats in the harbour. Vendors sell fresh fish, fruit and vegetables and the small local restaurants are great for lunch. As there are no cars on the island, it is a safe place with clean air for all to stroll around. Stop at the Pak Tai Temple built in 1783 and dedicated to popular Taoist God of the Sea, as well as the site of the famous Cheung Chau Bun Festival held every spring.

### **The Peak**

There's a reason why The Peak is one of the most popular attractions in Hong Kong: looking down on from the top of this mountain in the west of

Hong Kong Island, no one can fail to be stunned by the spectacular view of the city's skyline, including the world-famous Victoria Harbour as well as towering skyscrapers and distant hills of Kowloon. The highlight is perhaps the manner of getting there: pulled by steel cables, the Peak Tram climbs 373m up the mountain, and along a route so steep that the buildings it passes look like they are leaning over. Whether going up or coming down this mountain, families, especially children, will love the exciting journey. For a relaxing walk with continuously awesome vistas unfolding throughout, join in the one-hour Peak Circle Walk.

### **Sampan ride**

Children normally love boats, so it's a good idea for the family to take a sampan ride in Aberdeen Harbour to see the lifestyle of the remaining fishing communities living on their junks. Their traditional lifestyle contrasts dramatically with the towering modern skyscrapers, where many local families now reside. The harbour is a magical sight in the evening, with thousands of twinkling lights reflected on the water surface.

### **Hong Kong Wetland Park**

This park located in the New

Territories is a world-class ecotourism

facility home to an amazing array of wildlife, including birds, dragonflies, butterflies, reptiles, fish and many more. Entertaining and educational, the park is not only great for bird lovers but also fun for the entire family. Depending on the weather, explore the Wetland Interactive World or the outdoor Wetland Reserve.

## **SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **Heritage walking tour**

For those with a keen interest in architecture, why not take a solitary walking tour or one with a local guide to view Hong Kong's past through its heritage buildings? Given Hong Kong's long and fascinating history, there are still several historical monuments and landmarks to be appreciated, especially those built during the colonial period.

Start in Central District which, with its proximity to the Victoria Harbour, has served as the centre of trade and finance from the earliest days of the British colonial era, and continues to flourish and serve as the administrative centre since the transfer of sovereignty to China in



Philip Lange/123RF.com

Remaining boatlife on Aberdeen Harbour



Hong Kong skyline at night



Paul\_Rushston/123RF.com

Cheung Chau Harbour



Tram up to The Peak

1997. View the former Legislative Council Building, in turn the former home of the Supreme Court until 1985 when it was renamed. The building was designed by the British architect responsible for the eastern façade of Buckingham Palace and the Cromwell Road frontage of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Built on reclaimed land and opened in 1912, the two-storey granite building is neo-classical in design. Across the road stands the Cenotaph, constructed in 1923 and located between Statue Square and City Hall, which commemorates the Armed Forces who served in Hong Kong and died during the First and Second World Wars. Continue on to St John's Cathedral, the second-oldest building in Hong Kong and the oldest Anglican Church in the Far East which opened in 1849.

Next, cross the road again to the former Flagstaff House, one of the oldest colonial-style architecture remaining in Hong Kong. It had been a longtime residence of the Commander of the British forces in Hong Kong during colonial times. Today Flagstaff House contains the Museum of Tea Ware. Finally, take the tram to The Peak to enjoy the wonderfully tranquil Peak Circle Walk, an easy and flat 3.5km walk from Lugard Road to Harlech Road built in 1913 and a favourite of the locals, given its spectacular views of the old and new buildings of Hong Kong.



Leung Cho Pan/123RF.com

## MD'S HOT PICK



### Family fun: dim sum making

One of the most famous local Hong Kong foods is dim sum, which are steamed or fried savoury dumplings in all shapes and sizes boasting as many as 150 items on a typical restaurant menu, but possibly 2,000 in the entire range. As a memorable and fun bonding activity, families should have a go at making this local speciality. The two-hour cooking class at Easy 1234 Dining & Cooking Studio introduces participants to the recipes of three popular dim sum items. The chef will first demonstrate how to roll, mould and shape the dim sum, after which participants create their own dim sum, moulding the pieces into adorable animal shapes, etc. Finally, the dim sum will be steamed or deep fried and be enjoyed by all. Each class at the centrally located cooking studio takes in 12 to 25 participants.

### WELLBEING

#### Feng shui talk cum tour

Literally translated as “wind and water”, feng shui is the oriental principle of man living in harmony with nature. On this tour, one can learn about the principles of this ancient philosophy and see how it has influenced the landscape of major commercial areas in Hong Kong. The tour's first stop is Lung Cheung Road Lookout, a point from which visitors will be shown the “dragon's den”, or the place with the highest concentration of the dragon's energy that is reputed to have created the city's prosperity. Later at the Nine Dragon's Wall in Wanchai, the feng shui principle of suppressing negative influences on the surroundings will be explored. After that, continue on to Central District. Here, standing at Statue Square, the guide will provide explanations on feng shui's influences on notable landmark buildings, as well as the energy that has propelled the district to become a leading financial centre in the world.

#### Tai chi exercise

Join in a class of tai chi while in Hong Kong. Tai chi, sometimes referred to as Shadow Boxing, was developed many centuries ago. Its graceful movements help to balance the *yin* and the *yang*, doing as much benefit for the mind and soul as for

the body. To this day, this traditional Chinese practice remains one of the favourite means of keeping fit in Hong Kong, especially among the older generation.

#### Fortune telling on Temple Street

Shopping is not the only thing to do on Temple Street, which is renowned for its night market. Walking through this area in the evening, learn more about the city's culture with fortune tellers to read your palm and foretell your future, coupled with entertainment by amateurish Cantonese opera singers.



Night market on Temple Street

Mt Kang/123RF.com

# India

Amber Fort in Jaipur, Rajasthan state



OstHil/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Andrey Arnyev/123RF.com

According to India's Bureau of Immigration, foreign tourist arrivals in India stood at 6.6 million in 2012 – an annual growth rate of 4.3 per cent. However, the growth prospects of the country's inbound arrivals in 2013 were marred by the immense negative publicity generated after a spate of sexual violence against women foreign travellers. As such, in a national tourism conference in New Delhi attended by 23 state tourism ministers, India's tourism minister, K Chiranjeevi, exhorted state and union territory authorities to set up tourist police as soon as possible in a bid to regain travellers' trust.

The top 10 popular Indian states among foreign travellers include Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh, according to the Ministry of Tourism. Goa is another destination of choice, while the state of Jammu and Kashmir is gaining popularity.

India has been trying to promote its north-eastern region to overseas tourists. In January, the Ministry of Tourism

organised an international tourism mart in Assam's Guwahati. The state welcomed around 32,000 foreign tourists in 2012.

### ARRIVALS

As per the provisional estimates of India's Ministry of Tourism, the country welcomed 3.3 million foreign tourists from January to June this year, a 2.6 per cent year-on-year growth. India's foreign exchange earnings from tourism stood at an estimated US\$9.2 billion, a year-on-year growth rate of 8.8 per cent; in 2012, they were US\$17.7 billion, a year-on-year growth of 7.1 per cent.

The top 10 source countries for foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2012 included the US, UK, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Canada, Germany, France, Japan, Australia and Malaysia. The total share of the top three countries in overall tourist arrivals was 35.2 per cent. Maharashtra was the number one state, with a share of 24.7 per cent, while the three states (Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan) of hugely popular tourist circuit, golden triangle, together attracted 27.9 per cent.

India attracted 0.6 per cent share of total global tourist arrivals in 2012 and is targeting for this to increase to one per cent by 2017.



# AN ODE TO BEAUTY A SONNET OF LOVE



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[www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org)



Luciano Mortula/123RF.com

Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Tough economic conditions, coupled with huge supply additions, have exerted pressure on India hotels' average room rates and margins in the sector's financial year April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013. As per Crisil Research, there was an 11 per cent year-on-year rise in room additions in 2012-2013.

According to a report by ICRA, a ratings agency, India's supply of rooms in the organised sector was more than 93,000 at the end of 2012, an increase of around four times from around 25,000 in 2001-2002. The report showed industry-wide margins in 2012-2013 nearly halved to 18 per cent from a high of 37 per cent in 2007-2008, on the back of the industry reporting a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of a mere four per cent in revenues. According to hotel consultancy firm HVS, a little over 50,000 branded rooms will be developed over the next five years.

Also as per Crisil Research, in premium hotel segment (five-star and five-star deluxe) there was a year-on-year decline in occupancy rate by one percentage point to 61 per cent in 2012-13, while average room rate and RevPAR fell five and seven per cent respectively.

The occupancy rate for premium hotels is expected to hit a decade low of 58-59 per cent in 2013-14, and RevPAR dip in the business destinations comprising National Capital Region (NCR), Chennai, and Kolkata between seven and 10 per cent CAGR over the next two years.

### Premium hotel segment performance in 2012-2013

Average occupancy rate	61%
Average room rate	Rs7,350 (US\$119)
RevPAR	Rs4,450

Source: Crisil Research

### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

#### 2013

- The Spree Hotel, Bengaluru, 76 keys, 1Q
- Hyatt Regency Gurgaon, 451 keys, 2Q
- Leisure Inn Grand Chanakya, Jaipur, 52 keys, 3Q
- Keys Klub Hotel Parc Estique, Pune, 115 keys, 3Q
- Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan, 175 keys, 3Q
- Vivanta by Taj-Surajkund, Faridabad, 287 keys, 3Q
- The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, 277 keys, 3Q
- Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru, 148 keys, 4Q
- Hyatt Regency Ludhiana, 194 keys, 4Q

#### 2014

- Radisson Blu Hotel Kolkata Hastings, 100 keys, 4Q
- Sheraton Greater Noida Hotel, 254 keys, 4Q
- Alila Fort Bishangarh, Jaipur, 59 keys, 2Q

### AIR ACCESS

According to India's Ministry of Civil Aviation, passengers carried by domestic airlines from January to August increased 3.3 per cent to 41.1 million, from 39.8 million in the corresponding period last year.

In May, IndiGo launched seven new flights on its domestic network. The airline started daily direct Mumbai-Jammu and Chennai-Kochi flights, second daily Mumbai-Srinagar, Chennai-Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai-Trivandrum and Jammu-Srinagar flights, as well as third direct Mumbai-Kochi flight. In August, new daily flights to Ranchi from Delhi and Patna were introduced. Another Indian LCC, SpiceJet, started Chennai-Mysore and Pondicherry-Bengaluru flights in January.

Meanwhile, the number of international flights operated by Indian airlines is expected to go up to 1,695 weekly from 1,074 in 2012. SpiceJet launched Delhi-Guangzhou flights in February, while IndiGo introduced new daily direct Chennai-Singapore flights in March. The Middle Eastern network was enhanced with the commencement of Jet Airways' second Delhi-Dubai daytime service in January, as well as SpiceJet's thrice-weekly Ahmedabad-Muscat and Pune-Sharjah services in August.

International airlines too, expanded their Indian operations this year. SilkAir started new thrice-weekly Hyderabad-Singapore services in January, while Cathay Pacific started 10-weekly Hong Kong-Mumbai flights in April. Air India commenced daily flights from Mumbai to Sydney and Melbourne in August after a 16-year



Malgorzata Kistyn/123RF.com

Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai

gap, and British Airways increased its London-Hyderabad services from six flights weekly to daily in October. At press time, Etihad Airways had planned to increase capacity from daily to double daily between Abu Dhabi and Delhi and Mumbai by year-end, while Jet Airways expected to operate a daily flight from Delhi to Paris, Dusseldorf, Barcelona and Beijing and from Mumbai to Zurich from winter.

A joint venture between Malaysia-based AirAsia and Tata Sons and Telestra Tradeplace focusing on providing domestic second- and third-tier city connectivity to Indian travellers is likely to start services by end-2013 from Chennai to Bengaluru and Kochi. Singapore Airlines (SIA) also inked a memorandum of understanding in September with Tata Sons for a full-service airline. According to global consultancy KPMG this will open up competition in the westbound routes from India.

There are 454 airports and airstrips in India out of which only 93 are operational, thus offering immense opportunities to airlines looking to tap new markets.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

One of India's most elaborate theme parks, Adlabs Imagica, opened in April at Khapoli, south-west of Mumbai. Built on the lines of Disney Park, this family entertainment park has a capacity for 10,000 to 15,000 visitors daily, with enticing features such as Wrath of the Gods and Bollywood-themed rides.

In May, the world's first silver museum opened at City Palace Complex in Udaipur. The museum displays family heirlooms dating back to 743 AD of the royal family of Mewar. The exhibits are displayed at the renowned Amar Mahal, which is located at the entrance of Zenana Mahal and said to be the inspiration for the Taj Mahal in Agra. Pieces range from objects used in rituals such as *ram rewaris* (portable shrine) and traditional royal transport like the *haudah*, used for mounting elephants in religious, state and military processions.

Meanwhile, the project for development of Chhindwara as a tourist circuit in Madhya Pradesh was launched in September. The government has also extended finance assistance for a mega tourist destination in Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh), which includes the construction of a guest house complex, restaurant, dormitory complex, waterfall viewing gallery, children's park and amphitheatre. Ministry of Tourism has also collaborated with Ministry of Shipping for the development of heritage lighthouses as tourist destinations, from which a passenger terminal will be constructed at Konhoji Angere lighthouse in Mumbai.

Chennai International Airport's new international terminal began operations in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in August. The 65,000m<sup>2</sup> new terminal cost US\$330.1 million to construct and has bumped up airport capacity to seven million passengers annually.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

October to February, as the weather is pleasant, ranging from 18-29°C with hardly any rain.

#### Tipping culture

Tipping is expected in India and depends on the quality and scale of a place.

#### Public transportation

Visitors should hire pre-paid taxis and avoid flagging them off the street. Buses are an economical way to travel, while some major cities such as New Delhi have an extensive metro train network.

#### One sound advice

One should avoid roaming alone in secluded areas in the late evening.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

Ministry of Tourism  
Website: [www.tourism.gov.in](http://www.tourism.gov.in)

#### Travel Trade Associations

Travel Agents Association of India  
Website:  
[www.travelagentsassociationofindia.com](http://www.travelagentsassociationofindia.com)

Indian Association of Tour Operators  
Website: [www.iato.in](http://www.iato.in)

Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India  
Website: [www.adtoi.in](http://www.adtoi.in)

Travel Agents Federation of India  
Website: [www.tafionline.com](http://www.tafionline.com)

Outbound Tour Operators of India  
Website: [www.otoai.org](http://www.otoai.org)

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

Thomas Cook (India) [website: [www.thomascook.in](http://www.thomascook.in)] has partnered with a reputed non-government organisation (NGO) which works with street children and runs many shelters in the old Delhi area. The organisation has developed a city walk through the streets of the inner city of Paharganj and the New Delhi Railway Station area, with an aim to sensitise people to the lives of distressed street children. The unique 1.5-hour walk near the railway station is guided by the desolate children, who showcase the area they came from or grew up in before reaching the NGO, and explain how they have progressed. The walk also provides an opportunity for these children to improve their social and communication skills. All proceeds go directly to the trust to enable more opportunities to be made for street children. Tourists can also visit the shelters for interaction with the children.

## FAMILY FUN

Worlds of Wonder (WoW) [website: [www.worldsof wonder.in](http://www.worldsof wonder.in)] in the heart of Noida is the first theme park in India to have all rides imported from the same world-class suppliers for Disney, Universal and Six Flags. WoW also houses North India's biggest man-made lake crowned by an island in the middle, which is connected to the shore through three bridges.

Over in Gurgaon, Kingdom of Dreams (website: [www.kingdomofdreams.in](http://www.kingdomofdreams.in)) is India's first live entertainment, theatre and leisure destination. The attraction provides visitors a flavour of Bollywood and Indian culture, art, heritage and cuisine. Since its launch, it has mesmerised visitors with the critically acclaimed Bollywood magnum opus Zangoora, The Gypsy Prince, international presentations by world-renowned Magic Guru Franz Harary, and the human acrobat geniuses of the Mongolian Circus.

For a perfect outing together, families can also head to EsselWorld (website: [www.esselworld.in](http://www.esselworld.in)) in Mumbai. Apart from rides, the amusement park offers an ice skating rink, a bowling alley, a dance floor and many F&B outlets.

## NIGHTLIFE

High-end S Pangaea is the newly opened night club at Ashok Hotel in New Delhi. Accommodating up to 400 guests, the club has redefined standards of clubbing in the capital city.

For a good dinner, those craving for authentic Thai food should head to Neung Roi, Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi's newest Thai restaurant [tel: (91-11) 2677-9191]. From the ambience to the decor, from the food to the selection of beverages, everything in this restaurant reflects the Thai way of eating.

Another dining option is Amsterdam Kitchen & Bar [tel: (91-98) 1011-1534] located in DLF South Court Mall, Saket, New Delhi. Recreating the streets of Amsterdam, the place offers signature dishes such as stuffed zucchini with basil pesto, fish fingers with wasabi mayonnaise, slow-cooked shank of lamb, smoked salmon, crispy fried Amsterdam prawn and the Amsterdam-Style cottage cheese steak.

In the pink city of Jaipur, Lounge

18 located at the Jaipur Marriott [tel: (91-14) 1456-7777] is the place for partygoers. The scintillating music and delectable food ensures an evening to remember.

## SHOPPING

Most of Indian cities offer a variety of shopping options, be it swanky malls or shopping streets ideal for souvenirs and local products.

In New Delhi, DLF Emporio [tel: (91-11) 4611-6666] and Select Citywalk [tel: (91-11) 4211-4211] are the ideal places for high-end products. For bargains and fashion apparel at competitive prices, Janpath Market at Connaught Place is the right street to go to. For a range of products made by local artisans, visitors should head to Delhi Haat, operated by Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation.

Mumbai also offers a host of shopping options. Those looking to buy antiques can go to Chor Bazaar at Bhuleshwar Mutton Street, while budget



Jama Masjid Mosque in New Delhi

travellers can check out Fashion Street Market to bargain for new items to add to the wardrobe. Shrujan [tel: (91-22) 2618-3104] offers embroidery work like wall hangings and purses which can be perfect gift items for friends back home. For branded products, head to High Street Phoenix [tel: (91-22) 4333-9994] and Infiniti Mall [tel: (91-22) 2637-4531].

**SPECIAL INTEREST**

Cricket is a hugely popular sport in India. The hugely popular Indian Premier League has resulted in tour operators coming up with special packages in its season. Goibibo.com launched a special package Travel Premier League to tap the opportunity vested in the sporting extravaganza.

The Old World Experiences, a product of Old World Hospitality (website: [www.oldworldhospitality.com](http://www.oldworldhospitality.com)), puts together an entire itinerary for a half day, day, or longer, to unearth the very best of New Delhi. Participants can not only discover the popular products of the capital city but also explore some offbeat places. Based on the interests of participants, culture, history, food, entertainment and shopping can be included in the itinerary.



The colourful Meena Bazaar

Joerg Hackmann/123RF.com

**ASIAN  
TOURISM  
EXPERT  
GUIDE**



Troff Svedjeholm/123RF.com

Authentica (website: [www.authenticaleisure.com](http://www.authenticaleisure.com)) organises special tours to Kerala covering ancient temples and murals, rural rambles, treks and waterfalls, thus offering a host of products to history and photography enthusiasts.

### WELLBEING

India is a land of yoga, meditation and ayurveda. Many spas have opened in India in recent years that combine these three elements. There are also spa venues that offer other Asian and European therapies.

Mandara Spa at Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Alibaug (email: [reservations@rdalibaug.com](mailto:reservations@rdalibaug.com)) – 20 miles away from Mumbai – is one of the largest spa properties in Asia. Treatments include a variety of massage styles, body wraps, facials, salt scrubs, aromatherapy, reflexology and a selection of freshwater baths. There is also a full-service beauty salon.

Ananda Spa in the Himalayas (website: [www.anandaspa.com](http://www.anandaspa.com)) is a luxury destination in the foothills of the Himalayas, the birthplace of the ancient arts of yoga, ayurveda and meditation. It offers 24 treatment rooms and an extensive spa menu of over 80 treatments. Programmes are overseen by the ayurvedic consultants, nutritionists and experienced therapists to create a personalised therapies and activities to meet individual needs and health goals.

Meanwhile, Espace Spa at Radisson Blu MBD Hotel Noida (website: [www.radissonblu.com/hotel-noida](http://www.radissonblu.com/hotel-noida)) offers a special treatment involving a therapeutic massage using warm, poultice-heated muslin bags filled with healing fragrant herbs and spices.

*Compiled by Rohit Kaul  
All information is correct at press time*



A traditional houseboat on Kerala backwaters

Dmitry Rukhlenko/123RF.com

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Yoga practice at a tea plantation in Munnar Hill

Marina Pissarova/123RF.com

# Indonesia



Rafal Cichawa/123RF.com

Komodo National Park in Nusa Tenggara

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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**T**ourism infrastructure has been growing across Indonesia, drawing travellers even to off-the-beaten-track destinations such as Komodo, East Nusa Tenggara and Kalimantan.

The increased number of hotels in secondary cities such as Tasikmalaya, Purwokerto and Malang has also allowed tour operators to create new products around these areas.

Additionally, the expansion of Bali Airport coupled with the opening of Medan's Kuala Namu International Airport, Indonesia's gateway to Sumatra and Western Indonesia, have greatly enhanced air accessibility. Airlines such as Garuda Indonesia, Lion Air and AirAsia have opened hubs in major cities like Medan (North Sumatra), Makassar (South Sulawesi) and Surabaya (East Java), connecting with smaller cities surrounding these hubs.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has set a target of 9.5 million arrivals for 2014, which is lower than the initial five-year development target of 10 million by 2014. Its minister, Mari Elka Pangestu, said the revised number

was a realistic target in the face of the prevailing global economic condition.

The tourism budget will also be cut by some 40 per cent next year as the government is pulling resources for the national and presidential elections. As such, marketing programmes will be focused on markets with a strong economy and demonstrating good growth this year.

### ARRIVALS

Earlier this year, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy set a high target of nine million arrivals and a moderate target of 8.6 million for this year. To achieve the high target, the country needs an average growth rate of 12.5 per cent per month which, given the prevailing global economic condition, is a challenge. However, according to the Ministry, the 6.4 per cent growth from January to July this year was still higher than the global tourism growth of five per cent.

Meanwhile, visitor arrivals to Indonesia between January and July this year totalled 4.9 million arrivals, 6.4 per cent higher than the 4.6 million of the same period in 2012.

Singapore, Malaysia, Australia,

China, and Japan remained the five top markets, followed by South Korea and the US. In Asia, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, India and Taiwan showed strong double-digit growth, between 14 and 20 per cent, while arrivals from major European markets rose four to 5.6 per cent.

The Middle Eastern market also showed double-digit growth in the first seven months. The Ministry attributed this to increased seat capacity by Middle Eastern airlines Etihad and Emirates, as well as increased investment interest from the Middle East in various sectors, including hotels.

The Ministry is optimistic Indonesia can at least reach the moderate arrival target of 8.6 million by year-end.



Piotr Pawinski/123RF.com

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Hotel development has been ongoing in Indonesia as property developers see opportunity in the growing Indonesian middle class and network expansion by domestic and regional airlines provide access to secondary and tertiary destinations.

While Bali and Jakarta continue to attract both international and national hotel operators, new hotels and projects are popping up in other areas. Destinations such as Tasikmalaya (West Java), Madiun (East Java), Pangkalan Bun (Central Kalimantan) and Pekalongan and Cilacap (Central Java) had not been in the radar of the hotel chains some five years ago, until now.

Based on the figures in 2012 as well as projections for 2014 and 2015, there seems to be an oversupply of rooms in major destinations including Jakarta, Bali, Surabaya, Bandung and Jogjakarta. STR Global data showed average occupancies in these destinations between January and July this year were between 62 and 69 per cent. While average occupancies of Jogjakarta and Surabaya went up

slightly, those of Jakarta, Bali and Bandung fell.

However, the hotels seemed to have managed to increase their room rates to between 6.5 and 16.5 per cent, with the exception of Jogjakarta, whose rates dropped a slight 0.7 per cent.

Hoteliers, however, remain optimistic that the market will grow

despite the apparent oversupply of rooms. In fact, in a hotel development conference earlier this year, HVS China and South-east Asia chairman, David Ling, projected Indonesia would need 800 more hotels with a total of 100,000 rooms around the country in the next decade to meet potential growth in domestic and international tourists.

### No. of mid- to upper-scale rooms

	2012	2014 projection	2015 projection
Jakarta	34,000	39,500	42,800
Bali	40,500	44,000	47,800
Surabaya	6,700	8,100	8,400
Bandung	8,600	9,200	9,400
Jogjakarta	4,400	4,700	5,200

### Average room rate in January-July 2013

Jakarta	1.1 million rupiah (US\$95)
Bali	1.4 million rupiah
Jogjakarta	595,371 rupiah

Source: STR Global

### % year-on-year change in average occupancy rate in January-July 2013

Jakarta	-4.3
Bali	-7.9
Bandung	-5.6
Jogjakarta	+3.3
Surabaya	+1.5

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- The Regent Bali, 120 keys, 2Q
- Le Méridien Bali Jimbaran, 118 keys, 2Q

#### Archipelago International:

- Aston Cirebon Hotel & Convention Center, 200 keys, 1Q
- Aston Pluit Hotel & Residence, Jakarta, 203 keys, 1Q
- Hotel Neo Melawai, Jakarta, 88 keys, 2Q
- Aston Jember Hotel & Conference Center, 148 keys, 2Q
- The Alana Surabaya, 162 keys, 3Q
- Harper Kuta, Bali, 149 keys, 3Q
- Aston Belitung Hotel, Bangka Belitung, 202 keys, 4Q
- Aston Jimbaran Hotel & Convention Center, Bali, 268 keys, 4Q
- Aston Kupang Hotel & Convention Center, NTT, 179 keys, 4Q
- The Grove Suites by Aston, Jakarta, 151 keys, 4Q
- Quest Hotel Surabaya, East Java, 135 keys, 4Q

#### Best Western International:

- Best Western Grand Palace Kemayoran, Jakarta, 156 keys, 2Q
- Best Western Premier Sunset Road Kuta, Bali, 274 keys, 2Q
- Best Western Makassar Beach, 156 keys, 2Q
- Best Western Coco, Palu, 126, 2Q

#### Accor:

- Grand Angkasa Medan, 266 keys, 1Q

- The Royal Surakarta Heritage Solo, 150 keys, 2Q
- Novotel Banjarmasin, 198 keys, 2Q
- The Kuta Beach Heritage Bali, 149 keys, 2Q
- The Amarterra Villas Bali Nusa Dua, MGallery, 38 keys, 2Q
- Ibis Jakarta Senen, 155 keys, 2Q
- The Hills Bukittinggi, 101 keys, 2Q

#### Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts:

- Hotel Santika Depok, 122 keys, 3Q
- Hotel Santika Premiere Gubeng - Surabaya, 252 keys, 4Q
- Hotel Santika Premiere Bintaro, Tangerang Selatan, 167 keys, 4Q

#### Dafam Hotels:

- Grand Dafam Banjarbaru, 152 keys, 4Q
- Hotel Dafam Pekanbaru, 107 keys, 4Q

#### Parador Hotels & Resorts:

- Atria Hotel & Conference Malang, 175 keys, 4Q
- Ara Hotel Paramount Serpong, Tangerang, Jakarta, 136 keys, 4Q

#### Swiss-belhotel International:

- Swiss-Belhotel Cirebon, 182 keys, 4Q
- Swiss-Belinn Legian, Bali, 126 keys, 4Q
- Swiss-Belinn Malang, 203 keys, 4Q
- Swiss-Belinn Manyar, Surabaya, 149 keys, 4Q
- Swiss-Belinn Springhill, Kemayoran, Jakarta, 158 keys, 4Q

#### Tauzia Hotel management:

- Harris Hotel Tuban - Bali (extension), 86 keys, 4Q

- Harris Hotel Raya Kuta, Bali, 80 keys, 4Q

### 2014

#### Archipelago International:

- Grand Aston Tunjungan, Surabaya, 316 keys
- Aston Priority Simatupang, Jakarta, 296 keys
- Aston Gajah Mada, Jakarta, 176 keys
- Aston Sentul, Bogor, 220 keys
- Aston Titanium Cijantung City Hotel, Jakarta, 221 keys
- Aston Pekalongan City Hotel, Central Java, 100 keys
- The Alana Solo, 251 keys
- The Alana Yogyakarta, 268 keys
- Harper Mangkubumi, Yogyakarta, 115 keys
- Harper Perintis, Makassar, 159 keys
- Harper Juanda, Samarinda, 175 keys
- Quest Hotel Balikpapan, 79 keys
- Quest San Denpasar, Bali, 180 keys

#### Dafam Hotels:

- Hotel Dafam Rio, Bandung, 35 keys
- Hotel Dafam Kayun Surabaya, 150 keys


#### Parador Hotels & Resorts:

- Ara Hotel Yogyakarta, 153 keys, 4Q

#### Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts:

- Hotel Santika Radial, South Sumatra, 153 keys
- Hotel Santika Pekalongan, Central Java, 97 keys
- Hotel Santika Rawamangun, Jakarta, 144 keys





8am: Catching a glimpse of local folks, from an ancient village built on stilts

1pm: Exchanging stories with the locals,  
sampling food so full of flavour

5pm: Sitting on the pier with the village cat,  
watching the skies as the sun sets

BINTAN RESORTS. MY DAY DONE MY WAY.

Penyengat Island, Bintan

Located south of Bintan Island, the charming Malay fishing village of Penyengat Island truly reflects Bintan as a place of culture and history. Visit this 18th century village or discover the 100-year-old Banyan Tree Temple in nearby Senggarang – all here, in Bintan Resorts.

For more information, visit [www.bintan-resorts.com](http://www.bintan-resorts.com), email us at [bintan@bintan-resorts.com](mailto:bintan@bintan-resorts.com) or call us at +65 6389 3535.

**BiNTAN**  
**ReSORtS**

- Hotel Santika TB Simatupang, Jakarta, 154keys
  - Hotel Santika Yos Sudarso, Jakarta, 160 keys
  - Hotel Santika Solo, Central Java, 164 keys
  - Hotel Santika Sunset Road, Bali, 103 keys
  - Hotel Santika Premiere Hayam Wuruk, Jakarta, 232 keys
  - Hotel Santika Serpong, Tangerang, 291 keys
  - Hotel Santika Premiera Serpong, Tangerang, 198 keys
- Swiss-Belhotel International:**
- Swiss-Belresort Watu Jimbar, Sanur, Bali, 312 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Lagoi Bay, Bintan, 190 keys
  - Ciputra World Surabaya, 212 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Makassar, 234 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Pangkalpinang, Bangka, 120 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Petitenget, Bali, 88 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Serpong, Jakarta, 150 keys
  - Swiss-Belresort Pecatu, Bali, 197 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Airport, Jakarta, 130 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Pontianak, 257 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Jambi, Sumatra, 120 keys
  - Swiss-Belresort Tanjung Benoa, Bali, 278 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Rasuna Epicentrum, Jakarta, 324 keys
  - Swiss-Belhotel Darmo, Surabaya, 239 keys
- Tauzia Hotel Management:**
- Yello Hotel Seminyak, Bali, 95 keys, 1Q
  - Yello Hotel Benoa, Bali, 120 keys, 3Q
  - Yello Hotel Arcade, Bali, 150 keys, 4Q
  - YELLO Grand Dadap City – Cengkareng, Jakarta, 264 keys, 1Q
  - YELLO Hotel Embong Sawo – Surabaya, 160 keys, 3Q
  - YELLO Hotel Jemur Sari – Surabaya, 150 keys, 3Q
  - HARRIS Resort Puncak – Jakarta, 146 keys, 2Q
  - Harris Hotel Kuta Galeria, Bali, 174 keys, 1Q
  - Harris Hotel Seminyak, Bali, 231 keys, 1Q
  - Harris Hotel Cokroaminoto Bali, 87 keys, 2Q
  - Harris Hotel Sanur, Bali, 80 keys, 4Q
  - HARRIS Hotel Gubeng – Surabaya, 160 keys, 2Q
  - HARRIS Hotel Skyline – Surabaya, 262 keys, 3Q
  - Tijili Resort - Label Preference, Bali, 121 keys, 3Q
  - Rumah Lewih - Label Preference, Bali, 67 keys, 4Q
  - Worldhotels Balangan, Bali, 76 keys, 3Q

## AIR ACCESS

In the international sector, Garuda Indonesia this year started twice-daily Medan-Penang flights, four-times-weekly Surabaya-Singapore, and daily Denpasar-Brisbane and Jakarta-Perth. Through a codeshare agreement with Etihad Airways, the airline added services to Frankfurt, Brussels, Milan, Dusseldorf, Munich and Bahrain.

In the domestic sector, the airline also added 17 new routes in line with the arrival of 24 new aircraft this year. Some of the new routes are Medan-Padang, Padang-Pekanbaru, Medan-Batam, Medan-Palembang, Batam-Pekanbaru, Jakarta-Bengkulu, Jakarta-Tanjung Pandan, Denpasar-Bandung, Surabaya-Kupang and Medan-Pekanbaru.

The airline has also opened Medan as its fourth hub after Jakarta, Denpasar and Makassar. It has deployed five aircraft in Medan and currently serves Batam, Padang and Palembang from Medan.

Meanwhile, Tigerair Mandala launched a Jakarta-Hong Kong service four times weekly in July and Surabaya-Bangkok in August; while Jetstar started its four-weekly Perth-Lombok flights in September.

SilkAir also expanded its

Indonesian network with the launch of thrice-weekly Singapore-Semarang and Singapore-Makassar flights.

AirAsia too increased its Lombok-Kuala Lumpur and Denpasar-Perth flights from four times weekly to daily, and reopened the Denpasar-Darwin service for four times weekly.

Lion Group has launched its full-service airline subsidiary, Batik Air, initially operating Boeing 737-900ERs and serving domestic routes, while its sister airline, Malindo Air, has started serving daily Kuala Lumpur-Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur-Bali flights from September.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

The long-anticipated Medan's Kuala Namu Airport opened in July. The airport is the second biggest in Indonesia after Soekarno-Hatta Jakarta. It has capacity for nine million passengers and there is plan for further development in a later stage to boost capacity up to 16 million passengers a year.

In Bali, Ngurah Rai International Airport underwent an US\$250 million expansion of its passenger terminals and has grown its capacity from seven

million to 25 million passengers a year. The city also developed its first toll road to ease the traffic. The 12.7 km toll road was built over Benoa Bay and the mangrove forests, providing panoramic views of the surroundings. It connects the airport, Nusa Dua and Benoa.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY – JAKARTA

### Best time to visit

June and July, when events such as Jakarta Great Sale, Jakarta Fair, as well as culinary, contemporary and traditional festivals take place to celebrate the city's anniversary on June 22.

### Tipping culture

The service charge applies at major hotels and restaurants; otherwise tipping is expected.

### Public transportation

Metred taxis can be flagged off the street, but hiring by phone or queuing for one at a hotel or shopping mall will ensure more reliable services. The TransJakarta bus service is a good choice when one is in a hurry to avoid traffic jams.

### One sound advice

Eating in public during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan is frowned upon.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy  
Website: [www.budpar.go.id](http://www.budpar.go.id)

Director of international promotion, Nia Niscaya  
Tel: (62-21) 383-8309  
Fax: (62-21) 386-0628  
Email: [nia\\_niscaya@yahoo.com](mailto:nia_niscaya@yahoo.com)

Director of MICE and special interest tourism marketing, Rizki Handayani  
Tel: (62-21) 383-8300  
Fax: (62-21) 344-9268  
Email: [rizha\\_jr@yahoo.co.id](mailto:rizha_jr@yahoo.co.id)

### Travel trade associations

Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies, Chairman, Asnawi Bahar  
Tel: (021) 759-000-94/95  
Fax: (021) 750-7537  
Website: [www.asita.org](http://www.asita.org)

Indonesia Ticketing Agents Association Chairman, Elly Hutabarat  
Tel: (62-21) 3199-0535/0531  
Fax: (62-21) 3199-0549  
Website: [www.astindo.org](http://www.astindo.org)

Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association, Chairman, Yanti Sukamdani  
Tel: (62-21) 2555-8980  
Fax: (62-21) 2555-8981  
Website: [www.phrionline.com](http://www.phrionline.com)

# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

Many villages in Indonesia still preserve their culture and traditions and allow foreign tourists to observe and take part in their everyday activities. Village tourism has been developed to help the local people – who used to survive through environment-damaging activities such as wood cutting, coral and fish bombing – earn a living.

Staying in the locals' homes, taking part in their activities and buying souvenirs from them directly contribute to the local economy. Tourists can also help by sharing expertise such as product packaging, simple marketing and book keeping skills.

Some 'tourism villages' include Desa Wisata Pentingsari, Brayut, Sambi, and Tembi in Jogjakarta (website: [www.desawisatasleman.wordpress.com](http://www.desawisatasleman.wordpress.com)); Pemuteran Village and Menjangan Island in Bali; and Rantih Village in Sawahlunto, West Sumatra.

In Bali, non-profit organisations

such as Indecon (website: [www.indecon.or.id](http://www.indecon.or.id)) and the Karang Lestari Coral Restoration Foundation (c/o Tamansari Resort, websites: [www.tamansaribali.com](http://www.tamansaribali.com); [www.biorockbali.webs.com](http://www.biorockbali.webs.com)) help develop sustainable tourism and create CSR programmes with the villagers.

Travel company Dewatha Sakti Tour & Travel Yogyakarta (website: [www.dewathasaktitours.com](http://www.dewathasaktitours.com)) organises tours to Kinahrejo Village, which was ruined by Mt Merapis eruption in 2010. There, the locals will take tourists to the spots that used to be their home. Other programmes include tree planting and helping the locals make farming tools.

Similarly, Bali Prana Travel & Leisure (website: [www.balinagasari.com](http://www.balinagasari.com)) and DMC Bali Plus offer tailor-made CSR programmes.

## FAMILY FUN

Integrated beach resort Lagoi Bay (website: [www.lagoibaybintan.com](http://www.lagoibaybintan.com)) in the northern shores of Bintan

Island, when fully completed, will offer a variety of resorts, leisure and lifestyle activities for all in the family.

Air Adventures Flying Club Bintan opened in November and is an ultra-light aircraft ride centre and flying school. Seasoned pilots and novices alike will be able to undergo flight training or go on introductory flights on board a fully equipped two-seat amphibious aircraft operating out of an inland lake.

Luxury resort The Sanchaya is expected to open in February 2014. It will offer nine suites and 19 one to four-bedroom villas, an infinity pool, an all-day dining room, a BBQ restaurant and a salon combining a wine, cheese and cigar lounge.

Meanwhile, Plaza Lagoi, a shopping mall slated to open in April 2014, will boast a ferry check-in facility that allows easy luggage check-in and boarding pass collection, so families will be free to enjoy the shops and other facilities. It will also have a food court overlooking the sea and offering a



Bintan Resorts, Lagoi Bay

Lagoi Bay in Bintan Island

variety of cuisine.

Come 2H2014, families can also enjoy AdvenTreez, a new canopy adventure trail in the rainforests, and a four-wheel drive motorcross facility and driving academy. Other new resorts and retail clusters are expected to come on-stream progressively in 2014 and 2015.

### NIGHTLIFE

The night is alive in many places in Indonesia. Bali and Jakarta have an abundance of pubs and discos to choose from. In Bali, there are the SOS Roof Top Lounge and Bar in Seminyak, Wine House in Kerobokan, Ku De Ta, Su's Bar, or Sky Garden, just to name a few. A new place to try is Mejekawi, a tasting kitchen and laboratory concept by Ku De Ta.

In southern Jakarta, Blok M and Kemang are popular nightlife areas with many restaurants, pubs and bars frequented by expatriates and locals alike. In the business district areas of central Jakarta, the X2 Club, Red Square, Hard Rock Café, and Cazbar are some of the places to check out.

Jogjakarta, Solo, and Makassar offer night-out culinary hunt where tourists can find local specialties and seafood sold at street-side stalls, which open only at night. Check out Malioboro Street in Jogjakarta and Losari Beach in Makassar.

Family fun at night can be derived from Batu Night Spectacular at Batu, near Malang, East Java; Night Safari at Bali Safari Marine Park (website: [www.balisafarimarinepark.com](http://www.balisafarimarinepark.com)); and Taman Safari Indonesia at Cisarua, Bogor (website: [www.tamansafari.com](http://www.tamansafari.com)).

### SHOPPING

Jakarta has more than 170 shopping malls within the city and in outskirts areas. With the lack of public spaces, shopping malls have become the recreational hubs for the locals.

The malls vary from those catering for middle-market shoppers to the luxury ones housing top national and international brands. They also provide a wide range of eating places and entertainment facilities for children.

One of the new additions to the city is Lotte Shopping Avenue (website: [www.lotteshoppingavenue.co.id](http://www.lotteshoppingavenue.co.id)), which opened last June as part of the Ciputra World Mega Superblock development on Jalan Dr Satrio, better known as Casablanca area. It has brought new things like Lotte Duty Free, the first such store



The top of Mt Rinjani in Lombok Island

in the area, as well as the first Uniqlo store.

Jalan Dr Satrio also houses other malls, which are quite new, such as the upmarket Kota Kasablanka (website: [www.kotakasablanka.co.id](http://www.kotakasablanka.co.id)) and Kuningan City (website: [www.kuningancity.com](http://www.kuningancity.com)).

Travellers looking for handicrafts should head to SMESCO Indonesia (website: [www.smescoindonesia.com](http://www.smescoindonesia.com)) located at the UKM Gallery building. It showcases various handicrafts representing the best and latest innovative products from all over Indonesia.

For more exclusive and upmarket Indonesian products, Alun-Alun Indonesia (website: [www.alunalunindonesia.com](http://www.alunalunindonesia.com)) at Mall of Indonesia is one of the places to go. Tanah Abang market is famous for its bulk clothing shopping, while Thamrin City (website: [www.thamrincity.co.id](http://www.thamrincity.co.id)) is known for batik and the latest fashion of Muslim wear.

### SPECIAL INTEREST

An array of special activities abound in Indonesia, such as trekking at Mt Rinjani in Lombok (website: [www.rinjanitrekkingcenter.com](http://www.rinjanitrekkingcenter.com)), Kelimutu Crater Lake in Flores or Mt Tambora in Sumbawa; snorkeling, diving and underwater photography in Bunaken, North Sulawesi (website: [www.north-sulawesi.org/diving.html](http://www.north-sulawesi.org/diving.html)), Wakatobi in South-east Sulawesi (website: [www.wakatobi.com](http://www.wakatobi.com)) or Raja Ampat in Papua.

Flores Exotic Tours (website: [www.floresexotictours.com](http://www.floresexotictours.com)) takes tourists to the remote areas in Flores, such as trekking in Komodo Island, visiting the Liang Bua prehistoric habitation cave, horse riding and trekking in Mbalata (Ruteng), cycling as well as photography tours.

For a moderate cycling adventure, Asia World Indonesia (website: [www.asiaworldindonesia.com](http://www.asiaworldindonesia.com)).



Anusorn Sanaphanthu/123RF.com

com) has a one-day Batukaru and Jatiluwih, Bali cycling tour with the Jatiluwih rice terraces as a highlight.

Incito Tour (website: [www.incitoprime.com](http://www.incitoprime.com)) offers bird-watching tour in Sulawesi, *ikat* weaving in East Nusa Tenggara islands, while Smailing Tour (website: [www.smilingtour.co.id](http://www.smilingtour.co.id)) offers a customised photography tour and lesson with a professional photographer as well as a culinary tour with a celebrity chef. Multi Holiday (website: [www.multiholiday.net](http://www.multiholiday.net)) also customises photography tours to places such as Raja Ampat and Mount Bromo.

### WELLBEING

Massage techniques, scrubs and traditional medicines are deeply rooted in Indonesia's culture and traditions and passed on from generation to generation by many ethnic groups in the country.

Prominent Indonesian cosmetic producers have their own range of spa products based on the Indonesian heritage. Martha Tilaar's Dewi Sri Spa (website: [www.dewisrispa.com](http://www.dewisrispa.com)) and Mustika Ratu's Taman Sari Royal Heritage Spa (website: [www.tamansarispa.com](http://www.tamansarispa.com)) both have their own day spas, but their products and treatments are widely used by hotel spas in Indonesia and overseas.

Mandara Spa (website: [www.mandaraspa.com](http://www.mandaraspa.com)), which started business in Bali and now operates in resorts and hotels not only in Asia but as far as the US, has Balinese/Asian products and treatments on at least one-third of its spa menu.

Some of the Bali spa suppliers and venues are listed in Bali Spa & Wellness Association's website, [www.balispawellness-association.org](http://www.balispawellness-association.org). Among the new ones are the rooftop spa at Rimba Jimbaran Bali (website: [www.rimbajimbaran.com](http://www.rimbajimbaran.com)) and the Heavenly Spa by Westin at The Westin Resort Nusa Dua Bali (website: [www.westin nusaduabali.com](http://www.westin nusaduabali.com)). The latter offers water treatment facilities including thermal hydro pools, Himalayan salt saunas and steam rooms.

Spa treatments enjoyed by the whole family can be found at Jiwa Spa at Hilton Bandung (website: [www.hilton.com/Bandung](http://www.hilton.com/Bandung)), which has a special menu for kids aged seven to 12.

*Compiled by Mimi Hudoyo, with additional reporting by Kathy Neo  
All information is correct at press time*



Andarmansse/123RF.com

Underwater in Anemone, Bunaken

# Laos

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Noppakun Wiropart/123RF.com



Nong Khiaw river in northern Laos



Josef Muellek/123RF.com

Laos' tourism industry is in a healthy position in terms of arrivals. *Visit Laos Year 2012* saw more than three million foreign visitors come to the landlocked South-east Asian nation for the first time, a number which is expected to climb higher in 2013.

However, travel specialists say the industry is lacking strong leadership at the national level, a direct consequence of the Lao National Tourism Administration merging into the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism in 2011. Since then Lao tourism – the second income generator for the economy after mining – has been without coherent policy development or the launching of any significant strategies and campaigns, hampering growth.

The strength of Laos' offerings was demonstrated by the European Council on Tourism and Trade naming the country World's Best Tourist Destination 2013 and Favourite Cultural Destination 2013. Experts say Laos also has the potential to become Asean's leading ecotourism destination if the industry consolidates

its products and improves communication with the outside world – but this is unlikely to be achieved without clear national leadership and policy direction.

Meanwhile, infrastructure remains poor in many parts of the country, with large areas lacking electricity and only connected by dirt roads. While this helps preserve the traditional lifestyle, it also hampers sustainable tourism development and the benefits that tourist dollars can bring to local communities. As such, Luang Prabang and Vientiane will remain the main tourism destinations visited by most tourists, with only the more adventurous travelling further afield to destinations such as Pakse, the Plain of Jars and Si Phan Don.

### ARRIVALS

Tourism arrivals to Laos grew 22 per cent year-on-year in 2012, according to Tourism Development Department, while tourism revenue increased from US\$406.2million to US\$513.5million. The tourism ministry is targeting 3.58m for 2013. Arrivals topped 1.9m from January to June, according to PATA. Identifying key trends is a

difficult task as the country's tourism industry has grown in fits and spurts. Since 1990, arrivals have increased more than 235 times from 14,400 to more than 3.3 million. Key milestones were 2009 and 2012 when arrivals for the first time topped two and three million respectively.

What can be said is interregional travel is becoming increasingly important. Tourists from Asean formed the largest group of travellers coming to the country, representing four-fifths of total arrivals with 2.7 million visitors in 2012, up 24 per cent on the previous year. This is more than compensating for slower growth from traditional Western source markets.

Thailand accounted for almost 60 per cent of foreign visitors to the country in 2012, followed by Vietnam and China 200,000. South Korea was the most significant growth market with a 55 per cent rise, pushing it slightly past the US which only grew seven per cent from the previous year. The vast majority of international tourists were either FITs or groups organised by international travel operators, with only a small proportion securing the services of local operators. This category posted good year-on-year growth in 2012.

#### 2012 figures

Total arrivals	3.3 million
Total revenue	US\$513.5 million
Average length of stay:	
overall	4.6 days
international	7.2 days
domestic	2 days

#### International arrivals

2012	50,754
2011	36,040

Source: Tourism Development Department

#### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

##### 2013

- Hotel ibis Vientiane Nam Phu, 64 keys, 3Q
- Landmark Mekong Riverside Hotel, Vientiane, 200 keys, 4Q
- Lanith Luang Prabang, Luang Prabang, 4 keys, 4Q
- Vansana Luang Prabang Hotel, Luang Prabang, 43 keys, 4Q

##### 2014

- U Luang Prabang, Luang Prabang 50 keys, 4Q



Patuxai monument in Vientiane

#### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

The most recent official occupancy figures date from 2011. They showed marketwide occupancy at 56 per cent, the same as the previous year and slightly higher than 54 per cent in 2009. Given the consolidation in the number of properties and rooms in the market and the substantial increase in arrivals, occupancy should have increased during 2012 and this year.

Three key factors continue to have a negative effect on the sector's development. Perhaps the most significant is that many hotel investors still only view Laos as a two-destination country: Vientiane for business and Luang Prabang for leisure and heritage tourism. That means most new properties are being built in those cities. Improving infrastructure across the country and providing incentives to build hotels in other destinations could help stimulate supply elsewhere, but this would first require tourism authorities to play a more active role.

The accommodation sector is also highly dispersed, according to tourism experts on the ground in Laos, with a plethora of small guesthouses and low-rated hotels and relatively few higher-end properties and quality boutique resorts. Finally, heavy seasonal swings leave most hotels near empty in low season (April-September) and full during high season (October to March).

There are no sector-wide reliable figures for average room rates or RevPAR in Laos. However, some travel specialists estimate average room rates of more than US\$100 in Luang Prabang and around US\$80 in Vientiane, however, this figure would be significantly lower if guesthouses are taken into account.

#### Overall supply

	2012	2011
Total no. of rooms	35,857 (-5.1%)	37,801
Total no. of properties	2,030 (-17.9%)	2,473

Source: Lao National Tourism Administration; PATA



Buddhist monks on Vientiane's streets

### AIR ACCESS

Six foreign carriers – Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, Vietnam Airlines, AirAsia, Jin Air, and China Eastern – currently serve Laos with scheduled flights, accounting for just under half of the country's air capacity. The government-owned Laos Airlines and private Lao Central Airlines handle the rest.

Laos Airlines carried 658,252 passengers in 2012, up 19.2 per cent year-on-year. The airline plans to expand its fleet of 14 aircraft with the addition of two Airbus A321s and two more ATR72-600s in 2015. It also plans to launch daily flights to Seoul, Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City in the near future.

Capacity increased significantly between October 2011 and January 2013, when the number of weekly domestic and international seats increased from 28,000 to 58,000, according to Centre for Aviation. This saw Laos shake off its position as Asean's smallest aviation market as its weekly capacity exceeded Brunei's by 17,000 seats. Much of this growth was due to the arrival of two Airbus A320s in November 2011 at Laos Airlines.

Analysts at Centre for Aviation

believe the country's aviation sector is in for more rapid growth, which will be catalysed by the newly opened terminal at Luang Prabang International Airport.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

#### Thai-Laos Friendship Bridge

The fourth Thai-Laos Friendship Bridge, which spans the Mekong River and connects Chiang Khong in Thailand with Huay Xai in Laos, is finally set to open in December. Several past deadlines for completion were missed, but reports on the ground say the 630m long and 15m wide construction has been completed, as have four-lane highways connecting the nearby towns on both sides of the river. The bridge will not only help support an increased number of overland tourists and cross-border trade, but it is also a key piece of the North-South Economic Corridor, a road route which will eventually connect Yunnan in China with Singapore.

#### Lanith Luang Prabang

Lao National Institute of Tourism

Hospitality (Lanith) opened Lanith Luang Prabang in November. The four-room lodge features meetings facilities suitable for groups of up to 36 and a 60-seat restaurant called The Balcony, where Luxembourgish Chef Pit Wanderscheid crafts seasonal dishes with herbs and vegetables grown in the property's garden. Also, as part of the broader joint venture between Luxembourg and Laos, the lodge and restaurant are also used to train Lao students in the fine art of tourism and hospitality management and is part of Lanith's *Passport to Success – Go for Gold* capacity development programme. Part of the profits made help fund the programme.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

December and January are the best months to visit Vientiane as the skies are clear, rain is very unlikely and the temperature reaches 28°C during the day, but can drop to a crisp 16°C at night.

#### Tipping culture

While higher-end restaurants tend to add a service charge to bills, tipping is not widely practised. However, a small offer of thanks for good service will be much appreciated.

#### Public transportation

Public transport in Vientiane has a somewhat worn-out look about it: most of the buses, tuk-tuks, minivans and taxis have seen better days. Flagging a taxi is probably the easiest way to get around.

#### One sound advice

Touring the streets, lanes and temples by bicycle is one of the more leisurely ways to get to around the city. Rent a set of wheels from Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise, which uses the fund to help produce and fit prosthetic limbs for people injured by unexploded ordinance, a brutal hangover of the US wars in Indochina.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

Ministry of Information,  
Culture and Tourism  
Website: [www.tourismlaos.org](http://www.tourismlaos.org)

#### Travel trade associations

Lao Association of Travel Agents  
Website: [www.latalaas.org](http://www.latalaas.org)

Lao Hotel and Restaurant  
Association  
Website: [www.laohra.org](http://www.laohra.org)

Compiled by Greg Lowe

All information is correct at press time



# Insider highlights



## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Visit to Ock Pop Tok and COPE Visitor Centre

Luang Prabang and Vientiane have some excellent community projects, which are often the best way to meet locals and really get to understand the country.

In Luang Prabang, Ock Pop Tok is a textile gallery and weaving centre with an aim is to keep Laotian textile art alive for generations. Here, visitors get to appreciate a beautiful selection of locally made scarves, home textiles and accessories, observe the weaving process and also participate in classes where the local weavers impart the art of weaving and dyeing. This self-financing initiative that produces and designs textiles and handicrafts is a means of livelihood for some 200 local people.

Over in Vientiane, the extremely thought-provoking COPE Visitor Centre is surprisingly often of great interest to children. The centre's exhibits and documentary films offer visitors an insight into Laos' UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) problem and the important work undertaken to provide rehabilitation services for UXO survivors and other people with



Trekking in Phou Khao Khouay

disabilities across Laos. Donations will go towards the funding of the project.

### Trekking in protected Phou Khao Khouay

Located approximately 90km away from Vientiane, the Phou Khao Khouay region is a nature reserve nearest the capital. Diethelm works directly with the local villagers for its community-focused trekking tours, from which the money earned goes directly towards upgrading the locals' living standards. The villagers either provide services as trekking guides or sell food and handicrafts.

To reach Phou Khao Khouay, there is an adventurous trip first by car,

then by long-tail boat deep into the dry evergreen and deciduous forests that are home to large endangered animals such as sun bears, tigers and elephants.

A full-day trek with the local guide under green canopies with blooming orchids and fluttering butterflies reveals much about the beauty of this unspoilt, protected region. The trek is interspersed with a Lao-style picnic lunch, and perhaps a refreshing dip at the beautiful Tad Xay and Pha Xay waterfalls. Another highlight of the tour is a special orchid trek with a French botanical specialist to seek out the unique and beautiful orchids of the jungle, as well as visiting the village of Ban Hatkhai.

Visitors can learn about the traditional lifestyle of the friendly Lao Loum people in this village.

### Fair Trek cultural homestays and Clay School Project

In Nong Khiaw, two hours north of Luang Prabang, Diethelm's partner as well as specialist trekking and adventure activity company, Tiger Trail, collaborates with the local villagers to offer a variety of trekking cum homestay programmes that help

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Fair Trek activity in Nong Khiaw





Fair Trek elephant riding

generate income for them.

The Fair Trek cultural homestay project benefits the Lao communities through controlled tourism activities in Lao homestays. The most popular trekking cum homestay is a two-day adventure trekking through amazing hilly karst landscapes towards the Khamu and Hmong villages, to gain a good understanding of the life and culture of the Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Sung people. For homestay in one of the villages, the host family will serve delicious Laotian cuisine and provide simple accommodation within a community home. Another two-day option more suitable for the energetic traveller includes elephant riding, mountain biking and kayaking through a lot of nature, before ending with a trek to a village.

Another homestay option is the Nong Khiaw Cultural Lodge in Ban Nalung village. Fully owned by the community, profits go to the village fund to improve healthcare, education and local infrastructure.

With spectacular views of the surrounding mountains, the lodge accommodates up to six people and makes a great base for day treks through rice paddy fields and pristine forests to the Khamu and Hmong villages. Pigs, chickens and ducks roam about as freely as the village children, while the adults go about their daily life weaving handicrafts and farming.

Education has become a key focus of Fair Trek initiatives, thus the

Clay School Project allows visitors an opportunity to partake in the building of a school using clay, a material that is cheap, simple and ecological. Currently, the only school in these villages is a small bamboo hut, which accommodates only small children aged between four and eight. The older children have to walk for almost two hours to the nearest secondary school. Visitors' donations will go a long way towards the construction of more schools for the villagers.

#### Elephant Village

The well-managed Elephant Village is located 15km outside of Luang Prabang, and supports the livelihood of both the villagers and elephants. The villagers earn an income by working in this village, selling food for the elephants and renting out their land (mainly forest land) as trekking routes. Laotian elephants are still working under adverse conditions in some logging camps, thus the village project aims to improve their work life. For instance, the village is strict about the working hours and conditions for the elephants. At 14.00, the elephants stop working and return to the forest for bathing, eating and resting. They also have a dedicated vet.

This is the only elephant camp around the Luang Prabang area endorsed by Diethelm. Programmes offered include a full-day excursion comprising an hour-long elephant ride combined with cycling or a visit to Tad Sae waterfalls, as well as a one- or

two-day Mahout Experience learning to ride, bathe and feed an elephant. This is an absolutely magical experience for visitors of any age.

Visitors can also stay overnight at the simple Elephant Village, or choose between the luxurious Shangri Lao Tented Camp and nearby Lao Spirit Resort. Those seeking to revive the adventures of the early explorers may embark on one of Shangri Lao's amazing expeditions to discover the region by trekking, river boating or elephant riding.

#### FAMILY FUN

##### An array of activities for children

Exciting child-friendly activities in and around Luang Prabang include jungle trekking, biking, elephant riding, kayaking, rock climbing and swimming in crystal-clear turquoise water at the waterfalls. While exploring the villages, children will also get to interact with the local kids; homestays in the villages are particularly refreshing and a great chance for cultural exchanges. Be it staying in a tented camp close to wild-roaming elephants or visiting a rescue centre for bears, all activities are operated with a high level of safety.

#### SPECIAL INTEREST

##### Textile appreciation

Luang Prabang is one of the main spots where visitors can buy hand-made fabrics and visit weaving villages. It is easy to access craft shops and

watch the locals at their incredible weaving task.

Traditionally, it is the women who weave and dye the fabrics. It is also the women, rather than the men, who proudly wear the traditional clothing. Materials used to produce clothing, carpets, bedding and even curtains are often home-grown, such as silk made from silk worms cultivated in mulberry plantations, and hemp and organic cotton planted in the cool mountain air.

Laotian textiles are an essential component of the country's cultural diversity. Home-woven textiles are used in daily life and for special ceremonies. For example, teenage girls weave textiles as their dowry. Furthermore, motifs used for Lao textiles often reveal a lot about its owner or the weaver. The ethnic group, region, purpose and marital status can be determined from examining an item. For example, the *shin*, a traditional Lao skirt, has different patterns from village to village. The Thai Lue ethnic group wears it with horizontal stripes using the *ikat* weaving technique. Symbols often used in fabrics include the *naga* (mythical snakes), butterflies, birds and elephants. While the snake symbolises fertility, the butterfly symbolises temporalness.

Diethelm organises day trips to the weaving villages for visitors keen to learn more about the local people, their lifestyle, and of course, traditional weaving techniques. One such village is the **Ban Phanom Weaving Village** on the banks of the Nam Khan River, which used to be one of the main suppliers of textiles for the Laotian royal family. The fabrics produced here contain a lot of history and the patterns have remained unchanged from the past. The villagers sell them at an affordable price and are happy to

show visitors around.

Another option for visitors is the **Living Crafts Centre**, open daily (except on national holidays) from 09.00 to 17.00. Here, visitors can watch the weavers working on traditional looms, or sign up for classes to learn about Laotian textiles. The village is only two kilometres from Luang Prabang and easily accessed by bicycle, tuk-tuk or car. Textile enthusiasts can also visit the **Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre** located at the foot of Phousi Hill at Ban Khamyong (closed on Mondays).

Quality home-made products, created according to fair-trade principles, are not cheap. They are, however, the perfect gift to take home. Diethelm recommends the **Kop Noi Export Promotion Centre** near Wat Aham and L'Etranger, the renowned Books & Tea coffee shop, for stunning fabrics. The locals in surrounding villages produce all the items for sale in this shop, and the earnings go towards ensuring a better quality of life for them. Another shop worth checking out is the **Ock Pop Tok** (see CSR and sustainability).



Smiling local tribal woman



Luang Prabang

## MD'S HOT PICK



### Special interest: morning cycling tour in Luang Prabang

Grasshopper Adventures takes visitors on a cycling tour in Luang Prabang, traversing secret back alleys and lanes to key attractions as well as areas visitors will not find on their own. Starting with a traditional Laotian coffee in one of the city's oldest coffee stalls, visit Wat Xiengtong, the most important temple in the city. Next, explore the morning markets, where the guide will explain about the unusual produce for sale. Pedal a short distance and one will be on small dirt roads outside the city, encountering traditional crafts such as saa paper making (paper flower making), wood carving and rice wine production. Next, drift downstream on a boat to the pottery villages, before finally heading to a silk weaving centre where a local expert walks visitors through the production process from the silkworm to the finished scarf. The tour ends with a delicious Laotian lunch. The biking distance is about 18km and mainly on flat tracks and small roads, with frequent stops to chat with the locals, snack, drink water and cross rivers by boat.

# Macau

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Keng Po Leung/123RF.com

Macau's dazzling cityscape in the evening



The second highest commercial bungee jump in the world from the 233m Macau Tower

Assawin Chomjit/123RF.com

Despite the continuing global economic uncertainty, Macau has done well in terms of visitor arrivals, thanks to the booming travel and tourism industry in Asia. China has remained the powerhouse, sending over 25 million visitors in 2012 and is expected to turn in another record number in 2013.

Positioning Macau as the world's centre of tourism and leisure will continue to be Macau Government Tourist Office's (MGTO) guiding principle for years to come. Realising the importance of market diversification, the NTO is employing innovative promotional techniques to explore international markets in South-east Asia and Russia. The NTO will be launching an awareness campaign in other longhaul markets and plans to promote high-speed rail tours in China to open up new market segments.

Additionally, regional cooperation within the Pearl River Delta is a must given the rising trend of multi-destination travel. Therefore, Macau also leverages its advantage as a gateway to China and forges partnership to market the region.

The city is facing new challenges

in terms of capacity, manpower shortage and training, product quality as well as stiffer regional competition. The NTO will focus on quality tourism by developing unique cultural tourism products and promoting festivals and events with new elements.

### ARRIVALS

Visitor arrivals for the first eight months of 2013 totalled 19.6 million, up 4.7 per cent year-on-year. China continues to dominate and accounts for 64 per cent of the inbound traffic.

The top 10 source markets during the period were China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the US.

Both China and South Korea recorded 11.1 and 4.7 per cent growth respectively, while arrivals from Hong Kong and Taiwan decreased by 3.9 and 10 per cent respectively. The longhaul markets did not perform well, with a year-on-year decline in visitor numbers from the US, Australia and Canada. Only the UK registered a year-on-year increase.

The destination remained a popular escape for day trips as same-day visitors

grew 7.4 per cent to 10 million.

Overnight visitors and hotel overnight guests continued to rise. Based on MGTO statistics for the first seven months, the number of two- to five-star hotel overnight guests registered a 15 per cent increase to six million. Another interesting trend is that of FITs from China who visited Macau through the Individual Visit Scheme, numbering five million and recording 15.8 per cent year-on-year growth.

In terms of arrivals through package tours, the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) showed 4.1 per cent increase year-on-year to 858,970 in July. Visitors on package tours mostly came from China, with 276,318 from Guangdong Province, followed by those from Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea. In the first seven months, total visitors from package tours totalled 5.5 million, up 12 per cent year-on-year.

UNWTO ranked Macau sixth in the top 10 destinations by total tourism receipts in 2012, after Germany, the UK, Hong Kong and Australia.

### Top 10 source markets in January-August 2013

Country	Arrivals	Market share (%)
China	12.4 million	64
Hong Kong	4.6 million	23.5
Taiwan	647,945	3.3
South Korea	312,944	1.6
Japan	186,478	1
Philippines	180,687	1
Malaysia	164,955	0.8
Thailand	162,093	0.8
Indonesia	143,293	0.7
US	115,337	0.6

### Top four longhaul markets in January-August 2013

Country	Arrivals
US	115,337
Australia	68,846
Canada	47,030
UK	38,793

### Top four source markets by package tours in January-July 2013

Country	Arrivals
China	678,810
Taiwan	58,588
Hong Kong	35,706
South Korea	26,726

Source: MGTO; DSEC



Leung Cho Pan/123RF.com

### NEW HOTEL IN 2013

- Sheraton Macao Hotel, 2,067keys, 1Q2013



Sheraton Macao

### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

The city is home to 97 hotels and guesthouses as at end-July, providing 27,759 guest rooms, up 14.5 per cent year-on-year. The debut of Conrad, Holiday Inn and Sheraton of the Cotai Central in 2012 added 5,800 new rooms, with five-star rooms comprising 66.2 per cent of the total supply.

However, the pace of new hotel development has slowed down this year with no new openings. The next wave of new supply will be in Cotai from 2016 onwards, when the new integrated resort (IR) projects are completed.

In the first seven months, the total number of hotel guests grew 14.7 per cent year-on-year, average daily rate rose 2.2 per cent and average occupancy rate dropped 2.1 percentage points. Foreign visitors comprised 71.2 per cent of the total number of overnight guests, up from 64.9 per cent.

Knight Frank Hong Kong expects Macau to remain the focal point of international hotel operators, with major new developments concentrated on Cotai Strip. As Macau's casino industry is transforming into a more-entertainment, non-gaming business base, outlook for the hotel market is positive for the long term, with expected increase in both visitor numbers and length of stay.

### Performance in January-July 2013

Total no. of rooms	27,759 (+14.5% year-on-year)
Total no. of overnight guests	6.1 million (+14.7%)
Average occupancy rate	80.5% (-2.1%)
Average daily rate	US\$179 (+2.2%)

Source: DSEC

### AIR ACCESS

Insufficient international air connections have been a stumbling block for Macau's tourism development. According to Macau International Airport Company (CAM), the city connects directly with China, Taiwan and 12 other destinations such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Charter flights from Japan and South Korea are common.

Progress has taken place slowly but surely. In 2012, new city routes such as Taichung, Busan, Chiang Mai and Danang were launched. This year, two new routes were added, involving China's Zhengzhou and Kunming. Sources say the long-awaited connection to India is expected to materialise early next year.

CAM recorded a total passenger throughput 4.5 million in 2012 of and in the first eight months this year the number reached 3.3 million, up 12.5 per cent year-on-year. Flight movements increased 18.5 per cent to more than 32,000. Projection for passenger throughput for 2013 is 4.8 million, which is still a big gap from neighbouring airports' traffic.

To cope with an increasing passenger flow, Macau International Airport (MIA) launched infrastructure improvement works such as the optimisation of baggage handling system and CCTVs. Scheduled to complete end-2013, the automatic baggage screening back-of-house will contribute to greater efficiency.

The eventual removal of the x-ray machine in check-in halls will free up a 1,800m<sup>2</sup> space for passengers. MIA also introduced a limousine service in May to provide transportation service from MIA to hotels and other destinations.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

After the lavish debut of Cotai Central in 2012, it may take another few years for the next wave of tourism developments to be completed, such as MGM's Cotai project and the revamp of theme park Macau Fisherman's Wharf.

Still, stakeholders and MGTO continue to refine the software to enhance tourists' experience. In 2012, MGTO launched a brand-new website in 15 languages and packed with new information such as shows, cultural and creative industries, and family fun.

For MICE, Casa Garden is the latest historical venue to stage private events. Built in 1770 to accommodate a wealthy Portuguese, it is now the headquarters of the Macau delegation of the Orient Foundation. Event planners need to seek approval from Orient Foundation for usage of the venue.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

Autumn and winter (October to February), as the weather is pleasantly cool.

### Tipping culture

Not a must, but visitors may tip to reward good service

### Public transportation

Buses and taxis are very affordable but do bear with traffic jams during peak hours.

### One sound advice

Smoking is prohibited in public areas, such as restaurants, hotels, karaoke bars, cinemas, schools and universities, maritime terminals and airports, museums, as well as public parks and gardens.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

Macau Government Tourist Office  
Tel: (853) 2831-5566  
Tourist hotline: (853) 2833-3000  
Fax: (853) 2851-0104  
Website: [www.macautourism.gov.mo](http://www.macautourism.gov.mo)

Macau Business Tourism Centre  
Tel: (853) 8396-3029  
Fax: (853) 2872-7310  
Website: [www.macautourism.gov.mo](http://www.macautourism.gov.mo)

#### Travel trade associations

Association of Macao Tourist Agents  
Email: [amta@macau.ctm.net](mailto:amta@macau.ctm.net)

Macau Hotel Association  
Email: [mhacmo@macau.ctm.net](mailto:mhacmo@macau.ctm.net)  
Website: [www.macauhotel.org](http://www.macauhotel.org)

PATA Macau SAR Chapter  
Website: [www.macautourism.gov.mo/patamacauchapter/](http://www.macautourism.gov.mo/patamacauchapter/)



Shoppes at Cotai Central

# Insider highlights



DreamWorks' official launch ceremony at Sands Cotai Central

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

CSR and sustainability opportunities for visitors are limited. The Institute for Tourism Studies campus comprises a 20-room training hotel and a restaurant. The restaurant serves as a training unit for the hotel's culinary students and is open to the public for lunch and dinner. There is no better way to support the school and its trainees by paying a visit and giving feedback to their products and services [tel: (853) 8598-3077/3076; email: fbreservation@ift.edu.mo].

## FAMILY FUN

The family-friendly DreamWorks Experience was launched this summer at Sands Cotai Central, featuring DreamWorks All Star Parade, a signature Shrekfast with the DreamWorks Gang! breakfast, as well as opportunities to interact with popular DreamWorks characters. In winter, DreamWorks Ice World will feature characters from DreamWorks Animation movies by talented ice carvers and craftsmen from Harbin.

In 2014, visitors to Cotai Strip Resorts Macao can look forward to a fantastic DreamWorks 3D light-and-sound show. Families staying at Sheraton Macao Hotel [tel: (853) 2882-9188; email: sheraton.macao@sheraton.com] and purchasing



Institute for Tourism Studies' training restaurant

DreamWorks Experience packages will receive a DreamWorks Experience Welcome Kit, featuring Sheraton Kids Passport, welcome kit bag, neck pouch, photo frame and a tumbler with DreamWorks Experience-themed colouring sheet.

## NIGHTLIFE

Macao's nightlife is famous for its variety and diversity, with plenty of bars, restaurants and discos open all night long and dazzling world-class shows.

In April, the reputable Taboo show produced by Franco Dragone returned with scheduled night performances until next year [tel: (853) 8868-6767; email: showenquiry@cod-macao.com; website: www.cityofdreamsmacao.com/tc/taboo].

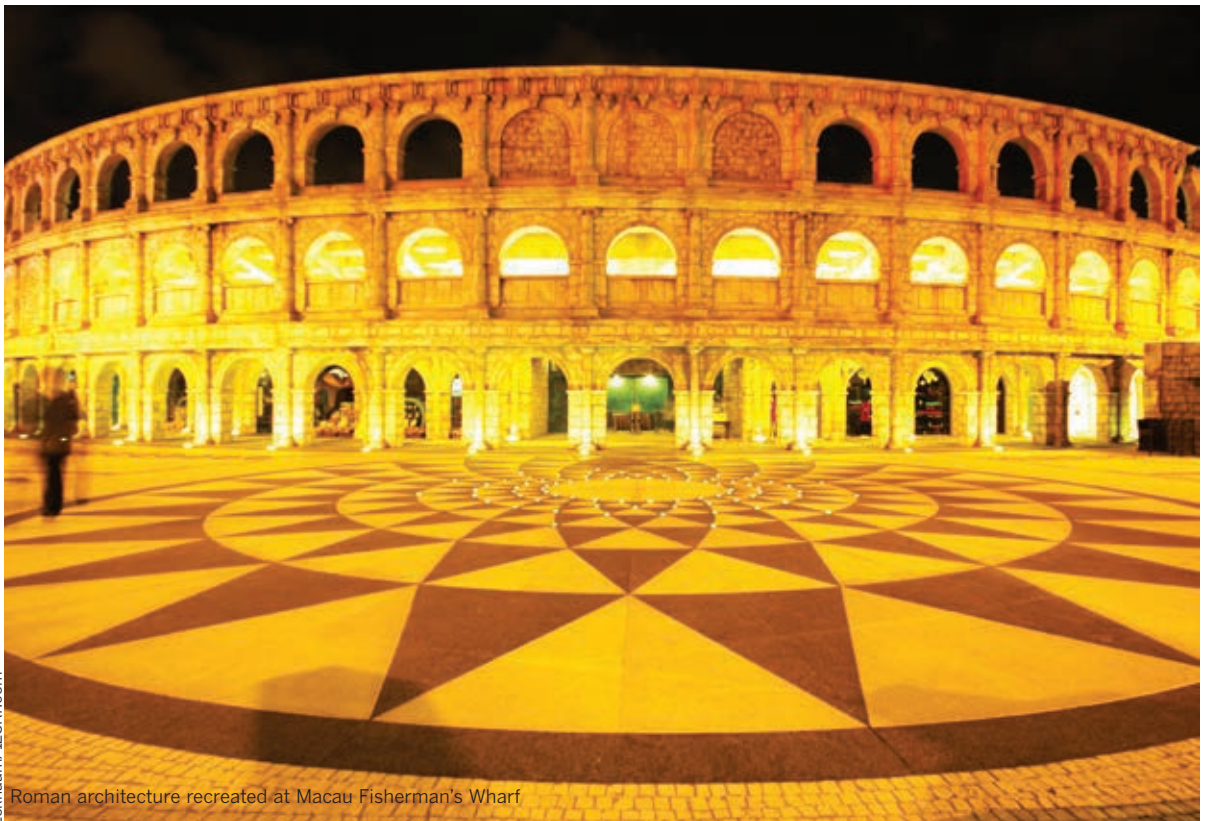
Meanwhile, an ultra-exclusive private-member club, China Rouge at Galaxy Macau, was launched last year, adding to options for night entertainment and drinks.

Visitors may want watch movies at UA Galaxy Cinema, which is Macau's newest and biggest nine-screen 3D



Eddy Galeotti/123RF.com

Shops along a street in central Macau



Leknaam/123RF.com

Roman architecture recreated at Macau Fisherman's Wharf



cineplex. This modern facility occupies nearly 16,000m<sup>2</sup> and is definitely a hotspot for night owls craving midnight screenings [tel: (853) 2314-4228; email: cityline@cityline.com.hk; website: www.galaxymacau.com].

Alternatively, visitors may go on board the Macau Harbour Cruise, departing from the historic Inner Harbour and sailing past famous local attractions [tel: (853) 2893-0012; website: www.cruisemacau.com].

On land, hop on an open-top bus at Macau Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal run by Goldspark Macau Tours (email: info@goldspark.com.hk; website: http://goldspark.com.hk), which offers two departures every night at 19.00 and 20.40. The tour starts at Macau Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, journeying past StarWorld Hotel, L'Arc New World Hotel Macau, Wynn Macau, Kun Lam statue, Sai Van Bridge, Ocean Gardens, The City of Dreams, and ending at Venetian Macao (West Wing).

## SHOPPING

Visitors are spoilt for choice shopping in Macau. In terms of luxury goods, most integrated resorts house leading international brands in their malls. The Shoppes at Cotai Central, which opened last year, added nearly 100 boutiques offering duty-free shopping experience. The mall joins Shoppes Venetian and Shoppes at Four Seasons to offer 600 stores in all.

Apart from trendy and modern commodities, visitors looking for antiques may head to Largo do Senado for collections like ancient stamps and coins. Starting from Ruins Street to Haystack Street, there are several antique and furniture shops.

For some unique shopping experience, go to Taipa Flea Market at Taipa High Street. Opened every Sunday from 11.00 to 20.00, this market comprises stalls selling items from traditional delicacies, period postcards and stamps, to lamps, jade pieces, jewellery, coins, toys and other collectibles. The district also hosts an interactive street event from 16.00 to 17.30 featuring magic, music and dance shows [tel: (853) 2833-7676/8988-4000; website: www.iacm.gov.mo].

Every December, the month-long Macau Shopping offers territory-wide discounts and activities such as lucky draws, supported by large shopping malls, retailers and many small and medium enterprises (website: www.macaushoppingfestival.org).

Finally, a trip to Macau will not be complete without buying local souvenirs, which are available at the various museums' shops.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

Macau's rich post-colonial Portuguese culture and the presence of UNESCO world heritage sites mean there is a lot to explore for history buffs. Visitors may hop on a two-hour open-top sightseeing bus equipped with an audio guide, or hire a vintage car with a tour guide [Avis Macau -Tour Machine, tel: (853) 2872-6571; email: avis@avis.com.mo; website: www.avis.com.mo].

For wine lovers, Wine Museum is an ideal place to learn more about Portuguese wine history through wine tasting and looking at the exhibits [tel: (853) 798-4108/4188; website: www.macautourism.gov.mo].

Gourmets may also take heed from the Michelin guide, which includes 62 establishments in 2012 (46 restaurants and 16 hotels).

Recently, MGTO [tel: (853) 2831-5566; email: mgto@macautourism.gov.mo; website: www.macautourism.gov.mo] has even started wooing sports enthusiasts with the launch of four walking tours: Tour of Historical Trails, setting off from Avenida da Praia Grande to Praça de Ponte e Horta; Tour of Nature and Creativity, from Kun Lam Temple to St Lazarus Church; Tour of East Meets West, from Senado Square to Maritime Museum; and Tour of Arts and Culture, from Macau Fisherman's Wharf to A-Ma Temple. Themed Step Out, Experience Macau's Communities, these routes lead explorers to the lesser-known quarters in Macau. Tour maps are available in different languages, including Chinese (traditional and simplified), English and Portuguese.

## WELLBEING

Altira Macau's spa offers a 90-minute body massage based on the ancient Chinese concept of *qi* uses a selection of gemstones chosen by the guest, for relieving stiff muscles and releasing toxins [tel: (853) 2886-8886; email: altiraspa@altiramacau.com].

Sofitel Macau At Ponte 16's So Spa with L'Occitane descended in Macau early-2013 and entices guests with its innovative multi-sensory shower and flotation bath as well as traditional Asian treatments and Hammam treatments from the Middle East. The latest modern French cosmetology techniques are all part of the So Spa experience [tel: (853) 8861-7801; email: so-spa.macao@sofitel.com].

In Cotai Strip, Grand Hyatt Macau's Isala Spa has launched a face and skin rejuvenation treatment, HydraFacial, which uses serums that specifically target skin issues including sun damage, blackheads, whiteheads, enlarged pores, brown spots, uneven skin tone, fine lines and wrinkles. There are three choices of treatment, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes [tel: (853) 8868-1193; email: macgh-isala\_spa@hyatt.com].

When Conrad Macao debuted in 2012, it rolled out Bodhi Spa, which offers aboriginal, ayurvedic and Asian spa traditions with modern touches, among other massage treatments. Its signature ayurvedic spa experience offers a choice of three levels of massage: deep, medium or light [tel: (853) 8113-6188; email: bodhispa.macao@conradhotels.com].

*Compiled by Prudence Lui  
All information is correct at press time*



# Malaysia

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

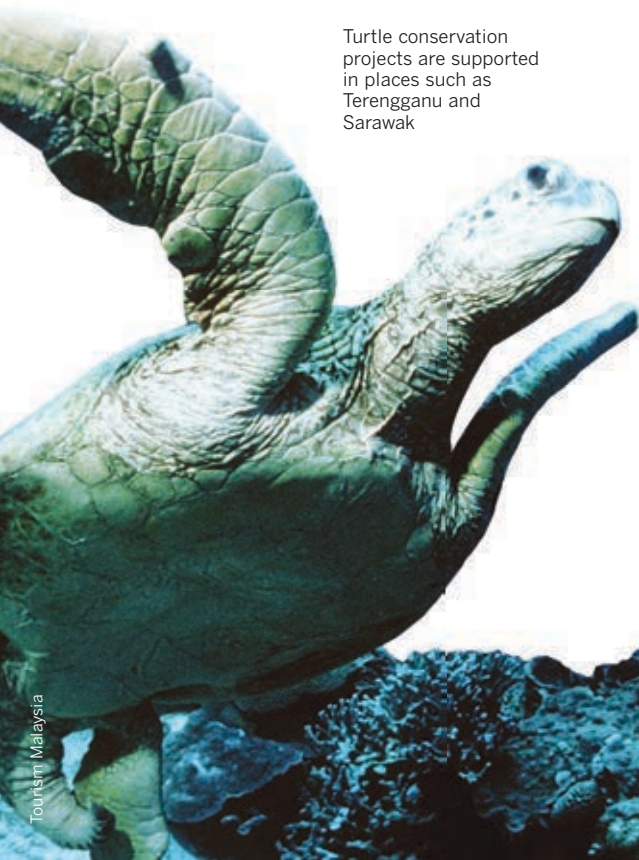
• 64

Shirley Hu, Xiao Fang / 123RF.com



Petronas Twin Towers  
in Kuala Lumpur

Turtle conservation projects are supported in places such as Terengganu and Sarawak



Tourism Malaysia

In 2012, Malaysia attracted around 25 million tourists and RM60.6 billion (US\$19.3 billion) in tourism receipts, a year-on-year increase of 1.3 per cent and the highest recorded number of arrivals to date. For this year, Tourism Malaysia has set a target of 26 million and continues to run the *Malaysia Truly Asia* campaign to demonstrate the diversity of Malaysia in terms of the racial make-up, history, cuisine, culture and tradition.

Tourism Malaysia also reopened its overseas office in Istanbul in October to oversee the Turkish, Armenian, Romanian, Azerbaijani, and Bulgarian tourist source markets to Malaysia. The office was last operational in 2009.

Meanwhile, to spread the economic benefits of tourism wider across the country, the NTO is also promoting secondary destinations beyond Kuala Lumpur, such as Penang, Langkawi, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak.

For instance, to benefit the rural communities, the government has partnered the private sector in promoting homestay programmed.

Also in November last year, There are also concerted efforts to woo travellers wishing to contribute to the community or to the preservation of wildlife in a destination. The NTO has put together 20 packages developed by local tour operators that offer volunteer opportunities at places such as turtle conservation centres, children's homes and national parks.

### ARRIVALS

Tourist arrivals totalled 12.5 million as of June this year, an increase of 7.9 per cent over the same period in 2012.

The top 10 generating markets for the first half year were Singapore, Indonesia, China, Brunei, Thailand, India, the Philippines, Japan, Australia and the UK. They accounted for 87.6 per cent of the total tourist arrivals.

Destinations that showed the biggest year-on-year growth were Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Iraq and Egypt, while China, the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia also recorded strong double-digit



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growth due to recent improvements in air links. Traditional longhaul destinations such as the UK, Germany and the Netherlands showed single-digit growth.

The depreciation of the Indian rupee against the Malaysian ringgit partly contributed to the drop in arrivals from India, which fell 4.6 per cent from 365,104 in 1H2012 to 348,309. Other destinations that recorded a deficit were Iran, Kuwait, South Africa, Thailand, New Zealand, Laos, Nigeria, South Korea, Pakistan and Oman.

#### Top 10 source markets in 1H2013

Singapore	6.3 million
Indonesia	1.2 million
China	943,756
Brunei	593,536
Thailand	581,683
India	348,309
Philippines	277,378
Japan	250,293
Australia	250,123
UK	211,286

#### Source markets with double-digit year-on-year % growth in 1H2013

Bangladesh	+45.2
Cambodia	+42.3
Nepal	+33.7
Iraq	+28.6
Egypt	+25.3
China	+24.5
Philippines	+16.5
Japan	+15.9
Indonesia	+12.1

#### Arrivals; year-on-year % growth of traditional longhaul markets in 1H2013

UK	211,286; +7.4
Germany	68,900; +6.5
Netherlands	40,194; +0.5

#### Markets with year-on-year % decline in 1H2013

Iran	-44.2
Kuwait	-13.3
South Africa	-9.3
Thailand	-8.9
New Zealand	-8.1
Laos	-5.3
India	-4.6
Nigeria	-3.3
South Korea	-3.6
Pakistan	-2.4
Oman	-0.1

Source: Tourism Malaysia



The historic Christ Church in Malacca

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

The Ministry of Tourism and Culture has estimated the room supply in Malaysia to reach 234,000 rooms by 2020, from 138,237 rooms of all star-rated categories as of May 2013.

According to Malaysian Association of Hotels' May 2013 statistics, the country has 30,261 five-star rooms and 35,080 four-star rooms.

Hotel rates in Malaysia are one of the lowest in Asia, and are expected to increase between eight and 15 per cent among three to five-star categories in 2014.

#### Total no. of rooms by star rating as of May 2013

City/state	5-star	4-star	3-star
Kuala Lumpur	10,544	7,463	4,190
Penang	2,847	4,538	1,389
Kedah	1,909	1,783	1,526
Sabah	3,061	1,840	4,538
Sarawak	1,257	2,199	3,197

#### Performance by star rating in 2012

	5-star	4-star	3-star
Average occupancy rate	70.5%	56.1%	83.3%
Average room rate	RM335 (US\$102)	RM210	RM101
RevPAR	RM236	RM118	RM84

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- Renaissance Johor Bahru Hotel, 345 keys, 2Q
- Traders Hotel Puteri Harbour, Johor, 283 keys, 2Q
- Ibis Styles Lahad Datu, 108 keys, 4Q
- Ibis Styles Ipoh, 118 keys, 4Q
- Best Western Premier The Haven, Ipoh, 100 keys, 4Q
- Heritage Ri-yaz Melaka, 355 keys, 4Q
- Best Western Premier MITC, Malacca, 300 keys, 4Q
- The Royale Bintang Penang, 180 keys, 4Q
- Dreamtel Kota Kinabalu, 160 keys, 4Q
- UCSI City Island Hotel, Kuching, 360 keys, 4Q
- Four Points by Sheraton Penang, 220 keys, 4Q
- Legoland Malaysia Hotel, 249 rooms, 1Q
- The Rice Miller Hotel & Residences, Penang, 67 keys, 2Q
- Hilton Garden Inn Hotel Kuala Lumpur, 255 keys, 2Q
- Best Western Plus Centrestage, Petaling Jaya, 331 keys, 2Q
- DoubleTree by Hilton Johor Bahru, 350 keys, 2Q
- Lexis Hibiscus, Port Dickson, 641 keys, 4Q
- Lexis Suites Penang, 222 keys, 4Q
- Austin Central Hotel Johor Bahru, 322 keys, 4Q
- The St Regis Kuala Lumpur, 208 keys and 160 residences, 4Q
- Swiss Garden Hotel & Residences Malacca, 306 hotel keys and 392 serviced apartments, 4Q

### 2014

- Best Western Shah Alam, Selangor, 91 keys, 1Q
- St Giles Hotel Penang, 435 keys, 4Q

## AIR ACCESS

New airlines that started services this year to Kuala Lumpur were Air France, Turkish Airlines, Thai Smile, Regent Airways and Philippine Airlines.

Malindo Air, a new low-cost carrier with hubs at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Subang Skypark, commenced services in March. It has a strong domestic network with flights to major cities and recently commenced its first international route to Dhaka in August. A month later, it commenced daily services from Kuala Lumpur to Denpasar and Jakarta.

AirAsia X, the longhaul arm of AirAsia, expanded its fleet size from 11 to 18 aircraft this year, after taking delivery of seven new A330s. It launched new daily services to Shanghai in February, four-weekly flights to Busan in July and four-times-weekly flights to Adelaide in October.

Malaysia Airlines also increased its capacity on many routes. The airline reinstated its Kuala Lumpur-Dubai services in August with daily flights, after the service was suspended in January 2012 as part of the airline's route rationalisation exercise.

It also reintroduced direct flights to Narita International Airport, Tokyo from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah in October. In November, services between Kuala Lumpur and Darwin were reinstated since their cessation to the northern territory of Australia in 2002. The five-weekly flights will utilise the 160-seater, B737-800 aircraft.

Meanwhile, the new low-cost carrier terminal, klia2, is scheduled to open in May 2014. It is expected to be able to handle 45 million passengers annually, three times the maximum capacity of the current airport.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

Legoland Water Park, the latest attraction at Legoland Malaysia, opened in October. Claiming to be the first in Asia and the largest in the world, it will have more than 20 water slides and over 70 Lego models among its offerings. It features slides, wade pools, rides, an interactive water-play structure as well as a Build-A-Raft River where families can build their own raft using soft Lego blocks.

It complements the dry theme park and both have separate entrances so visitors can choose to purchase one of three categories of tickets: theme park only, water park only or the combo ticket, which allows free movement between the two parks.

Then, quay-side retail lifestyle and

family entertainment complex, **Little Red Cube**, became the flagbearer of Puteri Harbour in Nusajaya and the pioneer property under the Little Red Cube brand when it was launched in June. Located at the waterfront marina of Puteri Harbour, the attraction is within walking distance to the new ferry terminal that opened in May and which offers ferry services from Batam and Singapore. It is also a 25-minute drive from Senai International Airport. Visitors enjoy two levels of retail, leisure, F&B and entertainment options, such as the newly opened Puteri Harbour Family Theme Park comprising Hello Kitty Town, Little Big Club and LAT's Place, a restaurant that brings the Malaysian cartoonist's famed village boy character to life.

Over in Selangor, Water World@i-City is a RM25 million water theme park at i-City in Shah Alam, featuring the Tornado Ride – a zero-gravity journey on a tube raft down a 48.8m water tunnel connected to a seven-storey funnel. The park is suitable for all ages, with sections designed for toddlers, teenagers, families and the elderly.

Also in i-City is another new attraction, Red Carpet, which is Malaysia's first interactive wax museum where exhibits "come to life" via voice and motion synchronisation.

Meanwhile, Bukit Gambang Resort City opened its Safari Park this year. It includes the Petting Kingdom where visitors can touch and feed animals such as alpaca, llama and guanaco, as well as a drive-through safari where visitors ride an air-conditioned tram to see wild animals from Africa, Malaysia and Australia. The park is divided into five sections, namely African Savannah, Tropical Rainforest, Australian Outback, Desert Land and Bear Mountain.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

During the fasting month of Ramadan, for good hotel rates and offers.

### Tipping culture

Tipping is usually not expected. Some establishments include a service tax, otherwise, about 10 per cent of total bill if service warrants it.

### Public transportation

One can flag a taxi off the street and commuting by bus, train and monorail services is cheap and easy.

### One sound advice

Carry small change when you use public transport.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

### NTO

Tourism Malaysia  
Email: enquiries@tourism.gov.my  
Website: www.tourism.gov.my

Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau  
Website: www.myceb.com.my

### Travel trade associations

Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents  
Website: www.matta.org.my

Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association  
Email: mitamsia@gmail.com  
Website: www.mitamalaysia.com

Malaysian Association of Hotels  
Email: info@hotel.org.my  
Website: www.hotels.org.my

Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners  
Email: enquiries@maho.org.my  
Website: www.maho.org.my

The Malaysia Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers  
Email: secretariat@maceos.com.my  
Website: www.maceos.com.my

PATA Malaysia Chapter  
Email: patamalaysia@unifi.my  
Website: www.pata.org/Chapters/6510

Compiled by S Puvaneswary  
All information is correct at press time



Sanrio Hello Kitty Town at Little Red Cube in Puteri Harbour

# Insider highlights



Mother and baby orang utans at Semenggok Orang Utan Centre

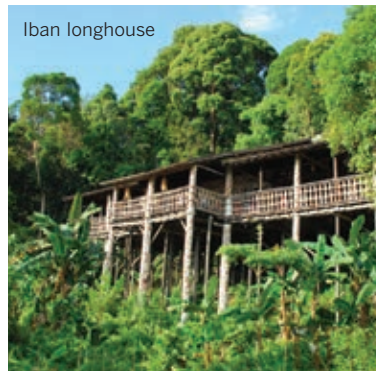
## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Heart 2 Heart orang utan conservation project

This on-day programme is a unique conservation initiative run by the Sarawak Forestry Cooperation in collaboration with Sarawak Convention Bureau. On arrival at 08.00, participants will be briefed before proceeding to carry out tasks such as cage cleaning and food preparation, among other behind-the-scene conservation works. Lunch is from 12.00 to 13.30 in Kuching City, after which participants head to the Semenggok Orang Utan Centre to observe the semi-wild orang utans which have been rescued from captivity and trained to survive in the surrounding forest reserve. The day ends at 16.00, with each participant receiving a certificate that acknowledges their contribution before departing back to Kuching.

### Iban longhouse homestay

The Ibans are the largest tribe in Sarawak dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They live in longhouses built on stilts near a river. Diethelm operates homestays for visitors to learn more about the Iban culture and experience a night or two in the jungle. Around 290km away from Kuching in the rainforest of Sarawak, board a native longboat and travel upstream for 45 minutes on the Lemanak River. Arrive at the Iban longhouse, meet the villagers and join in activities such as weaving or fishing. An Iban guide takes visitors to the rainforest to see medicinal and edible plants and fruit which the villagers use on a daily basis. After



Iban longhouse

dinner, the Ibans will sound their gongs and perform their war dance in full ceremonial regalia.

### Charity tour to Mari Mari Cultural Village

This tour starts with a drive through the countryside and passing local villages to the town of Tuaran. Over there, visit a native market with local vegetables and exotic fruit in season. The guide will advise on the purchase of items much needed for the foster home to be visited. Then stop by a pottery place where vases and jars are handmade and decorated with traditional native designs. The next stop following lunch is the Jireh Foster Home for neglected, underprivileged and abused children. The earlier purchased contributions in the form of rice, fish, poultry and vegetables as well as stationery for the children will be handed over at the home. Proceed with a brief 30 minutes ride to the Mari Mari Cultural village and learn to make fire from bamboo or partake in traditional games like the Murut Langsaran and blow pipe.

There are stalls offering local delicacies where guests get to taste herbal drinks, rice wine and cook their own chicken in a bamboo. The visit ends with a simple demonstration of traditional dances including the famous bamboo dance.

### Sea turtle adoption programme

Sea turtles have been around since the Triassic period, or even 200 million years ago. However, the breeding habits that have served these graceful swimmers well for so long are now contributing to their extinction. They are highly endangered species nowadays due to their slow reproduction rate, over-harvesting for their meat and eggs, as well as habitat destruction. The Sarawak Forestry allows tourists to actively participate in turtle conservation. This programme involves spending four days at the turtle conservation station on Pulau Talang-Talang Besar, which offers volunteers hands-on experience on sea turtle conservation work. Guests can also spend four days at the Talan-Satang National Park in Sarawak, Borneo, and adopt their very own turtle.

## FAMILY FUN

### Langkawi

Stunning turquoise sea, sandy beaches, paddy fields and hills make Langkawi a treasure trove of exciting holiday opportunities for families. Hike through one of the world's oldest rainforests, which covers more than 50 per cent of the island, while the guide points out a wide variety of birds, butterflies and other creatures. Alternatively, explore the coral reefs and mangrove swamps, or take a boat trip to one of the deserted offshore islands. Attractions wise, one of most popular is the innovative and highly informative marine aquarium of Underwater World, built to raise awareness on the importance of conserving our precious aquatic life forms. The Langkawi Bird Paradise Wildlife Park is a paradise for bird lovers, with more than 1,000 bird species flying freely around the park. Visitors interested paddy culture should visit the Rice Garden (Laman Padi) complex that is dedicated to the staple diet of Asians. Families can also take the cable car to the summit of Gunung Machincang (708m), taking in an awesome 360-degree panoramic view of the Langkawi islands, Kedah



Cable car ride to the summit of Gunung Machincang



Diving at Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park

Tourism Malaysia

and Southern Thailand. Finally, the entire Langkawi Island is a duty-free zone, making it legendary for shoppers.

### **Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**

If children were allowed to dream up and plan their own holiday, we are sure this trip would be it. Visiting Lok Kwai Zoological Park, children get to come close to the endangered orang utan, Borneo pygmy elephants, hornbills and other exotic species. Then, the Mari Mari Cultural Village takes everyone on a journey back in time to the days of the headhunters. Meet the village headman, make fire from bamboo, learn to use a blowpipe

and get one of the headhunters to draw a henna tattoo. A visit to Sabah would not be complete without having the chance to see the famous long-nosed Proboscis Monkeys. This is possible with a leisurely cruise in search of wildlife in the Klias Wetlands and Mangrove Reserve. The cruise also provides an amazing welcome by glittering fireflies among the canopies as the sun sets. Another activity, which allows one to reminisce the old colonial days, is the boarding of a North Borneo Steam Train pulled by a Vulcan's steam locomotive. Families need only to sit back and enjoy the journey 'puffing' past villages, rubber plantations and paddy fields. Finally,

what is a vacation without a day at a pristine white sandy beach? The Coral Island inside the Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park allows family-bonding time building sand castles, swimming, snorkelling or simply relaxing in paradise soaking up the sun.

### **SPECIAL INTEREST**

#### **Trekking trip to Kampong Kiding**

This exciting three-day tour fits the adventurous traveller willing to trek in humid conditions and live in primitive conditions. Day one's highlights include a two-hour trek up Mount Kiding, walks on bamboo bridges and through cultivated farmlands, and a homestay at Kampong Kiding of the local hill tribe Bidayuh. Day two involves another two-hour trek to reach Tanju Waterfall, while the final day is about packing up and bidding goodbye to the hosts before trekking back downhill for approximately 90 minutes, stopping to take photographs of the scenic surroundings along the way.

#### **Heritage walks**

Malaysia offers some of the most fascinating heritage walks in Asia. Here are four to consider.

**Kuching white Rajah trail:** Kuching is a perfect city to enjoy on foot. Walk down the streets and alleys that the three 'white kings' used to take for strolls during their 100-year reign. See beautiful colonial buildings such as the Astana, an old palace. Stop to visit the oldest Chinese temple in Sarawak,

walk to the waterfront jetty and, like the white Rajah James Brooke used to do, take a sampan across the Sarawak River to visit a small Malay village. Explore the old narrow streets of Carpenter, Gambier and India, and visit the Indian mosque.

**Kuala Lumpur heritage trail:** walk in the historic heart of Kuala Lumpur, passing many famous colonial-era buildings clustered in a compact area surrounding Merdeka Square. This tour starts and ends at the Masjid Jamek LRT Station – one of the oldest mosques in the city dating from 1907. Passing the old City Hall and High Court building, look out for the magnificent Sultan Abdul Samad Building (completed in 1897) built in a neo-Saracenic style that originated from India. The Industrial Court building, previously housing the Loh Chow Kit Emporium which opened in 1905, and the adjacent Loke Yew building are stunning art deco examples. Continuing on to Independence Square, the National History Museum (formerly Standard Chartered Bank of India, Australia, and China, the first bank to operate in Kuala Lumpur) the next stop is the Royal Selangor Club. This club

founded in 1884 was a meeting place for recreation and relaxation especially for expatriates, but it had a mixture of Chinese, Indian and Malay members as well.

**Kota Kinabalu heritage walk:** this walk combines visiting historical sites with a stroll down the oldest street in Kota Kinabalu, learning about its pre-war, post-war and post-independence eras while mingling with the locals, before ending with a stop at Museum Kopitiam (coffee shop) for a simple traditional tea break.

**Taiping Heritage Trail:** the town of Taiping is Perak's foremost historical town. Originally known as Larut, during the 1870s, the town's was known for bloody feuds among Chinese secret societies who worked at the lucrative tin mines. After peace was declared in 1874, the town changed its name to the present one. Before the founding of Kuala Lumpur, Taiping had prospered for several decades, scoring a number of firsts: first museum in the country, first English newspaper and first swimming pool. Today, it is full of wonderful heritage buildings dating from 1884 to 1931.



Old palace Astana

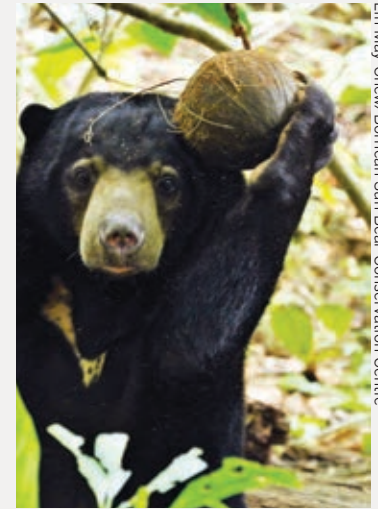
Johnmydevil/123RF.com



Sultan Abdul Samad Building

Tourism Malaysia

MD'S HOT PICK



Lin May Chew/Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre

**CSR and sustainability:  
visiting Borneo Sun Bear  
Conservation Centre**

Among the thousands of species to be found in Malaysia's large areas of unspoiled tropical forests are the sun bears. These smallest of bears make nests similar to those of the orangutans, and have strong claws for climbing trees and searching in the soil for termites and insects. While deforestation is threatening them with extinction, they are also hunted, often with the mother bears killed and the babies sold to villagers as pets. As such, the Borneo Sun Bear Conservation Centre opened in 2008 in Sepilok, Sabah to give some hope of saving the species. The centre will open its doors to the public in early 2014, making it possible for visitors to see these beautiful creatures and support a vital conservation project. Currently the centre is home to 28 rescued sun bears, many still nervous after years of confinement in small cages. Gradually the centre nurtures them back to good physical and emotional health, with the objective of reintroducing them into the wild.



# Maldives



Vladimir Ovchinnikov/123RF.com

Small tropical island in the Maldives

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The year 2012 was one of the most challenging for the Maldives' tourism, which saw a shaky first half due to political unrest that slumped growth from 17.6 per cent the previous year to 7.4 per cent.

By now, the country's tourism has recovered, although the government's plans to increase tourism taxes were shelved in 2H2013 owing to protests from the trade. The NTO is targeting 1.1 million arrivals for this year and 1.2 million for 2014.

While celebrations to mark the country's 40 years of tourism were launched in October 2012, this year, a lot of attention went into finalising the fourth five-year tourism master plan jointly drafted by the government and the trade and launched in September.

The master plan's main focus is on organising country-specific roadshows, increasing promotion and marketing spend per tourist, as well as providing more employment in resorts for locals, particularly women.

### ARRIVALS

While China continued its dominance of tourism arrivals to the Maldives despite a few hiccups in early 2012, most European markets were affected by the ongoing Euro Zone crisis. Although the market leader since tourism began in the Maldives, the continent has been losing market share over the last five years. Its market share by end-July 2013 was

49.2 per cent versus Asia's 44.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, Russia has emerged as a major source market, increasing its market share from one to seven per cent in a decade and showing good growth of 18.1 per cent. Most noteworthy was India, which registered a dramatic increase of 41.7% in the first seven months.

### Arrivals; % year-on-year change for top 10 markets

Country	January-July 2013	2012
China	179,070; +28.5	229,551; +15.6
Germany	52,636; +8.4	98,351; +8.7
UK	50,135; -8	91,776; -12.2
Russia	44,401; +18.1	66,378; +3.8
Italy	34,864; -5.6	62,782; -24.4
France	34,487; -7.7	56,775; -4.9
India	21,766; +41.7	31,721; +2.4
Switzerland	20,419; -7.4	35,457; +9.1
Japan	19,066; +4.8	36,438; +1.8
South Korea	14,123; +16	23,933; -5.3

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture

**HOTEL PERFORMANCE**

Compared with the same period in 2012, the number of accommodation properties from January to July 2013 was 251 against 221, with bed strength being 25,901 against 24,977.

The average occupancy rate showed sharp variations in the different categories, with the resorts performing much better than others. Generally, the occupancy rate of all categories rose slightly, with the except safari vessels, which dropped 5.3 per cent.

While the total number of room nights from all categories rose 8.4 per cent to 527,393 from 486,670, the average duration of stay per visitor fell marginally from 6.3 days to six days.

Average room rates also vary sharply within the same category, with three-star offerings in the range of US\$180-\$350 per night; four-star, US\$350-\$750; and five-star, US\$450-\$30,000, according to industry sources.



**NEW HOTELS  
IN 2013 AND 2014**

**2013**

- Maalifushi by COMO, Thaa Atoll, Maldives, 66 keys, 2H
- Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives, Lhaviyani Atoll, 150 keys, 2H
- The Residence Maldives, Huvadhoo Atoll, 94 keys, 2H
- Centara Ras Fushi Resort & Spa Maldives, North Male Atoll, 140 keys, 2H
- Cheval Blanc Randheli, Noonu Atoll, 45 keys, 4Q
- Velaa Private Island, Maldives, Fushivelavaru, Noonu Atoll, 50 keys, 2H

**2014**

- Finolhu, Baa Atoll, 200 keys
- Amilla, Baa Atoll, 200 keys

**Number of properties; beds for each category of accommodation**

Category	January-July 2013	January-July 2012
Resorts	100; 22,323	97; 21,899
Hotels	17; 1,515	19; 1,597
Guest houses	69; 1,011	45; 647
Safari vessels	65; 1,052	60; 834

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture

**Average occupancy rate**

Category	January-July 2013	January-July 2012
Resorts	73%	68.8%
Hotels	31.5%	26.1%
Guest houses	14.5%	13.3%
Safari vessels	9.1%	14.4%

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture



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Niyama Maldives resort

Subsix at Niyama Maldives resort

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### AIR ACCESS

In 2012, National carrier Mega Maldives recorded stupendous growth carrying 78,856 passengers, sharply up from 19,127 in 2011, the year the carrier was launched. In August this year, the carrier acquired a Boeing 757-200, adding a third aircraft to its fleet of 767-300ERs and increasing capacity. It currently flies to seven international destinations, including six cities in China (includes Hong Kong) and Seoul in South Korea.

SriLankan Airlines was the largest operator followed by Emirates, Singapore Airlines and Mega Maldives. Charter traffic increased by 20.8 per cent and accounted for 15.5 per cent of overall traffic. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, scheduled flights dropped 5.7 per cent.

New domestic airline Flyme, which commenced operations in 2011, recorded a huge increase in flight numbers from 834 to 3,724. Island Aviation Services' airline Maldivian also registered an increase in its movements as well as passenger load.

This year, Bangkok Airways and Singapore Airlines have recorded increased movements while Jetairfly and Shanghai Airways have stopped flying to the Maldives. Eithad Airways and China Southern Airlines have operated as charters, while new charters include Hong Kong Airlines, Korean Air and Sichuan Airlines.

The country has four international airports: Hanimaadhoo International Airport on Haa Dhaalu Atoll upgraded in February 2012 from a domestic airport; Ibrahim Nasir International Airport, Hulhulé in North Malé on Kaafu Atoll; Gan International Airport on Addu Atoll; and Villa International Airport, Maamingili on Alifu Dhaalu Atoll.

Domestic airports include Thimarafushi Airport on Thaa Atoll opened in September 2013 and others at Kooddoo on Gaafu Alifu

Atoll, Dharavandhoo on Baa Atoll, Fuvahmulah on Gnaniyana Atoll, Kaadedhdhoo on Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, Kadhdhoo on Laamu Atoll and Kooddoo on Gaafu Alifu Atoll. In June, the government signed a contract with a private company to develop another domestic airport on Shaviyani Atoll, with construction slated to complete in 15 months.

With the opening of new domestic airports, seaplane operations reduced considerably last year, resulting in the closure of the Maldivian Air Taxi.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

New domestic airports and an underwater nightclub are among the infrastructure developments in the Maldives in 2012.

The world's first underwater nightclub at the Niyama Maldives resort on Dhaalu Atoll, Subsix, opened in October 2012 and has drawn many top-billing acts. Additionally, at a recent plenary session of the United Nations dedicated to the development of Rio+20, President Mohamed Waheed said the Maldives will soon embark on a five-year project that will see the country boast the world's first biosphere reserve by 2017.

Aviation wise, a new domestic airport on Kooddoo island in Gaafu Atoll and an international airport on Maamagili island in Alifu Dhaalu Atoll opened in September 2012, while the domestic Dharavandhoo airport on Baa Atoll opened in October 2012. Work on a new US\$500 million terminal at the International Airport in Male, however, has been stalled after the Government rescinded the management contract with joint venture partners Indian infrastructure giant GMR and Malaysia Airports Holdings in December 2012.

As part of the new five-year tourism master plan, Gan island –

which has an international airport – is to be developed into an international airport hub.

Meanwhile, this year the government has announced a public tender for the lease and development of tourist resorts on six virgin islands - Ismehele Hera on Seenu Atoll, Dhigudhoo on Gaafu Alifu Atoll, Kudafushi on Raa Atoll, Fasmendhoo on Raa Atoll, Vanabadhi on Thaa Atoll with Kani on Thaa Atoll, and Kunnamelai on Noonu Atoll.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

The Maldives has year-round tropical weather. Peak travel season is between December and April when the weather is calm, while February and March are the sunniest and an ideal refuge for European holidaymakers from winter back home.

#### Tippling culture

A service charge of 10 per cent is usually added to the bill but customers may choose to leave a tip, which may range from US\$1-\$20.

#### Public transportation

Public transportation is limited in the capital, Male, but taxis are widely available at a fixed rate of 20 rufiya (about US\$1.30) to any destination in this small space.

#### One sound advice

Alcohol is available in the resorts but banned in the capital, as is carrying alcohol on arrival.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS NTO

The Ministry of Tourism,  
Arts and Culture  
Tel: (96-0) 332-3224/6  
Fax: (96-0) 332-2512  
Website: [www.tourism.gov.mv](http://www.tourism.gov.mv)

Maldives Tourism Promotion Board  
Website: [www.visitmaldives.com/en](http://www.visitmaldives.com/en)

#### Travel trade associations

Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators  
Website: [www.matato.org](http://www.matato.org)

Maldives Association of Tourism Industry  
Website: [www.matimaldives.com](http://www.matimaldives.com)

Liveaboard Association Maldives  
Website: [www.liveaboardassociation.mv](http://www.liveaboardassociation.mv)

Maldives Association of Yacht Agents  
Website: [www.mayamaldives.com](http://www.mayamaldives.com)

Compiled by Feizal Samath  
All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights



## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY/ FAMILY FUN

### Four Seasons Resort Maldives

The 102-villa Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru sits on a large private island in remote Baa Atoll. Surrounded by some of the richest waters in the Maldives, children can snorkel in one of the country's largest natural lagoons and marvel at encounters with dolphins, eagle rays, manta rays and many shoals of glorious tropical fish. Fun family activities include banana boating, dolphin cruises, kayaking, sunset fishing, private island excursions, wakeboarding, as well as diving programmes suitable for guests aged eight years and above. A highlight of any stay in this resort is a visit to the Marine Discovery Centre to learn about their pioneering conservation projects and participate in some of them as well. Adults and children alike will relish the chance to learn about the delicate and fascinating ecosystem of the Maldives. One project is the rebuilding of the coral reef through joining a local marine biologist student in attaching live coral to specially treated metal

circular frames using plastic ties.

The resort's Kuda Velaa Club keeps children active outdoors, allowing them to experience the Maldivian spirit. Children can take part in a fantastic selection of activities both in the water and out of it. Besides snorkelling, sailing and kayaking, there are nature walks, beach games, lizard safaris, scavenger hunts, palm tree picnics, tennis lessons, cooking classes, yoga and Dhivehi language classes.

## WELLBEING

With probably the highest concentration of luxury resorts in the world, the Maldives is a haven for spa and wellness junkies. Healthy competition between Maldivian hoteliers and spa specialists has resulted in innovative wellness experiences unique to the Maldives. Here are four such experiences we recommend.

### Underwater spa at Huvafen Fushi Maldives

The LIME Spa at Huvafen Fushi boasts the world's first-ever underwater treatment rooms. Building on the fact

that there is nothing more relaxing and calming than watching a school of fish circling the aquamarine waters of the Indian Ocean, the treatment rooms were built with large windows looking into the deep blue ocean. The interior of the spa is of a contemporary, simple design that makes sure nothing distracts one from viewing the exotic marine world outside. Each treatment room features soft-fabric upholstery which remind one of corals and sponges. The extensive spa menu features treatments such as aromatherapy facial and body treatments, detox treatments and water therapy, all of which are perfectly in tune with the surroundings.

### Ice Cream Spa at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

It is not only the adults who like to get pampered; the younger ones enjoy tailor-made spa treatments just as much. At the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, the Ice Cream Spa within the Maaja Children's Club is where children get treated like little princes

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Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru

Diving at Four Seasons Resort Maldives, Landaa Giraavaru



Huvafen Fushi Maldives



Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa

Night Spa at Four Seasons Resort Maldives

and princesses. Designed to have the ambience of an old-fashioned ice cream parlour, the Ice Cream Spa offers a wide variety of treatments including manicure, pedicure, icy body scrubs, wraps and massages with a wide range of flavours and toppings to choose from. Unfortunately, the scrubs and wraps are not edible. The

Ice Cream Spa also offers facials and fake tattoos especially designed for boys. The cutely named Clean Me Up and Calm Me Down facials are ideal for soothing children's skin after a day of fun in the sun.

**Sand massage at Maldives**  
At Beach House Iru Veli Maldives,

the De' Spa offers a unique Maldivian sand massage with the calming sound of the waves in the background. An expert therapist wraps one's body in pure Maldivian coconut oil and gently kneads the skin, making it soft and supple before exfoliating it with soft white sea-salt sand. This traditional sand massage is specifically designed to revitalise and energise the tired and stressed out body, but is also a good remedy for aches and pains due to the unmatched healing properties of sea sand, recognised as a recipe for health problems throughout the ages.

**Night Spa at  
Four Seasons Resort Maldives**

Spa treatments are not exclusively for daytime enjoyment. Guests will delight in trying one just before slipping into bed at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives, which has come up with a new innovative product – the Night Spa. The spa is separately located on a private island just minutes off the coast of the main resort island. Taking a traditional Maldivian boat, the *dhoni*, to the spa, and with the glittering



Sakis Papadopoulos/Huvafen Fushi Maldives

## MD'S HOT PICK



Jumeirah Vittavei

### Wellbeing: Island of Life massage at Talise Spa, Jumeirah Vittavei

The Talise Spa at the luxurious Jumeirah Vittavei island offers an indulgence of exotic East and South Asian treatments and massages. A signature product is the Island of Life massage. Guests will first fill up a form detailing specific information such as stress points and preferences, after which they will be guided to the treatment villa overlooking the Indian Ocean. Within such a serene and blissful setting, the masseuse will apply long, soothing strokes with deep pressure, mirroring the gentle movements of the waves. The use of a blend of rose, ylang ylang, geranium and sandalwood essential oils infused with locally-produced extra virgin coconut oil adds the exotic Maldivian islands touch to the treatment, making guests relaxed and rejuvenated. After the treatment, guests could further relax on the deck watching the wonderful marine life swim around.

stars' reflection on the surface of the dark ocean, is an experience in itself.

The spa's operating hours are from 22.00 every night to 1.00 the following morning, and its treatments are especially designed to set

guests in the right mood for a sound sleep. The Harmonise treatment is recommended, as it nourishes the skin and gives it a healthy glow, even in the full moon night. All treatments last at least two hours.

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Huvafen Fushi Maldives

LIME Spa at Huvafen Fushi Maldives

# Myanmar



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The Shwezigon Pagoda, a famous Buddhist temple in Nyaung U

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Giant standing and reclining Buddhas in Monywa

The year 2012 was a record-breaking year for Myanmar's tourism industry, with total international arrivals exceeding one million for the very first time. Although that figure is much lower than those of neighbouring countries, it is nevertheless an achievement for Myanmar. Industry sources said tourist arrivals are expected to rise 30-50 per cent in 2014, following a similar increase in 2012.

Progress in the last few years included the formulation of Responsible Tourism Policy, Myanmar Tourism Master Plan and Policy on Community involvement in Tourism led by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism in collaboration with international organisations and 12 private tourism-related associations.

The tourism industry received another boost with the Ministry of Immigration and Population opening of four cross-border checkpoints in

August: Tachileik-Mae Sai, Myawaddy-Mae Sot,

Kawthoung-Ranong and Htee Khee-Sunron, bordering with Thailand, are now international entry and exit points for Thais and nationals of other countries. Myanmar citizens with Thai visas will also be able to cross into Thailand through these points.

In June, Myanmar also successfully hosted the World Economic Forum on East Asia 2013 in Naypyidaw, which is a great platform for showcasing the development of Myanmar's reform processes since the elected government took office in 2011.

### ARRIVALS

According to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, from January to August this year, 444,257 tourists entered the country, a 39 per cent increase over the 319,406 recorded in the same period in 2012.

More than 65 per cent (292,090) were from Asian countries, the top four of which were Thailand – the largest single group by nationality – followed by Japan, South Korea and China. European nationals accounted



### Top four Asian source markets in January-August 2013

Thailand	71,251
Japan	41,980
South Korea	36,620
China	32,454

### Top three European source markets in January-August 2013

France	20,632
UK	19,280
Germany	14,388

### Arrivals by visitor types in January-August 2013

FITs	184,569
Business travellers	95,996
Package tourists	80,369
Social visa holders	27,252

### Top four Asian source markets to Yangon in 2012

Thailand	91,817
Japan	47,501
China	41,542
US	36,479

Source: Ministry of Hotels and Tourism

for 94,552 visitors, the top three markets of which were France, the UK and Germany.

Traveller types comprised of FITs, which made up the single largest group with 184,569 visitors, followed by business travellers, visitors through tour packages, social visa holders and others.

Yangon received an overwhelming majority of international air arrivals. Other significant gateways included Mandalay, Bagan and Naypyidaw. Overland entry was permitted to tourists from Thailand, China and India with prearranged border passes.

In 2012, Myanmar received 554,531 foreign visitors to Yangon alone, representing a 54 per cent year-on-year increase. Asian nationals accounted for 347,241 arrivals, representing more than 62 per cent of total arrivals, of which Thailand provided the largest share, followed by Japan, China and the US.

For 2014, industry sources said Asian countries are expected to continue supplying the majority of visitors, but the country's improving international image is likely to result in a steady increase of travellers from Western nations.

Kyaiktiyo Pagoda, a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site in Mon State



Amarin Kornvirin/123RF.com

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### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

As of end-June, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism maintained that Myanmar had 826 licensed hotels and approximately 29,999 rooms. In 2012, there were 787 hotels and 28,291 rooms.

Heritage buildings such as the former colonial-era police commissioner's office building in Strand Road, Yangon, will be converted into a US\$50-million, five-star hotel with 239 standard rooms and a number of larger suites and deluxe rooms, with a target to open in early 2015.

Additionally, the former Railway Company building has been planned for a two-year redevelopment into a five-star Peninsula Hotel.

### Total no. of properties in key destinations as at end-June 2013

Yangon	210 (9,163 rooms)
Mandalay	83 (3,522)
Bagan	76 (2,331)
Inle and Taunggyi	61 (1,718)
Naypyidaw	40 (2,573)

Source: Ministry of Hotels and Tourism

### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

#### 2013

- Avenue 64 Hotel, Yangon, 34 keys, 1Q
- Aung Tha Pyay Hotel, Yangon, 35 keys, 1Q
- Sky Star, Yangon, 120 keys, 3Q
- Shangri-La Residence, Yangon, 240 keys, 4Q

#### 2014

- Hilton Hotel, Yangon, 300 keys
- Nawarat Hotel, Yangon, 100 keys
- The State House, Yangon, 239 keys
- Rose Garden Hotel, Yangon, 60 keys
- Novotel Yangon Max, Yangon, 366 keys
- Best Western Luxury Hotel, Naypyidaw, 205 keys



Ballooning in Bagan

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### AIR ACCESS

The tremendous growth in the aviation sector in 2012 was expected to continue into 2013 with the continuing expansion of international and domestic carriers in Myanmar catering to growing business and leisure arrivals. However, Myanmar remains one of the least-served destinations in Asia.

Myanmar's first ever low-cost carrier, Golden Myanmar Airlines, entered the market on January 11 this year. Operating out of Mandalay, the airline also expanded its routes from Mandalay-Yangon-Singapore in April to Yangon-Bangkok in May and is planning to operate to Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong via Yangon in the near future.

According to the Centre for Aviation, Myanmar's international aviation market currently consists of about 81,000 weekly seats, with more than 75,000 passengers entering Yangon International Airport and approximately 5,500 arriving at Mandalay International Airport weekly.

Mawlamyine is also joining the international jet set. Thai-based Nok Air has started Mae Sot-Mawlamyine route from September and will extend it to Yangon very soon. In November the airline said it would launch a Bangkok-Yangon route, flying to and from Don Muang Airport. Nok Air is also studying possible routes connecting Thailand's Chiang Mai with Bagan and Yangon.

In anticipation of further growth, Myanmar's Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) will redevelop Yangon International Airport before the end of this year to double its handling capacity from 2.7 to 5.5 million passengers a year. A feasibility study conducted last year by DCA found that the number of passengers passing through the airport is likely to grow 20-23 per cent each year for the next four years, eventually reaching 5.5 million.

Development of Yangon's mothballed Hanthawaddy International Airport is also slated to get back on track, with the appointment of South Korea's Incheon Airport consortium to the task. Completion of the first phase in 2017 will give Hanthawaddy capacity for 12 million passengers annually, and 30 million after the second phase is finished.

Bangkok Airways became the first carrier to offer regular services between Thailand's capital and Naypyidaw. The airline launched its thrice-weekly service in September, ahead of budget carrier Thai AirAsia, which started flights between the two capitals in October.

Meanwhile, All Nippon Airlines, which relaunched flights linking Japan and Myanmar in October last year, increased Tokyo (Narita)-Yangon operations to a daily service in September.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

The newly launched Oriental Ballooning Company in Mandalay will run balloon flights every morning between October 25 and March 31, 2014. Subject to weather conditions, flights take off just before sunrise and cost US\$320 per person. The company hires experienced and licensed UK commercial balloon pilots to operate the rides, with international insurance included for passengers. The company has a total of six balloons, among which two can carry four passengers each and the remaining four can carry eight passengers each.

On the waters, Irrawaddy Princess River Cruises started to operate a newly built luxury cruise line along the Ayeyarwady River between Mandalay and Bagan in November. The *Princess Royal* is the third river cruise ship run by Irrawaddy Princess, and offers three-day/two-night trips.

Another new luxury cruise line, *Orcaella*, has been provided by Oriental Express since July, joining its sister ship *Road to Mandalay* on the Ayeyarwady River as well as new waters along the more mysterious tributary, the Chindwin. Named after the dolphins unique to Ayeyarwady, this elegant, four-deck ship takes just 50 passengers to the very heart of Myanmar on leisurely seven- and 11-night voyages. Prices start from £3,660 (US\$5,912) per person for the 11-night Discovering the Chindwin River cruise, inclusive of all meals onboard, excursions, transfers and domestic flights.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

The winter season from October to February, with average temperatures between 20°C and 24°C.

#### Tipping culture

The service charge is not imposed here, so one may tip from 200 Kyat for local restaurants and 1,000-2,000 Kyat for international or hotel restaurants.

#### Public transportation

It is easy to hire a taxi off the street but there is a need to negotiate.

#### One sound advice

Wear decent clothes when visiting religious sites and couples should avoid displaying physical closeness in religious sites and public places.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has about 30 appointed tourism companies overseas to promote Myanmar.  
Tel: (95-67) 406-056  
Fax: (95-67) 406-057  
Email: dht.mht@myanmar.com.mm;  
dg.dht@mptmail.net.mm  
Website: www.myanmar-tourism.org

#### Travel trade associations

Myanmar Tourism Marketing (formerly Myanmar Marketing Committee)  
Tel: (95-1) 523-473  
Email: pr.officer@tourismmyanmar.org  
Website: www.myanmar-tourism.com;  
www.tourismmyanmar.org

Myanmar Tourism Federation  
Tel: (95-1) 855-1012/1013  
Email: info@myanmar-tourismboard.org  
Website: www.tourismmyanmar.org

Union of Myanmar Travel Association  
Email: info@umtanet.org; umta@mptmail.net.mm  
Website: www.umtanet.org

Compiled by Rahul Khanna  
All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights



## **FAMILY FUN**

### **Visit to Yangon Zoo, Plain of Bagan, Inle Lake and Ngapali Beach**

Tours in Myanmar do not only involve visits to temples and pagodas. In Yangon, families should visit the Yangon Zoological Gardens, which houses a museum, an aquarium and an amusement park. There is also an interesting ride on the slow-moving Yangon Circular Train, which is always crowded and passes through many villages, allowing visitors a glimpse of the local life.

The Plain of Bagan has opportunities for flat cycling, horse-cart rides and boat trips. Adults and teenagers alike can enjoy longer rides on quiet, empty roads, peddling past rural villages and stunning landscapes to get closer to the friendly Burmese people.

Boat trips along Inle Lake will thrill passengers, and so will a range of walks and even the odd bullock cart ride which are readily available. Families can also join in and learn the

ancient Burmese game of Chinlon, a unique type of football involving a team of six players passing around a rattan-woven ball.

Then, if any family holiday has to end at the beach, the pristine Ngapali Beach is it with its soft white sand. Although unsophisticated with few activities taking place, a stroll along this beautiful beach is peaceful and relaxing. Families can also take walks to small fishing villages and local markets, explore the countryside by bicycle or take a boat trip to the undeveloped offshore islands for snorkelling.

## **SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **Visit to temple ruins in Mrauk U and tribal villages**

Mrauk U town in northern Rakhine State was once the capital of a flourishing kingdom in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a great trading centre coveted by many surrounding kingdoms, but its glory faded after

two disastrous earthquakes in 1761 and 1762.

Inland from Sittwe on the Rakhine coast lie the temple ruins of Mrauk U, accessible only by a five-hour boat ride up the Kaladan River. The pagodas are uniquely fort-like in structure, the most famous of which is Shittaung Pagoda, which houses some 80,000 holy Buddha images.

The beauty of Mrauk U is not just in its monuments; the charming local town with its markets, wooden houses, streams and friendly people are equally enticing to visitors. Viewing the magical sunset at the Harre Taund Pagoda hill affords an enduring memory too.

Additionally, visitors get to go on a day trip to three villages to see the weaving looms and observe the simple lifestyle of the Chin tribe. This will also be a precious opportunity to see the last generation of Chin women proudly showing off their

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Thanarit Surtiviriyanon/123RF.com

Fishermen at work on Inle Lake



Mrauk U temples

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Chin weaving

tattooed faces.

The trip ends with a short flight from Sittwe down the coast to the pristine Ngapali Beach. Visitors can take a relaxing stroll along this quiet beach.

### **Rafting, trekking, walking and biking in Putao**

Putao is a town in Kachin, Myanmar's northern-most state known for Myanmar's highest mountains and South-east Asia's largest lake, Indawgyi Lake. This small town is the base for trekking tours and

other activities in the north, and is visited by only around 500 visitors a year, making it one of the most remote and unspoiled locations on earth. Situated in a flat valley in the foothills of the Himalayas, the town and surrounding villages are inhabited by an exciting mixture of tribal people, including the Lisu, Rawan, Kachin and Khamti-Shan tribes. Here are just four of the many activities in Putao Diethelm recommends.

**Malikha River rafting:** this easy, grade two river-rafting excursion

starts on the pristine Mula River, which later joins the renowned Malikha River. Leisurely riding through thickly forested canyons and spotting rare bird species such as kingfishers and hornbills, this relaxing journey simulates the local people's way of life on the river that has been unchanged for centuries. A picnic lunch is served on a river beach island, affording an unforgettable finale to the trip.

**Namhtunkoo trek:** after a hearty breakfast and a visit to the local market, participants head off to the Namhtunkoo village inhabited by the Lisu people. From here, they trek through evergreen forests to the Namhtun mountain range, where, in clear weather, an amazing view of the Indian border and Mount Lancrumadin can be enjoyed. The accommodation for the night is a simple guesthouse located right next to the Namthun River. Participants can take a relaxing stroll around the village while dinner is being prepared. The group will trek downhill back to Putao the following day.

**Walking tour of villages:** this easy-to-moderate, five- to seven-hour walking tour takes participants to various villages in the Putao valley. The day starts with a visit to the small but bustling Putao market, after which the walking tour starts through paddy fields, bamboo



Biking in Putao

groves and along the Namhtun creek. The tour stops at the Shan village of Hopaing, where a social and cultural exchange with the friendly Burmese people is possible. On the way to the village, participants will also visit a Buddhist monastery and shrine.

**Biking tour:** participants biking in the flat valley of Putao, where ox carts and bicycles are the main means of transport, will encounter the region's varied flora and fauna and pass through small villages inhabited by the Shan and Lisu people. They will also stop by a school to be greeted by delightful children therein, before cycling on past paddy fields and temples and crossing rivers through suspension

bridges.

Meanwhile, the Putao Trekking House, Diethelm's partner for the arrangement of the soft adventure tours in the region, is a cosy lodge employing mainly the local tribal people who love to share their knowledge of the region. It operates several small-scale community projects in the surrounding villages, opening doors for visitors who wish to gain an insight into the local traditional way of life. Its bungalows were built from locally available wood using traditional building techniques. The rooms all come with attached bathrooms and hot and cold showers, and offer scenic views of the surrounding garden.

## MD'S HOT PICK



Yangon City Hall

### Special interest: walking tour of Yangon's heritage architecture

Embark on a walking tour to visit some of Yangon's colonial-era buildings. Start with Yangon City Hall, a fine example of mixed European architecture and Burmese design built between 1925 and 1940. Nearby the former Immigration Department was once the country's most fanciful department store, Rowe & Co, built in 1910. Next, cross the street to the Emmanuel Baptist church founded in 1885, destroyed during World War II and rebuilt in 1952. Then proceed to the High Court, a red and white brick building built in 1911. Continue walking to Strand Road, where the Yangon Division Office Complex, formerly the New Law Courts constructed in 1931, stands three floors high with Ionic columns. The tour goes on to include more heritage buildings such as Custom House, Yangon Division Court, Myanmar Port Authority, Inland Waterways Department and Lokanat Gallery, ending at the historic Strand Hotel.

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE



Trekking in Putao

# Philippines

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Dmitry Pichugin/123RF.com



El Nido Bay and Cadlao island in Palawan

The famous  
Quiapo Church  
in Manila



Antonio Oquias/123RF.com

The Philippines is on a roll, attracting tourists like never before.

The Department of Tourism (DoT) is targeting a 24 per cent rise in arrivals to 6.8 million in 2014, from 5.5 million expected in 2013, banking on steadily growing traditional source markets, the rebound in two important markets – China and Taiwan – and the resumption of flights between Manila and Europe.

Tourists' length of stay and spending are expected to maintain their double-digit growth from 2012, when tourists stayed an average of 9.6 nights, 19 per cent up from eight nights in 2011. Their 2012 spending averaged US\$894 per person, 21 per cent higher than US\$739 the previous year.

Most popular Philippine destinations include Manila, which is also the business and MICE capital; Palawan islands, with its sun, sea and sand; and in the Visayas, Boracay and Cebu twinned with Bohol.

Other "international tourism gateway clusters" that are being developed and marketed include Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur in Luzon; Baguio and Ifugao; Subic and Clark;

Albay, Masbate and Sorsogon (Almasor) in the Bicol region; Quezon province; Iloilo, Siquijor, Negros Occidental and Oriental in the Visayas; as well as Cagayan de Oro and Davao in Mindanao.

Tourism offerings are as diverse as the destination's thousands of islands and varied topography: nature and adventure, beaches, water activities, lifestyle, culture and heritage, sports, cruising, special interests, shopping and more.

### ARRIVALS

Visitor arrivals totalled about 2.8 million from January to July 2013, representing a healthy 11.1 per cent growth from 2.5 million a year ago.

Aggressive marketing and promotions, the buzz created by global accolades bestowed on the country's various natural attractions, and massive investments in tourism hardware have combined to rekindle interest in the destination dubbed by credit rating agencies and global companies as "the most improved nation in ASEAN" and having the "fastest economic expansion in Asia".

Asia was the biggest market comprising nearly 60 per cent of total

arrivals. It was also the most volatile. After having been blacklisted by China for five months in 2012 due to the unresolved territorial dispute over Scarborough shoal, Philippine tourism wrestled with another setback this year when it was blacklisted by Taiwan from May to August over the killing of a Taiwanese fisherman in Philippine waters.

The China market seems to have rebounded with a dramatic 48.6 per cent growth, but the Taiwanese market dipped 30.1 per cent, its full recovery likely to take place beginning 2014.

Next to Asia, the US was the biggest source market with a 15 per cent market share, although it grew slowly, by just 2.7 per cent.

Europe was a far third with just 8.2 per cent of the pie, due in large part to the absence of direct flights linking Manila to the continent. That, however, is changing now that the European Union has lifted the ban on Philippine Airlines, which is expected to spur Philippine flag carriers and European carriers to open routes from Europe to Manila.

The Philippines is also spending more marketing dollars in nascent and emerging source markets including the Middle East, Russia, India, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- Seda BGC, Bonifacio Global City, 179 keys, 1H
- Raffles Makati, 237 keys, 1H
- Fairmont Makati, 280 keys, 1H
- Solaire Resort & Casino, Manila, 448 keys, 1H
- Holiday Inn & Suites Makati, 348 keys, 1H
- Park Inn by Radisson, Davao, 204 keys, 1H
- Seda Abreeza, Davao, 186 keys, 1H
- Best Western Plus Lex Hotel, Cebu, 83 keys, 1H
- Best Western Sand Bar Resort, Cebu, 58 keys, 1H
- Mövenpick Huma Island, Palawan, 81 villas, 2H

### 2014

- Marco Polo Ortigas Manila, Ortigas, 316 keys
- Mercure Manila Ortigas, Ortigas, 150 keys
- Novotel Manila Araneta, Quezon City, 401 keys
- Worldhotel and Residences Makati, 252 keys

## Top 12 source markets

Country	Jan-July 2013	% share	Jan-July 2012	% share	% change
South Korea	706,998	25.3	578,062	22.9	+22.3
US	417,904	14.9	406,822	16.1	+2.7
China	246,967	8.8	166,219	6.6	+48.6
Japan	245,817	8.8	231,439	9.2	+6.2
Australia	118,186	4.2	106,069	4.2	+11.4
Singapore	100,334	3.6	84,960	3.4	+18.1
Taiwan	95,545	3.4	136,663	5.4	-30.1
Canada	77,656	2.8	74,824	3	+3.8
Hong Kong	76,555	2.8	67,844	2.7	+12.9
UK	71,088	2.6	66,592	2.7	+6.8
Malaysia	62,893	2.3	59,988	2.4	+4.9
Germany	41,990	1.5	39,936	1.6	+5.2

Source: DoT



Tkknv/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

The Philippines has a rapidly expanding inventory of new hotels and resorts in all categories – from affordable brands like Tune, Go and Island Stays to global brands like Grand Hyatt, Conrad, Shangri-La, Westin, Hilton and Sheraton, all of which are in active pipeline for opening on or before 2017.

Ending the dearth of luxury hotels in the capital city, close to 1,500 four- and five-star hotel rooms were added to Manila's inventory 1H2013, not counting the smaller and mid-priced accommodation that opened during the same period.

STR Global noted that there were 8,767 hotel rooms in the pipeline in Manila as of August. That included properties in construction, final planning and planning stages, but excluded projects in the pre-planning stage.

As expected, the increase in room supply affected hotels' occupancy rates. Data from STR Global showed that the average occupancy rate of Manila hotels dropped 6.1 per cent year-on-year from January to July. However, as tourist arrivals also increased, the average daily rate managed to grow by 5.4 per cent, while RevPAR dropped slightly by 1.1 per cent.

### Performance in January-July 2013

Average occupancy rate	68.3%	(-6.1%)
Average daily rate	US\$137.49	(+5.4%)
RevPAR	US\$93.95	(-1.1%)

Source: STR Global



Andrey Khrobostov/123RF.com

SM Mall of Asia

### AIR ACCESS

The Philippines has become more accessible, mainly from Asia, thanks to its open-sky policy and the advent of LCCs.

At least 31 airlines fly to the Philippines, mainly to the primary gateway in Manila, although an increasing number fly direct to secondary airports in Clark, Cebu, Boracay, Iloilo and Davao. Six Philippine LCCs (Cebu Pacific, PAL Express, AirAsia, Zest Air, Tigerair, and SEAIR) connect various domestic destinations.

New routes blazed in 2013 included flag carrier Philippine Airlines' (PAL) four-weekly Manila-Guangzhou service and China Eastern Airlines' daily Shanghai-Manila service.

Air service agreements hammered out more flights between Manila and Japan and 14 flights between Manila and Italy. More agreements are being sought with Russia, Israel, Papua New Guinea and other destinations.

A milestone was achieved when the European Union struck PAL off the aviation blacklist in July this year, enabling it to resume and launch four-weekly nonstop service between Manila and London's Heathrow Airport, after 15 years of absence in Europe. PAL is bent on flying to Rome, Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and other European cities.

Travel and tourism are growing but Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) could no longer handle the increasing traffic. Its single runway has been bursting at the seams since 1991. Designed only for 35 landings and takeoffs per hour, NAIA is forced to handle as much as 50 landings and takeoffs per hour, causing flight delays, cancellations and risks to safety.

The government is mulling several options to solve NAIA's

overcapacity, including moving the airport to a much bigger location and twinning it with Clark International Airport.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

There is a good list of new tourism infrastructure that has opened from 2012 onwards.

Credit goes to SM Hotels and Convention Corp for investing in several MICE venues, including ultra modern events venue Mall of Asia Arena for 20,000 people and SMX Aura Convention Centre for 2,500 people in Bonifacio Global City; as well as SMX Davao Convention Centre for 5,000 people in Mindanao.

Family entertainment and leisure village Circuit Makati opened Globe Circuit Event Grounds, an outdoor open field with a 2,000m<sup>2</sup> canopy ideal for big concerts, fashion shows and international events; and Sports Park with a huge football field and a skate park for international competitions. Coming up in 2014 are a 1,500-seat Circuit Theatre for Broadway-level productions and a multi-purpose Black Box for intimate shows, recitals, workshops and parties.

Manila has another gaming attraction, with the opening of Solaire Resort and Casino, one of the four luxury integrated resorts that will fill the Entertainment City along Manila Bay during the next three years.

Airports are being spruced over. Over at NAIA, Terminal 1 is undergoing a thorough makeover that includes architectural changes in the building, new furniture, carpet fitting and lighting for a modern Filipino feel. Terminal 3 is being completed in time for the World Economic Forum in 2014 and APEC

gathering in 2015.

Other secondary airports in various parts of the country are either being built, expanded or upgraded to meet the growing number of domestic and international travellers.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

From October to February when the weather is cooler and feasts, holidays and celebrations abound, and from March to May when it is bright and sunny and typhoons are far away.

#### Tipping culture

Tipping is optional on bills that include a service charge; otherwise tip up to 10% of the total bill.

#### Public transportation

A variety choices: taxis that can be flagged off the street, vans, buses, jeepneys, MRT and LRT (Light Rail Transit).

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

Department of Tourism  
Website: [www.tourism.gov.ph](http://www.tourism.gov.ph)

Tourism Promotions Board  
Website: [www.dotpcvc.gov.ph](http://www.dotpcvc.gov.ph)

#### Travel trade associations

Philippine Tour Operators Association  
Website: [www.philtoa.org](http://www.philtoa.org)

Philippine Travel Agencies Association  
Website: [www.ptaa.org.ph](http://www.ptaa.org.ph)

National Association of Independent Travel Agents  
Website: [www.naitas.org.ph](http://www.naitas.org.ph)

Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines  
Website: [www.hrap.org.ph](http://www.hrap.org.ph)

Pacific Asia Travel Association  
Website: [www.pata.org](http://www.pata.org)



# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

CSR and sustainability are very much alive in this land whose people are known for their inclusiveness and sense of community.

Several hotels, including Fairmont Makati and Marriott Hotel Manila, encourage guests to join their volunteer programmes to give something back to the destination. Others like Dusit Thani and Sofitel have green meetings to reduce the environmental impact of business events.

Travel philanthropy is welcome in many forms in many areas. In tandem with nonprofits and socio-civic organisations, both DoT (website: [www.tourism.gov.ph](http://www.tourism.gov.ph)) and Philippine Tour Operators Association ([www.philtoa.org](http://www.philtoa.org)) have a slew of projects combining fun and volunteering for that meaningful travel experience.

Some voluntourism opportunities include environmental protection (marine biodiversity identification, planting mangroves in coastal areas), heritage (preserving and restoring historical sites, and helping rehabilitate centuries-old Banaue rice terraces), livelihood (natural farming and teaching crafts), education (school refurbishing, teaching and tutorial), immersion in indigenous communities, feeding programmes and a lot more.

## FAMILY FUN

Filipinos are family-oriented. It is common to see multi-generational families from the great grandchild on the pram to grandparents on an outing.

Cruise ships are family friendly. A growing number of these ships

include Manila, Boracay, Palawan and other Philippine destinations in their ports of call.

Themed tours are also for families, including the new *Pasiyo sa Kabilin* heritage walk in Cebu, while Newport Performing Arts Theatre at Resorts World Manila (website: [www.rwmanila.com](http://www.rwmanila.com)) has musical productions, plays, shows and events for the whole family.

Bonifacio Global City (website: [www.fbdcorp.com](http://www.fbdcorp.com)) has public concerts, films, art interaction, street performances and other outdoor activities for community participation. Its Mind Museum, the first world-class science museum in the country, is for the whole family too.

At the Mall of Asia Bay Area Amusement Park (website: [www.smmallofasia.com](http://www.smmallofasia.com)), older folks can enjoy the view of Manila Bay or snack at the restaurants nearby while the young ones try the different rides. Other shopping malls have included facilities and entertainment for families, including parks, picnic areas, children's activity centres, shows and exhibitions.

## NIGHTLIFE

Metro Manila is a hotspot after dark, with live bands and singers performing in clubs, bars and lounges. Live music entertainment is a staple among deluxe hotels. Sing-along bars, disco and dance floors complete the night entertainment.

Several districts within the city have a concentration of entertainment venues. Resorts World Manila's (website: [www.remanila.com/bar/opus-restaurant-lounge](http://www.remanila.com/bar/opus-restaurant-lounge)) Opus Restaurant and Lounge is perhaps the most upscale, enlivened by top DJs performing live dance sets.

HyvE Manila at Bonifacio Global City is popular among clubbers because of its top-floor location at W Global Centre and live performances by international DJs. There are more bars and restos at The Fort Strip Entertainment Centre.

## SHOPPING

The Philippines has something for everyone, from local weaves and woodcarvings to brass and vintage for the motley crew of bargain hunters and splurgers.

In Metro Manila, street stalls *tiangge* and thrift stores *ukay ukay* are in every corner offering dirt-cheap



Helping to refurbish a run-down building



Villamor Air Base Brgy clean-up



Art Phaneuf/123RF.com

Colourful street market in Manila

bargains. Greenhills beckons with counterfeit bags, perfumes and haute couture. Festival Mall heaves with South Sea pearls and gemstones.

For quality yet reasonably priced local handicrafts and Filipiniana, the best bet is *Kultura*, the shop found in most SM department stores (website: [www.smsupermalls.com](http://www.smsupermalls.com)).

Intramuros, World Trade Centre, Malate and Ermita in Manila as well as various provinces in the country are for hunters of antiques and heirlooms.

Cebu boasts the best artisans and industrial designer Kenneth Cobonpue's showroom of world-class furniture and furnishings. Laguna is renowned for intricate and delicate woodcarvings while Pampanga is known for custom-made furniture.

Some of the best malls in Manila offering international brands include Resorts World Manila (website: [www.rwmanila.com](http://www.rwmanila.com)) at Newport City; Greenbelt, Power Plant, and Glorietta in Makati (website: [www.makeitmakati.com](http://www.makeitmakati.com)); and Bonifacio High Street at Bonifacio Global City (website: [www.fbdcorp.com](http://www.fbdcorp.com)).

#### **SPECIAL INTEREST**

Downright experiential options include swimming with friendly *butanding* or whale sharks in Donsol, helicopter rides over the crater of active volcanoes Taal and Pinatubo,



Arnel Manalang/123RF.com

The crater of Mt Pinatubo

spelunking in the caves of Rizal and Cagayan, and Revelry during the week-long *Ati-atihan* street party festival in Kalibo.

Sports enthusiasts can choose from golfing, mountain climbing, hiking, ziplining, cruising, diving, snorkelling, whitewater rafting, windsurfing, wakeboarding, skydiving and paragliding.

Tours combined with learning English as a second language are flexible and customised from a couple of days to a year, while for foodies, the Kulinarya food trip savours the flavours of homegrown cuisine in Pampanga, Ilocos, Bulacan, Quezon and other provinces (website: [www.tourism.gov.ph](http://www.tourism.gov.ph)).

History buffs can schedule a heritage tour with Carlos Celdran, one of the best travel guides in Manila known for his unconventional style and flair for wearing period costumes (website: [www.celdrantours.blogspot.com](http://www.celdrantours.blogspot.com); email [celdrantours@hotmail.com](mailto:celdrantours@hotmail.com)). In Cebu, guide Ka Bino Guerrero specialises in heritage tours, museums and walking tours (email [binoguidecebu@gmail.com](mailto:binoguidecebu@gmail.com)).

## WELLBEING

The Philippines is a natural sanctuary for health and wellness. It has abundant natural hot springs in Palawan, Camiguin, Laguna and Bicol. Aside from a long tradition of massages like *hilot*, a highly intuitive touch therapy and foot massage using bamboo sticks and *ventosa* or the cupping method, it also uses a lot of local herbs, oils and essences.

A new offering is Vietura, the in-house aesthetic centre of Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila. It offers non-invasive programmes for beauty and wellness given discreetly and privately. (website: [www.vietura.com](http://www.vietura.com); email [info@vietura.com](mailto:info@vietura.com)).

The newest urban oasis in Manila, the Willow Stream Spa at Fairmont Makati, is a luxurious day spa offering natural therapies. Facilities include spa rooms, eucalyptus steam room, wet relaxation area, outdoor pool and gym (website: [www.fairmont.com/makati](http://www.fairmont.com/makati); email: [willowstream.makati@fairmont.com](mailto:willowstream.makati@fairmont.com)).

Hospitals including St Luke's, Asian Hospital and The Medical City are part of medical tourism, enticing tourists to seek treatment in the Philippines with their modern facilities, competent medical staff, English-speaking staff and low cost.

Compiled by Rosa Ocampo  
All information is correct at press time



White water rafting in Cagayan De Oro, Mindanao



Diving in Panglao



Vietura

Danilo Jr. Pinzon/123RF.com

Marc Henauer/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

# Singapore

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Jordan Tan/123RF.com



Super trees and OCBC skyway at Gardens by the Bay



Sri Mariamman  
Temple in  
Chinatown  
district

Singapore's tourism has been facing a slowdown in arrivals in recent years and in view of this, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has identified that the next phase of tourism growth would have to come from increasing yield through visitor spend rather than from mere visitor numbers.

As the city's tourism industry seeks to sharpen its leisure and business event offerings in pursuit of quality growth, creating a pipeline of unique and innovative content is one of the priorities in the medium term. To encourage quality tourism, STB launched a series of workshops in July to help attraction players develop more in-depth products through master classes.

Current top attractions in Singapore include Resorts World Sentosa, Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay due to their relatively fresh appeal. Nonetheless, STB is working to rejuvenate existing attractions to court visitors back again.

For 2013, the NTO has made a conservative forecast of 14.8-15.5 million arrivals and tourism receipts of S\$23.5-24.5 billion (US\$18.3-19.1

billion). However, it hopes that by 2015, arrivals and tourism receipts will reach 17 million and S\$30 billion respectively.

### ARRIVALS

While Singapore continued to see an upward march in visitor numbers and tourism receipts in 2012, growth had in fact dropped to a single digit.

Some 14.4 million tourists arrived in Singapore in 2012, a nine per cent increase over 2011, while tourism revenue recorded S\$23 billion (US\$18.4 billion), a mere 3.6 per cent increase. In 2011, growth of visitor arrivals and tourism receipts was higher at 13 and 17 per cent respectively.

In 1H2013, Singapore's top source markets continue to be Indonesia, China, Malaysia and India. In 2012, these four countries accounted for slightly over 40 per cent of total tourism revenue and close to half of total visitor arrivals.

In the first three quarters of 2012, China and Japan registered the most optimistic growth, as the number of tourists from these countries and the amount they spent saw double-digit growth over the same period in 2011, based on STB's latest figures.

# CAN'T WAIT TO IGNITE THE NIGHT



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**Total arrivals; year-on-year change**

Jan-June 2013	7.6 million; +7.5%
2012	14.4 million; +9%

**China and Japan's arrivals; year-on-year change in 1Q-3Q2012**

China	1.5 million; +23%
Japan	554,000; +17%

**Top four source markets January-February 2013**

Country	Arrivals
Indonesia	449,504
China	441,704
Malaysia	181,696
India	130,619

Source: STB

**NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014****2013**

- Days Hotel Singapore at Zhongshan Park, 405 keys, 1H
- Parkroyal on Pickering, 367 keys, 1H
- Fairy Point Hill, 186 keys, 1H
- UE Park Avenue Changi, 251 keys, 1H
- Dorsett Singapore, 285 keys, 1H
- Ramada Singapore at Zhongshan Park, 384 keys, 1H
- Carlton City Hotel, 386 keys, 1H
- Big Hotel, 308, keys, 1H
- The Amoy, 37 keys, 2H
- Aqueen Jalan Besar Hotel, 76 keys, 2H
- Aqueen Paya Lebar Hotel, 162 keys, 2H
- Holiday Inn Express Singapore Orchard Road, 220 keys, 2H
- Holiday Inn Express Clarke Quay, 448 keys, 2H
- One Farrer Hotel & Spa, 238 keys, 2H
- The Westin Singapore Marina Bay, 301 keys, 2H
- Sofitel So Singapore, 134 keys, 2H
- Aqueen Hotel Little India, 50 keys, 2H

**2014**

- Patina Hotel (Capitol), 182 keys
- Traders Orchard Gateway @ Emerald, 512 keys
- Laguna Golf Green Hotel, 191 keys
- Aqueen Hotel Tyrwhitt, 160 keys
- Hotel Project 2, 90 keys
- Midlink Plaza Hotel, 492 keys
- Hotel Grand Central, 488 keys
- Hotel Grand Central Chancellor Orchard, 264 keys



Singapore city at sunset

**HOTEL PERFORMANCE**

Based on STB's preliminary statistics, from January to June, there was a slight drop in both average room rate and RevPAR of 1.9 and 2.1 per cent respectively, while average occupancy rate held steady at 86 per cent.

The OCBC Investment Research report published in June 2013 forecast that from 2013 to 2015, Singapore's hotel room supply will grow faster than the demand for rooms yearly. The declining average length of stay per visitor was attributed in part to the strong Singapore dollar, and the industry was projected to face potential oversupply in the medium term and continue struggling to sustain margins, given a tight labour market, higher operating costs, and the lack of near-term catalysts to prop up RevPAR.

According to the report, 3,981 upscale/luxury rooms are projected for 2013 to 2015. In 2012, 57 per cent of the total hotel supply in Singapore belonged to this category, with a total of 28,845 rooms.

Growth is expected for the mid-tier too. According to a report by CBRE Global Research and Consulting, in the next four years midscale hotels will supply the largest number of 4,100 rooms out of the total 11,000 rooms expected to enter the market.

**Performance in 1H2013**

Average occupancy rate	86%
Average room rate	S\$255 (US\$206)
RevPAR	S\$219

Source: STB

**Projected % growth per annum from 2013 to 2015**

Overall room supply	+5.8
Upscale/luxury room supply	+4.4
Demand for rooms	+5.4

Source: OCBC Investment Research report (June 2013)



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The sense of comfort you feel as you step into the hotel is seamlessly carried into its 386 exquisitely appointed rooms. Thoughtful additions such as Herman Miller chairs and posturepedic mattresses ensure your stay is memorable as well as comfortable. You can choose from Deluxe, Executive, Carlton Club or Suite rooms. Enjoy complimentary Carlton Club privileges with exclusive access to the club lounge on level 28.

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Indulge in a delectable spread of culinary delights. Lounge leisurely at The Trading Floor. Grab a quick picker-upper at Tuxedo. Feel like treating your tastebuds to a feast? Try Plate, relax by the pool or enjoy a breathtaking view up at Graffiti Sky Bar.

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Suntec Singapore

Thomas Lehinen/23RF.com

### Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre (rejuvenated)

The convention centre opened its doors to MICE once again in June after year-long renovation works. It now boasts a modernised façade that includes a three-storey interactive digital wall as well as amenities such as free Wi-Fi throughout its premises.

#### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

##### Best time to visit

Singapore is hot and humid most of the year, with average temperatures of 31°C in the day and around 24°C in the evening. The monsoon season is between November and February, so be prepared for rain on a daily basis during this period.

##### Tipping culture

Tipping is not practised here as a 10 per cent service charge is usually included in bills.

##### Public transportation

There is a comprehensive public transport system, with a tangled web of bus and train (MRT) routes taking visitors right to the doorstep of practically all attractions. Taxis are aplenty and a more pampered option.

##### One sound advice

Smoking is disallowed in enclosed/air-conditioned areas such as lifts, shopping centres, restaurants and entertainment outlets, as well as on public transport and taxis. The ban has also been imposed on public eateries and on spaces within a five-metre radius from building entrances. First-time offenders can be fined up to S\$1,000.

#### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

**NTO**  
The Singapore Tourism Board currently has 20 regional offices in seven regions, as well as a Business Travel & MICE arm.  
Tel: (65) 6736-6622  
Website: [www.yoursingapore.com](http://www.yoursingapore.com)

##### Travel trade associations

National Association of Travel Agents Singapore  
Website: [www.natas.org.sg](http://www.natas.org.sg)

Singapore Hotel Association  
Website: [www.sha.org.sg](http://www.sha.org.sg)

Association of Singapore Attractions  
Website: [www.singapore-attractions.com](http://www.singapore-attractions.com)

PATA Singapore Chapter  
Website: [www.patasingapore.org.sg](http://www.patasingapore.org.sg)

Compiled by Lee Pei Qi  
All information is correct at press time

#### AIR ACCESS

Singapore Changi Airport will undergo a massive facelift over the next decade with the addition of a mixed-use development codenamed Project Jewel and two more terminals.

Project Jewel will be constructed on the 3.5-hectare carpark site fronting Terminal 1 (T1) and will feature a large-scale indoor garden with a waterfall, aviation and travel-related facilities, retail outlets and leisure attractions.

The new Terminal 4 (T4) has a planned capacity of 16 million passenger movements a year and will increase the airport's total handling capacity to 82 million a year when completed in 2017. This two-storey building with a gross floor area of about 160,000m<sup>2</sup> is designed to meet the operational needs of both regional full-service and low-cost carriers, but will primarily handle narrow-body aircraft. Aerobridges will be available at the boarding gates, while the airside transfer of passengers and baggage between T4 and the other terminals will also be provided for.

Construction on Terminal 5 and the airport's fourth runway located in it should be wrapped up in a decade, doubling airport capacity. T1 will also be expanded to allow more space for the arrival hall, baggage claim areas and taxi bays.

Meanwhile, Singapore welcomed a new city link with the arrival of Golden Myanmar Airlines in April. The carrier operates daily services connecting

Singapore to Mandalay via Yangon. In the same month, Sichuan Airlines commenced twice-weekly services connecting Singapore to Nanning in China. This makes Changi Airport the most connected point in South-east Asia to China, with connections to a total of 24 Chinese cities.

Swiss International Airlines' direct Singapore-Zurich service returned to Changi Airport in May after a four-year hiatus. On July 19, Garuda Indonesia reintroduced a service linking Singapore to Surabaya, and increased flight frequencies out of the city-state to Bali, operating four times a week. Later on August 18, the flag carrier also launched a ninth daily flight to Jakarta.

#### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

##### Marine Life Park

The Marine Life Park opened in November 2012 offers a myriad of wonders in the marine world. Its S.E.A Aquarium has been accredited by Guinness World Records as the world's largest aquarium, featuring 100,000 marine animals.

##### 4D Movie Experience

Sentosa 4D Adventure Land launched the interactive 4D Movie Experience – Journey 2: The Mysterious Island in May, where one becomes a part of the adventure through synchronisation of 3D imaging and special effects such as wind scents and water sprays.



# Insider highlights



## FAMILY FUN

### Trip to Bedok Reservoir and Singapore Science Centre

Parents and children can have a swinging good time together at the Bedok Reservoir, one of Singapore's water catchment cum nature reserves, where the Forest Adventure Aerial Course takes participants in the air and through the trees with ladders, bridges, swings, nets, trapezes and giant zip lines. Secured with a harness and a helmet, children get to swing from tree to tree and zip across the reservoir. The longest zip line is 200m, putting the individual's endurance to the test, and the various routes require family teamwork for the course to be completed successfully. The 30- to 50-minute Kids Course welcomes young adventurers with a minimum height of 1.1m, while the Grand Course is suitable for anyone above 1.4m. Participants under 18 years old will require the company of an adult for the Grand Course, which takes approximately two hours and 20 minutes.

As lunch is definitely required after all this physical activity, families then head to HortPark in south-west Singapore. In the midst of this attractive leafy park is a new

restaurant called Vineyard. Its menu features the best of Thai, Italian and French cuisine as well as a selection of about 100 wines. There is also a dedicated Kids' Corner at the weekends, featuring a medley of fun-filled activities such as a bouncy castle, balloon sculpting, bowling and archery.

The rest of the afternoon will then be spent at the Singapore Science Centre, which boasts one of the world's foremost interactive science exhibits. From the interesting illustrations, sounds and flashlights, parents and children will learn of scientific principles in a clear and fun way. At the hands-on Discovery Zone, four- to 12-year-old children get to conduct simple science experiments by themselves, while the Kinetic Garden outside teaches them about different forms of energy through constantly moving sculptures powered by light, wind and water.

### Marine Life Park: new attraction for children

Opened in November 2012, the Marina Life Park is one of the main attractions at Resort World Sentosa and home to about 100,000 fish in over 55 million litres of water. Aiming

to be the largest oceanarium in the world, this park allows interaction with dolphins as well as snorkelling alongside rays and some of the ocean's most fascinating creatures. This attraction is all about family fun, interactive multi-sensory experiences and most importantly, ocean conservation.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### Local ethnic food tour

Singapore is a cultural melting pot boasting four major ethnic groups, which means there is a lot of diversity in culture as well as cuisine. In this tour, gourmets get to meet the locals and be brought around Singapore's ethnic quarters to eateries with a twist. No fancy restaurants, but a promise of clean, spacious food outlets.

Travelling by trishaw, the first stop is Geylang Serai, the Malay streets, to indulge in an authentic *nasi bryani*. Participants are encouraged to eat this spicy rice dish with their bare hands, as do the local Malays. Next, they move on to Katong Road, an area well known for its restaurants serving Peranakan

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

Ray Bay in Marine Life Park, Resorts World Sentosa





Chinatown

Singapore Tourism Board



Little India

Singapore Tourism Board



Peranakan laksa

Singapore Tourism Board



Malay dance

Singapore Tourism Board

(Straits Chinese) cuisine, the most famous of which is the spicy Malay noodle soup called *laksa*. Under the guidance of a chef, participants will prepare their own delicious dish of *laksa* with ready ingredients such as rice noodle, coconut milk gravy, spices, dried shrimp and chili, as well as toppings of fresh prawns, cockles and sliced fish cake. Then, they head to Little India, east of the Singapore River, to explore the Indian enclave of the city and taste the Indian *rojak* (an assortment of dough balls, prawn fritters, fish cake etc). Finally, in the heart of Chinatown, they get to try the famous Tian Tian chicken rice and Jin Hwa fish soup at the Maxwell Road Hawker Centre. This food centre proffers more than 100 stalls and is extremely popular among the locals.

**A green city for nature lovers**

Singapore is dubbed "The Garden City" in many tourist brochures and

boasts numerous parks and tree-lined roads all over the island. Being surrounded by water, the flora in Singapore comprises of both land and sea varieties. Along the coastline, varieties of mangroves can be seen, including some very rare examples such as the black mangrove. There are a number of hardwood trees and flowering plants too, with more than 3000 species of orchids, including the Vanda Miss Joaquim, the national flower of Singapore. Here are some green attractions Diethelm recommends for those who wish to discover and enjoy the flora of this city, whether they are serious botanists or just regular nature lovers:

**HortPark:** the 23-hectare HortPark is a unique venue where gardening enthusiasts gather for recreational, educational, research and retail activities under one roof in a park setting. Open from 06.00 to 22.00, visitors can enjoy a leisurely stroll through the park's various gardens, such as the Balinese Garden, the Spice Garden and the Floral Walk. A highlight is the Native Garden, which contains the highest concentration of native plants in urban Singapore.

**The Singing Forest:** to create the Singing Forest, more than 200

carefully selected fruit trees were planted at the Southern Ridges, which span the hills of Mount Faber Park, Telok Blangah Hill Park and Kent Ridge Park. An initiative by the National Parks Board to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity, the Singing Forest is also a haven for bird lovers.

**Singapore Botanic Gardens:** opened in 1859 in its present location at Cluny Road, the Singapore Botanic Gardens showcases a wide variety of equatorial plants and unique flowers. Located within the premises are the National Orchid Garden, the Ginger Garden and a small rainforest. The Gardens opens from 05.00 to midnight every day throughout the year and admission is free.

**Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve:** for those curious about mangrove forests, the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is the ideal place to visit. Visitors will get to see one of the rarest mangrove trees in the world, take a leisurely stroll along the boardwalks, and marvel at the rich diversity of the flora and fauna in the reserve. Opening hours are from 07.30 to 19.00 daily. Admission is free, except on weekends and public holidays.

## MD'S HOT PICK



Resorts World at Sentosa

### Family fun:

#### visit to Resorts World Sentosa

Spanning 49 hectares, Resorts World Sentosa is where families spend three days or more together for a fun-filled vacation. After checking into one of the six uniquely themed hotels, look for some adrenaline-filled adventure, such as Ride The Movies at Universal Studios Singapore, the region's first Hollywood movie theme park featuring rides and attractions from favourite blockbusters. For an educational experience, head to the Marine Life Park, which houses two separate attractions: the S.E.A. Aquarium and Adventure Cove Waterpark. The S.E.A. Aquarium holds Guinness World Records' world's largest aquarium title, showcasing close to 100,000 marine animals. If families prefer to soak up the fun under the sun, the Adventure Cove Waterpark awaits with thrilling water slides, such as South-east Asia's first hydro-magnetic coaster Riptide Rocket. Visitors can even snorkel amid 20,000 fish at Rainbow Reef, or feel the magic of wading alongside dozens of rays at Ray Bay.



Singapore Botanic Gardens



Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve



Wismu Harjo Yudhananto/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

# Sri Lanka

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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Shariff Che Lah/123RF.com

Golden Temple at Dambulla



Natalia Deriabina/123RF.com

Elephant riding in Pinnawala

Wooing Chinese and Eastern European travellers plus hoping for a revival of markets in Western Europe are on the wish list of Sri Lanka as it heads towards a challenging target of 2.5 million arrivals by 2016. Arrivals in 2013 are targeted at 1.3 million, up from just over a million last year, while arrivals for the first half of the year reached 512,281. Sri Lanka is expecting 1.4 million visitors in 2014.

Infrastructure wise, development is rapid, particularly in emerging locations such as the country's north-east region, which has opened to tourism since ending a long civil conflict in May 2009. Roads have been widened and hotels are springing up in popular eastern destinations such as Passekudah and Arugam Bay. The country's second international airport opened in March in the southern port town of Hambantota, providing faster access to southern resorts, the east and the central hills. A new domestic carrier, Cinnamon Air, launched daily flights in July to many parts of the country, while a host of other new domestic carriers are seeking approval for more services.

Meanwhile, as four- to five-star properties grapple with a crisis in occupancy due to an increasing number of travellers opting for cheaper hotels and homestays, at least three mega casinos in Colombo are in the pipeline following the announcement by Australian-led James Packer and John Keells Holdings, which owns Sri Lanka's biggest domestic hotel chain. A massive beautification of the Capital is also near completion for the Commonwealth leaders' summit in mid-November.

### ARRIVALS

China is powerfully making its mark in Sri Lanka, given that a mega-promotion campaign with billboards and advertisements on buses was launched for the first time in China in September, aimed at more than doubling Chinese arrivals to 60,000 this year from 25,781 last year.

Ukraine entered the fray with a strong showing of 124.2 per cent year-on-year growth last year, while India's position as Sri Lanka's largest source market is increasingly shaky. Industry sources say bigger growth from regional destinations is being deterred by the slightly costlier Sri Lanka, while more

arrivals are hailing from China and Eastern Europe.

Although Sri Lanka has been trying to woo visitors from the Middle East by participating at various tradeshows, there is not much progress reflected this year. Meanwhile, the UK, Sri Lanka's second largest source market, is showing signs of a recovery from the Euro Zone crisis. Among other traditional markets, Germany, France and Russia all showed strong growth in the first nine months.

#### Arrivals; % year-on-year change

Country	January-September 2013	2012
India	131,589; +7.8	176,340; +2.9
UK	90,714; +10.9	114,218; +7.7
Germany	59,950; +22.3	71,642; +28.2
France	46,807; +10.4	56,863; +16.8
Middle East	41,626; +7.5	56,169; -0.3
Russia	22,562; +37.6	22,348; +124.2
Ukraine	15,294; +25	28,402; +33

Sources: Tourism Ministry; industry



Oleksii Serghieiev/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

### HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Total room inventory across Sri Lanka rose to 15,570 rooms from 269 units at the end of 2012 against 14,653 rooms and 252 units in 2011, according to the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA).

With the exception of three-star rooms, the total number of which rose marginally in 2012, the number of one- to five-star rooms remained unchanged from 2011's. The most significant change was in the number of unclassified units such as small guesthouses, homestays and other unregistered accommodation, which rose to 6,102 and 155 units from 5,268 rooms and 139 units in 2011.

Meanwhile, the average occupancy rate fell across the board in 2012. Over the past 12 to 18 months, four- and five-star hoteliers have been complaining of lower occupancies despite rising arrivals, owing to many visitors' choice of the cheaper, unclassified accommodation options. Furthermore, the government has launched a programme with grants and cheap loans to upgrade homes, hoping to add 1,000-1,500 more homestay rooms to the inventory. Currently 160 homes with two to four rooms each are registered in SLTDA's website, with prices around US\$20 per night inclusive of breakfast compared to \$40 upwards for other types of accommodation offered in Sri Lanka.

Over in Colombo, the average room rate (including taxes) for five-star hotels was US\$200 net per night while those outside the city commanded US\$238.

All Colombo hotels come under a government-regulated minimum pricing policy since the later part of 2010, which is not applicable to hotels outside the city where rates for below five-star categories are the same or less.

#### Room strength in Sri Lanka in 2012

All categories	15,570
5-star	3,230
4-star	1,784
3-star	1,201
2-star	2,022
1-star	1,171
Others (guest houses, homestays etc)	6,102

#### Average occupancy rate (%)

Category	2012	2011
5-star	81.9	95.7
4-star	79.9	96.7
3-star	80.8	93.3
2-star	83.9	95.5
1-star	86.9	95.6

#### Room strength in Colombo and Greater Colombo

Area	2012	2011
Colombo	3,086	2,573
Greater Colombo	3,054	2,856

#### Average room rate in Colombo (not including taxes) in 2012

5-star	US\$125
4-star	US\$95
3-star	US\$75
2-star	US\$60
1-star	US\$45

Source: SLTDA  
(Note: As at press time, there was no information in the NTO's website on 2013's statistics)

### NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

#### 2013

- Amethyst Resort, Passikudah, 100 keys, 1H
- Pearl Grand Hotel, Colombo, 89 keys, 1H
- The Kingsbury Colombo, 229 keys, 1H
- Jetwing Lagoon, Negombo, 55 keys, 1H
- Hotel J, Negombo, 35 keys, 1H
- Centara Passikudah Resort & Spa Sri Lanka, 125 keys, 1H
- Anilana Pasikuda, 60 keys, 1H
- Laya Safari, Yala, 20 keys, 1H
- OZO Colombo Sri Lanka, 160 keys, 2H
- Jetwing Yala, 80 keys, 2H
- Ananthaya, Chilaw, 88 keys, 2H
- Anilana Nilaveli, Trincomalee, 70 keys, 2H

#### 2014

- Heritage Negombo, 143 keys
- Centara Ceysands Resort & Spa, Bentota, 165 keys
- Mövenpick Hotel Colombo, 80 keys
- Jetwing Colombo, 98 keys
- Citrus Kalpitiya, 200 keys
- Sheraton Colombo Hotel, 306 keys



Three-wheel tuk-tuks

Vicspacemaker/123RF.com

## ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE

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### AIR ACCESS

Sky is the limit as more international carriers and new domestic operators have launched flights to Sri Lanka in response to increasing arrivals.

Between October 2012 and October this year, Korean Air, British Airways and Turkish Airlines all launched direct flights to Colombo. Visitors from Europe had depended on Asian carriers such as Sri Lankan Airlines, Emirates and Singapore Airlines to travel to Colombo until the two European carriers entered the fray. At least 25 airlines, including budget carriers, are now connected to Colombo, flying directly from Europe or Asia, via hubs such as Singapore, London or Dubai.

From Asia, Sri Lanka is served by a host of carriers, namely SriLankan Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways, China Eastern Airlines, Korean Air, Malaysia Airlines, Maldivian Airlines and Thai Airways. This also includes airlines such as Emirates flying out from the Middle East, though most of the airlines including Air Arabia, Etihad Airways, Kuwait Airways and Qatar Airways focus essentially on the outbound labour traffic.

SriLankan Airlines has the most number of flights to and from any destination, followed by Emirates and Singapore Airlines.

Travellers from India, Sri Lanka's biggest source market, are also well served with Sri Lanka's two carriers, Air India and low-cost carriers Jet Airways and SpiceJet.

The entry of new operators has also seen a surge in domestic air travel, with the launch of Cinnamon Air being the most significant development. The new airline has daily flights to several inland destinations since July and joins other operators such as Expo Air, Air Deccan, Air Senok, Daya Aviation, Cosmos Airlines and the Sri Lanka Air Force-run Helitours, all of which operate a mix of daily and on-demand flights (to few local destinations though).

The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, Sri Lanka's second international airport, Hambantota in the south opened in March with a capacity to handle a million passengers a year. So far, SriLankan Airlines, Mihin Lanka, Air Arabia and flydubai are operating flights mostly to Middle East

destinations while Thai Airways is also considering operating flights.

Upgrading of the Bandaranaike International Airport, the country's main airport just outside Colombo, will see capacity rise to 12 million passengers by 2020 from six million now. There will also be a second runway to support the Airbus A380, an additional eight passenger gates, a domestic terminal, a five-storey carpark, and a five-star hotel near the airport.

### NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

Infrastructure is rapidly developing in Sri Lanka with new expressways, airports and seaports in the past two years.

Expansion of the 126km Southern Expressway from Colombo to the southern town of Galle, which opened in November 2011, by another 35km to Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport is expected to complete end-2013. The government also plans to extend the expressway further to Hambantota to connect with the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA), which opened in March 2013.

To mitigate traffic congestion in the Colombo Metropolitan area and improve connectivity with other regions, a 29km Outer Circular highway is being built to link seven trunk roads and the two new expressways (Southern and Katunayake). The project is due for completion by 2015.

The 25km Katunayake Expressway to the country's main international airport from Colombo opened in November just before Sri Lanka hosted the biennial Commonwealth leaders' summit involving 54 heads of state.

While the MRIA can handle one million passengers per annum, the main Bandaranaike International Airport is also being upgraded in phases to increase capacity from six million currently to 12 million by 2020. Domestic airports in Ratmalana, Ampara, Koggala, Trincomalee and Jaffna are all being upgraded to meet growing demand.

A luxury train service to Kandy, a popular hilly region for tourists, has been expanded to Badulla, Trincomalee and Vavuniya while state-run Sri Lanka Railways also launched an air-conditioned coach service in May to Kandy.

Meanwhile, three projects that are underway in Colombo include the Shangri-La Colombo, Krrish Square mixed-use development and Ocean Towers, all due for completion 2014-2015.

The Capital has spruced up under a mega development project with the addition of walkways, parks, jogging and cycling tracks, cafes as well

as an international rugby ground. The city's showpiece Vihara Maha Devi Park, which also has an amphitheatre, was redeveloped ahead of the Commonwealth leaders' summit.

### ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

#### Best time to visit

The months from November to April are for the sun and sand-seeking travellers while January to April are cool for travel in the central highlands.

#### Tipping culture

Tipping is generally practised, though a service charge is applied to most bills. Rule of thumb is US\$1-\$3 for hotel staff and \$5-\$15 per day to a hotel guide or driver.

#### Public transportation

Taxis are widely available and contact numbers can be obtained from hotels. Metered three-wheel tuk-tuks can be flagged on the street and they charge about US40 cents per kilometre. Public transportation is not efficient.

#### One sound advice

The tap water is unsafe and boiling/filtering is often done too hastily in some hotels and restaurants. It is best to drink bottled water.

### IMPORTANT CONTACTS

#### NTO

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority is the apex body for Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau.  
Tel: (94-11) 2426-900;  
(94-11) 2437-055/59/60  
Website: [www.srilanka.travel](http://www.srilanka.travel);  
[www.sltda.gov.lk](http://www.sltda.gov.lk)

Sri Lanka Convention Bureau  
Website: [www.visitsrilanka.net](http://www.visitsrilanka.net)

#### Travel trade associations

Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators  
Website: [www.slaito.com](http://www.slaito.com)

IATA Agents Association of Sri Lanka  
Website: [www.iata-agents.lk](http://www.iata-agents.lk)

Tourist Hotel Association of Sri Lanka  
Website: [www.chamber.lk](http://www.chamber.lk)

Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka  
Website: [www.travelagentsofsrilanka.com](http://www.travelagentsofsrilanka.com)

The Association of Small and Medium Enterprises in Tourism Sri Lanka  
Website: [www.asmetrilanka.com](http://www.asmetrilanka.com)

PATA Sri Lanka  
Website: [www.patasrilanka.org](http://www.patasrilanka.org)

Compiled by Feizal Samath  
All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Yala National Park and safari stay

Poaching and deforestation have caused the leopard population in Sri Lanka to shrink. Leopard bones are now regarded as an alternative to tiger bones in traditional medicine, resulting in more poaching, while gem mining, a very important contributor to Sri Lanka's economy, continues to claim precious hectares of land where leopards live.

The Yala National Park lies along the south-eastern coast of the country and is known in the world for its high density of leopard population. The park covers an area of approximately 979km<sup>2</sup> and lies in the southern province of Uva, 300km outside of Colombo. Being one of the first two conservation sites in Sri Lanka set up in the 1900s, Yala has been playing a crucial role for the conservation of Sri Lanka's birds, elephants and of course its national treasure, leopards. The park hosts a variety of ecosystems including semi-deciduous forests, which is the perfect environment for leopards.

February to July is said to be the best period to visit Yala, during which morning game drives are suggested for spotting the creature. The park closes, however, during the months of September and October due to the mating season. November and December are very busy tourist months because of the rare chance to see leopard cubs being born, so bookings need to be made well in advance.

There are a number of operators in Sri Lanka specialising in leopard-sighting experiences. One such company is Leopard Safaris, an award-winning safari operator specialising in responsible ecotourism. Inspired by southern Africa's private safari industry, Leopard Safaris provides African luxury-style mobile tents complete with all the comforts one needs for an overnight stay. The rangers and other staff are experts within their fields eager to share their vast knowledge and experiences with guests. They are also conservationists involved in the Wilderness and Wildlife Conservation Trust's Leopard Project.

If booked through Diethelm, Leopard Safaris will contribute a percentage of the revenue generated from each stay, as well as all the proceeds from selling Leopard Safaris-branded items such as T-shirts, postcards and other gifts, to the funding of research and awareness-raising activities for leopard preservation.

## FAMILY FUN

### Tour for viewing wildlife

Diethelm recommends a special 10-day tour to introduce children to the wildlife in Sri Lanka. The sense of adventure is heightened in this tour through transportation by helicopter and seaplane. If travelling between November and April, families begin at the Dolphin Beach Resort in Kalpitiya for dolphin and whale watching as well as snorkelling to see the reefs

of the azure Indian Ocean. If travelling between May and October, they can enjoy kite surfing on the nearby lagoon. Another stop is the Primate Research Centre in Polonnaruwa, which is home to three species of the monkey, namely toque macaques, hanuman langurs and purple-faced langurs. Families can delight in observing these primates' social behaviour and family relationships with the chance for close-up photo taking. Other activities include relaxing at Chaayu Blu's Upuvelli Beach on the gorgeous east coast, and pretending to be castaways for a day on Pigeon Island, with snorkelling and an evening barbeque to kill time with. Families will also fly by helicopter to Yala National Park (see also CSR and sustainability) for a leopard-spotting and camping trip. There, dinner is served under the stars before guests go to sleep to the lullaby of jungle sounds. After a final chance in the morning for more animal spotting – lucky guests may chance upon an elephant, wild buffalo, spotted deer, jackal or sloth bear – the group leaves the wilderness for the south coast for another round of fun and relaxation on the beach.

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### Tea plantation stay

Sri Lanka has consistently boasted the world's finest tea and is in fact the second biggest exporter of tea globally. The multiple varieties of Ceylon tea have a distinctive flavour and an exotic fragrance.

To experience Sri Lanka's rich history of tea production first-hand necessitates a stay at one of the country's tea plantations. Sitting on verdant green mountains thousands of feet above sea level are four colonial-style luxurious cottages equipped with modern amenities. There are also four tea plantations scattered across the Bogawantalawa Valley. Diethelm works closely with Ceylon Tea Trails for the arrangement of stays at the Relais & Chateaux cottages, sightseeing tours and visits to the tea plantations.

Andrew Taylor, the resident tea planter, will take guests through the remarkable tea-making process: first, by trekking through the jungle in search of the best slopes of the plantation; next, by watching the



A leopard that prowls Yala National Park





Tea plantations



Elephants in Yala National Park



Dolphin watching in Kalpitiya

skilled tea pluckers at their job. Guests then head to the factory equipped with traditional British machinery, where the production process ends and the tea leaves converted into a delicious blend of Ceylon black tea.

## WELLBEING

### Ayurveda treatments

Sri Lanka is not only an island of immense beauty, colourful history and warm-hearted people; it is also home to renowned ayurveda centres and health resorts.

**Abhyangha:** this is the ayurvedic oil massage, an integral part of the treatment and healing process. Benefits of this massage, which involves large amounts of oil, include deeper sleep at night, increased circulation, calming of the nerves and softer skin. The best time of the day to benefit from the massage is in the morning before taking a shower. This assists in releasing all the toxins which have accumulated overnight. The oils used for the massage vary depending on the weather, climate and the *dosha* (body constitution) of each customer. Sesame, coconut, mustard, almond and herbal oils are often used and the professional blending of the oils creates a double benefit. The herbs help nourish the skin and promote faster healing, whilst the esoteric characteristics of the oils balance the mind and emotions. Abhayagha can be



enjoyed at any spa in Sri Lanka; however, to get the most out of the treatment it is recommended to have a consultation with an ayurvedic doctor, who will suggest the best oil combination for one's dosha.

**Shirodhara:** this very relaxing treatment involves warm liquid being gently dripped onto the forehead, a spiritual spot above one's eyebrows which in ayurvedic teachings, is the gate which leads to the soul. The liquid used for treatment can be oil, milk or in some cases, buttermilk. The 60- to 90-minute long treatment starts with a massage, before a vessel with a small hole is prepared above the customer's forehead. From the hole, the liquid slowly drips onto the forehead, putting the customer in a relaxed and meditative state. Entirely stimulating and almost hypnotic, Shirodhara is a wonderful experience that should not be missed while in Sri Lanka. Apart from enabling deep relaxation, it also relieves problems such as tension headaches, shoulder and neck pain, anxiety, depression and insomnia. Try it at one of the many ayurveda centres and spas all over the island. Diethelm recommends a stay at the Siddhalepa Ayurvedic Health Resort located in Wadduwa, approximately 65km from Colombo International Airport.

**Yoga retreats:** Yoga has been practised for thousands of years. It not only teaches how the mind and body connect, but also relieves stress and pain, as well as increases flexibility and strength. The retreats are usually set up in scenic surroundings, close to



Ayurveda massage

nature. Ulpotha, a private hideaway in the jungle in central Sri Lanka, accommodates up to 19 guests and offers twice-daily yoga classes conducted by world-renowned instructors. The minimum stay of seven nights allows guests to make the most of the holistic experience. Yoga classes are conducted in the morning and evening; the time in between is for guests to enjoy a massage, swim in the lake, bird-watch, explore surrounding villages on a bike, take a jungle walk, order outfits from the local tailor, and enjoy delicious vegetarian Sri Lankan meals, among other activities. There is no hot water, electricity, and Wi-Fi here — making for a real retreat indeed from the fast-paced modern world.

## MD'S HOT PICK



### Wellbeing: rejuvenate with yoga at the Talalla Health Retreat

An exclusive hideaway to rejuvenate oneself physically and mentally is the yoga-focused Talalla Health Retreat located along the Southeastern coast, tucked away behind the coconut tree-studded shore of a small coastal town. Complete with alfresco-style rooms, airy yoga halls, lush gardens and adjoining powdery-white beaches and turquoise waters, guests enjoy customised programmes and consultations with the resort's resident yoga therapist and ayurvedic doctor. The entire stay at this exclusive escape includes exotic cuisine, various forms of meditation, yoga classes and fitness adventures, all aimed at being light and enjoyable. Moving beyond yoga and meditation, cooking classes and day excursions to wildlife parks and local markets can be arranged. Additionally, the resort's location offers an ideal spot for surfing.

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Yoga practice by the beach at Talalla Health Retreat

# Thailand



Grand Palace

Mirrapisan Swangphong/123RF.com

on the cards for Phuket and Chiang Mai. TAT will run the *Higher revenue through Thainess* campaign in 2014, which seeks to use Thai culture and customisation as key drivers of product development. However, the somewhat vague concept of Thainess has been invoked by TAT a number of times in the past, leading some travel specialists to call for a more concrete strategy focussing on specific areas like heritage tourism.

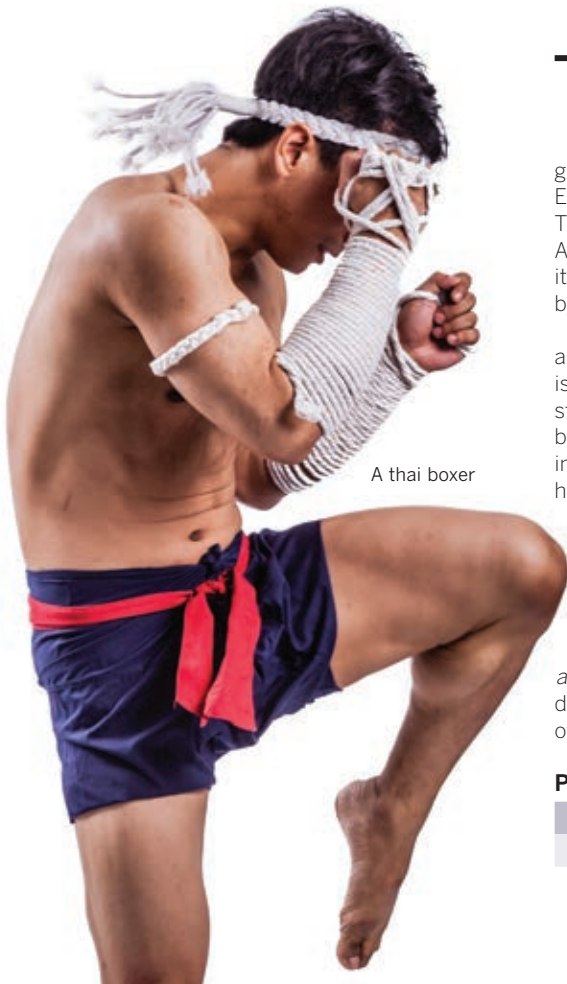
Meanwhile, India has been sending more visitors due to its increased air access with Phuket and the emergence of Hua Hin as a high-end wedding destination. The Russian market is also maturing, with operators expanding coverage beyond Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket to include Khao Lak, Krabi and Koh Samui.

## ARRIVALS

TAT has set a target for the year of 24.1 million international visitors, generating revenue of 1.1 trillion baht (US\$35.4 billion). This is forecast to rise to 28 million in 2014, while domestic tourism is targeting 136.8 million trips, with total tourism earnings set to hit two trillion baht for the first time.

From January to August 2013, visitor arrivals climbed to 17.4 million from 14.4 million in the same period last year, up 21.4 per cent from 8.6 per cent, according to Immigration Bureau. The top five source markets were China (which posted the most dramatic growth), Malaysia, Russia, Japan and South Korea. Indonesia, Myanmar and Taiwan all posted strong double-digit growth, though arrivals from those countries still numbered in the low hundreds of thousands.

Tourism spending exhibited different trends. Tourist receipts in 1Q topped 323 billion baht, an increase of 23.1 per cent year-on-year in baht terms. Per capita spending was up 5.9 per cent at 4,474 baht per day. Key source markets in terms of total expenditure were China (with the most dramatic), Russia, the UK, Malaysia and Germany. There was growth in total expenditure from the vast majority of source markets, though Italy, Sweden and Finland suffered the greatest declines at -13.1 per cent, -11.6 per cent and -9.1 per cent respectively. Hong Kong continued to lead in daily spend per visitor, followed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Singapore and Brazil.



A thai boxer

Thailand's tourism sector is seeing booming arrivals in 2013. Russia and Asian source markets are the key drivers of growth, while recoveries in the US and European economies also play a part. The surging arrivals have led Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to increase its 2013 target for international visitors by nearly two million, from 22.2 million.

Mass tourism has been identified as a key engine of growth, but there is a concern that Thailand's already straining tourism infrastructure could be stretched to breaking point by the influx of visitors. Coaches, guides and hotel rooms are in increasingly short supply, leading to calls for the NTO and industry to focus more on quality tourists than volume.

To ease capacity in Bangkok and develop new regional markets, the NTO launched the *Bangkok and Beyond* campaign this year to develop five key tourism routes outside of the capital. A similar strategy is

## Projected arrivals; year-on-year change and revenue for 2014

International	28 million	+13%	1.3 billion baht
Domestic	136.8 million	+9%	700 billion baht

### Top five source markets in January-August 2013

Country	Arrivals	% year-on-year change
China	3.2 million	+88.4
Malaysia	1.9 million	+16.9
Russia	1.1 million	+36.7
Japan	1 million	+15.5
South Korea	850,000	+11.9

### Top five markets for total expenditure in 1Q2013

Country	Amount (baht)	% year-on-year change
China	49 billion	+107
Russia	38.4 billion	+38.3
UK	16.1 billion	+8.3
Malaysia	16 billion	+16.8
Germany	15.8 billion	+14.7

### Top five markets for daily expenditure per visitor in 1Q2013

Country	Amount (baht)	% year-on-year change
Hong Kong	5,911	+5.6
Saudi Arabia	5,618	+4.7
UAE	5,617	+8.9
Singapore	5,459	+6.8
Brazil	5,359	+5.1

### Average daily expenditure per visitor; % year-on-year change in 1Q2013

Accommodation	1,371 baht; +5.4
Shopping	1,025 baht; +5.1
F&B	835 baht; +6.7
Entertainment	501 baht; +6.3

Sources: targets - TAT; arrival figures - Immigration Department

## HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Thailand's key hotel markets are Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai. Bangkok and Pattaya are known for offering value, while resort-focussed markets such as Phuket and Koh Samui can command much higher rates, some well in excess of US\$1,000 per night.

There are currently 7,069 licensed hotels in Thailand with occupancy rising from 58.42 per cent in 2011 to 64.9 per cent in 2012, according to Thai Hotels Association (THA). However STR Global/PATA recorded a different figure for average occupancy in 2011 – a six-percentage-point climb to 69 per cent – while average daily rate increased from US\$104 to US\$108 and RevPAR from US\$66 to US\$75.

The reported nationwide increase in occupancy indicates room oversupply in parts of the country is starting to be absorbed by rising arrivals, thanks mainly to strong growth from Asian feeder markets. This has led some industry and property sector sources to predict room rates in Bangkok could increase in 4Q2013. The city currently has the region's lowest five-star room rates outside of Kuala Lumpur, according to CBRE Thailand.

Bangkok saw the number of keys rise 1.3 per cent year-on-year to 96,822 rooms by end-2012. STR Global data shows. Supply is forecast to increase by some 2,250 rooms in 2H2013 and by 4,400 rooms by end-2015, according to new research from CBRE Thailand.

Phuket achieved marketwide occupancy of 76 per cent in the first half, its highest level since 2008 according to research from C9 Hotelworks, which also reported an increase in average daily rate and RevPAR. On the island, there are currently 24 hotels with 4,337 keys that are due to open between now and 2016, about two-thirds of which are in Patong.

Koh Samui's mid-year occupancy was also high at 75 per cent with the popular island getaway having hosted some 874,824 hotel guests during the first half of the year. occupancy was up seven per cent year-on-year, average daily rate increased by seven per cent from \$144 in 1H2012, while RevPAR grew 18 per cent.

### Average occupancy rate

City/region	2012 (%)	2011 (%)	Change (%)
Bangkok	66.8	60.1	+6.7
North	61.2	52.6	+8.6
North-east	75	63	+11.9
South-west	76.1	71.6	+4.4
East	59.1	61.3	-2.2
West	51.3	42	+9.3

Source: THA

### Performance in Phuket and Koh Samui in 1H2013

Indicator	Phuket	Koh Samui
Average occupancy rate	76%	75%
Average daily rate (year-on-year change)	+7%	+7%
RevPAR (year-on-year change)	+8%	+18%

Source: C9 Hotelworks

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- GLOW Pattaya, 162 keys, 3Q
- SENTIDO Graceland Khao Lak Resort & Spa, 338 keys, 3Q
- Novotel Phuket Kamala Beach, 166 keys, 3Q
- Hilton Sukhumvit Bangkok, 305 keys, 3Q
- Amari Buriram United, 60 keys, 4Q
- Best Western Buriram, 81 keys, 4Q
- Shangri-La Hotel Chiang Mai, 281 keys, 4Q
- Hansar Khao Yai, 39 keys, 4Q
- Anantara Bhoput Koh Samui Resort & Spa, 106 keys, 4Q
- Centara Grand Modus Resort & Spa Pattaya, 231 keys, 4Q
- Centara Grand Phratamnak Resort Pattaya, 165 keys, 4Q
- Point Yamu by COMO, Phuket, 106 keys, 4Q
- Sleep with Me Hotel design hotel @ patong, Phuket, 258 keys, 4Q
- Anantara Phuket Layan Resort & Spa, 77 keys, 4Q
- Hyatt Regency Kamala Phuket, 202 keys, 4Q
- Hansar Pranburi, 24 keys, 4Q

### 2014

- Ozo Chaweng Samui, 208 keys, 1Q
- Prana Resort Koh Samui Nandana, 60 keys, 1Q
- Le Meridien Suvarnabhumi Golf Resort & Spa, Bangkok, 223 keys, 2Q



Traffic jams in bangkok

Kinuruchon Chanthayakorn/123RF.com

## AIR ACCESS

Airports of Thailand (AoT) reported some 58.5 million passengers passed through its six airports during the first eight months of the year, up 17.7 per cent year-on-year. While such respectable growth supports the view that Thailand's tourism industry should continue to grow strongly over the coming years, both Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Phuket International Airport are faltering under the strain of increasing arrivals and insufficient capacity.

More than 52 million passengers passed through Suvarnabhumi's gates in 2012, well beyond its official capacity of 45 million. From January to August, 34.4million had journeyed through the facility, down 5.7 per cent over the same period in 2011but still more than the airport can handle. Phase II of its development expansion is now underway to raise capacity to 60 million, but this will not come online until 2016 at the earliest.

Partly because of the capacity problem, the Thai government has accelerated developments at Don Mueang International Airport, much to the chagrin of most airlines. Thai AirAsia and some low-cost carriers have moved to the old facility, taking more than six million passengers a year from Suvarnabhumi. What was once hoped to be a temporary measure is looking increasingly permanent, however. AoT announced in June that it would reopen Don Mueang's second terminal and increase capacity from 18.5 million to 30 million by end-2013. With no rail links between the two airports, transit passengers face a minimum of four to five hours disembarking one plane to board another.

Meanwhile, a number of new air services were inaugurated during the year. VietJetAir became the first private Vietnamese carrier to enter the international market when it launched daily flights on Airbus A320s between Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport in February. This was bolstered by the addition of daily flights to Hanoi in June.

Myanmar was connected with a number of new services. Nok Air kicked off its daily Mae Sot-Mawlamyine flight in September with plans to launch four-weekly flights between Bangkok and Yangon in November. Bangkok Airways

inaugurated its four-times-weekly Bangkok-Mandalay route in September. It launched flights to Nay Pyi Taw the same month, followed by Thai AirAsia in October.

Thai AirAsia also introduced a new daily Bangkok-Siem Reap (Cambodia) service in October, while Norwegian launched two new thrice-weekly services to Bangkok from Oslo and Stockholm in June.

Japan's HIS Group and Thailand's Baiyoke Group of Hotels formed Asia Atlantic Airlines, launching a charter service between Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Tokyo Narita International Airport in August. Daily return flights from Bangkok to Kansai International Airport in Osaka commenced in September. Services to South Korea and China were due to start in November.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

### Grand Postal Building

Bangkok added a new heritage building to its portfolio of meetings venues when IMPACT Exhibition Management took over management of the Grand Postal Building, an impressive 80-year old building that was once the epicentre of Thailand's postal and communications services. The functionalist European building comprises four stories and a basement of which IMPACT manages the first and third floors offering up more than 3,000m<sup>2</sup> of usable space for groups of 50-600 guests with parking for up to 200 vehicles.

### Escape Hunt

Launched in mid-2013, Escape Hunt is a murder mystery adventure which transports groups of two-to-five people a century into the past where they get to play detective and have to solve a heinous crime within 60-minutes. While there are strong teambuilding elements to the game, the key focus is fun.

### Ku De Ta

October saw the launch of Bangkok's first superclub when the Singapore-origin Ku De Ta opened its doors in October. The venue, located on the roof of Sathorn Square building in downtown Bangkok, offers staggering city views and an unparalleled space for dining and clubbing. Ku De Ta will have plenty for leisure travel specialists and events planners to choose from. Its two floors feature two clubs, seven bars, three restaurants and a high-altitude terrace.

### Opened land borders

Myanmar in August announced the opening of four land borders with Thailand – Mae Sot-Myawady, Mae Sai-Tachilek, Ranong-Kawthaung and Sunaron-Htee Khee – which will see the

development of new multi-destination products and tours taking in highlights from both countries. The majority of traffic is expected to flow overland from Thailand into Myanmar with groups most likely leaving by air from Yangon and Mandalay. These options will increase as air access to the previously isolated nation improve. The Mae Sot-Myawady route is expected to be the most popular.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

December to February, when one of the world's hottest capital cities enjoys a customary cold snap where the temperature can plunge to as low as 20°C.

### Tipping culture

Street stalls and shophouse restaurants do not expect tipping, though staff at more upscale venues is more likely to expect a gratuity for good service. Be sure to check your bill as an increasing number of restaurants include tax (seven per cent) and service charge (10 per cent).

### Public transportation

Traffic in Bangkok is a nightmare; if possible, travel by BTS or MRT. Taxis are pretty cheap, but be sure the driver understands where you want to be taken.

### One sound advice

Politics is a divisive issue in Thailand, so it is often advisable to steer clear of the matter. The monarchy is also best left out of conversations as harsh laws levy stiff prison sentences for those who bring the royal family's name into disrepute.

## CONTACTS

### NTO

Tourism Authority of Thailand  
Website: [www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)

Tourism Council of Thailand  
Website: [www.thailandtourismcouncil.org](http://www.thailandtourismcouncil.org)

Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau  
Website: [www.tceb.or.th](http://www.tceb.or.th)

### Travel trade associations

Association of Thai Travel Agents  
Website: [www.atta.or.th](http://www.atta.or.th)

Pacific Asia Travel Association  
Website: [www.pata.org](http://www.pata.org)

Thai Hotels Association  
Website: [www.thaihotels.org](http://www.thaihotels.org)

Thai Travel Agents Association  
Website: [www.ttaa-thai.com](http://www.ttaa-thai.com)

Compiled by Greg Lowe  
All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights



## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Tongbai Elephant Foundation

Diethelm takes visitors to the foundation camp to meet and learn about the Asian elephants, feed them and simply enjoy their company. These creatures love a refreshing bath in the afternoon, so visitors get to walk with them to a small river for this highlight activity of the day. The tour price is inclusive of a donation to the Tong Bai Elephant Foundation. Note: visitors do not ride the elephants here.

### Beluga School for Life

The Beluga School for Life close to the beach town of Khao Lak is home to 150 needy children including tsunami survivors and those from poor families. The school comprises family houses where seven to 10 children and a mentor live within each, the Small Kids' House, a kindergarten, a UNESCO-associated elementary and secondary school, a hotel training institute, bungalows for visitors as well as six learning centres. Apart from lessons in the classroom, the children participate in numerous daily projects at the learning centres, such as organic farming on the school's own farm and cooking nutritional and healthy food at the canteen and professional restaurant kitchen.



Karen Hill Tribe Lodge

Visitors can visit the school on a day trip or stay in one of the hotel training institute's comfortable bungalows. All proceeds from visitors are channelled directly into the project.

### Karen Hill tribe lodge

Deep in the mountains north of Chiang Mai, visitors can meet the indigenous Karen hill tribe and contribute to the preservation of its precious culture. Accommodation is available at a 10-room, open-air bamboo house that sits on stilts in the middle of the village, surrounded by a valley of rice fields and forests of banana, palm and sugarcane trees. Activities include trekking in the scenic countryside and the verdant jungle, and learning about the unique lifestyle of the hospitable villagers. Visitors can try rice pounding via

a wooden foot pedal and learn to weave via the back-strap method, an age-old technique that the women of this culture use to make colourful clothing and bags. The women are also good at traditional Thai massages. At night, the proud young hill tribe children charm audiences by singing and playing traditional musical instruments around a bonfire, underneath a star-studded sky.

## FAMILY FUN

### Adventure at Khao Laem Lake

Close to the Burma border, in the middle of a lush mountainous tropical forest lies a lake with beautiful floating water lilies. Visiting families can traverse this stunning area on board a floating houseboat, the Lake House, discovering submerged temples, waterfalls, stunning cliffs and remote villages; and spot hunting eagles, foraging hornbills, monkeys and other creatures. Each trip take four to 24 guests and spans five days, with the Lake House anchoring at a new location every day. The houseboat offers five double/triple rooms, two

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Khao Laem Lake House



Romantic boat ride down the Chao Phraya River



Lumpini Park offers a green escape



Zip around intuk-tuks



Explore the sights at Chinatown

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family rooms and one dormitory with six beds, as well as shared toilets and showers. Fun activities include elephant riding, bamboo rafting, splashing around in the clean lake water, and kayaking to a nearby island.

### SPECIAL INTEREST

#### Morning tour

This tour starts by taking early risers on a morning stroll through Bangkok's largest green oasis, Lumpini Park to watch the locals going about their morning exercise routine of martial arts, yoga and aerobics. Participants may even want to join in the daily one-hour Chi-Kung exercise performed on the lawn near the clock tower. The next stop is Wat Pho, to attend the chanting ritual of the monks followed by a guided tour of the temple grounds. Participants will then have their fortune read at Tha Prachan pier by a local astrologer (with translation by the guide), before finally taking a stroll at the highly interesting amulet market, where the sidewalk is crammed with makeshift stalls selling an array of amulets, talismans and charms. Some of the old shop houses there sell traditional medicines and herbs.

#### Bangkok tour via various modes of transport

To truly experience colourful Bangkok, this tour uses almost every form of transportation available in the city. Start with a walk to the nearest skytrain station and travel to Chaopraya River. Then go onto a public taxi boat to Tha Tien pier for a ferry boat ride across the

river to visit Wat Arun ("Temple of Dawn"). Continue on to Bangkok's oldest temple founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Wat Pho, which boasts a reclining Buddha. Walk back to the pier and depart by taxi boat towards Memorial Bridge and the largest flower and wet market of Paklong Talad. Here, visitors find a dazzling display of orchids and flowers grown in the cooler northern regions of the country, as well as a variety of vegetables and fruit. Next, a short tuk-tuk ride heads to Bangkok's vibrant Chinatown district for a meal at a typical Chinese Dim Sum restaurant and to pray at Wat Mangkon Kamalawat, the most important Chinese Buddhist temple. Then explore Pahurat Market, located in the heart of Little India, where locals shop for fabrics, clothing and wedding keepsakes. Continue on foot to visit Sri Gurusingh Sabha Temple, where the local Sikhs come to worship, before walk through Sampang Lane, a labyrinth of small alleys with stalls selling cheap clothing and household goods. Walk along Yaowarat Road located in the heart of Chinatown, where gold jewellery shops, Chinese herbal shops and stalls selling a large variety of snacks, household goods, incense etc line the street. Finally, return by taxi boat at Ratchawong pier to Taksin Bridge and take the skytrain back to the hotel.

### **Pantawan Cooking School, Chiang Mai**

Learning the secret recipes of Thai Cuisine in a true Thai ambience is the motto of the Pantawan Cooking School. An old Thai-style house classroom is the location for this cooking class. The programme starts with a tour of the local fresh market, where the chef guides participants in choosing the perfect ingredients for the cooking lesson. Each open class involves a fixed menu, takes

not more than 12 persons, and is conducted late-morning or in the afternoon. Private classes are available for either morning or afternoon sessions (minimum two persons), and participants can choose four dishes they would like to learn to cook under the guidance of a private chef who speaks both English and French.

### **Street food discovery**

This food tour starts at Bangrak Market, originally a flower market offering blooms for all occasions at wholesale or retail prices. Besides flowers, this trading area also serves as a wet market selling a variety of food. As participants walk towards Saphan Thaksin Pier, they may pick up some fruit and the traditional Khao Tom, a delicious rice soup which Thais eat for breakfast. At 09.30, they board a ferry for a 15-minute ride to Thang Cha Pier. The area around the pier plays host to Bangkok's most extensive Buddhist amulet market. Also, right next to the market is Thammasat University, one of Thailand's most prestigious universities. Participants can try out some Thai sweets and soft drinks while visiting the amulet market. Come 10.30, they continue on by taxi to Chinatown and explore this bustling area full of shops, food stalls and Chinese vendors. Pork buns, Dim Sum and other Chinese specialties can be found here. At 12.00, participants will travel by the tuk-tuk to Hua Lompong subway station towards Sam Yan Market. The ground level of this market is a fresh market, where everything from vegetables to fruit to seafood to fresh meat is sold. On the second floor, Sam Yan market is a food lover's paradise. Before heading back to their hotel, participants can savour various tasty choices here, including fresh Thai seafood, Thai-style steak, and other local delicacies.

## **MD'S HOT PICK**



### **Wellbeing: jungle spa experience at Waree Raksa Spa, Ao Luk**

The Waree Raksa Spa located in Klong Tom district, about 45km south of Krabi is surrounded by lush tropical landscape, with a large area dedicated to fruit orchards and an organic garden. The famous Krabi Hot Waterfall is just across the river from the spa. The natural hot spring surrounded by majestic mountains offer an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. Each pool is designed to blend in with the spring's natural shape with different temperature levels ranging from 38 to 45 degree Celsius, and each has a hidden cold-water area, for a perfect hydrotherapeutic experience. The spa offers innovative treatments using mineral water to promote good health. The signature treatment incorporates the science of hydrotherapy with self-exercises in the water. Apart from the variety of spa treatments, the day programme includes a visit to the local fruit market, the hot waterfall and the tropical plantation as well as a healthy Thai lunch and unlimited herbal drink and tea.

## **ASIAN TOURISM EXPERT GUIDE**



Pantawan Cooking School



Street food at a market in Phuket

# Vietnam

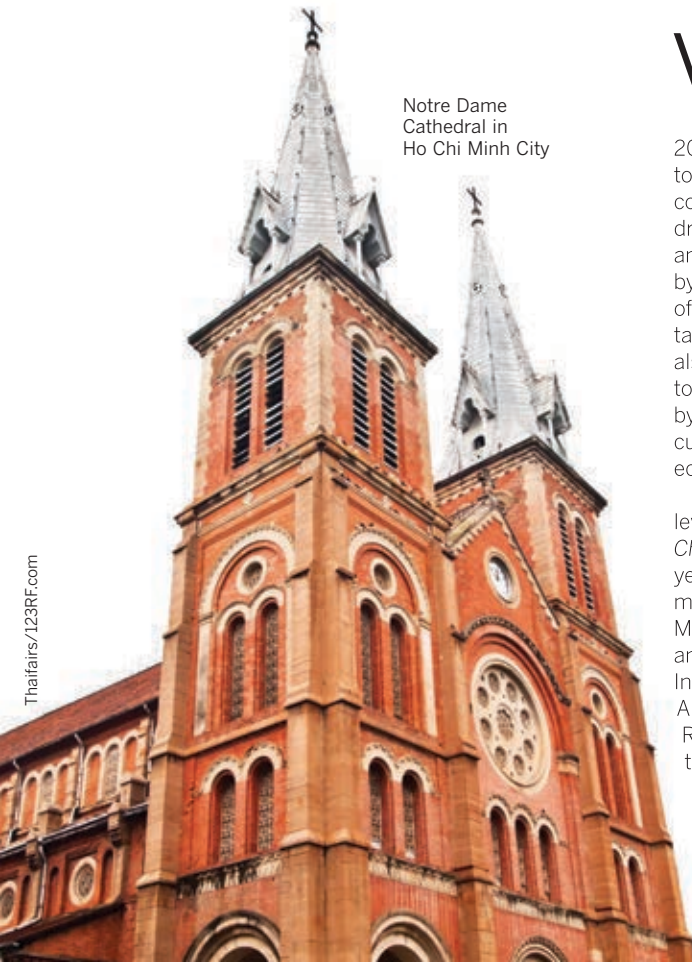
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Konstantinos Michail/123RF.com

A local woman in her taxi boat on Red River Delta



Notre Dame  
Cathedral in  
Ho Chi Minh City

Thafairs/123RF.com

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) announced earlier this year the National Action Plan 2013-2020, which seeks to develop tourism as a leading industry in the country by 2020. The plan aims to draw 7-7.5 million international arrivals and 36-37 million domestic tourists by 2015, as well as tourism receipts of US\$10-11 billion, with even higher targets outlined for 2020. The NTO also plans to develop 20 high-quality tourism products by 2015 and 50 by 2020, concentrating on beach, culture, community-based and ecotourism.

This year, VNAT will continue to leverage on the *Vietnam – Timeless Charm* campaign launched last year, focusing on eight major source markets: China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, France and Russia. It organised the Vietnam International Travel Mart in Hanoi in April, the National Tourism Year in the Red River Delta region in May and the Nha Trang International Sea and Island Fair in June.

However, the visa fee hike from January 1 for foreigners entering

the country – an 80 per cent increase from US\$25 to US\$45 – has been lambasted by the travel trade as a short-sighted policy that reduces the destination's appeal.

While Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Hanoi continue to draw the most number of tourists, Danang in the central region is rapidly scaling up as a beach destination in South-east Asia. Destination marketing organisation Central Coast Vietnam was set up early this year to promote central Vietnam, in addition to recent openings of five-star hotels, influx of new air links as well as a new golf course designed by Nick Faldo.

### ARRIVALS

For 2013, VNAT is targeting 7.2 million international arrivals, a higher goal bolstered by the record 6.8 million foreign arrivals last year, which represented a growth of 9.5 per cent from the year before.

Following a languid start at the beginning of the year, inbound arrivals to Vietnam picked up pace from the second quarter. Total international arrivals rose 7.9 per cent year-on-year and numbered close to 4.9 million in





Novotel Danang Premier Han River

**Arrivals; year-on-year % change in January-August 2013**

China	1.2 million; +33.1
South Korea	504,292; +5
Japan	392,990; +4.4
Australia	214,108; +12.7
Malaysia	212,217; +11.9
Russia	189,317; +63.1
Thailand	174,625; +24.2
France	146,308; -7.7
Indonesia	48,920; +25.6
New Zealand	20,568; +21.9

Source: VNAT

the first eight months, according to VNAT. This is a marked contrast from the lacklustre performance in the first quarter, which saw international arrivals decline 6.2 per cent year-on-year to 1.8 million.

East Asian markets continue to play a dominant role in the same eight-month period: China remains the top source market this year followed by South Korea and Japan. Indonesia remains an emerging market with a consistent year-on-year climb of over 20 per cent this year – a likely positive effect of the inaugural Jakarta-HCMC flights launched by Vietnam Airlines in late 2012.

Neighbouring Thailand also posted a strong growth, while Malaysian arrivals rose close to 12 per cent. Beyond South-east Asia, Australia and New Zealand both made significant strides, while Russia delivered the most dramatic increase of 63.1 per cent.

Meanwhile, several source markets registered sharp drops. France, a traditional source of longhaul arrivals dues to historical links, saw its arrivals to Vietnam dip 7.7 per cent. Finland, which leapt 42.2 per cent in overall arrivals in 2012, has posted a much lacklustre showing this year with decline of 23.7 per cent, although it remains to be seen if Finnair’s recently launched Helsinki-Hanoi flights would have any positive effects on inbound arrivals in the remaining months of the year.

**HOTEL PERFORMANCE**

The growth in arrivals has helped to ease the room boom across the country. Based on statistics from STR Global, the average occupancy rate of hotels in Vietnam grew 5.2 percentage points year-on-year (YoY) in the first seven months, while average daily rate and RevPAR rose 3.2 per cent and 8.6 per cent respectively.

With a current stock of 53 hotels with approximately 7,750 rooms as of 2Q2013, Hanoi expects an addition of seven projects injecting 1,300 rooms within this year. In the second quarter, RevPAR in the Vietnamese capital rose four per cent YoY, while average occupancy rate and average daily rate across all categories both climbed slightly.

In 2Q2013, HCMC’s total inventory in the three- to five-star segments grew seven per cent YoY to 89 hotels with some 11,870 rooms. From 2H2013 until 2015, the city’s supply is expected to grow by more than 2,100 rooms from 10 upcoming projects. However, the city’s hotels witnessed drops for other performance indicators. Average occupancy rate dipped five percentage points while average daily rate declined 12 per cent. RevPAR took a double-digit quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) dip for the three- to five-star segments due to fewer tourists during the low season.

Meanwhile, in the central region, Danang is seeing a steady growth in supply, with the total inventory expanding 39 per cent YoY to some 4,400 rooms in 1Q2013. Average occupancy rate rose five percentage points, while average daily rate dipped slightly by one per cent QoQ. And with 27 of 46 future projects expected to come online in 2013, Danang is slated to receive some 7,700 new rooms, which will represent about 190 per cent of its current inventory.

**Overall performance in January-July 2013**

Average occupancy rate	63.9%, +5.2%
Average daily rate	2.7 million dong (US\$128), +3.2%
RevPAR	1.7 million dong, +8.6%

Source: STR Global

**Performance in Hanoi in 2Q2013**

Inventory	7,750 rooms
Average occupancy rate	54%; +1%
Average daily rate	1.7 million dong; +0.7%
RevPAR	900,000 dong; +4%

Source: Savills Vietnam

**Performance in HCMC in 2Q2013**

Inventory: 3- to 5-star	11,870 rooms
Average occupancy rate	62%; -5%
Average daily rate	1.8 million dong; -12%
RevPAR: 3- & 4-star	-25%
5-star	-16%

Source: Savills Vietnam

**Performance in Danang in 1Q2013**

Inventory	4,400 rooms
Average occupancy rate	55%; +5%
Average daily rate	1.9 million dong; -1%

Source: Savills Vietnam

## NEW HOTELS IN 2013 AND 2014

### 2013

- Pulchra Da Nang, 31 keys, 1Q
- InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula Resort, 197 keys, 1Q
- Capri by Fraser, HCMC, 126 keys, 1Q
- Banyan Tree Lang Co, Thua Thien Hue Province, 49 keys, 2Q
- Angsana Lang Co, Thua Thien Hue Province, 229 keys, 2Q
- Hilton Garden Inn Hanoi, 86 keys, 2Q
- Moonlight Hotel Hue, 90 keys, 2Q
- Pullman Danang Beach Resort (rebranded from Lifestyle Resort Danang), 187 keys, 2Q
- Anantara Hoi An (rebranded from Lifestyle Heritage Resort Hoi An), 93 keys, 2Q
- Novotel Danang Premier Han River, 323 keys, 2Q
- The Grand Ho Tram Strip, Ba Ria-Vung Tau, 541 keys, 3Q
- Swiss-Belhotel Lao Cai, 186 keys, 3Q
- Amano'i, Phan Rang City, Ninh Thuan Province, 36 keys, 3Q
- Avani Quy Nhon Resort & Spa (rebranded from Lifestyle Wellness Resort Quy Nhon), 63 keys, 3Q
- Pullman Saigon Centre, 306 keys, 3Q
- JW Marriott Hotel Hanoi, 450 keys, 3Q

### 2014

- Eastin Hotel Hanoi (rebranded from Lakeside Hotel), 90 keys, mid-2014
- Ba Na Hills, Member of the MGallery Collection, 90 keys, 3Q

## AIR ACCESS

In 2012, Vietnamese airports handled 37.5 million passengers, a figure that has almost quadrupled since 2002, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam. Its international air connectivity has also been given a strong boost this year, most significantly by Finnair and the Gulf carriers.

Air Astana commenced its inaugural service to Vietnam with the launch of twice-weekly Almaty-HCMC flights on January 4, while AirAsia ramped up frequency on its Kuala Lumpur-Hanoi sector from seven- to 10-weekly flights on January 22.

Finnair started thrice-weekly flights between Helsinki and Hanoi from June 14, operating on a seasonal basis until October 27.

Daily connections between Vietnam and the Middle East are also growing. Etihad Airways launched daily flights from Abu Dhabi to HCMC on October 1, joining Emirates – which doubled passenger capacity on its Dubai-HCMC service in November 2012 – and Qatar Airways.

Having launched its four-times-weekly HCMC-Jakarta flights – the first direct connection between Vietnam and Indonesia – on A321 aircraft in December 2012, Vietnam Airlines introduced daily Danang-Siem Reap operations on January 23. The national flag carrier also began a weekly service between Nha Trang and Moscow on April 5, marking the country's third link to the Russian capital city. It started thrice-weekly flights between Seoul and Danang on July 1, adding to Asiana Airlines and Korean Air services on the same route. These services have boosted the central region's rapidly emerging status as an international beach destination.

On March 28, Dragonair established a thrice-weekly service from Hong Kong to Danang, and added a fourth weekly flight from July 6 until end-October due to strong demand during the summer season. From its Singapore base, SilkAir also announced it would up the frequency of its six-times weekly Danang flights to daily and its thrice-weekly Hanoi flights to four-times weekly from October 27.

Phu Quoc-based Air Mekong, which used to operate flights from Hanoi and HCMC to Phu Quoc, Con Don and Quy Nhon, has suspended all flights since March 1.

Meanwhile, LCC VietJet Air has expanded its network this year with new flights to domestic destinations and Bangkok. The airline also placed order for a number of Airbus aircraft.

## NEW TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE/ ATTRACTIONS

In July, the Vingroup rolled out Vincom Mega Mall Royal City in Hanoi, which is reportedly the largest underground retail complex in Asia. Covering an area of 230,000m<sup>2</sup>, the mall boasts over 600 shops, a water park, an ice-skating rink for 150 pax, a bowling area, a cinema complex as well as an F&B street with over 200 restaurants.

Phu Quoc International Airport opened its doors in December 2012, replacing the older facility in Duong Dong Town on the island. The 16.2 trillion dong airport is home to a 900-hectare terminal and a 3,000m runway, which makes it capable of landing Boeing 777s and Boeing 747-400s as well as receiving some

2.6 million passengers per year. More tourists and air links are expected for this southern island.

Phu Bai International Airport, located near Hue in the central province of Thua Thien-Hue, has resumed operations on September 20 following a closure for runway repair in March this year. After the six-month renovation, the airport can now accommodate larger aircraft. The upgrade is part of the government's effort to develop the central coast as a key tourist destination. The airport is expected to handle 20 aircraft and five million passengers per year by 2020.

Meanwhile, Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, in the north-central province of Quang Binh, is home to the world's biggest cave – Son Doong Cave – which will open in 2014.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE CITY

### Best time to visit

Vietnam can be visited year-round as its lengthy coastline offers a variety of climatic conditions from north to south, although it's advisable to avoid Tet in February – during which many businesses and restaurants close for the Vietnamese New Year.

### Tipping culture

Tipping is not expected but will be much appreciated, especially among tour guides, drivers and housekeeping staff.

### Public transportation

Taxis have become very common in Hanoi and HCMC, but look out for regulated companies such as Mai Linh Taxi (countrywide), Vinasun Taxi (HCMC and Danang) and Hanoi Taxi (Hanoi).

### One sound advice

Crossing roads full of motorbikes may be intimidating, but stay calm and move across at a steady pace.

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS NTO

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism  
Website: [www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn](http://www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn)

Central Coast Vietnam  
Website: [www.centralcoastvietnam.com](http://www.centralcoastvietnam.com)

### Travel trade associations

PATA Vietnam Chapter  
Website: [www.patavietnam.org](http://www.patavietnam.org)

Vietnam Tourism Association  
Website: [www.vita.vn](http://www.vita.vn)

Vietnam Association of Small and Medium Tourist Enterprises  
Website: [www.vtce.net](http://www.vtce.net)

Compiled by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena  
All information is correct at press time

# Insider highlights

## CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

### Streets International, Hoi An

Located right in the heart of beautiful Hoi An, Streets is not your average contemporarily designed Vietnamese restaurant. At this restaurant cum café, street kids and disadvantaged youth from the region are being prepared for a career in culinary arts and hospitality service.

Neal Bermas, founder of this innovative project, called on hospitality and food industry educators and business people to launch Streets International in June 2007. Based on the fact that the hospitality and tourism industries form a large part of developing economies throughout South-east Asia, Streets is the first real chance for many underprivileged teenagers to transit from poverty and life on the streets to a successful career in hospitality.

Every six months a class of 16 trainees begins the 18-month hospitality-training programme, which is internationally accredited by the award-winning Institute of Culinary Education in New York. The youths who learn their skills on the job at the Restaurant Café, under the supervision of instructors, are provided with housing, clothing, food, and medical care. The programme

also includes life skill mentoring and hospitality English classes.

Travellers to Hoi An should stop by Streets Restaurant Café and enjoy a delicious meal prepared by the trainees while learning more about this meaningful project.

## FAMILY FUN

### Travel to the family-friendly central region

The Vietnamese people are extremely child-friendly and they understand the needs of family travel, so travelling with kids in the country is easy. Narrowing down numerous options, Diethelm would like to recommend the central region for families, owing to its combination of great beaches and cultural attractions.

The tour starts in Hue at the new luxury resort, Ana Mandara Hue, which boasts 400m of beachfront and a host of water sports. Children will be enticed by an overnight excursion along the Perfume River onboard Emotion, a boat inspired by the traditional sampan of local fishermen. Two boats are currently operating; one offering six bunk beds suitable for up to 12 persons and a smaller, more private one with four cabins. It is also a brilliant way to experience local life

through activities such as shopping for ingredients at

Dong Ba market for a cooking class, visiting the imperial sites along the river, as well as biking and walking through villages and rice fields.

Driving over the spectacular Hai Van Pass, the next stop is the ancient trading town of Hoi An, checking in at the Victoria Hoi An Beach Resort & Spa. Hoi An is famous for its lanterns, said to be a result of the cultural exchanges of the Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese over the years. Cycle to the home of a craftsman in the old street and learn lantern-making skills from him. Afterwards, cycle on to the villages around Hoi An, to Kim Bong village and beyond, or to Tra Que, the famous vegetable village where children can have fun joining parents in preparing vegetable beds, planting young seedlings or leading buffaloes. Another stop is Thanh Ha traditional pottery village, where children can have a go at making pots the Vietnamese way. For something completely different, jump in a circular basket boat (coracle style) for a river cruise down to Cua Dai. Join the local fishermen and get hands-on experience of traditional round net and cast net fishing.



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Woman wearing a traditional Vietnamese hat cycling on a busy road in Hanoi



Fruit seller on boat



Halong Bay



Street vendor selling fresh fish

The trip ends in Nha Trang, where any child's first choice would be the Vinpearl Resort located on an idyllic island and is accessible by boat or cable car. Among the many attractions at the resort are an aquarium, an amusement park, a water park with unlimited access for hotel guests and an 18-hole golf course.

### SPECIAL INTEREST

#### Hanoi-Mai Chau-Halong Bay tour

Starting in Hanoi, discover exactly what the Vietnamese are eating at the local restaurants. One of the restaurants is in Le Mat village, famous for its snake-catching and raising techniques as well as unusual dishes of fried silkworms, grasshoppers and butter-fried crickets. The Red River Delta region houses villages specialising in pottery, gold leaf production, leatherwork, wood carving and sculpture. In the block printing village of Dong Ho, many artisans have switched to making beautiful paper offerings of virtually any imaginable item including miniature houses and cars intended for the dead in their afterlife.

Leaving Hanoi, head to the hill-tribe region of Mai Chau for an afternoon of cycling in this picturesque valley and a homestay experience including bamboo pole dancing and local wine tasting. After a day around Ninh Binh and a boat trip through the wonderful karst

scenery of Tam Coc, drive through the Northern Delta towards the port of Hai Phong. En route, stop at Bao Ha village, which is famous for its traditional puppetry: ordinary farmers have been preserving this stick puppetry, also known as water puppetry, for generations. A real highlight is the water puppet show staged at the village pond, with lunch at the house of the troupe owner.

Next, an overnight Emerald cruise takes visitors through the unbelievably picturesque and world-renowned Halong Bay. More than 3000 limestone islets rise spectacularly from the emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and the majority have precipitous, sparsely vegetated slopes with fantastic rock-blown formations. Ending in Hanoi, hop on the *Xe Om*, a popular two-wheeled scooter, for a guided tour of the old streets of the city. Amongst the hidden alleyways and the guild streets, some of which still maintain traditional crafts, try



Traditional water puppets

out local delicacies such as *Cha Ca* (grilled fish), *Tra Da* (iced green tea) and the well-known national staple, *Pho Bo* (beef noodle soup). In the evening, enjoy a performance of *Ca Tru*, an ancient musical art, and try playing the traditional instruments. Dinner is then served at Madame Anh Tuyet's, a highly respected specialist on Vietnamese traditional cuisine.

#### Romantic Mekong Delta sampan ride

One of the most romantic experiences in the Mekong Delta for couples, families or a group of friends is to hop aboard one's own private traditional-style sampan for either a two-day/one-night or a three-day/two-night journey into these fabulously scenic waterways. Imagine enjoying a sunset cocktail on the open-air front deck while watching the local river life glide by. With a fleet of five sampans (maximum six passengers per sampan) the Song Xanh sampans are simple but very tastefully furnished (note that each sampan's bathroom is communal and there is no air-conditioning).

#### Cooking classes in HCMC and Hanoi

The Vietnam Cookery Centre in HCMC helps participants prepare traditional Vietnamese dishes together with family and friends. Through the course, the classes of which are conducted in the morning, learn about the most popular Vietnamese dishes, the correct blending of the many

ingredients and spices to create the famous *nuoc mam* (fish sauce), the cooking of the different types of rice, the traditional Vietnamese kitchen and its cooking utensils, the history of Vietnamese cuisine with its roots in the Imperial City of Hue and its various influences from both Western and other Eastern cultures, as well as the intricacies of the Vietnamese dining etiquette and the technique to master the chopsticks! In the evening, there is a guided stroll through the Ben Thanh area. Listed by the Food & Wines Magazine in 2012 as one of the 10 best places in the world for street food, one can find all southern Vietnam delicacies here.

Over in Hanoi, the Hanoi Cooking Centre too offers cooking classes designed by international chef Tracey Lister, co-author of the books *KOTO-A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam* and *Vietnamese Street Food*. The class begins in the morning with a brief introduction to Vietnamese cuisine, highlighting the ingredients of traditional Vietnamese dishes. After that, everyone heads to the Chau Long Market, where the chefs highlight some of the daily produce sold, such as fruit, vegetables, meat and silkworms. Then the group returns to the cooking centre, where the chefs explain how to prepare the various dishes on the menu. Participants then enjoy the fruit of their own labour before visiting the

centre's shop where they find useful cooking utensils, recipe books, spices, and so on. Printed recipes, as well as samples of some local fruit, green bean cakes, quail eggs, etc can be taken home after the class.

#### Morning tour with tai chi class

Start the morning with the invigorating scent of fresh flowers at the Quang Ba Flower Market before heading to the busier Long Bien Wholesale Market where small business owners from around the city buy their daily fresh fruit and vegetables.

Then comes the highlight. Drive to Quan Thanh pagoda or Kim Lien Temple for an hour of tai chi practice with an excellent English-speaking tai chi master. Tai chi is no longer just a Chinese phenomenon. Warm up with lotus scented green tea, ginger snap and sugar-coated lotus seeds before the practice. The movements are gentle and easy to learn with an emphasis on deep breathing and mental focus to create balance, flexibility and calmness of mind and body. Tai chi helps to accumulate energy and leaves one refreshed and relaxed. Each participant's hard work will be recorded in an attendance certificate afterwards.

Conclude an exceptional morning with a bowl of *pho*, the country's favourite breakfast soup or a simple and typical French breakfast of *croissant au beurre* and coffee!

## MD'S HOT PICK



#### Special interest: golfing on the Central Coast

The Central Coast has seen the development of three stunning golf courses designed by some of the biggest names in the game. Located within the greater Laguna Lang Co integrated resort, Nasty Nick's 18-hole, par-71 championship course measures slightly less than 7,000 yards from the championship tees or a beginner friendly 5,263 yards from the front tees. The Montgomerie Links is situated midway between Hoi An and Danang and beautifully designed by Colin Montgomerie. Following in Monty's footsteps was Greg Norman, who designed the course at the Danang Golf Club, voted as Vietnam's best golf course in 2012 by the publication Asian Golf Monthly. The course has been described as a mesmerizing cross between a pure links and a sand belt track that rampages through massive sand hills framed by sparsely vegetated scrubland. Hence, with all this on offer, not to mention white sandy beaches and delectable cuisine, golf enthusiasts might want to think about Vietnam for their next golfing vacation.



From left: Hanoi street market; pho (noodle soup)





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